



CHRISTMAS EN PUERTO RICO



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THE CUATRO OF SAN JUAN

ARBOLITO, ARBOLITO

CHRISTMAS IS YOU

"A LAS TRES DE LA MAÑANA..."

AND MORE!!!



And Now...A Yuletide Word from the Sponsor

Once again, the editorial board of the Alpha Zeta Alpha chapter of Sigma Tau Delta manages to produce a unique and innovative issue of our Cayey Students Write creative newsletter to close out the first semester of 2019-2020. This time around they have developed a Yuletide issue under the theme: Christmas en Puerto Rico: 'It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year'. The call for papers was sent out in early October and soon the editorial board's team of (student editors) immersed themselves in receiving, reading, and assessing the submitted entries, which consisted of poems, stories, essays, and other aguinalditos (honestly, en velda, en velda! some may have been difficult to box into categories!). Eventually the entries were narrowed down to six pieces—which are sung [listed, with poetic liberties/license] below—making the final cut. Some of these will evoke reveries of tradiciones navideñas en Puerto Rico, likewise of puertorriqueños, regardless of their whereabouts in the world; some force one to reflect upon the season and its meanings, or lack thereof...and even hopes; a couple may lead you to break out into song, while others may force you to code-switch from English to español, español a inglés, y tal vez hasta yuKnow anigway, a spice of Spanglish in between...de picadera, as we say.



So sit back, grab your coquito or other preferred seasonal beverage, and sigiloasmente—shhshhhh, la parranda va'mpesar—and melodiosamente---bikose en puertorro, to'l mundo canta—sing or simply read along to:



“A Christmas en Puerto Rico”

Full of Yuletide cheer

Sigma Tau closes the year

With this issue for grandes y chico

As the clock strikes midnight, y pico!

“Arbolito, Arbolito” you read or sing

“Words Unspoken” will also ring

“X-mas en Puerto Rico” season engalana

“A Las Tres de la Mañana”

No sopón te darán

Yet, just “The Cuatro of (Old) San Juan”

Your ears will ring...

with repiques y melodía for you to meditate, read the issue and contemplate; o' just imbibe this humble Aguinaldo offering of our students and their creative proffering, for navidad, navidad, alegre navidad is finally here, and certainly 'tis the most wonderful time of the year! Enjoy, happy holidays from the past to the now, and a season's greeting from Sigma Tau.

David Lizardi

Sponsor



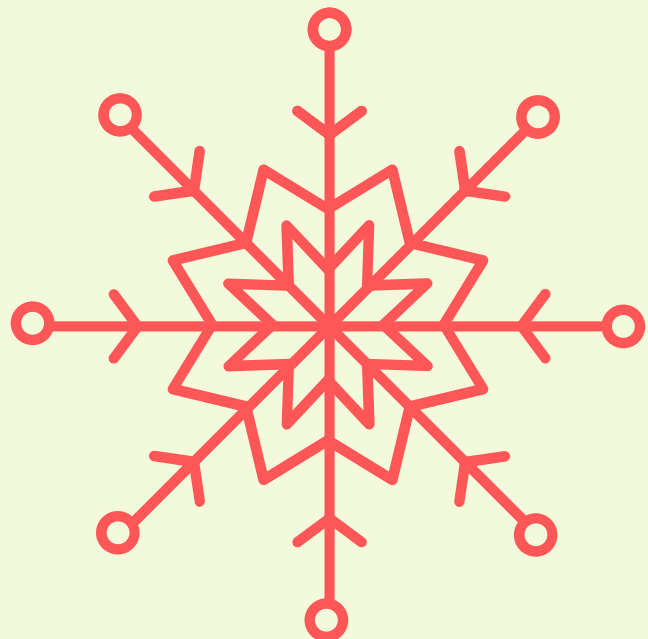
EDITOR'S LETTER



Dear Readers,

Welcome to another issue of *Cayey Students Write!* Since Christmas is already here, we wanted to celebrate our precious, local traditions by presenting some works elevating our culture. Thank you for taking the time to read them. Additional thanks to all Sigma Tau Delta members who helped put together this edition. We hope you enjoy it! ¡Feliz Navidad!

Marialin Batista
Editor-in-Chief



THE CUATRO OF SAN JUAN

by Madyanis Santiago

My idea of a harmonious vacation was filled with lots of melodic music, delicious treats and endless demonstrations of affection through families or friendships. So, after a long time of independent research (on various websites), my wife and I decided to take a trip to Puerto Rico in the month of December. It looked like a very good idea, after all. That island was known to have vastly beautiful landscapes, historical sites and great places to stay during our short visit. The general reviews that we found on social media talked excellently about nature. On December 12, we took a short trip from Savannah, Georgia to San Juan, Puerto Rico. The trip was peaceful and nicely entertaining.

We landed after three and a half hours of continuous flight, took a cab and reached a beautiful hotel located at the center of what is known as Old San Juan. What a fantastic place! We felt excited to see how well preserved that historical place was. It was like traveling back in time. One of the first things I realized from that place was their good taste in music. Traditional music was filling the streets and the small businesses' atmosphere, it was freely flowing through the air. We tasted the famous *piragüas*, which were colorful and refreshing. There were other tempting fried specialties brought from a place called Piñones: *bacalaítos*, *guanimes* and *alcapurrias*. Those were mouthwatering and really tasty traditional foods. It was Christmas season, so we had to visit places where the traditional music of the holiday was playing, and where we could find the season's gastronomy, of course!

One day, we decided to explore the entire Old San Juan until we could not walk anymore. While admiring the beauty of Puerto Rican history, an exotic, striking and melodic song caught our attention. Following the artistic trail left by those musical notes, we found their creator. A traditionally dressed middle aged man was sitting next to an emblematic monument in the crowded place, called *Fuente Raíces*. He was holding an attractive, rare and exotic (guitar-like) musical instrument of ten strings between his arms, which was accompanied by other two traditional instruments, referred to as *güiro* and *maracas*. Our attention got caught by the stringed one because now and then, it played fantastic melodies that denoted happiness, sorrow, melancholy and even innocence. It was called *Cuatro*, and this particular *Cuatro* was golden with some greenish-like designs that looked like traditional Puerto Rican art. It seemed magical, as those magical instruments that appear in fairy tales. I was wondering how all those emotions that I mentioned were able to flow through the musician to his instrument and pour themselves onto listeners, like us. We were blessed!



The place was vibrantly decorated with red flowers that the locals referred to as “*pascuas*.” Some passersby told us they are used to decorate almost every corner of the island when Christmas is near and that this usually lasts until the middle of January. That sounded like paradise! Their colorful Christmas season is known as *Navidad*, and it is pretty amazing. My wife experienced love at first sight when she saw a small table covered by green and red fabrics, which had traditional foods on them. We tasted the *coquito* and I have not known something as delicious as that creamy, sweet traditional beverage. Locals warned us that *coquito* had rum in it, but we just kept drinking. I was having a great time roaming around the plaza, tasting that addictive food and listening to the attractive songs of the *Cuatro*, that musical instrument that belonged to the man we saw at the monument. The *Cuatro* seemed to be made directly from the hands of a Caribbean God and gifted to the people of the island. It was mesmerizing.

As we enjoyed our time next to lots of Puerto Rican people, we fell into a kind of a “psychedelic trance-like state” that was intoxicating yet pleasurable. Maybe it was due to the joy we were feeling while walking around the streets, or maybe due to the effect of the rum from the delicious *coquito*, or it was just the effect that the *Cuatro*’s music had on us. We decided to leave and return to the hotel. I still think about that experience and try to decipher what really happened to us during our dreamy-like stay in Puerto Rico. Such enjoyable memories.

After that, all that I remember is that I was transported to the same hotel we stayed but it looked completely different. I do not know much about architecture, but it became a kind of lodge. Also, we had different clothes, like from a different time in history. When we peeped out from our window, we only saw carriages with horses and people carrying bags of sugar cane, coffee and other bizarre stuff. Our clothes were like from the eighteenth century, my wife had a very uncomfortable dress and I had a very formal kind of garment. Suddenly, someone knocked our door and called me by my last name. *Knock, knock!* “Mr. Wilson!” I opened the door to find the same man of the *Cuatro*, giving me the instrument with a strange expression. It seemed like he was in a hurry, and after a few seconds looking at me, he walked out from the lodge’s passage to the front entrance and disappeared.



I thought we would never see him again. But then, I woke up to find that it was just a dream! My wife was sitting next to me, waiting for me to open my eyes because it seemed that I was making sounds while sleeping. "Wake up, darling. Someone left a package for us. Come, I want to see what it is," she said. I decided to open it because she was really excited to see what was inside that box. It was a rectangular box with some red-colored paper alluding the season. We started to open it and for our surprise and shock, we saw the incredible golden *Cuatro* that the guy was playing the day before! I was completely static! My dream was not only a dream after all. Some part of it actually did happen. Unfortunately, we did not have time to check if it was sent to us by the same talented person. We left shortly after that moment. That is why we never knew who gave it to us, but we would never forget our Christmas vacation in the amazing Puerto Rico. We still have that piece of magic in our living room, blessing our home.



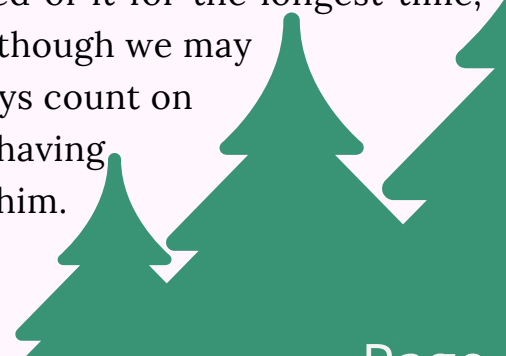
Arbolito, Arbolito

by Marialin Batista

The smell of *coquito* fills the air and the familiar sounds of *el cuatro* and the guitar come from the front door. I hear Emilia, the girl of the house, ushering her cousin to join the others. Everyone welcomes them with an exuberant cheer, a big hug and lyrics of Christmas songs. Ah, yes, Christmas. The most wonderful time of the year. And this year, it is the most wonderful time, indeed. The dad and the uncles, now in the living room where I am, improvise songs while *las tías* and *abuelita* recite *décimas* and *plenas*, those they repeat year after year. It is a miracle that they're spending the night together without an argument in sight. They're sharing and spending time with other family members, instead of thinking about themselves.

As the night moves along, an unexpected guest arrives. It's Emilia's long-lost brother, the one I haven't seen in around 5 years. Part of me always envied him. I, too, have wished to disappear, as everyone progressively forgets about me. Well, maybe they don't forget, but they've been giving me less importance over the years. Plus, nobody cares about Christmas anymore. Nowadays everyone is too busy. Unexpectedly though, tonight is an exception. It's a celebration in all its meaning. And I wasn't going to ruin the mood with my negative thoughts, not tonight.

The prodigal son treats himself to another bottle of *coquito*, and nobody gives him a glance because he's not a little kid anymore. Since he's never around, it's rare to hear a full conversation about him. I don't even know him. Yet seeing him give everyone a heartfelt hug, as if they were in need of it for the longest time, was nostalgic. It was the type of hug that said: "Even though we may never talk or have anything in common, you can always count on me." By the look on Emilia's face, I could tell she was having the same thoughts as I, and that she too, had missed him.



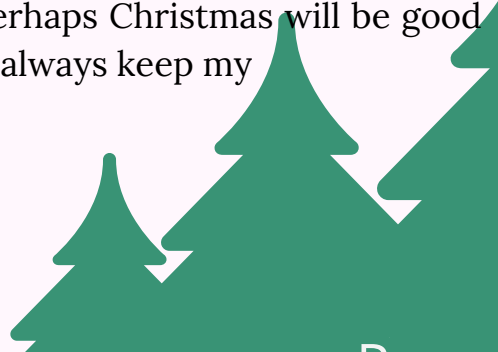
Our family has never been about dancing. It's always about the music and the food. This year, however, some of the youngest cousins are dancing, and I figure they've learned from the outside world. Although, dare I say, some are doing it terribly wrong. I might even be better than them. *La tía* who was singing her lungs out brings a plate with a mountain of *arroz con gandules*, *lechón*, *coditos*, *pasteles* and a cup of *tembleque*. It's the first time in a long while, that I see Emilia and her mom not caring about the amount of food they're ingesting. It's a great feeling, too. The Christmas food combination makes more sense when you eat until you drop dead. Before everyone finishes their meal, one of the uncles brings a Christmas present I hadn't seen before. "Secret Santa time!" he shouts. This of course upsets *abuelita*, since we're supposed to be celebrating *Los Tres Reyes Magos*, not *Santa Clós*. She doesn't say anything, but her face expresses a slight disagreement that no one else perceives. However, after an instant, she grins and I know she's content to have the whole family united. I am, too. Emilia receives an oversized t-shirt and, even though she pretends to like it, I can tell she doesn't. That's how it is for every child that's growing, but in the years to come she will appreciate it. A nostalgic feeling reaches the bottom of my heart, as I realize that I'm watching everyone grow old. This sudden realization makes me sad, but it also shows me how grateful and lucky I am to be here.

My melancholic trance is cut off by the screams of "**¡ASALTO!**" It was a big house after all, capable of holding a dozen more people. The rest of our family, some who lived *en la montaña*, were making their way to the living room. I had never seen them before, but a middle-aged woman glimpses at me and says: "Oh my! How pretty!" My heart feels full, partly because of the compliment and partly because it's been a long time since I last experienced a *parranda*.

"This is how Christmas should always feel like," I think to myself.



~

The sound of Emilia's dad rummaging through boxes brought me back to reality. As he opened the box where I was kept, a grown Emilia walked passed him with a bag full of Christmas decorations meant to be hung on me. I wondered if finally this year they'll be able to fill the void that nonexistent Christmas' spirits left behind. I took a deep breath as they lifted me out of the box. Perhaps Christmas will be good this year, just like it used to be. But no matter what, I'll always keep my promise of illuminating my family's house.









CHRISTMAS IS YOU



THE LONGEST CHRISTMAS IN THE WORLD
BEGAN THE FIRST DAY OF THE ELEVENTH MONTH.
FELL IN LOVE TO THE SOUND OF BOMBA Y PLENA,
HER LIPS SWEET LIKE COQUITO ON NOCHEBUENA.
INTOXICATING WARMTH OF RUM DOWN THE CHEST,
SHE'S A BREATH OF LIFE THAT I CAN NOT PROTEST.
SLOW DANCING UNDER TWINKLING LIGHTS,
BREAST TO BREAST, I HELD HER TIGHT.



TO YOU, MY DEAREST, I WRITE,
I'VE NOT KNOWN LOVE SO KIND.
ON THAT COLD WINTER NIGHT,
WE PUT OUR PRIDE ASIDE.
YOU LAID YOUR BODY NEXT TO MINE,
CREATOR OF ALL THAT IS DIVINE.
ROSY CHEEKS AND PINK WINE DREAMS,
YOU HELD ME TOGETHER AT THE SEAMS.
AND WHEN IN MY ARMS YOU FALL APART,
I SPEAK THE WORDS INSIDE MY HEART.



MI ACCIÓN DE GRACIAS ERES TÚ,
MY CHRISTMAS, MY NEW YEARS AND REYES, TOO.
UNDER FIREWORK HUES, YOUR SMILE ENCHANTING
LOSS OF ITS MUSE, LEFT OLYMPUS CRYING, RILED AND RANTING.
YOUR GOLD DIPPED HANDS WERE IN MY HAIR,
YOUR HEARTY LAUGHTER FILLED THE AIR.
I LEARNED THE INTRICACIES OF YOUR DESIGN,
EVERY DETAIL AND EVERY LINE.
I MUST BE HONEST, I MUST SAY,
I DON'T REMEMBER LIFE BEFORE THAT DAY.

IF SPRING SHOULD COME AND YOU'RE STILL HERE,
MY LIPS SHALL SAY, "I LOVE YOU, DEAR."



"A las tres de la mañana..."



by Dainaliz Feliberty

I want to eat some lechón," Juanita said, hiding behind the column in front of the door as the group of people took their positions to begin the parranda.

"Cállate, they're going to hear us!" hissed Don Pancho from his spot behind the other column.

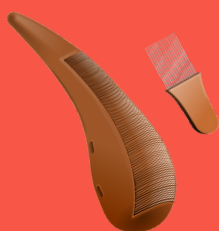
"A laj 3, we'll shout parranda!" Carlito whispered to the other guys who were getting in position with their pleneras.

"Where is my coquito?" Benito looked around impatiently trying to find the bottle of coquito bautizao'.

"A las una, a las do-"

"PARRANDA!" The terrified family screamed from behind the walls where the rejoicing reveling vecinos stood, playing the pleneras, maracas and güiros.

Loud shouts of joy and happiness echoed from the small entrance and all their voices united to sing old plena and meri crij'ma songs.



A CHRISTMAS IN PUERTO RICO

BY KATHIANA MEJÍAS MARTÍNEZ

Oh! A Christmas in Puerto Rico! There is nothing better than that! It is the loudest, the merriest, the longest of them all. It is the only time of the year when the year-long diets do not count. Come on, who is going to eat a cup of arroz con gandules when the full ollón is in your hands. Also, you cannot miss the lechón and the cuerito, that is where the flavors are. If you are in a hurry, I am sorry to tell you, but you will have to wait a while. Besides, abuela María will not let you leave without having eaten the whole course, at least twice; you know for lunch and dinner.

Oh! And let's not forget about the Christmas lights and decorations. Puerto Rico is the only place where the only reindeer we see is called Rudolf and it has a red light on its nose. Puerto Rico, where a snowman can exist without snow nor freezing temperatures and Santa arrive to the house door on a horse!



Retrieved from: Panaderia La Monserrate
Hormigueros & Car 114 Mayagüez

Ah! Christmas in Puerto Rico, the best season indeed; yet, with so much longing and nostalgia when watching it from afar. The absentee Boricua watching from the other side of the globe the hundreds of Facebook posts having the feast of the year singing Christmas carols like, "A comer pastel, a comer lechón, arroz con gandules, a beber ron, que venga morcilla y que venga de to' y que se chive to' compai" and you there, on the other side scrolling down eating Ritz with cheap cheese and a cup of a year-old hot Chocolate Cortés.

That is pretty good when you realize that you are at a distance. Is not like you can buy some coquito at the corner; so, you will have to work with what you have.

Ah! A Christmas in Puerto Rico is one of the things that keeps me wondering if I should go back.





December 24th, 2019

Christmas! “It’s the most wonderful time of the year” (singing in the Andy Williams melodic song with the same title) ...well, actually that is subjective.

It depends on what kind of lifestyle you choose to live, how much you value traditions, if you enjoy them at all, how many memes about it you can share on your social networks, the size of your family, if you have a family at all.

In addition to the number of gifts you receive on December 25th, which is Christmas day (and if they are worthy of your acceptance) added to how many pounds you gain after eating lechón asado, morcilla, chicharrones and arroz con gandules. At least that is the case of the Puerto Rican celebration. Hey! We cannot forget about the pitorro and coquito. These ingredients will provide la jumeta de tu vida. Wait, I forgot the group shouting of the Puerto Rican mandrágoras known as Los Cantores de Bayamón. (No shootings at the end of their performances because they have no guns. You are safe!).

First of all, let us remove “Christ” from Christmas and just add a big “X” before “mas”. I think I enjoy it better like Xmas. It is shorter and looks kind of millennial-like to me. Besides, it had nothing to do with the birth of Jesus Christ in its origins. He was not even born on December 25th.

“This Christian celebration is of fairly recent origin. The original term Yule may have derived from the Germanic jōl or the Anglo-Saxon geōl, which referred to the feast of the winter solstice”. (Hillerbrand, Hans J., 2019) The celebration was later on, adapted by Christians (as some of them used to do with holidays, celebrations and other things). Do not thank me for this information, I just got it from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Christmas>.

Fortunately, alongside with the Winter Solstice, there is a secular celebration including a big old man known as Santa Claus, who builds toys for children and on the night of Christmas eve, he flies on his sleigh pulled by ten reindeers giving the toys to every kid around the world. At least this is the story I prefer to tell my son. The bad thing is that I do not have a chimney for Santa to come down to my living room. Neither do I put milk or cookies, nor both, because I cannot afford to give away my meals. I DO put the gifts I have <the night before> wrapped up for my boy, at the bottom of the tree, just to see his face the next morning, when he finds out that all of them are his and he is allowed to make a mess with the wrapping paper on the floor.

Do not blame me. I know I am lying to him with this thing, but at least it is a little white lie, which will be the only white in our Xmas because there won't be any caroling out in the snow (as Mr. Williams sings) and once older, he will still enjoy Xmas (Winter holidays?) gifts.

The difference is that he will be able to choose, and I will still buy them. If I use the Christian's version, then I will have to stick to that fictional story for the rest of his life. And if he finds out that mommy lied to him, he (depending on the level of religiosity he develops) might burn me to death or torture me. Whatever punishment he prefers to adopt from the Christians of the dark ages.

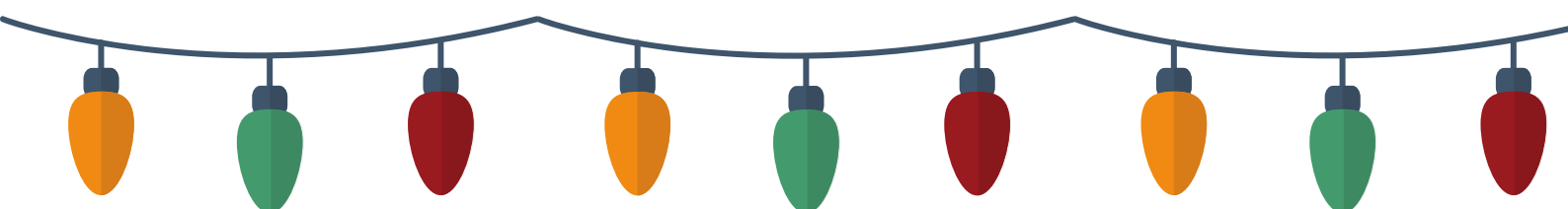
Now, let me go a little back in time. Two years from now to be exact. I do remember Xmas after Hurricane María (December 2017). They were, certainly, desperate times. Some of us did not have the electric power restored at home and decorations were only visible during daylight. Unless you were able to afford a gas-powered electric generator, you would not be able to turn the lights on to compete with your neighbors in the Decoration Contest. But among all the negative and sad situations we faced as a collective, we were able to discover a few things:

- In some houses, family members met each other for the first or maybe second time in their lives. Before the event, they used to be in their rooms enjoying the technology supported by the internet service.
- They almost reacted like vampires to the sun or garlic or even a cross when outside their comfort zones.



- Also, at night, people noticed that the sky was full of stars which were unable to be seen before, due to the artificial light pollution.
- Conversations between humans developed increasingly and there were also lots of family reunions and friendly (conversational) gatherings.
- Homework and school or college projects were done by handwriting. BY HANDWRITING! Can you imagine?
- Food trucks were a boom! At every corner.
- We discovered that Nestle bottled water tastes even more horrible than their worst chocolate candy product.
- Military food was given away like hugs and kisses on New Year's Eve.... becoming the new MISTLETOE!
- Oh! and the price of a bag of ice was more expensive than a pound of Ribeye steak.

- The majority of the food for 2017 Xmas tasted like carbon monoxide. The menu was mostly composed of lechón a la planta, hot dogs a la planta, arroz con gandules...you guessed it! a la planta, and everything else you could imagine a la planta! No joke, people! Although, not everything was bad. We were able to be in contact with nature.





Even though nature itself needed some attention and recovery, it managed to help us providing resources like water for us to drink, clean, do laundry and store at our houses. Unfortunately, the local government (assuming its best “Bad Santa” impersonation) wasted, hid and disposed without mercy, “ginormous” amounts of the precious liquid. Many people died waiting for the resource to arrive at their communities.

However, no matter how much or how little you enjoy Xmas in Puerto Rico, you still (even if it is mandatory or just to avoid receiving many calls from different family members asking for your time of arrival to the party) gather with family or friends to celebrate whatever event you prefer to call it. People even get elegantly dressed to be sitting in a living room or a carport in different houses.

However, the main goal of most Puerto Ricans is to eat and drink until every appetizer is finished, or they cannot stand still anymore. Some traditions never change, people do. Just do not let anyone tell you how to celebrate Xmas in Puerto Rico, because here, they are like no other place in the whole wide ROUND world.

¡Ahora sí! “te llegó la trulla como la querías” (Singing in Los cantores de Bayamón voices, “Te llegó la parranda” song).

By



Credits

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Stories, Letters & Poems



"The Cuatro of San Juan"
by Madyanis Santiago

"Abolito, Arbolito"
by Marialin Batista

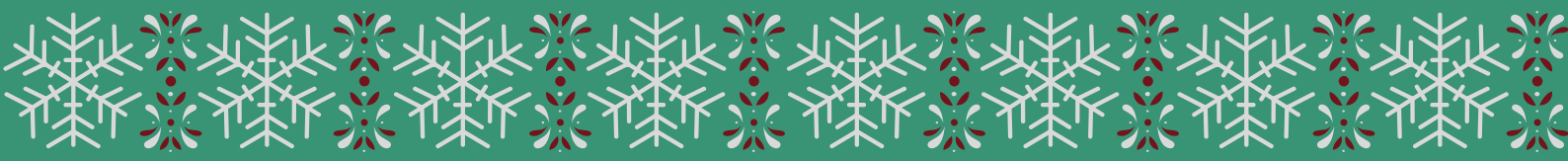


"Christmas is You"
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"A las tres de la mañana..."
by Dainaliz Feliberty

"A Christmas in Puerto Rico"
by Kathiana Mejías

An X-mas Letter
by Jacqueline Rivera





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