

Cookies, Hugs, and Love

By **María Marta Molina de Monterroso**
(Based on a true story)

Eva stood on her toes. She reached for the box in the cupboard. "Got it!" she said. She opened the box. Inside were small Nativity figures made of red clay. She took them out and placed the baby Jesus gently in the manger.

Then it was time to decorate the Christmas tree. Eva helped Mamá and her little brother, Nefi, hang strings of lights and *manzanillas*.

Eva loved the sweet smell of the tiny yellow fruits. When Papá came home, he helped Eva and Nefi put the star on top of the tree.

Eva was glad some of their Christmas tradition were the same this year. Everything else felt so different.

A few weeks ago, a hurricane hit their city in Guatemala. The heavy rain and winds destroyed many houses. Some people were still living in shelters. And many people were sick because of the COVID-19 virus.

Usually on Christmas Eve, Eva's aunts, uncles, and cousins came over for a big party. Eva and Nefi got to stay up late. They made *ponche* (punch) with their aunts and played with their cousins. At midnight, everyone went out into the streets, lit fire-crackers, and gave hugs to friends and neighbors.

But this year, their family members couldn't come to visit. And there would be no Christmas Eve hugs in the streets.

"Christmas won't be
the same this year,"
Eva said.

Eva felt sad about all the fun she would miss. "Christmas won't be the same this year," she said.

Papá nodded. "It is different. But Mamá and I have an idea that might cheer you up."

"Christmas is about giving," Mamá said. "Would you like to help us buy food for the families who lost their homes in the hurricane?"

"OK!" Eva said. Nefi nodded.

Eva and Nefi went with Mamá to the store. Eva helped put the food in grocery bags. Then she had an idea!

"Mamá," she said, "can you help Nefi and me bake cookies for the kids in the shelter? We can deliver them when we bring the groceries!"

Mamá agreed. Eva, Nefi, and Mamá spent several days baking cookies together. Eva and Nefi put the cookies into little plastic bags and tied them with ribbons. Then they put on their masks and walked with Mamá and Papá to the shelter where the families

were staying.

"There are lots of kids here," Nefi said. "Will we have enough cookies?"

"I hope so. Let's say a prayer," said Eva. They closed their eyes. Eva quietly prayed, "Heavenly Father, please help us so that everyone here can feel Thy love."

The children in the shelter stood in a long line. Eva and Nefi gave each child a package of cookies. There were enough for everyone!

As they walked home, Eva didn't feel sad anymore. She had a big smile on her face. She hadn't been able to give hugs to her friends on Christmas Eve. But each package of cookies was like a hug from her heart. ●

Turn to page 38 for a cookie recipe from Guatemala!



Eva and Nefi speak a language called Q'eqchi'. They're excited that a new temple is being built in Cobán, near their home!



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