

THE DECREE

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December 16, 2021

NORTH CAROLINA WESLEYAN COLLEGE, ROCKY MOUNT, NORTH CAROLINA 27804

Wesleyan Internationals Describe Xmas Traditions, Recall Memorable Gifts

Christmas traditions may vary in countries around the world, but two constants remain, no matter the culture -- fellowship and plenty of food.

With the holiday approaching, Wesleyan's Internationals--students and faculty--shared their family traditions and recalled their most memorable gift from Santa.

Ryan Cyusa Kigali, Rwanda

Ryan Cyusa, a Wesleyan student from Rwanda, described a Christmas celebration that would seem familiar to many Americans--gift-giving, morning church services and lots of food.

The junior, an exercise science major, said the traditional holiday meal is held on Christmas Eve. Sometimes the family cooks at home, while other times it heads to a restaurant, he said.



Ryan Cyusa

When cooking at home, the meal consists of the following--isombe (made of mashed cassava leaves and different ingredients and spices), ubugali (made of wheat flour and consumed with isombe, tomato sauce and beans); rice; plantains; and many varieties of meat: beef, chicken, goat, and pork.

After dinner, the family hangs out at home until midnight when there is an exchange of gifts. Cyusa said that there is little surprise. "Most times you know what you're getting for Christ-

mas," he said. "You just have to wait for the actual day." He said that most gifts come from parents to their children. "But in recent years, we're giving them gifts as well," he said.

Asked to name the best gift he ever received, Cyusa said it was a black-and-white nylon wallet, with cash--Rwandan Francs--inside. It was the equivalent of 20 American dollars, which seemed like a lot to a 9-year-old.

"It was not much but the thought of owning a wallet and having money at such a young age seemed crazy and made me feel all grown up," he said. He said he kept that money for a year. "I couldn't bring myself to spend it. I felt like it was sacred," he said, before joking, "I wish I could get that gift again now. Haha."

In most years Christmas is a joyous occasion for Cyusa, as extended family members return from abroad for the holiday. "We all get to see each other again," he said, adding that his family attends church services Christmas morning.

Cyusa did not return home for the holiday last year, instead talking to his family by phone. He noted that the Covid quarantine put severe limits on celebrations in his country. While he's unable to return home in 2021 as well, he hopes that "all goes back to normal" for his family.

Daniel Elias Lima, Peru

As with Cyusa's family, Daniel Elias' family gathers for a holiday meal and gift-giving on Christmas Eve in his hometown of Lima, Peru.

The environmental science professor said his family gets together with grandparents, aunt and uncles, and cousins.

During the holidays, Elias noted, many families listen to "villacincos," a type of Christmas music sung by kids.

"Many many many Peruvians play villacincos," he quipped.

Elias said that his family always served turkey for Christmas Eve dinner and that, on occasion, pork leg was part of the meal. He furnished the following additional menu items from his family dinners: Mash potatoes, apple sauce, sweet potatoes, rolls, onion relish, corn, Peruvian hot cocoa, and paneton, a traditional Peruvian sweet bread that originated in Italy.

After the meal, the family sits around the tree and then exchanges presents at midnight. Children get gifts from "Papa Noel," he noted.

Elias said his all-time favorite Christmas gift was a chemistry set, which he received around age 6. "It had always been my dream to be a scientist," he said.

It was an elaborate set, he explained, with glassware, a tiny burner, and various compounds that allowed him to create experiments and watch the reactions. Elias recalled trying different combinations in an effort to make fertilizer for house plants.

In one composition he added organic materials (fruit peels and skins) and mixed them with salt and water. "Then I set the mixture aside and forgot where I put it," he said. "It rotted and smelled really bad. My mom had to turn the house inside out to find it."

Elias said that his family is not among the many Peruvians that attend Mass or other church services on Christmas Day. After the busy Christmas Eve, he said his family likes to relax and enjoy leftovers as part of brunch.

Last year's Christmas was subdued, with Elias saying it was a smaller holiday for many in his country. "My dad couldn't visit his mom," he said. "I know this was a similar experience for many."

Elias is optimistic that, with more Peruvians vaccinated, Christmas 2021 will be closer to holiday celebrations of the past.

Now a resident of Rocky Mount, Elias and his wife, Miranda, have begun their own traditions with sons Gabriel, 14, and Julian, 10.

But this year the family plans a trip to Miami, where Elias' mother has lived for the past 20 years. "She follows all the Peruvian traditions," he said.

Young Kim Andong, South Korea

In South Korea, Christmas is observed by Christians and non-Christians alike.

Dr. Young Kim, associate professor in political science, said that for Christians, the holiday is, of course, full of religious significance, with Korean Christians attending church services on Christmas Eve and



Dr. Daniel Elias

Christmas Day. He estimated that 30 percent of South Korea's 51 million citizens regard themselves as Christians.

He added that in Seoul alone there exist a total of 8,000 churches of all denominations, with many Koreans adhering to Buddhism and Confucianism.

As a non-Christian, and a native of "the most traditional Confucian town in Korea," Kim said that his family has always treated Christmas more like a national holiday. He said that many Koreans will use the day to travel and visit grandparents and other relatives.

Kim said that parents give gifts to young children on Christmas morning, often putting them under the Christmas tree. "They say the gifts are from Santa Claus," Kim said. "But most kids know they're from their parents or grandparents. The Santa Claus myth is rapidly disappearing among kids."

Rather than hosting family dinners, Kim said that many Koreans will eat at an upscale restaurant, with Italian cuisine and steakhouses among the most popular choices.

Many Koreans view Christmas as an important day for couples, who, Kim said, eat dinner at fancy restaurants and exchange special and often expensive gifts such as rings, necklaces, boutique handbags, iPhones, and PlayStations. "Some lament that Christmas has become too commercialized," he said.

Entertainment is a key element in the Korean holiday season. Many like to watch the Christmas-themed movie "Home Alone," which airs constantly on television, having become a ritual for many families and an annoyance to others. In the 1990s and 2000s, Christmas carols were played in many public places--stores and restaurants, etc.--in Seoul.

"I remember some comedians singing carols in a funny way and making quite good money at that time," Kim said, adding that more stringent copyright laws have made carols less common.

Not all Koreans look forward to Christmas, Kim said. "Not because they're anti-Christian, but for personal reasons," he said. "Some find that Christmas puts an excessive financial burden on their shoulders because they have to purchase presents and dine out."

Christmas season can cause angst for single Koreans as well. "For them it's a 'cursed day,'" Kim said. "They often joke 'I wish I went to bed on the 23rd and woke up on the 26th so that I don't see all the lovers on the street.'"

The holiday was different in Korea during Kim's childhood. Unlike other Wesleyan Internationals, he said he never received a Christmas gift, though he often hoped Santa Claus would visit his home.

"Until I became a middle schooler, I still believed he would give out gifts to well-behaved kids," he recalled, noting that in letters written to Saint Nick, he would detail his good behavior and list the presents he wanted that year. "But I didn't get any gifts from Santa Claus or my parents."

Though disappointed, Kim said he was not hurt by Santa's snub. He said his situation was

not uncommon among his peers at the time. "Most friends didn't receive presents from Santa either," he explained. "Back then, Christmas was not a 'serious' holiday for many Korean families and many parents simply couldn't afford presents for their kids."

But, Kim said, he did receive small gifts from his church, on Christmas Eve. He said that many churches would hand out treats like Moon Pies to children. "For just one Moon Pie, we stayed in a church for several hours, singing and praying," he said. "I guess Christmas was a quite a good marketing opportunity for churches."

Kim said that life is returning to normal in Korea. Last Christmas gatherings were limited to four or five, masked, individuals. "Koreans like to hang out with family, friends and colleagues, but that became impossible with Covid," he said.

But now, with some 80 percent of the Korean population vaccinated, more families will feel comfortable getting together with each other.

Kim said that his family will wait until summer to visit family back in Korea and will spend Christmas at home in the Raleigh area. He said that, unlike their father, his two daughters should expect to find toys and other gifts from their "wish list" under the tree on December 25th. He noted that his youngest, Katherine, believes in Santa.



Dr. Young Kim

Halzyd Pupuleku Bolzano, Italy

In Italy, the Christmas season is steeped in tradition, as families enjoy together time and lots of food.

Halzyd Pupuleku noted that the holiday season begins on December 8, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and continues through Christmas Day in his Catholic-dominated homeland.

On Christmas Eve, relatives gather for dinner and then head to Mass at 10:30 that night. After Mass, he said, the congregation enjoys the sweetbread panettone and hot tea or mulled wine, as Christmas songs play in the background.

Pupuleku said that the family later exchanges gifts at home. In years when young children are present, an adult will leave church early to dress as Santa. "Then, when we all arrive at home, we start opening the gifts," he explained. "We open one gift at a time respecting the order from the youngest to the oldest family member."

When he was 6, Pupuleku received what he considers his most memorable gift--his first Xbox 360, one that came with a racing game, Need for Speed: Carbon. He called that Christmas "bittersweet." "It's when I discovered that Santa Claus didn't exist," he said. "I remember that, one day, I opened

See TRADITIONS pg 2

Tuition, Room and Board To Exceed \$46K Next Year

A Wesleyan education will cost \$1,300 more per year in 2022-23, the college has announced. The hike represents an increase of 2.8 percent over current costs.

Suzanne Brackett, the college's Senior Vice President of Administration, attributed the new price tag to higher operating costs that have resulted from recent inflationary trends nationwide--on everything from the price of food, paper, and cleaning products to technology. "Costs have skyrocketed in the past year," she said.

Next year total costs will rise to \$46,215. This covers tuition, a double room in a residence hall, and a standard meal plan, the college said. Books are included in the cost of tuition.

Costs for the Traditional Day Program in 2022-23

- Tuition: \$33,952 (\$32,996 in 2021-22)
- Room: \$ 5,505 (\$ 5,350)
- Meal Plan: \$ 6,758 (\$ 6,568)

Wesleyan reports on its web page that 99 percent of its traditional-day students receive some form of financial assistance.



Kayla Johnson and Damon McDowell, invoking their fifth years of eligibility, have brought their offensive talents back to their respective teams. For more on sports, turn to page 4. SI Photos