

If you're anything like me, you spend way too much time & energy focusing on the things in your life that are annoying, irritating, frustrating & just plain angry-making. Which, in turn, makes everything in life seem darker. But, there's something about this time of year that gets many of us focused on the brighter things. We're all busy and rather harried, but there's something about this time of year that makes us see more beauty and reflect more on our blessings -which is what I want to talk about this month!

December is probably the most reflective time of the year. Not only do we have several different religious holidays during this month, but we're also facing the end of the year which brings with it lots of natural "looking back". There is, of course, so much about this time of year that is breathtakingly beautiful – the first snowfall, the crisp, cold air, the Christmas decorations that light up the night, the way we think about others first (hopefully!). But, I think the most beautiful part of this time of year is to look back & see what we've come through. What we've overcome during the past year. How we've grown. What milestones have been reached. What we've learned about ourselves. These kinds of things are monumentally big. This is how we really & truly grow as people.

Do you really & truly know how much beauty there is in your life? How many blessings you have? How much you have to be thankful for? Do you ever take the time to stop & list those things that make you catch your breath in your life? I know you have them. This is the very best time to get those things down before you forget. Here are a couple ideas for you to help you get those thoughts & feelings out of your head & down on the page.

- 1) A neat LO (probably a 2-pager) would be to do a picture representing each month. Try to remember a significant event or a memory from each month of 2007. Choose a picture to represent it. Then, over each picture, write a short blurb about what stood out for you that month. Doesn't have to be much – just to remember what it was that stuck in your head for each month. It will neat to look back & see what was truly important to you over the past year.
- 2) Not to get all "Oprah" on you, but what about doing a gratitude list? What are you truly thankful for over the past year? Were there big, huge, life-changing moments? Were there little things you discovered that made your life easier or more pleasant? Come up with 10 or so things that 2007 brought for which you're truly grateful.
- 3) Holiday memories are always wonderful to memorialize. Not just another layout entitled "Christmas 2007" with some pictures of present openings & some family shots. Rather, what are YOUR holiday memories that made the biggest impression? They could be from your childhood, things you remember that your grandparents or parents did to make the holiday memorable, especially magical moments for your own children. Wouldn't it be neat for your kids to look back & see magical traditions from your childhood & then realize that you've recreated that for them as well?
- 4) What did you learn this year? How did you grow this year? Did you have any major accomplishments or disappointments? Take some time to chronicle this thing/these things and reflect on how it/they changed you. These kinds of layouts are so amazing for several reasons. First, it's incredibly therapeutic to work

through what's happened in order to get it down on paper. To go back & remember and attempt to verbalize it can really help you work through difficult issues. Second, going back months or years later to see that layout is huge. To see how far you've come from that time or how much you've grown since a particular incident is a monstrous pat on the back along your journey. And, I'm betting you deserve it!

- 5) If December holds a holiday that's important to you, then it's important for you to talk about that! Whether it's Chanukah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, Ramadan, Yule, Eid, Sinterklass or Boxing Day, if it's important to you, then it's important to memorialize. Spend some time thinking about the aspects of your holiday that stand out for you. Is it music? Food? Specific customs? Family traditions? Clothing or costume? If it's the religious observance of the holiday, talk about that. What is the observance & what exactly does it mean to you & your family? When did that part of the observance become important to you? If you had to choose one moment of that observance to focus on, what would it be? Be specific and thorough. Remember, when you're a grandparent, a great-grandparent or no longer around, how amazing is it going to be for those who come after to read about you and all the things that made you, *you*.

Those are my thoughts for y'all this month. Look back. Remember. And use it to learn, grow and love who you are. You have so much beauty in your life both to remember & to share. Don't be afraid of your story – because it *and you* are beautiful.