

THE GREATEST GIFT IS NOT JUST FOR CHRISTMAS

Madame P and I received great gifts while gift giving this year. Our merchandise was free in the marketplace of the heart. Too often we felt communally anesthetized and surgically disconnected from deeper meanings in giving presents. Frequently, those Frank Capraesque, 'It's a Wonderful Life' moments that moisten eyes, tighten throats and squeeze wallets are a crafted recipe of Hollywood pabulum concocted to give respite to tired souls in an unfair world-and sell crap

Our lives have been filled with too bright lights and too bright marketers haranguing us to buy the latest of the greatest of gifts. For years I have shunned buying ready made retail mementos of mirth. I make calls, labor over letters and strive to deliver my thanks for the recipients' existence by reflecting on that which connects us.

Many say the greatest of gifts is the laying down of ones life for another? Do we all think that means literally dying?

Perhaps the expression means dying to one's self; empathy, more so than sympathy. Not just understanding where the pain and passion of another lies, but crossing that magical bridge where in some meaningful sense you not only understand, but feel what might it be like to be them. Giving that gift to yourself and others releases a cornucopia that is never ending. A difficult notion to be sure, but it's easier with age and simple if you truly love.

Perhaps we measure a great gift not only in terms of the obstacles in giving it but the bridges it builds and the warmth of memories created that will melt the coldest heart.

You have heard of the Sicilian Tsunami Mommy (STM), Gina Ryan, all 4'11 on a hill in heels and a punch packing Pisan if ever there was one. That's mom; 89 years of wisdom, worries and war wounds and yet still a monument to the gift of wonder who surfs the web like a seasoned Google gal. She is immunized against death by her fabulous intellect and feverishly hot desire to learn anything.

We called a high ranking Geek Squad type, and after thorough vetting as regards the E ticket ride a few hours with STM promises, the present was arranged. Hell has no fire that can quench the STM's thirst for learning. Madame P and I called to tell her of the deal for the digital diva to have a few hours in her den of one on one training with an expert. Soon we were the recipient of the greatest gift of all; two kids learning how deeply and desperately a mother loves them. Enough said

A large part of the joy of these past few seasons of my life has been my having the pleasure to be in the company of Blind Billy Buckalew of Benicia, the best damn Conga player I have ever known. Born premature and blinded from birth, the recently motherless and now alone gifted musician and middle aged gentleman-child practiced only on pillows and will never have a penny to pay for a percussion instrument.

Sunday, Madame P and I heard the heavenly symphony of a pounding happy heart ringing off aged goatskins, resonating against Brazilian woods. We left Billy's apartment to the infectious thwop ca-ca coon, ca-ca coon, ca coon beat of a blind man filled with the sight of love, lost in wonder and joy and jamming on his new drums. He'll practice on pillows no more

So as the time of resolutions revolves around again, let's remember the greatest gift is you and it should be the reason behind every season you live. It is you if only for a moment living, laughing and dreaming as if you shared the hearts and hearths of another It is you saying thank you to them for being alive.

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