

## **KEEP X IN CHRISTMAS** – December 2005

— By Richard L. Kiniry

The shopping season is upon us. We may not believe any of the stories connected with the holidays but we are still expected to prove our affection for family and friends by buying stuff. I know I already have too much stuff and even the children in my world have more clothes, toys, and games than they will ever get to use.

A couple of years ago I went thorough my house packing up all the clutter. I filled three boxes without trying but refilled the place with new clutter in no time. Friends bring back presents from vacations, my birthday elicits a book or a nice shirt, and the Holidays arrive with more stuff I could live without. Of course, I am my own worst enemy. I can not walk past a piece of blown-glass without fingering my credit card. I keep promising that I'm going to move into a loft, an all white loft, with room for just a bed and a couple chairs - no room for pretty things or Cuisanart attachments.

The holiday season is a prime example of how materialistic we have become. The mythical stories that supposedly engender the holidays are for believers events with religious significance. But those stories include a large dose of magic. Besides a virgin birth and magic oil, there is a gift-giving old man from the North Pole and a reindeer with a stop light for a nose. So, the religious stories become an occasion for more magic - gifts magically falling into our laps. Of course, to perform the magic you need a credit card that will produce some black magic down the road.

Giving can be very satisfying but being forced to give takes some of the joy out of the giving. And since everyone we actually know already has too much, you have to be clever to fine some bauble that will please.

Well, this year I'm giving myself permission to be true to my beliefs. I have always given some presents that were contributions to the needy or to a cause, and I have decided it is time to be consistent and give only meaningful gifts. I may kill some of the magic of the season but that is a side benefit of intentional giving.

I could decide not to participate at all and announce that I will neither give nor receive holiday gifts, but that is a bit too high-handed and holier-than-thou. Actually my sentiments are not so unique and there is a growing trend among people tired of the meaningless giving who are looking for a better way. Charitable groups are offering us opportunities to give presents that give to others. You can present your family and friends with cards informing them that in their name you have bought a cow for a family in Bangladesh or feed a Native-American family. And there are always home-made gifts - rum balls or a bird house.

Our materialistic culture finds endless ways of manipulating our behavior and we have to work at freeing ourselves from its clutches. The holiday season is a perfect time to think about what we

are doing as we go forth into the world of jingling cash registers. It is time for more imaginative giving, gifts that both express our values and might also push someone closer to their better selves.