



## From the Desk of Maribel Z. Diaz....

December can be a hectic month, but I guess the longer I experience life, the less I want to rush and the more I want to savor the moment. I am also giving a wider and deeper meaning to the word "gift." Especially at Christmas time, "gift" is a synonym for things. Toys for the children, gadgets for family and friends and sometimes, when we reach our limit of craziness and frustration, anything will do. I am definitely not against gifts. I love to give them, and I love to receive them, mostly when they are meaningful to giver and receiver.

My dad started a tradition that both my brother and I remember fondly. We would each receive one gift "el dia de Reyes," and we would go to the store late on the night before. La Habana was a beautiful city full of color, traditions and joy. The stores would remain open all night the "vispera de Reyes" and the city would sparkle with Christmas lights, music and parents looking for that last minute gift for their children. I still remember the smell of roasted chestnuts and the "cucuruchos de mani." My brother and I would start thinking about what to choose months and months before Reyes. We would change our minds many times, but when that special time came along, we both knew exactly what we wanted. We held on to my dad's hand as we walked through the crowds to the largest and best toy store. Once there, my father signaled one of the Reyes' helpers and we would ask excitedly for our chosen toy. The ritual of, "I do not know if there are any left, let me ask Melchor," or "Close your eyes and wish real hard," would ensue. As we shook in expectation with our eyes shut tight, we would feel a beautifully wrapped box in our hands. Voila! Magically we got exactly what we wished for!

I still remember every gift I received for Reyes, and I rejoice in those memories year after year. This is what I wish for you and your children. Beautiful memories of love and trust. Time to tell your dear ones how much you love them. Time to laugh, to dream, to build. Time to instill in our children a sense of generosity, appreciation, acceptance and compassion. A sense of ethics, of responsibility, an ability to see the good and the joy in every person and situation. Inner happiness. Faith. Calmness. Peace. Love. Fulfillment.

Blessings, and the merriest of Christmases and a healthy New Year.

Much love,  
MZD