

Holiday traditions around the world



Theodore Bice of Bryan ponders possible Christmas gifts as he sits on Santa's lap.

RICHARD S. JAMES/The Battalion

By TERRI WELCH

Fröhlich Weihnachten! Feliz Navidad! God Jul! Merry Christmas!

As familiar Christmas traditions occur here in the United States, many other countries will be celebrating the holidays with their own customs.

Take, for instance, Germany. A pre-festival known as St. Nicholas Day is held for children on Dec. 6, said Wulf Koepke, a professor of German in the Department of Modern Languages.

"Children place their shoes on the window sill and hope for St. Nicholas to leave sweets if they have been good," Koepke said.

The real Christmas celebration is on Dec. 24, Christmas Eve, he said. Presents are given and parents decorate a natural tree with ornaments and real candles. Children are not allowed to see the tree until the candles are lit, Koepke said.

Dec. 25 and 26 are public holidays in Germany and families gather together for fun and good food, he said. Geese, venison and fish are the main dishes.

"Germans really live it up for New Year's," Koepke said. "There is lots of dancing and a number of customs for good luck."

Not far from Germany is Norway, where families gather for dinner as church bells ring in Christmas at 5 p.m. on Dec. 24, said Kato Hagen, a senior finance major from a town close to Oslo, Norway.

"The east coast traditionally serves a dish that includes meatballs, pork ribs, sausages, boiled potatoes and sauerkraut," Hagen said. "Homemade beer is also served."

Trine Maasoe, a senior English major from Bergen, Norway said, "The west coast serves steamed lamb ribs that have a salty flavor and are very good."

Boiled potatoes and lutefisk are also served, Maasoe said.

Julenisse is the Norwegian version of Santa Claus, Hagen said. The children are told he lives in the forest. He comes at seven or eight in the evening on Dec. 24 to bring presents to all nice girls and boys, Hagen said. Usually an adult will dress up and let the children see him coming.

"The children must sing to him before they receive their gifts," Hagen said. This differs from family to family.

If living on a farm, boys and girls are told to place a bowl of warm rice and milk with sugar, cinnamon and butter on top out in the barn, Hagen said. A smaller version of Julenisse will come and eat it in the middle of the night.

"If he doesn't get anything, Julenisse will be mean to the animals," he said.

Hanukkah celebrates religious freedom for all

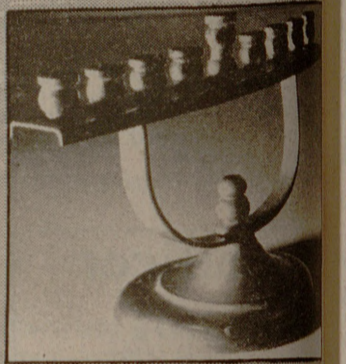
During this holiday season those of the Jewish religion will be celebrating Hanukkah which has no relation to Christmas except that they both occur around the same time of year.

"Hanukkah marks the liberation of the Temple which Assyria occupied," Rabbi Peter Tarlow of the Hillel Foundation said. "It concerns the idea of religious freedom for all people."

The celebration differs from family to family, but usually includes the menorah, a candelabrum with nine branches, Tarlow said. Each day of the eight-day tradition, candles of the menorah are lit until all are lit at one time.

Gifts are given to the children during the eight days, and each family decides how gift-giving will take place, Tarlow said.

"My children wanted to have one present on day one and work up to eight presents on day eight," Tarlow said.



The gift giving, which symbolizes the gift of religious freedom, is usually the reason Hanukkah is confused with Christmas, he said.

Tarlow, a professor in the Department of Sociology, said the liberation took place around 165 B.C., and Hanukkah has been celebrated since.

"People sing a song that also symbolizes the gift of religious freedom."

Usually, each home has a piñata breaking which is a custom that comes from the missionaries. They would tell the Mexican people that the piñata symbolized the devil and the people had to break it up, he said.

On Dec. 24, families get together for their own customs and a traditional dinner that includes tamales, turrones and a drink known as ponpe, Csitkovits said.

Families also attend midnight mass or "Misa de Gallo" Christmas Eve, he said.

"When I was a little kid, my family would have a piñata and a dinner that included turkey, stuffing, sweet potatoes," Csitkovits said.

As far as exchanging gifts, Christmas is not as big as "El Día de Reyes Magos" or "The coming of the three Wise Men," he said. The celebration is held Jan. 6, and gifts given symbolizing the gifts of the wise men brought to baby Jesus, Csitkovits said.

Many other celebrations also take place across the globe this day season.

As the children grow older and care less about Julenisse, presents are put under the Christmas tree which is very similar to those in the United States, Hagen said.

Between Christmas and New Year's Day, Norwegians celebrate Julebuk, Maasoe said.

"Julebuk is our version of Halloween," she said. "Families dress up so they are unrecognizable and go from house to house singing. Hoping to get invited inside."

Closer to the United States, Mexico has a variety of customs that take place during the holidays.

In a tradition similar to Norway's Mexican families go to other houses in a procession known as "Posada" which means "shelter," from about Dec. 12 to Dec. 23, said Alejandro Csitkovits, a senior finance major from Matamoros, Mexico and president of the Mexican Student Association.

"Posada symbolizes when Mary and Joseph wandered around looking for a place to stay the night Christ was born," Csitkovits said.

★ Spend the holidays catching up ★

By CINDY McMILLIAN

The abrupt change in tempo from pulling all-nighters studying for finals to lying on the couch for a month at Mom and Dad's house is enough to give any college student whiplash.

Don't be a complete vegetable — this is a great time to catch up on all those books you've been meaning to read. The following list includes a few old and new favorites.

"Catcher in the Rye" by J.D. Salinger. If you've never read it, you've really missed out. As the jacket liner says, each generation has tried to claim the book as its own — that's because the themes are timeless and universal and vital to young people of any era.

The main character is a young man trying to rationalize the goals and roles

While Salinger finds a common ground we can all relate to, I'd wager there are some observations Thompson makes that *no one* can relate to or begin to understand.

But that doesn't stop them from being entertaining and amusing.

Nothing is off-bounds to Thompson. Campaign scandals, the wonders of satellite-dish television, looting on the high seas — this collection of short essays and journal entries approaches both the mundane and the fantastic with hilarious irreverence.

In one memo to his editor of his aspirations to the journalist-in-space program and possible story ideas, he writes: "If the telephone call doesn't come from NASA and they send Cronkite instead of me into space, then it will be time to

Good books:

"Catcher in the Rye"
"Generation of Swine"
"Texasville," "The Last Picture Show"

J.D. Salinger
Hunter S. Thompson
Larry McMurtry

in life he's been expected to accept. He's been sent to the right schools, raised in the right family and dressed in the right clothes, but he can't see the point in any of it. He fails out of one school after another not because he is unintelligent, but because he pities and loathes his shallow, blindly accepting peers and the system they have so easily bought into.

One after another, he mentally pushes each of the people who should be close to him — parents, teachers, girlfriends — further away as he draws within himself.

The struggle to make sense of modern society and find his own place in it is something I think all young people can relate to. Sometimes, maybe in the middle of a really tough semester or at a turning point in our personal lives, we all stop and ask ourselves "What's the point?" While this book doesn't really provide any answers, the extent to which we identify with the character is a revelation in itself.

"Generation of Swine: Tales of Shame and Degradation in the '80s" by Hunter S. Thompson. Another chronicler of modern society, Thompson's observations are funny, caustic and weird.

deal with my notion of taking Vanessa Williams to Johannesburg for a casual Saturday night of dinner and dancing ...

"Generation of Swine" is labeled Gonzo Papers Vol. 2, the second such collection of essays and short entries. The third, "Songs of the Doomed," was released earlier this year and is available in hardback. "Swine" is the most recent Thompson novel in paperback.

"The Last Picture Show" and "Texasville" by Larry McMurtry. Though these aren't McMurtry's most recent novels or perhaps his best, they do a wonderful job of catching Texan local color with sharp wit and endearing characters.

"Picture Show" takes place in Thalia, a small, arid town near Wichita Falls, about mid-1960s. Duane and Sonny play for the high school football team, spending their spare time roughnecking, playing pool and going to the picture show Saturday nights with their girlfriends. The story is one of love and growing up in a small Texas town, where the pickings are often slim for young men and women looking to settle

down and nature is apt to deal a dirty hand. The strength of McMurtry's writing is his characters — they're real, funny, proud, lonely, sometimes a little pitiful. But I feel like I know them, and by the end of these two books, I feel like I grew up in Thalia.

Video releases

After the holidays have been celebrated, try popping a new release video cassette in the VCR to take away some of the out-of-school blues. Many of the summer's hottest movies will be available on video cassette in December and January.

Movies which will be released on video this holiday include:

• Silence Like Glass	Dec. 5
• Ghost Dad	Dec. 6
• Last Exit to Brooklyn	Dec. 6
• Street Hunter	Dec. 12
• Torn Apart	Dec. 12
• Robocop II	Dec. 13
• Gremlins II	Dec. 19
• Dick Tracy	Dec. 19
• Priceless Beauty	Dec. 20
• Hiroshima, Out of the Ashes	Dec. 26
• Amityville IV	Dec. 26
• My Blue Heaven	Dec. 27
• Young Guns II	early January
• Ford Fairlane	early January
• Diehard II	early January
• Navy Seals	early January
• The Freshman	early January

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"Texasville" catches up to the same Thalia residents in their middle age, complete with wives, children, jobs, a few oil wells and a few unrealized dreams. The satiric look at Texas' oil bust and boom is a funny dimension to this much longer, much later follow-up.

Be sure and read these books before seeing the film version of "Texasville" this Christmas.

Local organizations give to community during Christmas

By LISA YOUNG

While most Texas A&M students are preparing for finals, a few charitable campus organizations are truly in the spirit of Christmas. Local chapters of two national sororities are sharing their study time with the community by providing activities for the children in the Bryan-College Station area.

Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority, in conjunction with the Cain Hall Association, is sponsoring a Christmas party Saturday night for Bryan-College Station high school students.

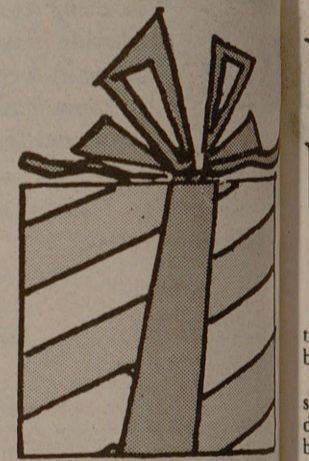
"We decided to sponsor a Christmas party to provide a social outlet for them," says Vice President and Service Chairperson Denise Nance. The high school students in the Bryan area do not have many social activities to choose from, Nance says. "The party will give them the opportunity to be with people their own age in a safe, controlled environment," she says.

The Cain Hall Association is a new organization formed this fall for the residents of Cain Hall and other male scholarship athletes. Cain Hall Association's president, Ramsey Bradberry, says they want to be positive role models for the community.

"Our main goal is to improve the relations among the athletes, other A&M students, and the community," Bradberry says. The children will get an opportunity to meet some of the athletes that attend school here, he says.

The party will be Saturday from 9 p.m. to midnight at Camp Junior High. Admission is \$1 with a canned food item and \$2 without. The canned goods will be donated to the Twin City Mission, and proceeds from both organizations will sponsor future service projects.

While the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority will be aiming its Christmas spirit at high school students, the members of Delta Sigma Theta will



be focusing on the smaller children in the community.

Breakfast with Santa, program for children between the ages of 6 and 12, is an annual event sponsored by the Delta Sigma Theta sorority. The organization will be holding a service project Saturday morning at the Lincoln Recreation Center.

"The children really enjoy the event," says sorority member Noel R. Boswell. The members cook breakfast for the children and after play games and read to them. "You can't have a Christmas party without an appearance at the breakfast," the children will be able to give their lists."

Pam Sherman, social chairperson for the sorority, says, "Breakfast with Santa is a wonderful project. It gives the children a chance to interact with black students," Sherman says. "It makes me feel good that I'm giving something back to the community."

Though most students are still long before Christmas day, these organizations hope to make a lasting impression on the children in the Bryan-College Station area this Christmas.

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