

Feliz Navidad

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It is, once again, Christmas Day. I am alone in my house, baking blueberry/lemon muffins and ginger/cranberry scones to take with me to a family brunch gathering in a few hours. Outside the sun is bright, the sky very blue, and the ice on the bushes by my windows is sparkling.

Two weeks ago, I was in Cuba. Ironically, I lived in Key West in 1959 as refugees were fleeing the Revolution. In retrospect I realize I did not know a lot about what was happening. I was 22, with two children under 13 months, and didn't pay much attention to anything beyond my immediate supervision. So, in Havana, walking through the Museum of the Revolution, I got a sense of those times...of those hopes, as the people, led by Castro, rose up to topple a corrupt government.

Today, more than 50 years later, one gets a glimpse of dreams unfulfilled. But not all of them. Cuba has, apparently, a good health care system; and a enviable education system, with 100% literacy. Very little violent crime, and practically no drug problems. Yet the people are terribly poor. The beautiful architecture—Havana must once have been one of the most dazzling cities in the world—is crumbling. Many of the luxurious homes that were owned by the wealthy, who fled, are now occupied by large numbers of people, and laundry flaps from the windows. The ruined sidewalks make for treacherous walking and the workers in the cigar factory dread the frequent power outages because they are sent home and get no pay for the day.

I always like to wander through small supermarkets in other parts of the world. They give such a sense of daily life. But one sees none of those in Havana. The population is provided monthly rations from the state ("never quite enough," one person confided with a rueful laugh)

Yet there is music—oh my, there is music!—and art, and dance; and a wonderful sense of community in the neighborhoods. One well-known tile artist has decorated his entire neighborhood so that it is bright with color.



My stuff is done and I must head out. Feliz Navidad.