

FIRST CHRISTMAS

AT RISE: The MAN and WOMAN are discovered.

MAN

I have just spent my first Christmas as a married man.

This, I'm sure, doesn't seem a terribly unusual event, but I'm 54 -- well beyond the age when most men marry for the first time. And I spent it in what must be called an unusual manner.

WOMAN

We used the several days to visit my 79-year-old father, a patient in a long-term-care facility. He suffers from an Alzheimer's-like condition.

MAN

It's left him unable to stand or speak and while he seems to recognise familiar faces he no longer seems able to identify them. Therefore, Roxanna -- his 37-year-old daughter -- has become a virtual stranger, and visiting him is difficult for her; the difficulty is compounded by the eight-hour drive required.

The combined stress, plus the fact that we'd moved

WOMAN

-- two days before the trip --

MAN

had left us both frayed, and so we decided to spend our Christmas Eve -- our first Christmas Eve together -- quietly in our motel.

WOMAN

This might seem a sad celebration to some, but for us it became an affirmation.

MAN

Feeling overwhelmed by all we'd just gone through, frazzled, and even a little depressed by our impending Christmas-Day visit to the nursing home, we turned on the television.

WOMAN

That, in itself, is an unusual event; Evan hasn't owned one in 30 years and I may spend an hour a month before my cableless, 13-inch black-and-white.

MAN

But we had the luck to discover the Perry Como Christmas Special, a particularly nostalgic 90 minutes for me since it recalled the living room of my childhood where my parents and I sat watching Como's peerless singing, his effortless squaredom. He was my mother's favorite singer, and my wife's mother's as well.