
PALS NEWS

The Newsletter of the Program in American Language Studies of Rutgers University-Newark
Session I Sept. 4–Oct. 23, 2007 Edited by Dr. Minoo Varzegar. Prepared by Darlene Smith Vol. 16 No. 1

A Korean Holiday

Bumjin Jang, Korea

In my country, the Lunar New Year's Day is celebrated as the most important holiday. The first reason is that people meet a lot of relatives from different places. People get together with their family members and cousins whom they have not seen for a long time and catch up with each other's lives. Also, they enjoy eating a variety of Korean traditional foods, such as rice cake soup, barbecued beef, or dumpling soup. Another reason is that people give and receive meaningful gifts during this holiday for celebrating the new year. In particular, the elders are supposed to give money to their children or grandchildren as a token of good fortune or good start when the children bow to them. The Lunar New Year's Day is a very meaningful and important holiday in my country. On this holiday, I can feel love more deeply.

Ramadan Holiday

Ozgul Karacay, Turkey

Ramadan is a very special month for my religion, Islam. Ramadan begins on September 13th this year and it will continue until October 13th. As soon as Ramadan ends, people will have a holiday for three days. This holiday is called "Ramadan Holiday" or "Candy Holiday". During this holiday we prepare everything for getting together with friends and family for a special feast and party. We buy nice new clothes, and for the guests we prepare dessert and buy chocolate or candy. We also give money or gifts to children to make them happy. This is how people have a happy time together. And that is how our holidays are.

Halloween in Colombia

Javier Garcia, Colombia

Halloween in my country is very popular because the young and children enjoy this day. Each year, on the night of October 31st, people celebrate Halloween by putting on costumes as : monsters, ghosts, and animals. Children go to the most important mall, where parents and children see shows, and sing "Trick or treat!" People give children candy, and sometimes there might be comical shows for children. Young adults go to parties, discos or their friends' houses. They dance and drink beer, water and liquor. They also participate in costume competitions and the winner receives a surprise prize. Colombian people spend a lot of money annually on Halloween, marking it as one of the country's important commercial holidays.

Woman's Day

Ekaterina Tarynova, Russia

“Woman’s Day” in Russia is one of the most popular holidays. It is celebrated on March 8th. March 8th is a national holiday in Russia and usually people don’t work on this day, except for people who work in stores and restaurants. It is one of my favorite holidays because on this day I usually get a lot of flowers, gifts, and attention from my mother, father, boyfriend, and friends. From everyone who loves me! It’s the one day a year I don’t wash the dishes, and neither do my mother and sister because my father does it. Unfortunately, it’s only one day a year. In addition, I like it when my father cooks dinner for us, especially my favorite chocolate cake. Usually he has a lot of excuses not to do it, so that’s why it’s a very special day for me. Furthermore, I like to spend time with my family and my friends, and have dinner together with them. In short, Woman’s Day is a good time to spend with your family and friends.

The Ramadan Festival

Meyyade Kutkuoglu

At the end of Ramadan we have a three-day holiday to celebrate the Ramadan festival. Ramadan is a month when the Muslim people fast. Every year we have a particular holiday for celebrating Ramadan. The Ramadan festival’s other name is “Sugar Festival” because when we reach the Ramadan festival, we visit the older people and we are given a lot of candy by them. So all the children like the Ramadan festival because of the delicious candies. Also, during Ramadan, poor people are given some financial help by the rich and charitable people. This festival is really the best solidarity month.

At the beginning of the festival, I am woken up early in the morning by my mother. My brothers and my father go to the mosque for festival praying. My mother and I prepare the breakfast again after a long Ramadan break. I’m very excited because I haven’t had breakfast for a month. So on the festival morning I really look forward to having breakfast.

Also, we actually have marvelous traditional customs. Before the festival, we go festival shopping and our parents buy new clothes for us to wear at the festival. After, my brothers and my father come back from the festival prayers, we have breakfast together. When we are finished having breakfast, we visit our grandparents. Then we go to the cemetery to pray for our dead relatives. In the afternoon we come back to our home. Then we are visited by our relatives. Older people are visited by younger ones during the festival. It is a Turkish custom. In the evening we are brought home to have dinner. When we finish our dinner, my brothers and I are given gifts by our parents.

If we want to summarize the Ramadan festival, we can say we promote friendship, and solidarity among people.

The Carnival in Ecuador

Johanna Guzman, Ecuador

In my country one of the most famous holidays celebrated by people is the “Carnival”. This date is a good time to share with the family and friends. First of all, there are many reasons why people celebrate this date. For example, a lot of people welcome the Holy Week; the natives give thanks to “Paccha Mama” (that means “Mother Earth”) for food, wealth, and fertility. Others consider this date as the beginning of Lent, and a lot of people only see it like special days for marketing and publicity.

Secondly, Carnival is celebrated during February over three days. In many places of my country, people start the party one week before. During these three days a lot of people do different activities; for example, they go to the beach. On the other hand, in the center of my country, people organize a big party. You can see children, adults, and old people dancing in the streets. They wear unusual costumes that represent their cultures. Moreover, you can meet new people of different countries because many tourists visit Ecuador for this occasion. I think that the Carnival reinforces brotherhood.

Finally, it was the best way for me to invite you to know a little bit more about my country. Come to Ecuador during Carnival and I ensure you that it will be very fun.

Brazilian Independence Day

Loyane Sousa, Brazil

One interesting holiday in Brazil is celebrated on September 7th. On this day, so many Brazilians go to the capital of the country, Brasilia, to celebrate Brazil's independence. In the morning they have a celebration with the armed forces. It is amazing. The Air Force does many flights in the sky of the city and the soldiers display fireworks. In the afternoon we have a party in the streets with food, drinks, and a lot of Brazilian music. The president goes there to speak out about independence and the statistics of Brazil for the citizens. At night we have family dinners where all the folks get together and thank God for blessing Brazil. Independence Day is the most important holiday in Brazil and everybody celebrates it with enthusiasm.

Christmas in Ecuador

Alexandra DeJesus, Ecuador

In Ecuador the most important holiday is Christmas. People begin this day with different activities. Some are interested to buy food, others are more careful about children's gifts, but everybody enjoys this day with the family. Christmas does not begin on the same day. Sometimes people begin preparing for this celebration months before. Months before Christmas night, parents go to get their Christmas trees. When they arrive at the house, they get some lights to decorate their Christmas trees. Some used to put old shoes at the base of the tree, trying to get a bigger gift. In some towns, children believe that some gifts are brought by Jesus on his space ship.

On Christmas Day, everybody enjoys the day with his family and sometimes with his friends. Around 10 pm, everybody has had his dinner. After that, everybody enjoys music, conversations, and sometimes playing with their children. On this day, all families who have children hide their gifts until midnight. At midnight they give them the gifts.

Seol-Nal

Sun Young Kim, Korea

The particular holiday in Korea is Seol-Nal, which is Korean New Year's Day. The reason why I chose this is that everything we do on that day is a tradition. On that day, all my relatives gather together in my house. I can meet my cousins and talk about our lives. In the morning, my relatives and I commemorate our ancestors and eat the traditional soup, "Dduck-guk", and in the afternoon we visit isolated relatives who cannot come to my house because they are too old or sick. Last, in the evening we play traditional Korean games such as "Yut-Noli".

We have a total of three holidays to celebrate Seol-Nal. As I mentioned before, many Koreans are used to visiting their parents or oldest sibling's homes. So they are used to spending time traveling. They can even spend time on the road over half a day. The reason why they go to their relatives' or parents' houses is that most Koreans believe that when they meet all their family members, they are given energy, and they can rest with them. That is, Koreans believe the rest that is taken by meeting family members on that day is different from other kinds of rest. I think it is not only a Korean tradition and custom, but also a rooted idea that considers family and nation as the most important things. Although it makes people tired, many Koreans can feel and get comfort and warmth of spirit.

The Colombian Christmas

Liana Olivella, Colombia

In my country a lot of holidays are celebrated. All our cities and towns have their own celebrations, but Christmas is the unique holiday that is celebrated almost the same in all of Colombia. Our important dates are on December 7th, 24th, and 31st.

Christmas starts on December 7th when a lot of colored candles are lighted by many families to honor the Virgin Mary. Then it is called "Day of Candles". On December 16th the first day of the Christmas Novena is celebrated, when families, friends, and neighbors pray and sing Christmas carols around the Nativity during nine days in different houses. Christmas Eve is celebrated on December 24th, when the Novena is prayed and relatives and friends wait until midnight to open presents. These are brought by Baby Jesus because our children do not believe in Santa Claus. Also, they all share a wonderful and great supper.

Finally, December 31st is the most important Christmas day. Relatives and friends join together to celebrate the arrival of the New Year. Then they prepare a big variety of appetizers, meals, and drinks. Furthermore, they decorate boy dolls and fill fireworks to burn at midnight. This party continues until the next day.

Colombian Christmas is a huge and cheerful holiday celebrated in each zone of the country with similar traditions.

New Year's Day in Korea

Sung Ho Kim, Korea

Many countries celebrate New Year's Day in various ways. Some people go to parties and celebrate the first day of the year counting time. Other people travel with family or spend the time with friends or lovers. But Korea's New Year's Day has a different way of being celebrated in comparison with other countries.

First, Korean New Year's Day is January 1st in the lunar calendar. The main industry of Korea was agriculture, so Korea used to observe the lunar calendar. But we don't use the lunar calendar anymore. That's why Korean New Year's Day changes every year. Second, Korean New Year's Day is the day for ancestors. On New Year's Day morning, many families make a sacrifice to their ancestors. They prepare various foods for the sacrifice. All the members of the family come together. They remember their ancestors and have a great meal. They become more familiar through the sacrifice.

Every country has its own ways to celebrate New Year's Day, but I like the Korean way. We enjoy the New Year's Day with the family. Also, we remember our ancestors, our roots. So I think New Year's Day is the best and biggest holiday in Korea.

“In every conceivable manner, the family is a link to our past, bridge to our future.”
“May you look back on the past with as much pleasure as you look forward to the future.”
Alba Rossis , Dominican Republic

I certainly believe that our pasts definitely determine our futures: there is a phrase that says, “We would never know where we are going, if we didn't remember where we came from.”

Our pasts are our bridge to our futures, our families, our birthplaces, our childhood friends, our past mistakes. All these things define the type of lives we are going to live in our futures. Many people choose to supposedly erase their pasts, because of the many rough times they have been through. However, those bad experiences help us grow up, and be even stronger against all the obstacles that life puts in our way.

It is imperative to know where you come from. If you know where you come from and your family roots, you can learn from what other family members have done in their own lives and that's something you can move on from. You can learn from their mistakes and try not to make the same mistakes as them. For example, if your parents got divorced, people say that you are more likely to get divorced, too, but in that case you'll have to learn from their mistakes and figure out a way to take care of your marriage.

Just as you can learn from others, you can also find role models worthy of following from history, such as bible characters, martyrs, presidents, and people who fought in history for our civil rights and freedoms. Those people exemplify persistency and courage, which would be necessary for us in order to survive destiny.

Another way in which our past is a link to our future is in the choices we make based on our culture and the way we were raised. For instance, people who come from a Latin country are more prone to live in a Latin American community in which the majority of the members of that community are Latin Americans. Also we are more likely to eat the foods and dress in the way we were taught. Most of the time we follow the same patterns as our parents did and we have the same customs, which we transmit to our children.

Based on my personal experience, I know how greatly our pasts affect our futures. For my husband Alejandro and me, it has been really difficult to adapt to marriage because both of us come from divorced parents. Our parents got divorced when we were little and I was raised with my mother, so that makes it very hard for me to raise my children together with a father figure, but, on the other hand, my husband Alejandro has a clear concept of what a family should be like, and I believe that is what is helping to maintain a stable marriage.

I thank God because He has given me the strength to learn from my parents' mistakes, and work for my marriage. Nowadays, most of the adults that came from a divorced home either never make it to marriage or as soon as they get married they get divorced for whatever reason, instead of changing the curse of history. It is very easy to go with the flow instead of going against the patterns. A lot of people use their pasts as an excuse to justify the mistakes or the choices they make in the future, but that is not the way it should be and I am glad I was not one of them. Today I could say that the family that I formed on my own is my source of happiness and the inspiration of my life.

Furthermore, I feel that I am blessed and the happiest person in the world with two angels from heaven: My husband, Alejandro Martinez, and my son, Gregory. They give meaning to my life, and because of them I do not regret my past; instead I look forward to my future. I consider my life to be an open novel that I allow God to write. My present life is full of ups and downs and my future is still uncertain, but my soul is ready to attain it.

In conclusion, in order for human beings to pave their futures, they have to walk back to their pasts and close up any open chapters of their book called life. There is a quote that says not to worry about the people of your past, because for some reason they did not make it to your present and will not make it to your future. But I do believe that our pasts represent half of our lives, and it's necessary to have a clear past in order to clear up our way to our future. If people from your past didn't make it to your future, it's because they were done with their missions in your life.

Psychological Problems in Poland

Ewa Plucinska, Poland

In my country people with psychological problems keep their problems inside and do not go for help. Usually they are isolated and rejected by society because of their sickness. The most common problem is depression.

People who suffer from depression usually keep it as a secret. They are scared that others will not accept them. They are embarrassed about it and do not want treatment from a doctor. Depressed people need prescription medication to improve. Without care, their sickness becomes worse until they really are not able to live around others.

It seems that the Polish people have developed a bad habit of trying to fight through their problems without medical help. I think the problem is in education. Knowing about depression can keep it from getting worse. If proper medication is prescribed and people speak out and talk about their problems, they surely can get advice. The ones who are sick should not feel rejected and isolated but talk to someone and get help.

In conclusion, the psychological problems that people have need more medical attention. This way the problems can be brought under control and sick people can live normal lives. At least that is how it should be in my country.

A Divided Korea

Youngnam Kim, South Korea

Korea has been divided since the end of WWII. The Korean War, the result of that division, was started by North Korea in 1950 and was fought between communist forces supported by the Soviet Union in the North, and U.N. led forces including the U.S. in the South. The war ended without unification in 1953 with the Korean Armistice Agreement. Since then, North Korea and South Korea have had separate governments and military forces.

Most young South Korean men have to go into the army for two years. It is their duty to protect the South from the North. It is a miserable situation to become enemies with people of the same blood. The older generation still has dispersed family members in North Korea. They hope the unification of the country will come about as soon as possible so that the younger generation won't have to go into the army and die in war.

However, I think there is still a need for the military for the people's safety because Korea still has to be vigilant about the hostility between the North and South. There is a possibility that the war will start again. South Korea keeps the army to protect its people even though the expense of keeping the military is exorbitant, and the energy of the young people is being spent during a precious period of their lives.

I think the best way to solve the military problem is to focus on unification. I'm not positive that unification will come about easily, but both North and South Korea have to try continuously

to get together in order to give one country to the next generation of Koreans.

Are You a Competitive Person?

Dariusz Skibinski, Poland

In my lifetime I have faced many challenges. It is my competitive response to these challenges that has made me stronger.

When I was a child I had asthma, and, as a result, I missed a lot of classes in primary school. I spent a lot of time in hospitals and sanatoriums. I never thought that I would finish high school or attend a university. My illness was very serious, and I was in an emergency room three times. This was a terrible time for my parents and me. However, I am perseverant and never give up. Besides taking medical treatment, I started to do exercises with my physical therapist and I felt better and better. Then I started working out in a gym. Finally, I finished high school and got a university degree. I wanted to be a physical therapist and be able to help other people. I have been working out for eleven years now, and this has become my addiction

Another example of my competitiveness is from my high school years. During that time, my friends and I created a band, where I used to play the drums. We spent a lot of time on practice. Every student in school knew us. When we felt more confident as musicians, we started playing at concerts. Once we were participants in a competition. The best band could record a CD in a professional studio. It was amazing: we won and spent three days in a professional radio studio. Our teachers were very happy, and the whole school was very proud of us.

Now my goal is to be a physical therapist in the U.S. This is my new challenge, and I know I can do it. I also know it won't be easy to learn a new language and take the professional exam in English. I think everything is possible, provided that you have motivation, patience, health, opportunity, and the will to work hard.

In my opinion, I am a competitive person who likes new challenges. Now I have two: to be good in English and pass the physical therapy exam. In the future I would like to help people in a hospital, and I believe that I can.

The PALS News is devoted to presenting the writings of our intensive English language students.

Program in American Language Studies (PALS)
Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey
152 Conklin Hall, 175 University Avenue, Newark, NJ 07102-1814

Phone: 973-353-5013 Fax: 973-353-1438

Email: pals@andromeda.rutgers.edu Web: <http://www.esl-newark.rutgers.edu>

Copyright © 2007 All Rights Reserved.