

Feliz Navidad Nacia Un Bebé



A History of Christmas

The history of Christmas dates back over 4000 years. Many of our Christmas traditions were celebrated centuries before the Christ child was born. The 12 days of Christmas, the bright fires, the yule log, the giving of gifts, carnivals (parades) with floats, carolers who sing while going from house to house, the holiday feasts, and the church processions can all be traced back to the early Mesopotamians.

Many of these traditions began with the Mesopotamian celebration of New Years. The Mesopotamians believed in many gods, and as their chief god - Marduk. Each year as winter arrived it was believed that Marduk would do battle with the monsters of chaos. To assist Marduk in his struggle the Mesopotamians

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El Nacimiento de Jesús
Navidad proviene de la palabra Natividad y significa el nacimiento de Jesús. Esta fecha es una de las más importantes celebradas en el ámbito religioso, con ella se renueva la esperanza de los hombres por alcanzar la salvación y resurrección prometida por el Mesías.

El 24 de diciembre día de Nochebuena, se preparan los más suculentos guisos y se reúnen familiares y amigos para esperar simbólicamente, el nacimiento de Jesucristo ó Navidad. Sin embargo el 25 de diciembre posiblemente no coincide con la fecha del verdadero nacimiento de Jesús.

Según los historiadores este acontecimiento data del año seis antes de nuestra era, tiempo que fue calculado en base a la muerte de Herodes el Grande, acaecida en el año cuatro antes de nuestra era. Recordemos que fue él quien mandó matar a todos los niños de Belén menores de dos años, luego entonces se deduce que Jesús nació dos años antes de estos hechos.

Parece increíble pensar que Jesús nació a.C. (antes de Cristo), pero los hechos están fundamentados en las cuentas realizadas por el monje escita Dionisio el Exiguo, quien para establecer una nueva numeración con respecto a la venida del Señor, hizo coincidir el 1° de enero del año 1, con el 1° de enero del año 754 fecha de la fundación de Roma, sin embargo el dato exacto de ésta corresponde al año 748.

Aumentando los años que le fal-



taron contemplar a Dionisio, el nacimiento de Jesús debió ubicarse en el año 6 a.C., esto quiere decir que estaríamos en el año 2003 y no en 1997.

Asimismo otros estudios realizados por el matemático y astrónomo Kepler, señalan que el día del natalicio

de Cristo hubo una conjunción de Júpiter y Saturno en la constelación de Piscis, lo cual provocó una emisión de luz intensa, descrita en los evangelios de San Mateo y San Lucas como la "estrella de Belén".

Al respecto existe otra hipótesis en donde se manifiesta que la verdad, es

que coincidieron en el signo de Piscis el Sol, la Luna, Venus, Júpiter y Saturno, formando lo que pareció una estrella de gran resplandor, tal acontecimiento astronómico ocurrió el 1° de marzo del año 7 a.C. De ser esto cierto Cristo no nació en diciembre, ni en el año cero.

A pesar de las diversas investigaciones efectuadas en torno al nacimiento del Mesías, no se ha determinado una fecha legítima, no obstante en los primeros siglos del cristianismo se conmemoraron los días 6 de enero, 25 o 28 de marzo, 19 de abril y 133 días más.

Fue el Papa Julio I (337-352) fue quien estableció el 25 de diciembre para la celebración litúrgica de la Navidad. Desde entonces el festejo se lleva a cabo con tres misas: la primera a media noche llamada "misa de gallo", la circuncisión llevada a cabo el 1 de enero y finalmente la purificación de María, el 2 de febrero.

En realidad lo importante no es precisar la fecha exacta de la natividad, más bien lo relevante es comprender el significado de la palabra de Dios y sentir el verdadero espíritu navideño, hoy y los 364 días restantes del año.

"Aunque Cristo naciera mil veces en Belén, si no nace en usted mismo, siempre dudará de su existencia".

Lic. Sandra Noemí Cuapio Campos.

Merry Christmas

Llega Pancho Clos a Lubbock ¡Ajuuua!

The Lubbock Chapter of the American G.I. Forum followed a 25 year tradition this past weekend as they hosted Pancho Clos' yearly trip to Lubbock to visit and bring gifts to children.

Hundreds of kids lined up in front of Maggie Trejo Center to welcome Pancho who arrived in a big red firetruck "gritando A-juuua!"

Pancho Clos, originally conceived and introduced to Lubbock by Jessie Reyes, the late Agustin Medina and Bidal Agüero as they worked late into the night to publish La Voz de Texas Newspaper and hear a song by Cuco Sanchez telling about a black bearded man who wore a sombrero and used burritos instead of reindeer to delivery gifts to children.

Pancho Clos was later adopted by the American G.I. as a way of spreading cheer in Lubbock barrios.

Throughout the years the project has been sustained through fundraisers and donations. This year's main sponsor was Lubbock Power and Light.

The Pancho Clos concept has spread to other cities including San Antonio when an ex-sargent from Reese Air Force Base. Raul Sanchez introduced the project.



Wishes you a Merry Christmas
& Prosperous 2003 to You and Yours

Una Carta a Santa Claus de un Profesor Jubilado

Por Raymond Rodríguez

Querido Santa, sé que estás ocupado por lo que te estoy enviando una lista de deseos de Navidad para todos los niños. Estoy seguro que estás trabajando bajo mucha presión por las condiciones inestables en muchas partes del mundo. Por favor, ten cuidado al hacer el recorrido. Todos los niños dependen de ti.

Debido a la condición de nuestra economía, algunas familias están en una situación económica desesperada. Sin embargo, mi lista puede resultar útil porque estos regalos no cuestan nada.

La mejor parte es que siguen regalando todo el año porque están envueltos en amor. Aquí está mi lista de deseos:

Santa Claus, por favor díles a los padres y a los tutores que pasen más tiempo con sus hijos. El hecho de estar juntos, abrazarlos y compartir un momento de tranquilidad con ellos puede ser muy enriquecedor. El amor es lo que más necesita un niño, en particular durante estos momentos tan difíciles. Que sepan que te preocupas por ellos y que pueden contar contigo.

Santa Claus, haz que alguien les lea a los niños con regularidad. A los niños que descubren el placer

por la lectura a edad temprana nunca les falta qué hacer, y es emocionante. Pasar el tiempo con un buen libro es como estar con el mejor amigo.

Santa Claus, recuérdales a las personas que permitan que los pequeños cocinen u horneen algo. A los niños les encanta cocinar y la atmósfera, incluso de las cocinas más pequeñas, crea lazos de afecto que perduran toda la vida. Si, algunas veces hacen un desorden, pero el resplandor en sus caras hace que valga la pena.

Santa Claus, por favor aconseja a los adultos que se relajen y se sienten en el piso y se unan a la diversión y a los juegos, sin importar lo tonto que se puedan sentir. A todo el mundo le gusta pasar un buen rato y las carcajadas de alegría son contagiosas. A los niños les encantará ver a los adultos acompañándolos en sus risas.

Santa Claus, alienta a las familias para que siembren algo, aunque sólo sea en un macetero de cerámica. Permite que los niños se ocupen de la planta, que lo hagan su proyecto. A los niños les fascina las cosas que crecen. Ven el milagro de la vida desarrollándose frente a sus ojos. Descubren que todas las cosas vivientes tienen cier-

tas necesidades en común. El proceso de aprendizaje es fascinante e interminable.

Santa Claus, también aconseja que construyan algo juntos, aunque sea con una vieja caja de cartón. La imaginación de un niño no tiene límites. Las cosas más simples se pueden transformar en objetos maravillosos. ¡Hasta puedes subirte a una caja y viajar a la luna! El construir algo permite que los niños usen sus propias ideas y sus habilidades. Por favor ten cuidado con las herramientas.

Santa Claus, recuérdales a los adultos que saquen a los niños a pasear. Las excursiones a las bibliotecas, a los museos, los conciertos en parques o los desfiles les permiten disfrutar la plenitud de la vida. Estas experiencias no tienen precio. Ayudan a que cada niño cree conciencia sobre la riqueza de su patrimonio cultural y el de los demás y los inspira a soñar en lo que algún día pueden lograr.

Santa Claus, permite que los padres ayuden a los niños a desarrollar amor y aprecio por la naturaleza y sus maravillas. Llevarlos a caminar por la orilla de mar, por el lecho de un río, por un camino rústico, o un paseo por el parque. Dejar que dirijan y establezcan el

ritmo. Se maravillarán con lo mucho que verán a través de los ojos de un niño curioso.

Santa Claus, recuérdales a mamá y a papá que permitan que los niños ayuden con las tareas del hogar. Les hace sentir que son miembros útiles de la familia. Siempre dicen con orgullo ¡Ayudé! Recompénsalos por sus esfuerzos y contribuciones, sin importar lo insignificante que puedan parecer.

Santa Claus, no dejes de decirles a los padres que les enseñen a sus hijos el verdadero significado de la Navidad. Todos tenemos tanto que agradecer. Lo mejor de todo es formar parte de una familia amorosa que trabaja, juega y ora junta. Estos niños nunca se alejarán de los valores que aprenden a apreciar.

Cielos, Santa Claus, te estoy pidiendo demasiado. Sin pena haz cualquier cambio que creas apropiado para que éstas sean las mejores Navidades para todos los niños y niñas alrededor del mundo.

Santa Claus, quisiera hacer un último y personal pedido: Por favor tráenos a todos el regalo de la paz. ¡Mil gracias!

P.D. Disfruta la leche y el pan dulce.

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A Latino Holiday Memory - Bloody Christmas

By Kenneth Burt

Christmas is a time of celebration, a joyous occasion for family and friends to gather together. It is one of those special moments when we create new memories and reminisce about times gone by.

But not all such recollections are sweet. One is still etched in the memories of several Mexican-American families from East Los Angeles half a century after it occurred. Few others ever heard it told. On Christmas Eve 51 years ago, Los Angeles police officers picked up seven young friends at a neighborhood bar for allegedly disturbing the peace. At the station where they were taken for booking, a false rumor spread that they had beaten a cop. That's when more than 50 police officers took time out from their own alcohol-accented holiday revelry to line them up and pound them without mercy.

"They were climbing over each other to get at us," recounted Elias Rodella, a World War II veteran and city employee. "They'd say, 'Merry Christmas' and they'd slug us."

More electricity. Never before had a city councilman made such a public accusation. While a number of politicians rose to defend the police department, leaders within the Catholic Church, some labor unions and Latino civic groups demanded a public hearing on Roybal's allegations.

To the surprise of most, a jury found Rios not guilty of the standard charge of resisting arrest.

The fact that an all-white jury had believed a Mexican-American over two police officers gave the "Christmas Seven" defendants (as they became known) new hope. They changed their defense strategy mid-trial and talked about the unprovoked beatings that caused most of the young men to be hospitalized. An attending doctor stated that one of the victims might have died had he not received prompt medical attention.

Judge Joseph Call was appalled by what he heard. "This (police) testimony stinks to high heaven and all the perfumery in Arabia cannot obliterate its stench," stated the judge. He then took the highly unusual step of demanding a grand jury investigation.

A Retired Professor's Letter to Santa

By Raymond Rodríguez

Dear Santa, I know you're busy, so I am submitting a Christmas wish list for all the children. I'm sure you are working under tremendous pressure due to the unsettled conditions in much of the world. So please be careful in making your rounds. All the kids are depending on you.

Due to the condition of our economy, some families are in dire financial straits. Therefore, my list may prove useful because these gifts cost nothing.

The best part is that they keep on giving all year long because they are wrapped in love. Here is my wish list:

Santa, please tell parents and guardians to spend more time with their children. Just being together, hugging them and sharing a quiet moment can be very fulfilling. The thing every child needs most, is love, especially during these trying times. Let them know that you care and they can count on you.

Santa, have someone read to the children regularly. Children who discover the joys of reading early

in life are never at a loss for something exciting to do. Spending time with a good book is like being with a dear friend.

Santa, remind people to let the little ones cook or bake something. Children like to cook, and the atmosphere of even the smallest kitchen creates bonds of affection that last a lifetime. Yes, sometimes they make a mess, but the glow of their faces makes it worthwhile.

Santa, please advise the grown-ups to relax and get down on the floor and join in the fun and games, no matter how foolish they may feel. Everybody loves having a good time, and the shouts of joy are contagious. The children will like seeing the adults join in their merriment.

Santa, encourage families to plant something, even if it's only in a clay pot. Let the kids tend it, make it their project. Children are fascinated by growing things. They see the miracle of life evolving before their eyes. They discover that all living things have certain needs in common. The learning process is intriguing and endless.

Santa, also have them build something together, even if it is made out of an old cardboard box. A child's imagination is boundless. The simplest things can be transformed into marvelous objects. Why, you can hop in a box and rocket to the moon! Making things allows children to use their own ideas and their talents. Please be careful with the tools.

Santa, remind adults to take children on outings. Trips to libraries, museums, concerts in the park or to parades enable them to enjoy the fullness of life. Such experiences are priceless. They help each child develop an awareness of the richness of their own and others' cultural heritages, and inspire them to dream of what they can some day achieve.

Santa, let fathers assist children in development. A love and appreciation of nature and its wonders. Take them for walks along the seashore, a riverbed, a rustic trail or a stroll through the park. Let them lead and set the pace. You will be amazed at how much more you will see through the eyes of a curious

child.

Santa, remind Mom and Dad to let the kids help with the household tasks. It makes them feel they are useful members of the family. "I helped!" is always said with pride. Praise them for their efforts and contributions, no matter how small they may seem to be.

Santa, be sure to tell parents to teach their youngsters the true meaning of Christmas. We all have so much to be thankful for. Best of all is being part of a loving family that works, plays and prays together. Such children will never stray far from the values they learn to cherish.

Goodness, Santa, I am asking for a lot. Feel free to make any changes you deem appropriate to make this the best Christmas ever for all the boys and girls around the world.

Santa, I would like to make a final, personal request: Please bring all of us the gift of peace. *Mil Gracias*!

P.S. Enjoy the *leche* and *pan dulce*.

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The officers interrupted the beating temporarily to parade the battered men before a group of assembled journalists. The reporters were told that the subjects had resisted arrest and that the arresting officers "looked worse." The Los Angeles daily papers reported the story as the police gave it to them.

The young men were charged with disorderly conduct. They chose not to talk publicly about the police beating. It was unlikely that a jury would believe the words of Mexican-Americans over those of police officers. No member of the Los Angeles Police Department had ever been fired for brutality.

The true nature of what happened never would have surfaced except that weeks later the attorney for Tony Rios, yet another Latino victim of police brutality, chose to break the wall of silence.

The charge was electric. It received media coverage because 39-year-old Rios was the politically connected head of the Community Service Organization. The group had been instrumental in electing Edward Roybal as the first Latino in modern history to serve on the Los Angeles City Council.

Councilman Roybal talked about Rios' beating by police in an open city council meeting. He also charged the police department with other abuses.

The floodgates of public scrutiny opened. The press played the story as "Bloody Christmas." For his part, Police Chief William Parker insisted the charges were an "unwarranted attack" against his fine officers. He even asserted it was a Communist conspiracy.

Grand jury indictments of eight officers were followed by trials. At one, 23-year-old city engineer Eddie Nora graphically described the nightmare he endured. "As I lay on the floor in a pool of blood, a man with a pistol stood over me. He said, 'I'll shoot this -- and I begged him to go ahead.'"

In the end, five policemen were convicted and kicked off the force. Two spent time in jail. Another 36 received official reprimands.

The Bloody Christmas trials and convictions made history. It marked the first time police officers in Los Angeles were held accountable for such behavior.

While such a story is not typical Christmas fare, it should remain part of our collective memory. It is especially appropriate now as we gather to celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace.

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Recuerdo de un Dia Festivo Latino Navidades Sangrientas

Por Kenneth Burt

La Navidad es época de celebración, una época feliz para que las familias y amigos compartan. Es uno de esos momentos especiales para forjar nuevos recuerdos y recordar tiempos pasados.

Pero no todos los recuerdos son dulces. Todavía hay uno grabado en la memoria de varias familias mexicano-americanas del este de Los Angeles cincuenta años más tarde. Aparte de ellos, pocos han escuchado la historia.

En una Noche Buena hace 51 años, varios policías de Los Angeles recogieron a siete jóvenes amigos en una cantina del vecindario alegando que causaban disturbios. En la estación de policía donde los llevaron para registrarlos, se difundió el falso rumor de que los jóvenes habían golpeado a un policía. Fue entonces cuando más de cincuenta policías tomaron un descanso de su jolgorio alcoholizado para alinearlos y golpearlos sin misericordia.

"Se trepaban unos sobre otros para llegar a nosotros", volvió a contar Elias Rodella, veterano de la

Segunda Guerra Mundial y empleado municipal. "Decían, 'Feliz Navidad' y nos golpeaban".

Los policías interrumpieron la paliza por un tiempo para exhibir a los golpeados hombres ante un grupo de periodistas reunidos. Se informó a los reporteros que los sujetos se habían resistido al arresto y que los policías que los arrestaron "se veían peor". Los diarios de Los Angeles dieron a conocer la historia como se la contó la policía.

A los ocho jóvenes se les acusó de alteración del orden público. Ellos decidieron no hablar públicamente sobre la golpiza de la policía. Era poco probable que un jurado creyera en las palabras de unos mexicano-americanos sobre la de los oficiales de la policía. Ningún miembro del Departamento de Policía de Los Angeles había sido despedido por brutalidad.

La verdad de lo que pasó nunca se hubiera conocido de nos ser que unas semanas después, el abogado de Tony Rios, otra víctima latina de la brutalidad policiaca, decidió romper la barrera del silencio.

Los cargos fueron electrizantes

Recibió cobertura de los medios de comunicación porque Rios de 39 años era el director con influencia política de la Community Service Organization (CSO por sus siglas en inglés). Este grupo había sido clave en la elección de Edward Roybal como el primer latino en la historia contemporánea de fungir como concejal de la ciudad de Los Angeles.

El concejal Roybal habló sobre la golpiza de Rios por la policía en una reunión abierta del concejo. También acusó al departamento de la policía de otros abusos.

Más electrizante aún. Nunca antes un concejal municipal había hecho una acusación pública así. Mientras un número de políticos se alzaron para defender al departamento de policía, líderes de la Iglesia Católica, algunos sindicatos de trabajadores y otros líderes cívicos latinos exigieron una vista pública sobre las alegaciones de Roybal.

Para sorpresa de muchos, un jurado encontró a Rios inocente del cargo de resistencia al arresto.

El hecho de que un jurado compuesto de sólo blancos haya creído

en un mexicano-americano por encima de dos oficiales de la policía dio a los defendidos o a los "siete navideños" (como se les llamó) una nueva esperanza.

A mitad del juicio cambiaron la estrategia de defensa y hablaron sobre las golpizas sin provocación que causaron que la mayoría de los jóvenes fueran hospitalizados. Un doctor de turno señaló que una de las víctimas habría muerto si no hubiese recibido pronta atención médica.

El juez Joseph Call estaba consternado por lo que escuchó. "Este testimonio (de la policía) apesta tanto que todo los perfumes de Arabia no pueden acabar con el hedor", señaló. Entonces dio el paso muy inusual de solicitar una investigación del gran jurado. Las computas del escrutinio público se abrieron. La prensa presentó la historia como 'Navidades Sangrientas'.

Por su parte, el director de la policía Parker insistía en que los cargos eran un "ataque injustificado" contra sus destacados oficiales. Incluso afirmó que era una conspiración comunista.

mians held a festival for the New Year. This was Zagmuk, the New Year's festival that lasted for 12 days.

The Mesopotamian king would return to the temple of Marduk and swear his faithfulness to the god. The traditions called for the king to die at the end of the year and to return with Marduk to battle at his side.

To spare their king, the Mesopotamians used the idea of a "mock" king. A criminal was chosen and dressed in royal clothes. He was given all the respect and privileges of a real king. At the end of the celebration the "mock" king was stripped of the royal clothes and slain, sparing the life of the real king.

The Persians and the Babylonians celebrated a similar festival called the Sacaea. Part of that celebration included the exchanging of places, the slaves would become the masters and the masters were to obey.

Early Europeans believed in evil spirits, witches, ghosts and trolls. As the Winter Solstice approached, with its long cold nights and short days, many people feared the sun would not return. Special rituals and celebrations were held to welcome back the sun.

In Scandinavia during the winter months the sun would disappear for many days. After thirty-five days scouts would be sent to the mountain tops to look for the return of the sun. When the first light was seen the scouts would return with the good news. A great festival would be held, called the Yuletide, and a special feast would be served around a fire burning with the Yule log. Great bonfires would also be lit to celebrate the return of the sun. In some areas people would tie apples to branches of trees to remind themselves that spring and summer would return.

The ancient Greeks held a festival similar to that of the Zagmuk/Sacaea festivals to assist their god Kronos who would battle the god Zeus and his Titans

The Roman's celebrated their god Saturn. Their festival was called Saturnalia which began the middle of December and ended January 1st. With cries of "Jo Saturnalia!" the celebration would include masquerades in the streets, big festive meals, visiting friends, and the exchange of good-luck gifts called Strenae (lucky fruits).

The Romans decorated their halls with garlands of laurel and green trees lit with candles. Again the masters and slaves would exchange places.

"Jo Saturnalia!" was a fun and festive time for the Romans, but the Christians thought it an abomination to honor the pagan god. The early Christians wanted to keep the birthday of their Christ child a solemn and religious holiday, not one of cheer and merriment as was the pagan Saturnalia.

But as Christianity spread they were alarmed by the continuing celebration of pagan customs and Saturnalia among their converts. At first the Church forbid this kind of celebration. But it was to no avail. Eventually it was decided that the celebration would be tamed and made into a celebration fit for the Christian Son of God.

Some legends claim that the Christian "Christmas" celebration was invented to compete against the pagan celebrations of December. The 25th was not only sacred to the Romans but also the Persians whose religion Mithraism was one of Christianity's main rivals at that time. The Church eventually was successful in taking the merriment, lights, and gifts from the Saturnalia festival and bringing them to the celebration of Christmas.

The exact day of the Christ child's birth has never been pinpointed. Traditions say that it has been celebrated since the year 98 AD. In 137 AD the Bishop of Rome ordered the birthday of the Christ Child celebrated as a solemn feast. In 350 AD another Bishop of Rome, Julius I, choose December 25th as the observance of Christmas



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EL ORIGEN DE LAS POSADAS

"En el nombre del cielo, os pido posada pues no puede andar mi esposa amada..."

Las posadas se han llevado a cabo desde hace 398 años, justo nueve días antes de la navidad. El festejo se realiza del 16 al 24 de diciembre, tiempo durante el cual se representa simbólicamente el peregrinar de José y María a su salida de Nazaret, culminando en la Nochebuena con el nacimiento del niño Jesús.

Amenizadas con letanías que se vuelven cánticos, las posadas reaniman el espíritu religioso de los participantes, cómo olvidar esos momentos, los peregrinos, las oraciones, la procesión, las piñatas, el ponche, la fruta, pero sobre todo la emoción, alegría y amistad que se respira durante este tiempo.

Dichas fiestas de fin de año



tienen su origen más allá de la época colonial, cuando los indígenas festejaban durante el invierno ó Panquetzalitli, el advenimiento de Huitzilopochtli, Dios de la Guerra. En un esfuerzo de evangelización los religiosos agustinos, sustituyeron la imagen de Huitzilopochtli por la de José y María.

En sus inicios estos festejos no fueron como los conocemos ahora, primeramente se les llamó "fiestas de aguinaldo" y consistían en la proclamación de la misa

incluían piñatas, luces de bengala, cohetes y cantos populares.

Uno de los elementos indispensables para la realización de las posadas son las piñatas multicolores, éstas tienen un origen bastante incierto, sin embargo, se cree que fue en Italia donde se les dio vida (Pignata significa olla), de ahí, pasaron a España, en donde durante el primer domingo de cuaresma se rompía la olla. Posteriormente los misioneros trajeron la costumbre a

la Nueva España, cambiando la fecha para las posadas, más tarde los mexicanos les añadieron adornos de papel.

No obstante algunos autores atribuyen el origen del adorno a los chinos, quienes durante la primavera confeccionaban una figura de vaca, buey o búfalo cubierta con papeles polí cromados y rellena de semillas, con el objeto de vaticinar buenas condiciones para el año agrícola que iniciaba. Una vez

vaciada la piñata, se quemaba el papel y la gente obtenía un poco de cenizas ya que la consideraban de buena suerte para todo el año.

El simbolismo de las piñatas, es también muy particular, representa al diablo quien atrae al hombre con placeres superfluos, la persona vendada es la fe que es ciega y se encarga de destruir al espíritu maligno y el palo encarna la virtud que vence la tentación. También se cree que la piñata representa las

tres virtudes teológicas: la fe, la esperanza y la caridad.

Asimismo la forma clásica de

la piñata es la de estrella con siete picos y significa los siete pecados capitales: soberbia, lujuria, gula, ira, avaricia, pereza y envidia.

Por otro lado es obvio que la tradición se ha modificado y de aquellas piñatas confeccionadas en ollas de barro, sólo van quedando recuerdos. Y qué decir de las piñatas y sus tradicionales figuras de estrella, frutas o flores que por la inevitable influencia de los medios de comunicación, están siendo sustituidas por los héroes surgidos de películas, cómics.

Ciertamente se trata de conservar la tradición, por ello no permitamos se apague la luz de las velas que iluminan la procesión de los peregrinos, mucho menos dejemos se olviden los cantos que dan vida a las posadas, unamos nuestra voz y recuperemos nuestras costumbres.

Dale, dale, dale, no pierdas el tino, mide la distancia, que hay en el camino...



Twass The Night Before Christmas

'Twas the night before Christmas, and all through the CASA,

Not a creature was stirring. I wondered, "QUE PASA?" I was hanging the stockings with MUCHO CUIDADO. I hopes that old Santa would feel OBLIGADO, To bring all the children, both BUENOS Y MALOS, A nice batch of DULCES and other REGALOS.

My brothers and I went to sleep in our CAMAS, Some in long underwear, some in PIYAMAS. When out in the yard there arose such a GRITO, That I jumped to my feet like a frightened CABRITO. I ran to the window and looked AFUERA, And who in the world do you think Quien Era? St. Nick in a sleigh and a big SOMBRERO. Came dashing along like a little BOMBERO. And pulling his sleigh, instead of VENADOS, Were eight little BURROS, approaching VOLADOS. I watched as they came, and this fat little HOMBRE Was shouting and whistling, and calling by NOMBRE: 'AY PANCHITO, AY PEPE, AY CUCA, A BETO! 'AY CHATO, AY CHOPO, MARUCA Y NIETO!'

Then standing erect, with his hands on his PECHO, He flew to the top of our very own TECHO. With his round little belly like a bowl of JALEA, He struggled to squeeze down our own CHIMENEA. Then huffing and puffing and a little CANSADO, He picked up a bag that looked so PESADO. He filled 'all th stocking with lovely REGALOS. For none of the NIÑOS had been very MALOS. The chuckling aloud, seeing very CONTENTO, He turned like a flash and was gone like the VIENTO. And I heard him exclaim, and this is VERDAD: 'Merry Christmas A TODOS... FELIZ NAVIDAD!'



Procesion a la Virgen de Guadalupe se celebros en St. Patricio la semana pasada.



Feliz Navidad
y Prospero Año Nuevo!



Procesion a la Virgen de Guadalupe se celebros en St. Patricio la semana pasada.

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Celebrating 150 Years

Pastorelas, Posadas and Other Hispanic Christmas Customs

By: Luis Dumois
In those days a decree from Emperor Augustus was issued, ordering a census for the entire world. [...] Everybody had to be registered, each one in his city. Also Joseph, who came from the lineage of David, came up from the city of Nazareth, in Galilee, to the city of David, named Bethlehem, in Judea, to register himself and his wife Mary, who was pregnant. Being there, the time for birth arrived, and she gave birth to her first born son; she wrapped him in nappies and put him in a crib, because they did not find a place in the inn. Luke, 2:2-7

Soon we will enjoy our first Posadas for this year in Mexico. Las Posadas are fiestas that begin on the 16th and end on the 24th of December. In Mexico, during this period, there are many Posadas every evening.

Invited -and as usual, some non invited- guests arrive at the house where the Posada will take place, always in the evening. A group goes outside the house, with lighted candles and papers with the words of the verses to ask for Posada. They sing,

En el nombre del Cielo
os pido posada,
pues no puede andar
mi esposa amada.
In the name of Heaven
I ask you for lodging,
because She cannot walk,
my beloved wife.
The group inside answers,
also singing,

Aquí no es mesón;
sigan adelante.
Yo no puedo abrir,
no sea algún tunante.
This is no inn,
keep on going.
I won't open the door,
in case you are a truant.

Many verses are sung in this fashion, with those outside asking for a place to spend the night and the people inside the house saying, no way, until those inside "discover" who are the personalities freezing outside. Then they open the door and let the pilgrims enter. In the very traditional Posadas, a girl is dressed as the Virgin Mary, while a boy represents Saint Joseph. In some cases even a burro is present, for the Virgin to mount. Sometimes,



those outside carry images of the Holy persons with them.

When they open the door to let those outside enter, they sing,

Entren, Santos Peregrinos,
reciban este rincón;
no de esta pobre morada,
si no de mi corazón.
Enter, Holy Pilgrims,
accept this dwelling;
not of this humble house,
but of my heart.

During the rest of the party we break piñatas, there are villancicos -Christmas carols- in the air and we eat the traditional things: buñuelos (very thin fried pastries covered with sugar), colación (a mixture of different candies), tamales, and ponche, fruit punch.

This beautiful tradition of the Posadas comes from the times of the Colonial period, but it is interesting to note that before the Conquest the Aztecs celebrated every year the arrival of the god Huitzilopochtli, between the 7th and the 26th of December. Under the Spanish domination, Catholic priests incorporated some days of the ancient tradition to a new set of religious festivities.

One of those first Christian festivities in Mexico were

Aguinaldo -Christmas presents- masses. After Holy Mass, piñatas were broken, people sang villancicos and they watched the performing of pastorelas. There were nacimientos (depictions of the birth of Jesus Christ) on display for everybody to visit and admire.

The Náhuatl people used to represent plays enacting important historical events and stories taken from real life. Missionaries incorporated this custom to the Christian holidays, so during the nine days of the Posadas many pastorelas were performed on stage. These pastorelas are dramatic pieces that represent the trip of Saint Joseph and the Virgin Mary to register themselves in the Roman census taking place in those days, or the hardships they suffered while looking in vain for lodging. The roles in these pastorelas included, besides Joseph and Mary, shepherds and shepherdesses (pastores, hence the name, pastorelas), sheep, burros, and perhaps a little devil or two.

These pastorelas played an important part in the evangelization of the colonies. Franciscans and Augustines,

among others, used these representations to accompany the religious activities of the day, making the festivities more attractive and colourful. As it was, this custom was preserved and is still cherished among the Mexican people, a people who love family traditions and vivid fiestas.

It is said that Marco Polo brought with him the idea of piñatas: vessels adorned with color paper, that in China, were broken by hitting them with sticks to commemorate Springtime. Italians adapted the action to symbolize the victory of Good over Evil. In Lent they made piñatas with seven colored paper points, each one representing a capital sin. The stick that broke these sins played the part of Christian faith.

In Mexico the piñata assumed this meaning and then some others. One of them: It is the devil that holds in his belly all that is good in this world, just as the olla inside the piñata is filled with fruit like mandarin, orange and sugar cane; candy and gifts. The stick (Christian faith), put to good use by the girl or boy who strikes at the piñata (the hard work of women and men in this world), breaks the treasure's chest for the benefit of all.

The piñata is firmly tied to a rope, and then hung from a pole or the branch of a tree. Someone holds the other end of the rope, pulling the piñata up and down to make it a more

elusive target. It is customary to let the youngest children start the hitting and then to give the opportunity to the grown-ups. The little ones will be able to see the moving piñata when they try to hit it, while the elders take their turn later, eyes covered with a handkerchief or shawl.

While the hitter is doing his or her best to break the piñata, people surrounding the action sing in a chorus,

Dale, dale, dale,
no pierdas el tino;
porque si lo pierdes,
pierdes el camino.
Hit it, hit it, hit it,
don't lose aim;
because if you lose it,
you will lose your way.

Eventually someone, able or lucky enough to accomplish the task, will break the olla inside the piñata. Fruit, candy and gifts fall to the floor, for everybody to rush to gather whatever they can from the scattered goodies.

After piñatas, dinner is served. Tamales with atole, and crunchy buñuelos for desserts. Hot ponche will help to warm the cold winter evening. For the children, ponche made from seasonal fruits, like tejocote, guava, plum, mandarin, orange, or prune, sweetened with piloncillo (a brown sugar), and perfumed with cinnamon sticks or vanilla. For the grown-ups, the same ponche, but with piquete (sting), which is a bit of rum or tequila added to the potion to make it happier. There

are as many ponche recipes as there are grannies in Mexico. In Colima, for instance, they prepare a delicious concoction made of milk, sugar, orange leaves and vanilla, grated coconut and a drop of rum.

When the Posada is about to end, every guest receives a small gift, or aguinaldo, usually a package containing cookies, dried and fresh fruit, and colación (assorted and colourful candies). Now is the time to sing villancicos, carols that talk about the good news given to the shepherds by the angels, that our Savior was born. A very old tradition calls for everybody to gather in front of the nacimiento (the nativity scene) to sing villancicos to the newborn child.

Traditional nacimientos picture the birth of Jesus. It seems than Saint Francis of Assisi was the first one to come out with the idea of representing with figures the scene in the stable of Bethlehem. That first nacimiento was placed inside a cave in Greccio, Italy, in 1223, to later become a well established tradition in that country.

The excellence of Mexican artisans helped in a significant way to the development of this custom in our country. A typical nacimiento shows Jesus in a crib, with the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph at His side. Inside the portal (porch), which can take the form of a cave, a stone house or a cabin, there are several animals surrounding the Holy persons: burros, oxen, sheep, cows, horses. Additional personalities who take part are shepherds, angels, pilgrims, and the Kings from the East who came to adore Him. The star they followed to Bethlehem always crowns the nacimiento, giving it light and color.

Soon we will enjoy our first Posadas down here.

These traditions are alive and well in Mexico, thank God, in spite of the noise and hurried pace of our so called modern life.


This is a time for joy. This is a time for children. And as I watch them play and sing and have fun, I know I will remember my own childhood. I will remember those who are now gone, and I will think about the future.



Pinatas can be found in all shapes and sizes. Modern ones often represent cartoon or other characters known to most children. Others are shaped like fruits, baskets, rockets etc. Sometimes people of political stature are satirized. At Christmas, star-shaped piñatas suggestive of the Star of Bethlehem are especially popular. One's imagination is the creative limit.


Traditionally, piñatas are filled with both candies and fruits. around Christmas in México, wrapped candies, peanuts, guavas, oranges, jicamas, (sweet root vegetable), sugar cane and other goodies are used.

Feliz Navidad!



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FELIZ NAVIDAD

Making Merry in Mexico
By Dale Hoyt Palfrey
(Dale Hoyt Palfrey is a freelance writer, translator, interpreter and public relations consultant based in Ajijic, Jalisco. Her moth-eaten parka, mittens and longjohns have remained packed away for the 20-plus sunny Christmases she has celebrated in Mexico.)

Dreaming of a white Christmas? If you're spending December in Mexico, forget it! The closest you'll come to frosty is to reminisce on winter wonderlands while sipping an icy Margarita. You can expect the holiday season south of the border to be as warm and colorful as a tropical garden. And you'll discover a delightful array of seasonal traditions that make celebrating Navidad (Christmas) in Mexico a unique and unforgettable experience.

LAS POSADAS
Christmas festivities begin with Las Posadas, nine consecutive days of candlelight processions and lively parties starting December 16.

In villages and urban neighborhoods throughout Mexico youngsters gather each afternoon to reenact the holy family's quest for lodging in Bethlehem. The procession is headed by a diminutive Virgen Maria, often perched on a live burro, led by a equally tiny San José. They are followed by other children portraying angels, the Santos Reyes (Three Kings), and a host of pastores y pastoras (shepherds and shepherdesses), all usually decked out in colorful handmade costumes and carrying brightly decorated báculos (walking staffs) or faroles (paper lanterns).

The parade of Santos Peregrinos (Holy Pilgrims) stops at a designated house to sing a traditional litany by which the Holy Family requests shelter for the night and those waiting behind the closed door turn them away. They proceed to a second home where the scene is repeated. At the third stop the pilgrims are told that while there is no room in the posada (inn), they are welcome to take refuge in the stable. The doors are flung open and all are invited to enter.

This is an active way of teaching children the story of the Nativity, but the chief attraction is the merrymaking that follows, above

all the chance to engage in the ruthless smashing of piñatas and a mad scramble for the shower of fruits, sugar cane, peanuts and candies released from within.

LAS PASTORELAS
Pastorelas (Shepherds Plays) are staged throughout the holiday season by both amateur and professional groups. These traditional, often improvised, theatrical presentations date back to Mexico's Colonial period when Roman Catholic missionaries wooed converts and taught doctrine through dramatizations of Biblical stories.

The light, humor-filled Pastorelas tell of the shepherds' adoration of the Christ Child. First they are visited in the fields by an angel who announces the holy birth. As the shepherds attempt to follow the great star leading them to Bethlehem they are plagued by a series of evils and misadventures provoked by the Devil. But in the proverbial all's-well-that-ends-well finale, good triumphs over evil and the shepherd's reach their intended destination.

EL NACIMIENTO
In most Mexican homes the principal holiday adornment is el Nacimiento (Nativity scene). The focal point, naturally, is a stable where clay or plaster figurines of the Holy Family are sheltered. The scene may be further populated by an angel, Los Reyes Magos (the Magi), the ox and the ass, shepherds and their flocks, and assorted other people and livestock. It is not unusual to also find the forces of evil represented by a serpent and a grotesque Lucifer lurking in the shadows. The figures may be simply positioned in a bed of henop (Spanish moss), or scattered throughout an elaborate landscape.

A major masterpiece may occupy an entire room, often near the front of the house for convenient viewing by neighbors and passersby. The creation of the basic landscape begins with papel roca (paper painted in earth tones) draped over tables, taped onto boxes, crushed and shaped to form a multi-leveled, natural looking terrain that frequently includes a series of hills and dales, a cellophane waterfall, a mirror pond, artificial trees, cacti, palm trees, and little houses set to form an entire village scene. Colored sawdust and a variety of natural mosses may be spread out as ground cover before the addition of strings of Christmas lights and the assorted human and animal figures. The scene will not be completed until Christmas Eve

when the newborn Baby Jesus is finally laid in the manger bed.

Nowadays a decorated Christmas tree may be incorporated in the Nacimiento or set up elsewhere in the home. As purchase of a natural pine represents a luxury commodity to most Mexican families, the typical arbolito (little tree) is often an artificial one, a bare branch cut from a copal tree (Bursera microphylla) or some type of shrub collected from the countryside.

NOCHE BUENA
Holiday festivities culminate on Noche Buena (Christmas Eve) with the celebration of a late-night Misa de Gallo (Rooster's Mass). Afterwards families head home for a traditional Christmas supper which may feature a simple fare of homemade tamales and atole (corn gruel) or other regional dishes. A more exotic feast might include bacalao a la vizcaina (Biscayan cod) and revoltijo de romeritos (wild greens in mole sauce). Roast turkey, ham or suckling pig are other popular menu items for those who can afford it. Ponche (a hot fruit punch), sidra (sparkling cider) or other spir- its are served for the holiday brin- dis (toast). The evening is rounded out with the opening of gifts and, for the children, piñatas and luces de Belen (sparklers). As these happy family gatherings generally last into the wee hours, December 25th is set aside as a day to rest and enjoy that universal holiday bonus -- el recalentado (leftovers).

Incidentally, Santa Claus and the clatter of reindeer hooves on the roof do not generally figure in the scheme of Navidad. A Mexican youngster's holiday wishlist is directed instead to el Niño Dios (the Holy Child) for Christmas Eve and the Reyes Magos (Magi) for Three Kings Day.

LA FLOR DE NOCHE BUENA
Its Latin name is Euphorbia Pulcherrima. Its Mexican monikers include the ancient Nahuatl term Cuilxochitl (star flower), along with Catarina (Catherine), Flor de Pastor (Shepherd's Flower) and, most commonly, Flor de Noche Buena (Christmas Eve Flower).

In the English-speaking world this illustrious holiday bloom is called the Poinsettia, named after Dr. Joel R. Poinsett, a U.S. diplomat who served as Minister to Mexico in the 1820's. Like many newcomers to Mexico, he was no doubt enthralled by the sight of the gargantuan shrubs covered in mid-winter with brilliant vermillion blossoms. After experimenting

with various methods of propaga- tion, he returned home to Charles- ton, South Carolina with enough cuttings to begin the cultivation of these stunning plants in northern climes.

The bright petals of the poin- settia are not really flowers, but bracts or leaves that surround the true blossom, a rather inconspic- uous cluster of yellow florets. The bracts may be solid creamy white, salmon pink or scarlet, variegated or double blooms.

Among pre-Hispanic tribes of ancient Mexico, the Cuilxochitl was more than just a pretty face. The blood-red bracts were often placed on the chests of those suffer- ing afflictions of the heart to help stimulate circulation. They were sometimes crushed to a pulp to be used as a poultice for the treatment of skin infections.

A note of good cheer to those more inclined to be couch potatoes

than gardeners: Modern-day Mexi- cans enjoy still another form of Noche Buena-- a rich, dark, bock- like beer distributed only during the holiday season.

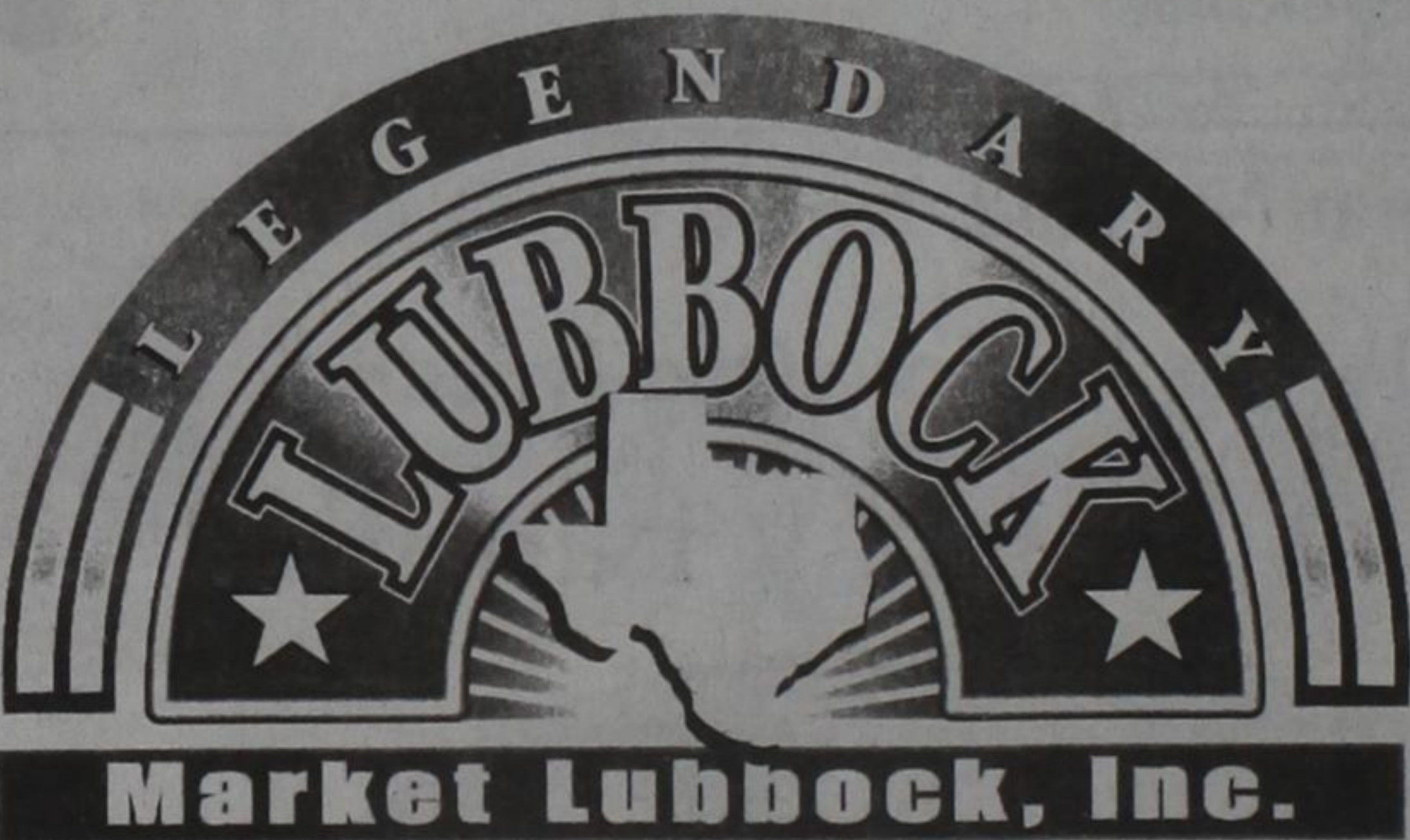
LOS SANTOS INOCENTES
December 28, Day of the Holy Innocents, is a religious com- memoration of King Herod's order- ing the slaughter of all male infants in his kingdom, intended to in- clude the Christ Child. In Mexico it is celebrated as day akin to April Fool's, an occasion for jokes and pranks. The usual tactic is to ap- proach a friend and ask to borrow cash or some object of value. If fooled by the ploy, the victim may be given a candy or silly gift in re- turn, along with much joking and name calling. So beware or you may find yourself titled Fool Saint for a day!

LOS REYES MAGOS
The Christmas season continues

unabated in Mexico through Epiph- any, which is called Dia de los Reyes (Three Kings Day). Echoing the arrival in Bethlehem of Wise Men bearing gifts for the baby Je- sus, children throughout Mexico anxiously await waking up January 6 to find toys and gifts left by the Reyes Magos (Magi). In some re- gions it is customary to leave out shoes where treasures may be de- posited by the visiting Wise Men. A special treat served one this day is the Rosca de Reyes--a crown-shaped sweet bread decorated with jewel-like candied fruits. Tiny figures of babies are hidden in the dough before baking. There is much excitement as each partaker cuts his or her own slice, for who- ever gets a piece containing a baby is obliged to host another party on or before Candlemas, February 2, when Mexico's holiday season fi- nally comes to an end.



Report Card October 1, 2001 - September 30, 2002



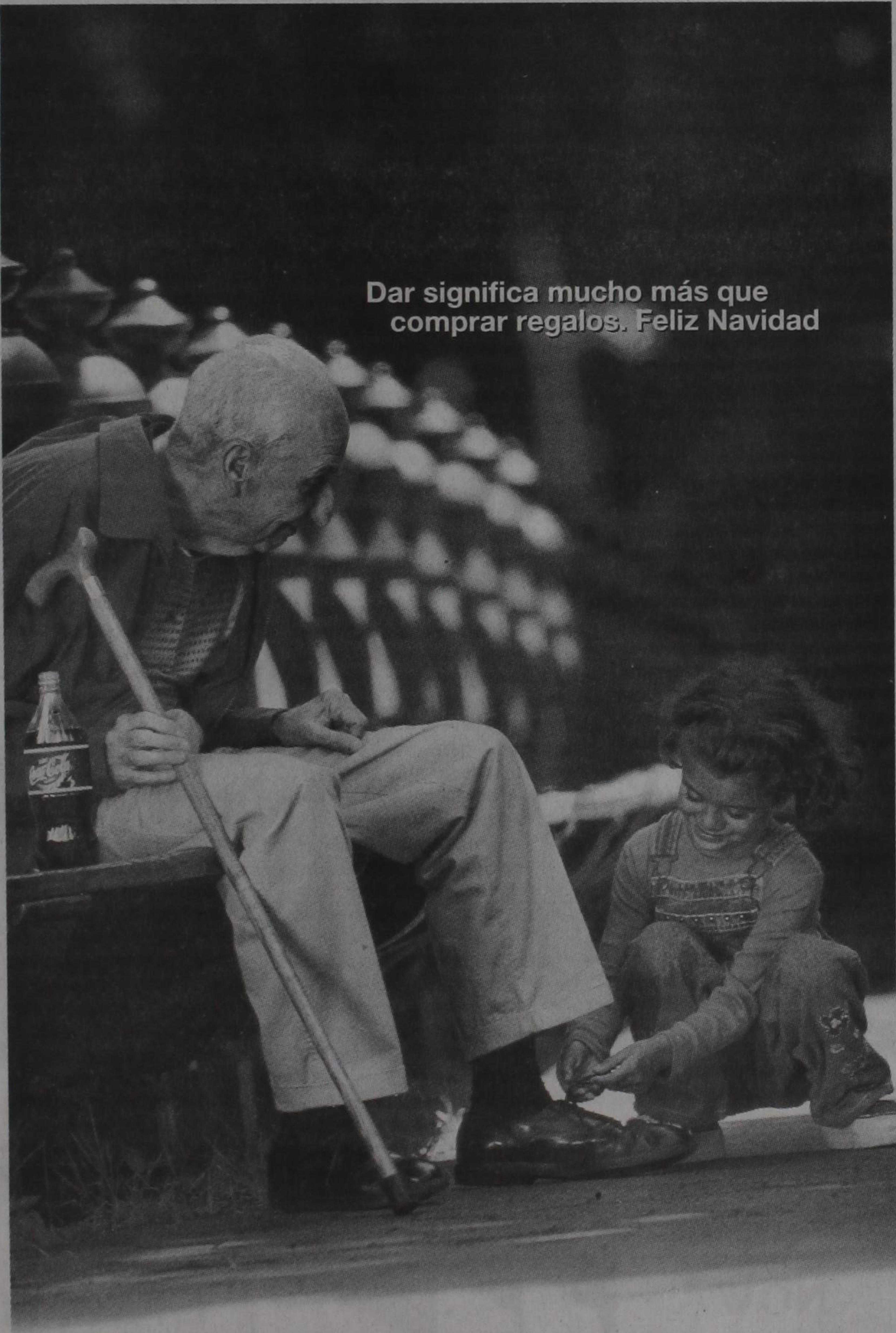
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Dar significa mucho más que
comprar regalos. Feliz Navidad

Hay momentos en que sólo puede haber una bebida.



A Merry Michoacan Christmas

By ROCIO AGUIRRE

The atmosphere is so "warm" during this time. It is definitely a time for fun, laughter and good food with family and friends. I was fortunate enough to live in Mexico for five years and I was able to celebrate Navidad one year with my mother's family in Lazaro Cardenas, Michoacan -- an industrial port located about an hour from Ixtapa. The climate is warm since it is in a tropical zone.

I remember the following for the Christmas of 1986: At my grandfathers house, "La Casa Grande" was big enough to accommodate all of the relatives, from first cousins to great aunts and uncles. I remember that Christmas was just that: the celebration of the birth of Christ. We would have an enormous manger made to the side of "el patio," and it would have every imaginable animal figurine in clay form. There would be a variety of plants and poinsettias and lights.

In the evening after Mass, everyone would gather together in La Casa Grande. The youngest child in the family (who could walk) would carry a porcelain baby Jesus to the manger after a brief singing of the Las Posadas. Everyone held a candle and would join in the short procession to the manger. After that we would play "el estereo" all night long with every type of song imaginable from modern to traditional cumbias and mariachi music. It was a very festive atmosphere.

Then we would all find a seat somewhere, since there are never enough seats, and feast on pollo asado con verduras. This was slow cooked all afternoon, with its scent tempting us until it came time to actually eat and taste it.

My other aunts would also bring their dishes of tamales de elote, arroz, and frijoles con queso, and my uncles would be cooking up the carne asada on a huge grill. We had "ponche" and



buñuelos and empanadas de coco with "Campurrado de Chocolate" and of course, the typical aguas de jamaica y de arroz y de tamarindo.

My aunts always invited the neighbors, who were needy, and treated them like family. I always liked that they could share with others less fortunate and not turn their heads as if these people didn't exist. In the United States, we are lucky if we even know the last name of neighbors.

Afterward, we would break the piñatas -- one for children and one for adults. The one for children had candy, peanuts, and money. The one for adults was always a riot. It would either be full of flour, rocks, or water. Of course, very few people would know what was in

the piñata and whoever broke it would always be a good sport about it. We all would be rolling with laughter at these innocent antics.

Another thing was the "intercambio". This is just like the Grab Bag that is done in the U.S. We would have the regular intercambio and then we also all brought along a "prank" gift -- "de broma." We would place our names in a hat and whoever we picked would get our prank gift. Some of these gifts included: live frogs, laxatives, and enormous underwear among other things. Everyone would love this and I remember everyone would be a good sport about it.

The whole night would be about laughter, dancing, good food and "un buen ambiente" that could only be created by real love and genuine caring. It can't be bottled or purchased anywhere. Those magical happy times I will always remember as they enrich my Christmas every year.

A La Isla Con Santa Clos

Por: Patricia Guadalupe

Estoy convencida que se goza más en el Caribe durante la Navidad. Sólo hay que poner la radio aquí y escuchar "Noche de Paz" e iguales canciones. Compárelas con la radio en Puerto Rico, donde durante las fiestas navideñas, hasta algunas canciones religiosas tiene ese toque de merengue y salsa.

Y allá no hay porque esconderse debajo de tanta ropa por el frío o preocuparse que vaya una a resbalar en el hielo por ponerse tacones. Además, las fiestas no se acaban en Puerto Rico hasta mediados de enero. Eso definitivamente tiene que ser más divertido que regresar al trabajo al día siguiente después de despedir el año a todo dar.

Así es, llegó la hora de largarse a Puerto Rico. El viaje al Caribe comienza en serio en la terminal de la línea aérea American en la aeropuerto internacional Kennedy en, como dicen muchos, los Nueva Yores. Mientras con creciente frecuencia otras líneas aéreas viajan a las islas, por mucho tiempo American ha controlado el 80% del mercado. Y aunque la población puertorriqueña aumenta en otras partes de Estados Unidos, la llamada Gran Manzana sigue siendo la capital estadounidense de Puerto Rico, y de la República Dominicana. Por ende, Kennedy es el punto principal de partida.

Hay tres grupos que viajan desde el aeropuerto Kennedy en las Navidades: los puertorriqueños, los dominicanos, y LOS DEMAS. Los llamados demás usualmente son pequeños grupos de anglosajones calladitos que mayormente viajan a lugares populares entre anglosajones durante esa época: Miami o Bermuda o Jamaica. No se ven ni se escuchan por el alboroto latino en el aeropuerto de los que van

a "la casa de mami" en San Juan o Santo Domingo.

Miles y miles llegan a la terminal por el viaje de poco más de 3 horas, aunque solamente dos o tres del gentío viajarán. El resto está para la gran despedida e instrucciones de última hora de, "por favor", saludar a juniol, paco, pepe, juan, anita, maria, nelson, willie,manuel, y los primos y vecinos. Y, "perate!" te gritan desde lejos cuando ya estas por partir, "acuérdate que la camiseta es para fulano, los zapatos para sutano," y siguen hasta que media humanidad ya sabe lo que llevas en la maleta. Y Dios te libre de no cargar con ella al avion. Que pasa, santo Dios, si se pierde en el equipaje y llegas sin regalos!

Lo que no quepa en esa maleta -- a pesar de que se sentara encima un primo gordo par ayudarte a cerrarla -- se pone en una caja de cartón y amarrada con un ROLLO ENTERO de cinta adhesiva, Dpáque no se abra. Y se amarra con sogá, por si acaso. Luego en los cuatro lados de la caja, con plumón negro y el letras mayúsculas, se escribe la dirección del recibidor. Es para asegurarse que si se pierde la caja, el que la encuentre sepa donde mandarla, por supuesto. A lo mejor ya usted conoce estas famosas cajas navideñas: las Samsonite puertorriqueñas. Se acuerdan del comercial en la television donde un gorilla enjaulado tiraba una maleta al suelo tratando de romperla? Pues, se robaron la idea de los vuelos navideños en el aeropuerto Kennedy. Estoy segura de eso. Estoy dispuesta a apostar que se puede mandar una vajilla entera en la samsonite boricua y no le pasa nada. Claro que nadie piensa qué pasa si le piden en el aeropuerto que las abra. Se oye mucho de lo siguiente:

una noche entera cerrándola!"

Claro que SIEMPRE ha alguien llorando cuando es hora de irse. Pero siempre es alguien que se queda para bregar con el frío y "noche de paz." Pobrecita.

En la salida, el gentío espera, hablando duro, tocando salsa o merengue en esas radios enormes que seguramente son regalos de Navidad para algun familiar. Aunque probablemente hace bastante frío afuera, muchos llevan pantalones cortos y camisetas, preparados para el calor tropical.

Tan pronto anuncian el vuelo, TODOS -- sin importar el asiento asignado -- se levantan y casi atropellan a la pobre muchacha en la entrada. Es tanta la desesperación por llegar a la playa.

Y claro, al apagarse la señal del cinturón de seguridad, el vuelo parece un cabaret -- risa y carcajadas, gritaría y a veces un juego de dominó mientras se camina por el pasillo. De vez en cuando enseñan una película, pero es mas bien para entretener a los chiquillos mientras sigue el chismorre.

Después de un rato, una miradita por la ventanilla y ya se puede ver debajo de las nubes el agua cristalina y azul y las montañas. Pronto serás parte de esa tradicion boricua de aplaudir al aterrizar y verás las caras de los miles de familiares que te vinieron a buscar, emocionados al verte, y en ese lo estará mami. "Ay, miña. Qué pálida estás. Necesitas sol!"

Si, en las Navidades se goza más en el Caribe. Y la fiesta comienza en el viaje.

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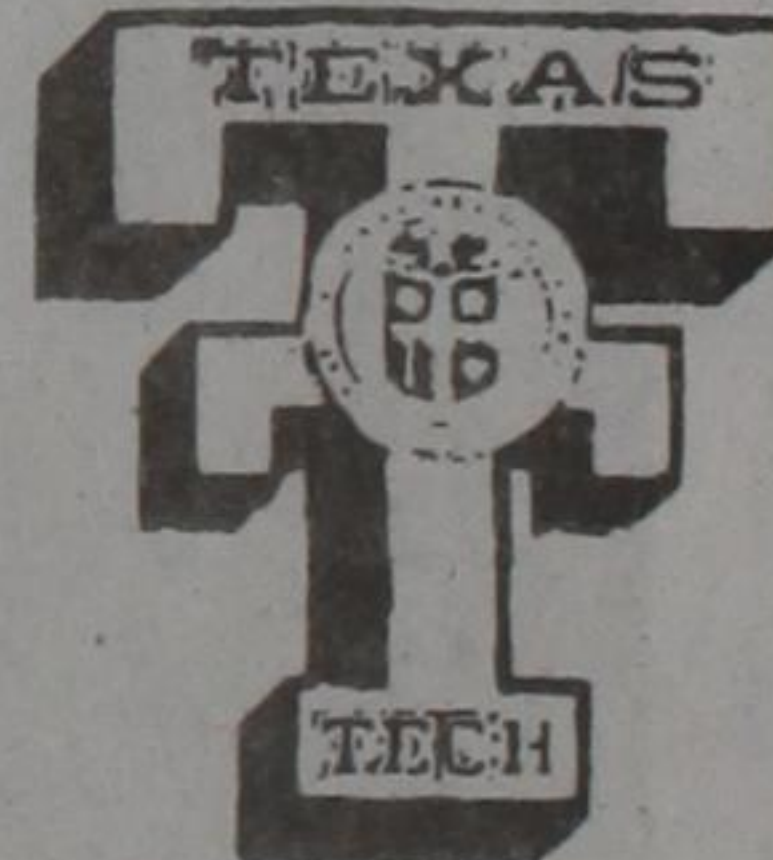
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Three Lawyers and Los Reyes Magos

By ROBERT WADDELL

One's a poet, one's an artist and one is a college professor. But once a year, they all become kings for a day.

Papoleto Melendez, Benny Ayala and Jose Olmo-Olmo don regal attire and regalia to become Magi for New York's El Museo del Barrio's annual Día de Los Reyes celebration, participating in what has become a barrio tradition.

The Three Kings march from 106th Street to 3rd Avenue, up to 116th Street, down Lexington Avenue and back to 104th Street in Manhattan. The celebration, now in its 23rd year, has become a secular and religious intersection of medieval festivity and Latino culture.

"This is for all of us. We show our children a memorable time while returning to our roots, our traditions," said Ayala, who has portrayed King Melchor for the last 15 years.

Unlike the hectic commercialism that surrounds the holidays, El Día de Los Reyes returns Latino celebrants to the true meaning of Christmas: honoring the birth of Jesus Christ. For the Jan. 5 tradition, children gather up grass and hay and leave it in a box under their beds. The next morning, children are told that the Three Kings' camels have eaten the grass after their long journey, and the kings leave presents as thanks.

"Grass is hard to come by where we live," said Milagros Morales, a librarian at Mott Haven Village School in the Bronx. "So my daughters and I leave cheerios; I think they're sick and tired of eating hay."

Throughout the Caribbean and Latin America, The Three Kings is the preferred holiday of the Christmas season. "When December 31 comes, the holidays are over, but for us the feast continues," said Antonia Anguita of Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico. Anguita spends months in preparation for the January 6

holiday. She takes used plastic bottles, cuts off the tops, sews miniature clothes and attaches pre-fabricated plastic heads to create miniature statues of Los Reyes for her family and friends.

With the influx of Mexicans and other Latin Americans to New York, the holiday has gained a resurgence in popularity in recent years, said Melendez, who portrays Gaspar in the New York parade.

But the New York parade is not without controversy. Each year following the parade, The Kings have delivered presents to children in nearby hospitals, then they're invited to City Hall. Last year, Melendez's gift to the Mayor was a performance of "El Borinquen," the song of Puerto Rican liberation. He said that as far as he knows, he and his fellow Kings haven't been invited back to City Hall.

"In the original story," said Melendez, "The kings met for the first time when Herod wanted them to find and tell where the baby Jesus was. They found him, then went their separate ways without telling Herod a thing."

"It's curious that we always wound up at the mayor's house, like we were going to tell Guilianni where Jesus was hiding," he said.

With its general lack of commercialism and close ties to Latino culture, the Day of the Epiphany remains a richly unifying day for many Latinos, say the portrayers of the Kings. They're glad that, so far, the annual parade has not had any vigorous corporate sponsors.

"I'm always hearing about the billions of dollars that can be gained from millions of Latinos," said Jose Olmo-Olmo, who'll portray Baltazar for the first time this year. "It will get tapped as shamelessly as Santa Claus has been tapped."

**Merry Christmas
Feliz Navidad**

Christmas In Mexico

The first thing to know about celebrating Christmas in Mexico is that most everybody takes off the last two weeks in December - to party, spend more time with the family, visit with old friends, even make new friends. One of the biggest fiestas of the year - in small towns, big cities, the beach resorts, everywhere - Christmas in Mexico is celebrated in a variety of ways. A common denominator is the *posada*, a recreation of Mary (on donkey) and Joseph searching for a "room at the inn." Accompanying them is a choir of small children who knock on doors asking for lodging for the weary couple. By previous arrangement, there are no takers.

The procession, which takes place during the 12 days before Christmas, moves along, growing in numbers until it reaches the church, where mass is held. After the service, the children get to enjoy a festive *piñata* party.

Even though variations of this *tableaux* are repeated throughout the country, you can expect to find some regional differences, which makes a Mexican Christmas not only a cross cultural mix, but a varied and interesting experience. Year after year. Region after region.

For example, in the *Ajijic* area, a "riviera resort community" suburb of Mexico City, in the little village of *San Antonio*, the *posada* is a most moving and spiritual experience. Same for Taxco and Querétaro. Catch the event in these areas if you can. Also in Querétaro, there's a huge parade on December 23.

In the town of *Cajititlán* (near Guadalajara), as in many other places in the Hispanic world, they celebrate the

holidays on Three Kings Day (Epiphany), which falls on January 6th. In fact, this was the traditional time to celebrate the gift-giving aspect of Christmas throughout Mexico. But in most parts of the country, the holiday now coincides with the day of celebration north-of-the-border: December 25. Many children now expect gifts on both days.

The ritual often begins in the afternoon or at dinner time when the family shares a *rosca* or two (a *rosca* is a sweet, ring-shaped loaf with a ceramic *muñeca* (doll) representing the Christ child baked inside). Unlike a cracker-jack box where the winner takes all, whoever is *unlucky* enough to get the doll has to throw a party on February 2 (*Día de Candelaria*) for all the others present. In this case, the "winner", who has to foot the time and expense, is often the loser. (Note: on the afternoon of *Día de Candelaria*, dancers gather for a performance in the churchyard. Sometimes as many as six different dance groups perform at the same time. The dancers are divided among those portraying Christians and Moors, each competing for the most attention. Other groups are represented as well. In small towns where this festival is held, there's also a special market on that day.) The party itself usually includes some favorite dish spiced with a zesty regional molé sauce.

The fiesta for the *Virgin de la Soledad*, the patron saint of Oaxaca, December 16-18, signals the beginning of the *navidad* festivities. The highlight, again, is the *posada*, held at a different church each night from December 18-24. On December



23, the annual *Noche de los Rábanos* takes place. This is a very festive time when booths are set up along the length and breadth of the *zócalo*. The focal point of each booth is an exhibit of hand-carved, giant radishes. Most often, these sculptures carry a religious theme. But this is not necessarily so. The subject could be comical, a scene from a bullfight or anything that strikes the fancy of the sculptor. On *Nochebuena*, processions from various churches fan out to the *zócalo*. There are also colorfully-decorated floats, music, traditional dancing, and *piñata* prizes. The crowning glory of this fiesta is a mammoth fireworks display.

On Christmas Eve, in *Santiago Tuxtla* (Veracruz), everybody assembles in the

zócalo for an evening of dancing the *huapango* to the accompaniment of a *jarocho* band.

In *Quiroga* (Michoacán), villagers present Nativity plays (*Pastorelas*) at churches on Christmas Eve and on Christmas Day.

Even the capital México City, takes on a festive air with the famed *zócalo* (or sometimes called the *Plaza de la Constitución*) ablaze with a sea of colorful lights festooning this ancient square. The festival of lights goes on throughout the Christmas/New Year's period. In addition, there's a colorful flag-raising/lowering ceremony every morning and afternoon during the holidays. The rest of the city is similarly decorated. And, of course, traditional services are held in the city's many churches.

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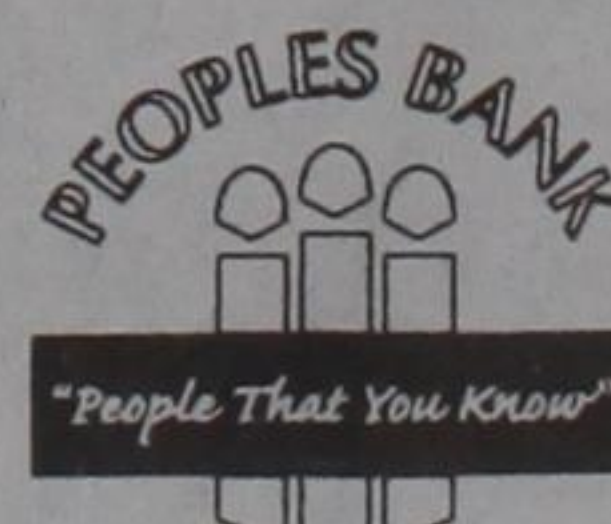
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--- A Christmas Story ---

By Wendy Devlin ©1999

One hour north of Manzanillo, Colima, the Primero Plus gave one final jolt in front of Melaque's bus station. From air-conditioned comfort, we stepped down into the afternoon warmth. By arriving mid December at this small seaside resort, Josh, Rose and myself hoped to beat the vacation crowd due by Christmas. By that time, the small hotels would offer few *cuartos vacantes* (Vacant rooms). Hefting luggage over our shoulders, we headed down along Gómez Fariás, Melaque's main beach drag and around the corner. Opening unto a quieter side street, our modest hotel is sandwiched between a low row of cream-colored casas rising directly from the sidewalk. Glancing up from the reservation book atop the huge mahogany desk, Lupita Fallones smiled.

"Bienvenido, Señora Devlin!" Her dark eyes sparkled as I exchanged Spanglish while booking our room. Rose, thirteen, pointed to the box for the key to room # 3. "Can we stay there again? That's our home in Mexico."

This was our fourth trip to Mexico and third visit to Melaque. Bring kids here when they're small and they want to come back. But the same room? Go figure!

"How's your father and step-mother?"

A fleeting frown creased Lupita's smooth forehead. "Bueno. But my stepmother and children live with her family in Colima City. She separated from Nestor last August."

Surprised by this turn of events, I inquired, "So sorry. Is your father around?"

"He'll return ----mañana."

Several hours later a short sixty-year old man with a trim mustache knocked on our door. Nestor! He shook my hand formally then embraced me in a warm abrazo. At five feet and four inches, our heights match. We chatted happily, catching up on a year of news, then, he disappeared for..... three days!

When I asked twenty-three year old Lupita as to Nestor's whereabouts, her eyebrows arched over a sweet smile. "My father? Mañanaaaaa."

That famous mañana. Mañana, tomorrow; en la Mañana, some morning of some Mañana or mañana; mañana, the day after tomorrow. Mañana...later Anytime..... but now.

Requiring?..... boundless patience, practice and persistence.

When Nestor resurfaced I joked, "Amigo. Three days--gone? In Canada, our RCMP search for someone missing after 24 hours."

Coughing quietly, he dropped his head as I translated his Spanish roughly. "Not missing. Sick three days. In bedsore throat, coughing. No move a muscle til today. Still, very bad. My wife, kids move away. Maybe I sell hotel. Very bad time for me."

"Lupita told me this when I first arrived. Did you say----OWN this hotel?"

"Sí. This hotel.... fifteen years. Why so surprised, amiga?"

"I'm an idiot! When I met you last year and you said you managed the hotel, I didn't know you owned it. I even wrote about you managing this hotel on the Internet."

My teens, Josh and Rose divided their time among the small mercado, the beach and the hotspots of Melaque's sister village, Barra de Navidad four miles away. For breakfast and lunch they perched on the mercado stools, ordering the simple specials. Relaxing on the beach by day, they partied and danced until the wee hours at night. Rarely did they join my daily outings, hiking or riding local buses to outlying villages and their exquisite beaches. Sometimes, they dropped their independence, to join me for la cena (supper) with other friends or Nestor at favorite restaurants around the village.

So I cheered up and sure enough things got worse!

Nestor chuckled and took me to dinner.

Over the following week I joked and gently teased him, hoping his gray cloud would lift. Nestor spent a lot of time talking urgently on the phone in the lobby. After my morning walk, I joined folks for a fresh cup of coffee at the Bananarama on Gómez Fariás. Sipping slowly, I watched as Don and Marie dished out tasty plates of waffles and eggs or muffins. Enjoying breakfast, I listened to ex-pats, locals and visitors swapping news, gossip, philosophy and jokes. People jostled along the sidewalk, sometimes stopping to chat or slowly rumbling by in vehicles. With her bumpy streets scheduled for paving and a new military base constructed on the outskirts of town, Melaque is gradually changing.

my age of forty-six with long, lustrous wavy hair framing an attractive face. Nestor comes from the distant state of Tamaulipas on Mexico's East Coast. Juanita comes from a family of thirteen children in nearby Colima. Today she met us with a frosty manner.

Reconciliation underway? Later on I bumped into Nestor and asked what I hoped was a tactful question. "Do you have plans for Christmas Eve?"

His face dropped towards his shoes.

"I do nothing special. Juanita no want to go out. She prepares no special meal. I work like always."

He looked like he wanted to cry. It triggered thoughts of my own husband and oldest son back in Canada at Christmas. My tact dropped into a bucket and started leaking.

"I'm not doing anything either. Let's do nothing together! Last night I went dancing over in Barra. The kids are going back tonight. How about... a few beers? Sit together and talk."

Nestor's gold-capped teeth parted with comprehension. "Bueno!"

Returning minutes later from a tiny tienda, I spotted Juanita standing in the lobby. Dwarfed behind the huge desk, a man's voice piped from somewhere. "My wife wish to have beer with us, too."

"Sure! There's enough for everyone."

Nestor jumped up and pulled over a heavy chair for Juanita.

Is this a 'delicate situation' in Mexico? Heck it's a situation anywhere! I could join gringos tonight. But I want to see how Mexicans spend Christmas. Gringos I know, Mexicanos, I'm learning!

Leaning forward, I reached into my small pack, for some photos of my kids and home. Since Nestor and Juanita speak only a smattering of English, the photos provided conversational help. I gave them copies taken last year in Melaque. A hint of a smile darted across Juanita's face. An hour later the couple's two teens appeared with hands wide



open for dinero. While rapidly firing Spanish, Nestor dug in his slacks and forked over some paper pesos. A few minutes later, the teens returned, munching on snacks, handing back the change and exchanging another quick round of Spanish. Suddenly Nestor reached down, lifting a large painted sign and perched it on the desk against the wall.

"We go! Kids say restaurant having special dinner."

The sign declared in big black letters on a white background.

NO HAY LOS CUARTOS VACANTES (There are no vacant rooms)

Grinning, Nestor pointed towards the wooden cubicles holding several hotel room keys. "Amiga. Six empty rooms! Now... they FULL!"

Nestor, Juanita and myself walked a block, seeking out the small restaurant. Tonight, the humble building and its outdoor patio metamorphosed under soft lighting. A candle glowed in a fish-shaped glass bowl gracing each outdoor table. Centerpieces of fresh crimson carnations and sprigs of red roses adorned each snowy tablecloth. Tall bottles of rose Champagne and crystal glasses caught quick gleams of light. Strings of clear Christmas lights twinkled, draped along plaster walls and encircling

whitewashed bases of palm trees. Beating bongos in the corner, a man crooned soothing Latino melodies. When he switched to a more up-beat tempo, several dining couples sprang to dancing feet.

Nestor waved the young waiter over to order cervezas. When the musician returned to ballads, Juanita began singing. Softly she sang the lyrics for every tune.

"Abhhhhh. My wife. Such a romantic."

"Sí. But you...are Pancho Villa!" Juanita's dark mass of hair flounced without missing a beat.

Did jealousy plague this marriage?

My friends rose to dance a few slow songs. A little later, four other women left their partners, to weave a lively chorus line.

Without a partner I might not get a chance to dance. This looks like it.

I shimmied up to the line. The ladies hooted approvingly while the men clapped wildly for the gringa joining their party. The next song, the chorus line formed a chain, picking up most of the men as it wove through the tables and chairs. My jaw ached from smiling and laughing as I flopped back into my seat.

Juanita fixed a glittering gaze on me.

Something said while I danced?

Nestor flourished his hand to order round three of cervezas as heaping plates of seafood

steamed upon our table.

The musician stood up, announcing a short break. Loud taped music flirted with the night air. Abruptly the melody shifted to a galloping polka.

Never have I sat through a polka!

Throwing caution to the wind, I cocked my finger to our waiter who strode to the table.

"¿Un baile, por favor?"

His white teeth parted in a wide smile and he opened his first finger slightly away from his thumb.

"Momentito. Señora."

He dashed off to the kitchen counter, dropped his serving tray and hastened back.

Gonzalo was a live one! The next two polkas deposited me breathless in my chair.

"Gracias, mi amigo."

"De nada. Señora."

At our table, her voice pitching higher, Juanita urged Nestor to open the bottle of Champagne.

"Por Wendy!"

"¡No! Gracias. I protested. Estoy mucha borracha." (I am very drunk)

Not exactly the truth but if I drank any Champagne, I would be!

Did a glint in Juanita's eye suggest this was the general idea?

Nestor's hands rocked his head slightly, muttering words like 'home' and 'bed'.

Saved by the bell.

Tonight I rolled as a third wheel. Unescorted women in Mexico walk a tightrope between fun and compromising situations. Gringas especially need to avoid getting pigeonholed as loose women. Also Mexicans think badly of a drunken woman at any time. I watched with relief as Nestor purchased the bottle of Champagne and handed it to his wife. Walking back in fine spirits, I teased Juanita.

"You carry that bottle like a baby."

She tossed her head back, laughing and wagged her finger at me.

By two a.m. Josh and Rose returned by taxi from Barra just as Nestor removed the sign upon the front desk. The hotel bell rang incessantly until six a.m. as people continued to arrive looking for cuartos vacantes. The inns were full.

A firecracker exploded outside my ground floor window and my second Christmas day in Mexico began. Someone ending their night or beginning their day? Will Mexico ever fail to surprise or delight me?

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