APEUnion

APEUnion Newsletter

Volume 4
Christmas Edition 2007

Welcome

This is our very special Christmas APEUnion. Newsletter with perspectives, pictures and ideas from different countries.

The web site is up and running and can be visited at www.attachmentparenting.eu. There is a great discussion forum in English, German and Dutch at this stage and we hope to be adding French, Danish and Italian in the near future.

Please email me with and comments or news to include in our next edition. Kate@attachmentparenting.eu

APEU is holding monthly On-Line Support Meetings in the 3rd Wednesday night of every month at 8.30pm GMT.

At this stage the meetings are held in English but as time goes by we should be hosting meetings in other languages too.

To connect to the meeting, go to http://chat.xs4all.nl, choose a nickname, enter channel: #apeuchat and join in.

You are all welcome to join the new mail group for support and discussion at http://www.yahoogroups.com/groups/apeu

You can subscribe by sending a blank email to apeu-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

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Does the Santa Legend Endanger Trust?
by Jan Hunt

A close friend and I had an interesting discussion recently about the Santa Question. Is it OK to tell a child that Santa Claus is real? Is this a harmless "white lie", an innocent and loving attempt to give a child the pleasure of make-believe, and the reassurance of fitting into our culture, or is it essentially and inescapably a lie that can affect the child's critical capacity to trust?

Although my son Jason was taught to believe in Santa, I worried about the eventual outcome this might have, as I had not been told the Santa story in my own childhood. When he asked the "Santa question" at age eight, I learned that my fears had been correct. I can still remember his look of dismay, confusion, and sadness as I admitted as gently as I could that Santa was, in fact, a myth. Although I then told Jason the true story of Saint Nicholas of Patara, this did little to comfort him. I've regretted our original decision ever since.

Is there a way to keep the fantasy without the lie?

But how can a parent draw the line between innocent fantasy - so important in a child's life - and an ultimately harmful lie that will inevitably have to be explained later? Children thrive on fantasy and make-believe. They love inventive stories and fictional characters, and readily give their stuffed animals and dolls names and unique personalities. Fantasy and play are essential elements in a child's life. They not only bring joy and humor, but also enhance the ability to imagine and to think "outside the box". Imagination is a critical part of thinking and problem solving. What is the difference, then, between healthy fantasy and deception that endangers parent-child trust? Is there a way to keep the fantasy without the lie?

I found this puzzle to be surprisingly difficult to resolve. But after much thought I felt that there might be a middle ground. If a child were simply told the "Santa story" about a kindly old gentleman who leaves gifts for children in his make-believe world, but who remains within the fictional world of the story, there would be no need to undo the lie that he is leaving gifts for the child in *our* world. Parents and children could play the "Santa game" by leaving gifts for each other, just as Santa does in the story. This allows the opportunity for children to learn the pleasure of giving to their parents and siblings, as well as gaining the knowledge and appreciation of their parents' efforts on their behalf - an opportunity that is completely missed in the traditional approach.

For the Santa question, and for other stories about such figures as fairies and elves, the central question becomes: Are the characters left in their own imaginary world, or are they claimed to be somehow magically making the transition from their world to ours? Are they presented as fictional characters, meant to entertain or inspire, or can they directly affect the child in some way in the real world - leaving gifts or Easter eggs, or exchanging teeth for coins? The movie "The Purple Rose of Cairo" is a good illustration of a fictional character magically leaving his world and breaking into the heroine's real world. But the movie was presented as an intriguing and entertaining fiction, not as a news story.

If fictional characters are all left within their own make-believe worlds, parents and children could still leave surprises under the tree "like Santa does in the Santa story". The child would still receive gifts and enjoy the Santa tale, but there would be no deception to explain or regret later, and the child is being given authentic information about the real world. Children need a truthful picture of their world so that they can learn to navigate within it with confidence, knowledge and safety. Providing such an understanding is as important a reason to avoid the Santa myth as the need to maintain the child's trust. If we keep the magic fantasy, but hold it within the borders of

the world of fiction and story telling, we can foster imagination and delight today without worrying about the questions we will surely be asked tomorrow.

This article and many more can be found on www.naturalchild.org

Buying Toys This Christmas - Ideas And Suggestions To Please Everyone!

With Christmas fast approaching now is the time to stop and think about the gifts we will buy for our children and why. For many of us the commercialism of the Christmas season and the pressure from children, marketing companies and even extended family to give particular gifts can turn what should be a beautiful and special time of year, into a time that is uncomfortable and stressful.

We can help to ease some of this tension by thinking about what type of gifts we would like our children to receive and why. Once we have this worked out we need to clearly express this to other family members. Thinking about this now is also beneficial to us as parents, because even though we may know what we do and don't like, often if we leave shopping to the last minute, we end up over purchasing and buying things we wouldn't have considered buying if we had taken the time to plan ahead.

The first thing we need to consider is what we feel makes a good toy, a toy that is suited to the age of the child and also our own philosophies. Sometimes we don't know exactly why we have an aversion to a particular toy, but there is probably a good reason for it. We need to listen to our inner feeling without being influenced by what marketing companies and well meaning family tell us our child 'should' have. Just because it is the norm and 'everyone else has it', doesn't mean that it is what is best for your child. As parents we usually know what we do and don't want in our life and in the lives of our children, and we shouldn't feel guilty about trying to protect this.

I have always felt that I would prefer my children to have fewer toys of higher quality, rather than a lot of cheap, throw away, plastic toys. When we give our children beautiful toys that we ourselves have a respect and appreciation for, we are passing that feeling on to our child. We naturally want to care for the toy, place it somewhere visible, neatly displayed on a shelf or in a small basket, rather than throwing it into the bottom of the toy box or back of the cupboard to be lost amongst chaos.

When we care for a toy in this way, our child will learn to love and care for it in the same way. They will develop an appreciation for beautiful, natural things, and they will truly cherish the gifts they receive. We can speak to our child about the source of the toy, where it came from, the materials used, and the skill of the craftsperson that made it.

The most valuable toys we can give a child are those that we have made for our child with our own hands. A gift made and given in this way has a very special quality and this will be recognised by the child. However, when making gifts is not an option, there is no need to resort to mass produced, toxic, lifeless plastics – there are many talented local toy makers in Australia, and so many European family businesses that have been handcrafting wooden toys of exceptional quality and beauty for generations.

Along with considering the physical quality of a toy, we also need to consider its play quality. How many different uses does it have? Does it dictate the play to the child, or is the child free to play with it in any way they choose? Toys that are open-ended are open to a variety of uses limited only by the imagination of the child. The simpler the toy, the more potential it has to become other things in play. Toys that are both well made and open ended have the ability to grow alongside your child and become part of their play in various ways throughout their childhood.

A great example of this is the wooden rainbow 'puzzles' often seen in Steiner kindergartens. We have one of these at home and I love to see the way my two sons use it in their play.

Initially my two year old would simply lay out the pieces from end to end – the result was a beautiful, colourful, curving line stretching across the floor. Now, as he approaches the age of three, I see him beginning to include the rainbow in more imaginative play - perhaps using the arches as a fence for an animal, a tunnel for a small truck, or a mountain for a horse to cross.

My six year old can be found using a single arch as a seesaw for a small doll or a frame for a small house - but mostly he can be found creating beautiful arrangements with the pieces – perhaps stacking them and balancing them into a tower of arches, or creating colourful patterns and shapes flat on the table.

Neither of them play with this toy every day, but it is something that both of them can enjoy in so many different ways for many, many years - and when not in use, it is a beautiful wooden rainbow sitting on a low cupboard in our living room, ready to be played with at any moment.

Other elements of a toy worth considering are the environmental impact of the toy, and the conditions under which it was made. We will feel more proud and comfortable giving a toy that we know was made by workers who were paid fair wages. If we know that our purchase comes from a sustainable resource and has minimal impact on the environment, we are giving our child a positive message through our gift, and when they are of the age to understand we can even explain why we made this choice.

Once we know what type of toys we are happy for our child to receive we need a way of getting this message across to other family members that will be buying gifts for our child. Some Grandparents, Aunts and Uncles are happy to buy what they know you want your child to have, others insist on buying what they know you would never buy for your child yourself.

This is different in every family and I know that for some it can be a very sensitive issue. I think the most important thing in all cases is not to take away the ability of the giver to choose. Gift giving is very personal and if we tell people exactly which gift to buy, they are missing out on the joy of selecting something for that child on their own. The best way to do this without having to compromise your own ideals is to go to a favourite shop or online store that shares your philosophies. You can then have a thorough look at what is on offer and make a list of all the things that you know your child would love, and you know you would be happy for them to receive. Pass this list around the family with prices and details of where the items can be purchased. This way they can choose for themselves what they would like to give your child, and you both know it will be a gift that you are happy to have in your home.

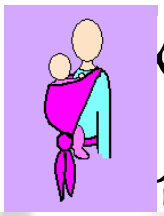
With a little planning there is no need to become overwhelmed by the approach of the Christmas season. All our children need in a toy is simplicity, beauty and the ability to play freely without the constraints of adult concepts and thinking.

By giving our child toys that support the growth of their imagination we are preserving the true beauty of childhood – and this is the most important and valuable gift that any child can receive.

APEU Ireland Sling Library

This page is dedicated to the kind and generous people that have donated slings to the library.

We thank you…



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December Celebrations in our Family by Diana Boskma APEU - UK

Our family is a nice combo of Dutch/German, living in the UK. We live a pagan lifestyle. The below is how we celebrate the whole December month, as it is very difficult for me to write only about X-mas as we basically do not do that in the way others do.

In our family we do use the days from the 1st of December to the 31st of December to have various celebrations. The real big days are: 5 December - St. Nicolas, 21 December - Yule and 31 December - New Years Eve.

On 5 December we celebrate St. Nicolas.
We buy presents for all of us, wrap them, and hide them throughout the house. The kids are fully aware of what we are doing and try to stay away as much as possible or help out when required. As we live in the UK now I don't have St. Nic. wrapping to my disposal, so now I have resorted to use winter decorated paper, which is used for X-mas here. I make a long letter, which a neighbour puts in our letter box with quite some noise in banging on the windows and doors. The kids love that. They always wonder who is doing that, for the last years it has been the same neighbour and they didn't figure it out yet. In the letter its written where the presents are hidden, so we have an evening full of fun while they are searching and after that each simple present is unwrapped with everybody there. We drink hot chocolate and eat traditional St. Nicolas sweets, cookies, etc., like: pepernoten, kruidnootjes, taai-taai, borstplaat, speculaas etc.

We do not take any tree or Yule deco out until 6 December or the nearest weekend. Usually the kids help out decorating the tree.

We use an Advent-like calendar. We tend to have sweet, chocolate or something in there for each day, for each child. Nothing very important, just a fun countdown. Sometimes I buy the chocolate Advent Calendars they sell here, but they are not fully suitable as they go to 24 December and we only count down to 21 December.

The celebration on 21 December is about the winter solstice:

Solstice means "sun stands still." This is the longest night of the year, the night that darkness rules. It also marks the turning though. From here on the days will slowly be getting a little bit longer and the light a little bit stronger as the Wheel turns back towards Springtime. Yule is halfway around the Wheel Year from Midsummer, which is the Summer Solstice. It's the first official day of Winter. Most of the customs that come to us today about Christmas originated in Pagan times with Yule. Like bringing a tree into the house, and decorating it with fruit and popcorn. Or putting candles in the windows. And let's not forget the holly and the ivy. Or the songs, like Deck the Halls. Or the stories.

SUPPLIES: Seasonal decorations, a bell, the Sun candle (we use a 9-inch yellow pillar candle), a small votive candle for each person at the table (it's nice if your child can have their favorite color) and the safety lighter.

Begin by having the children turn off all the lights all over the house, to simulate the dark of the year.

Be sure to explain to younger kids why you're doing this, before you start, so they don't get scared. If you have an upstairs have them start there first. Making sure you leave a light on on the stairs so they can find their way back down. Younger children will probably need an escort, since the dark is scary for them, even if this ritual is supposed to be fun. Work your way back towards the ritual table, turning everything off as you go. When you're ready everyone should be gathered around the table and the house should be in complete darkness, except for one candle to read by.

Dad says quietly:

Begin by turning off all the lights all over the house, to simulate the dark of the year. Start upstairs, make sure you leave a light on so they can find their way back down safely! And be sure to explain to younger kids why you're doing, before you start, so they don't get scared. The house should be in total darkness now, except for one small candle to read by. Dad says quietly:

/For half the year, day by day
Slowly the world has gone dark.
For half the year, night by night,
Slowly the dark has grown longer.
/
Making sure the matches are right at hand, Dad blows out the last candle, plunging the room into darkness. Keep the little ones close to mom or dad so they don't get scared because the house will be very dark and very quiet. Wait a minute for effect and then dad says:

/ But the darkness was never complete.
A spark was always waiting...
/
Light the match and let the drama of the moment have its effect. Then end with:

/To return
And turn the dark to light once more./

Dad lights the Sun candle. Now Mom says:

/Tonight the dark time ends.
It is Yule. The Solstice.
The Wheel has turned
Bringing our land back to the light.
And now the spark will grow
Greater and greater.
The light will come back,
The cold will go away
And soon we will celebrate Spring!/

Dad lights his candle from the Sun candle and places it in the middle
saying:

/The wheel is turning
The light is returning!
/
Then each person at the table, starting with mom and proceeding to each child from the oldest, lights their candle from the sun candle and repeats:

/The wheel is turning
The light is returning!/

When everyone has had their turn, bask in the glow of the candle light. Now send the kids hurrying through the house turning on all the lights. Every light in every room (try to forget your electric bill) should be turned on to drive away all the darkness and shadows. When everyone is back at the table mom says:

/Winter is a time of darkness.
We all have moments like that,
When you feel lost or scared or unsure.
The Earth understands us
Because it is alive too./

/That is why the Earth teaches us
That no matter how dark it gets
The light always returns.
The night will always end And a new day begin./

Now you can serve dinner, leaving the candles burning. (We leave candles in the center of the table so little hands are tempted to play with them). While you eat, discuss the celebration of Solstice around the world. Midwinter is celebrated in remarkably similar ways in very different cultures. The most important part of the celebration is light. The Pagan Yule log, Christian Advent candles, Hebrew Menorah and African-American Kwanza candles all celebrate the light. (If you're looking for a neat Christmas video pick up *THE PUZZLE PLACE* Christmas tape. It doesn't actually say "pagan" but it handles the whole light thing very nicely) Its meaning varies from culture to culture, and even person to person. It can be magic to help the sun return, a sign of hope in the dark and cold, a symbol of the Unconquerable Sun to cheer us or an exaggeration of the light needed in this dark time. But the common denominator is light.

Bring in the Pagan background of Yule by explaining that the Yule Log is an indoor bon- fire. All the same virtues were ascribed to it: fertility, purification, continuation of life, protection from evil and such.

Much ritual and ceremony surrounded the bringing in of the Yule log. It was usually oak, ash or fruitwood, and it had to be cut from one's own property, because purchasing it was considered bad luck. The Yule log was always kindled with a piece of last year's Yule log, which was kept for just that purpose. Once lit, it was essential it burn steadily until it was time to extinguish it. Some customs say let it burn for 12 hours, others say for the full 12 days of Christmas.

In any case The Yule Log was never allowed to burn completely away, that would forecast bad luck for the coming year. The leftover log was saved to kindle next year's Yule fire.

The Christian celebration of Christmas mimics many of the Pagan traditions too. Explain how the new religion built their story of Jesus' birth onto the Old Religion's beliefs, to make it more acceptable to the Pagans. Gently point out the Sun/Son theme. (Be careful not to let any negative feelings you might have about Christianity creep into your words. Children are an open book and they'll learn what you teach them, so be positive and loving.) You can tell them how Jesus was actually believed to have been born in the spring, when the sheep would have been out in the fields, like it says in all the songs. But the church decided to set his birth date to coincide with the ancient celebration of Winter Solstice, so the "birth" of the Son would match the ancient Pagan festival celebrating the rebirth of the Sun.

Talk about what other religions do at this time of year. Let them tell you what they know about Christmas and Hanukkah and Kwanza. And if they don't know the stories, fill them in!

Remember, this is a time of great celebration. The Goddess has given us a sign that it is the beginning of the end of the long, cold winter.

The change won't come over night of course, but the Wheel has turned and spring *is* on the way. Remember, Yule might be the longest night of the year, but it marks the return of the Sun. So celebrate!

When dinner is over make a show of putting out the Yule candles. Mom goes first and says:

/May the light of the Yule candles
Burn in our hearts
All throughout the coming year.
Blessing of the Season on you all.
/
As each person extinguishes their candle (we made a long-handled candle snuffer for safe extinguishing) they can say:

/Blessings of the season on you all./

The candle ritual might seem short. It was actually longer but we had to cut it down because the kids need things short and sweet to keep their attention.

After 21 December we leave the tree until New Years eve, to keep the deco in the house and with that the warmth. As we do like the days off for X-mas, we do use those days for nice meals and relaxation as well, somewhat like an extension to Yule. On 31 December we eat stuff like oliebollen, apple beignets and have a nice dinner (like raclette, fondue or something like that). We are all together until midnight, when we light the fire works. After that we call friends and family to wish them a happy new year.

With living in the UK it has become impossible to find any of the things below, so I have started making it all myself. Here are some recipes. I have several for these things, and try out different ones every year. Most i have dug out from the internet. Usually they are only in Dutch online.

Recipes:
kruidnootjes:
250 gr flour
2 gr baking powder
5 gr cinnamon powder
2,5 gr. clove powder
2 gr. cardemom powder
1 gr. ginger powder
125 gr butter
125 gr demerrera sugar
50 gr golden syrup
3 gr salt.

Put flour, bakingpowder and spiced in a bowl. Mix in a pan butter, sugar and syrup with salt and melt it all. Mix both mixtures together to a well mixed batter. Leave this until its more firm. Make small balls out of it and put those on a greased baking tray into the oven, 180C for 15 minutes. Take kruidnootjes out of the oven and leave to cool.

Taai-taai & pepernoten
250 gr flour
100 gr honey
1 tbs syrup
1/2 tsp salt
1/2 tsp baking powder
3 tsp cinnamon powder
1 tsp anis powder
1 tsp nutmeg powder
1 tsp clove powder

Warm the honey until soft and put syrup into it. Mix flour, spices and baking powder. Stir honey into flour mix to make a firm dough. Make large shapes for Taai-taai and very small balls, really close together for pepernoten. Put it on a greased baking tray and bake on 160C until done, for about 15 to 20 mins. Taai-Taai is usually made in the shape of dolls.

Borstplaat
12 tbs white sugar
4 tbs cream
some taste, like: vanilla, lemon, cocoa, raspberry aroma or instant coffee. I basically only use vanilla aroma or cocoa powder as the kids love those tastes. mix sugar with cream and cook it slowly, let it cook for about 5 minutes. When a drip becomes hard in cold water it is right. When you want to use instant coffee or cocoa powder you have to use that while cooking, the rest comes in when the pan is taken off the stove. You can make circles out of this or use cookie cutters to make shapes. Make sure the cookie cutters are heat resistent. You can do this in 1 ways: 1 way is to put the cookie cutters flat on baking paper and pour a bit of the fluid in there. The other way is having the fluid on a baking tray and cut them out of that.

Speculatius
50 gr self raising baking flour
50 gr flour
75 butter
50 gr demerrera sugar
1/2 tbs speculaas spices **
1/2 tsp salt
2 tbs almond shavings

Preheat oven to 160C
Put all ingredients in a bowl, cut the butter in small chunks with 2 knives. and knead the lot to a nice dough. Roll the dough out to 1 cm thick. Put cut out pieces (either with cookie cutters or just squares) on a greased baking tray and bake for 25 to 30 mins in preheated oven. Let cool for 10 mins.

** speculatius spices=
1 tsp cinnamon powder
1 tsp cardamom powder
1/2 tsp ginger powder
1/2 tsp clove powder

Oliebollen:
This is just the basic recipe, but they are also made with banana, whipped cream, vanilla cream, cherry and other fruit. So, if you know how to make the normal ones, you can use your imagination on the recipe and make different kinds of 'oliebollen'. We do have to mention, that they are very fatty, and contain lots of calories. So, don't eat them every week, save it for a special occasion, like New Years Eve or Christmas. You will need a deep-frying pan with fresh deep-frying fat for this recipe.

500g flour
75g raisins
1/2 litre milk
20-25g fresh yeast (or one small package which is approx. 7g) 50g chopped candied peel 1 teaspoon sugar 1 teaspoon salt 1 teaspoon cinnamon

Wash the raisins, and let them dry out.
Heat the milk in a saucepan until it's tepid.(max 40°C, so don't let it

boil!)
Crumble the fresh yeast, mix it with the sugar and 1dl (100ml!) tepid milk in a bowl, and stir until it's a nice smooth mixture. Mix the flower with the salt in a big bowl. Make a little hole in the centre, and pour the yeast mixture into it. After that add the (tepid)milk that is left into the same hole. Mix it with a hand blender or a spoon until it's a nice smooth mixture. Mix the raisins, the chopped candied peel and the cinnamon into the mixture. Cover the bowl with some foil and let the batter stand (rise) for about an hour on warm spot.

Heat the deep-frying fat until it reaches 180ºC. Now, you can do the next step with a soup spoon (a deep big one). Stick the spoon in the heated fat for a couple of seconds; this will prevent the batter from sticking to the spoon. Use the spoon just as you would use it to serve soup. Make sure the spoon is filled with the batter, and carefully dip it into the oil/fat. Repeat this, but don't have more than 4 of them into the oil at the same time (this also depends on the size of your pan). Fry the 'oliebollen' for about 8-10 minutes until they are nice gold brownish.(rotate the them with a fork after 4 minutes, so the whole thing gets fried equally).

(Repeat this step until the all of the batter is used.)

Let the 'oliebollen' dry out on some kitchen paper before you serve them. Arrange them on a nice dish and don't forget the powdered sugar!

*If you don't like raisins, apples or candied peel, you can leave this out. After you fried the 'naked oliebollen', let them leak out, and cut them open. Now you can stuff them with whipped cream, strawberries, or whatever you prefer. (or eat them without anything, that's my favourite way, just with loads of sugar!)You can eat them hot, or cold. It's not a problem if you let them cool down; keep them in the refrigerator and just heat them the next day in your oven.

*You can also mix some nuts (hazelnuts for example)in the batter.

The Fairy At The Top Of The Christmas Tree

This story was given to Jenni Cargill by a woman called Morgan in Sydney. Morgan cherished this story as it has been handed down orally through her family for many generations. It gives a different spin to the Santa Claus theme of Christmas and has an ecological and non-materialistic tone.

I love to tell my children this story on Christmas Eve by candlelight. It is a tradition and makes Christmas so magical - perfect if you are looking for a way to make Christmas special and you are not a Christian. I love to keep the magic alive for kids and they will remember this tradition for the rest of their lives.

Have you ever wondered why we decorate a tree at Christmas? Why we wind silver tinsel around the tree and put a fairy on the top? Or why we hang stars and flashing lights on the tree's branches?

Well, long, long ago, the land which we call Europe had many great forests. It is said that within these great forests lived the fairies or the fair ones. While it is true that the fairies had pale skin from living in the dullness of the forests, this is not how they got their name. They were called fairies because they were fair of heart, fair of mind and fair of spirit, and so the fairies had been rewarded by the Gods and Goddesses with the gift of magic.

The fairies, like many creatures that possessed the knowledge of magic, had a special fondness for children. Every mid-winter's eve, the Queen of the fairies invited all the children of all clans and tribes to visit her deep in heart of the forest.

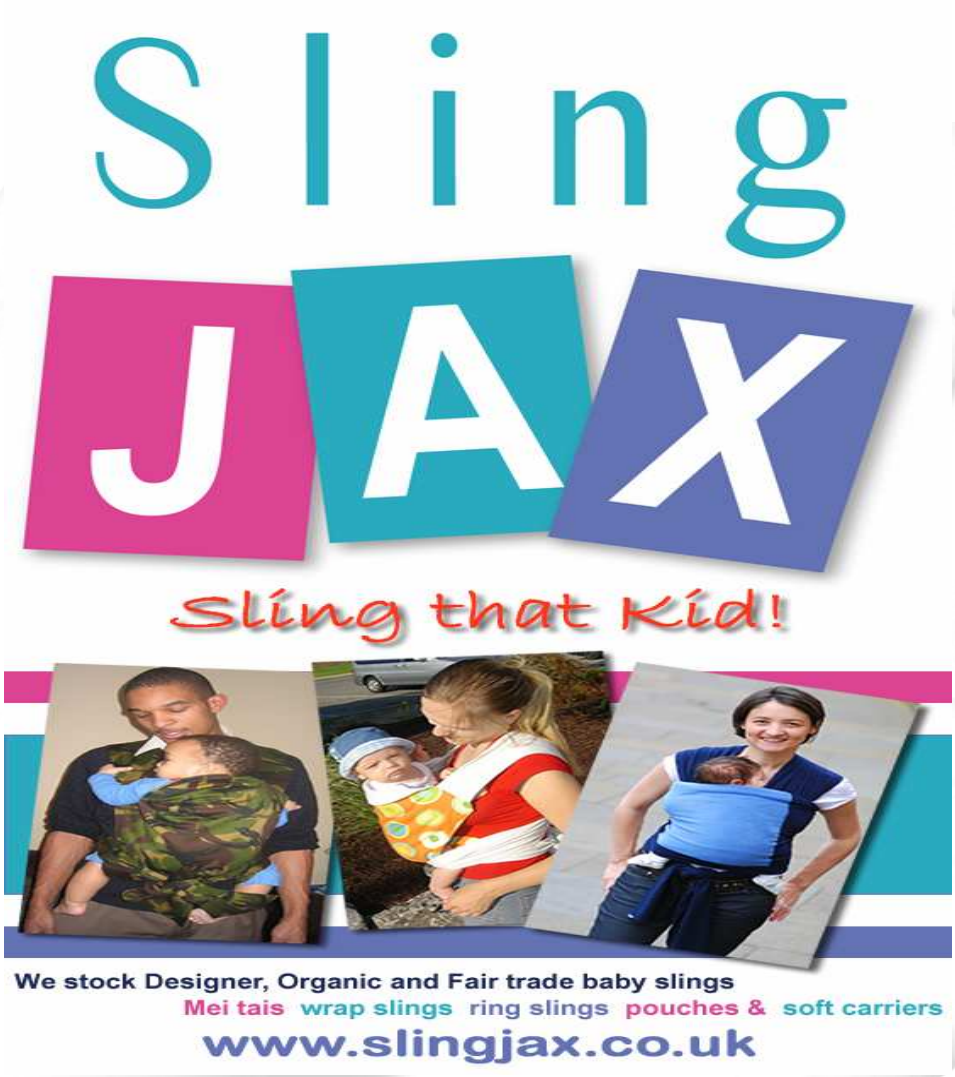
Since only the children were invited and the forest can be a scary and dangerous place for children who don't know it well, the Queen bade the spiders to weave a web from the edge of the forest right into the centre where she sat at her throne.

Then at sunset as the children gathered at the edge of the forest, the Queen waved her magic wand. She turned the spider web to silver threads that glittered under stars and moonlight and guided the children through the darkness of the forest in towards her throne. As the children made their way through the forest, the flickering torches carried by the older children could be seen by their parents as they waited outside. Children often took gifts which they made for the fairies, though it wasn't necessary to have one.

As they reached the Queen's throne, the children would approach her in single file. One at a time and with a whisper in her ear they would ask for a gift which *only the Queen Fairy* could bring. Then with a kiss on the cheek from the Queen, each child would follow the silver threads back to the edge of the forest where their parents waited for them. The children knew they were not to speak of what they saw or tell what wish they had made. For if they did, they knew their wish would not come true.

Today the fairies, like the forests are few; and the children of human tribes too many. Most children no longer have the opportunity to visit the fairies in their forests, but those of us who still believe in the fairies provide a small forest in which they might dwell on Christmas Eve.

We bring our little forest into our homes and decorate the forest or tree with symbols of a time long past. A silver thread is wound from the bottom edge of the tree through its branches to the top center of the tree - symbolising the silver spider web. Silver stars are hung and flashing electric lights replace the flickering torches. Little statues of elfin and fairies are placed on the tree with a Queen of the Fairies on top. On Christmas morning, children awake to find presents at the bottom of the tree representing the gifts from the fairies. And one last thing - don't forget to put some food and drink out for the fairies who dwell in your little forest.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CHRISTMAS IN NEW ZEALAND.... By Rachel Sime AP - NZ

The Southern Hemisphere generally experiences a nice, long, hot day on Christmas day (but not always!). Most people have Christmas with their family and then Boxing Day at the beach, or a rodeo or on the road to their campsite for the Christmas/New Year break. Most of us will still have a traditional English roast meal including turkey, pork, new potatoes, peas etc and for dessert we have Christmas puddings, trifle etc , but my favourite is Pavlova. Christmas Day tea is barbeques (if the weather is good) and lots of left overs. There has been an ongoing argument whether Pavlova can be claimed by New Zealand or Australia, but it is New Zealand icon. Yummy with cream on top then toppings like shaved chocolate and/or strawberries, kiwifruit. Eat with fresh fruit salad and jelly. The trick with the pavlova is to cook it, then turn the oven off and leave it until the oven cools.

PAVLOVA

Some "secrets" to successful Pavlova making!

- Ensure implements are scrupulously clean.
- Never use a copper bowl to beat the eggs.
- Egg whites should be whipped at approximately room temperature.
- Ensure that no yolk gets into the egg white.

This is a typical recipe for a "homemade" Pavlova

4 egg whites	1 teaspoon vanilla essence
¼ teaspoon salt	1 teaspoon vinegar
1 cup castor sugar	2 teaspoons cornflour (cornstarch)

Preheat the oven to 150°C(Gas Mark 2).
Beat egg whites and salt in a bowl until soft peaks form. Gradually add the castor sugar while beating. Continue until stiff peaks form. Beat in the remaining ingredients, vanilla essence, vinegar and cornflour. Turn mixture out onto a baking paper covered tray. Shape into a circle approximately 23 cm (9 in) in diameter.

Reduce oven temperature to 140°C. Bake for 15 minutes, then further reduce the oven temperature to 120°C and bake for 1 ¼ hours. Cool completely in the oven. Top with whipped cream and your choice of fresh fruit.

Enjoy and Good Luck!

Serving suggestions

Pavlovas are usually dressed with fresh whipped cream and selected fruits, nuts. The options seem endless, and provide a real opportunity for hosts to express themselves creatively.

Kiwifruit and strawberries are traditional favourites. But pineapple, paw paw, passion fruit, peaches, banana, coconut, raspberries and grapes are also common in a variety of combinations. These are often combined with nuts such as hazelnut, almonds and walnuts. Some people also like to add chocolate hail or chocolate sauce.

Pavlovas are very versatile. Dress them however you prefer. Get creative! To help you get started, or for a little something different our staff have collected some of their favourite serving ideas.

Try these out: -

Cut pavlova in half. Remove top half and cream the bottom. Replace the top and cream also. Drizzle the top with melted chocolate. This works really well with a hazelnut pavlova.

For that extra some thing special add a small amount of cocoa powder to the cream prior to whipping.

Fold chocolate shavings to the cream on a cappuccino pavlova.

Crush brandy snap pieces and fold gently into the whipped cream just prior to serving. If added too early the brandy snap pieces will dissolve.

If you like a tropical flavour try drizzling passionfruit sauce over the whipped cream and serving with fresh melon, grapes and pineapple. Adding some pineapple leaves as a garnish will give that finishing touch.

This is the Pohutakawa tree which flowers in the summer. It is seen as a sort of New Zealand Christmas tree and we even have our own version of the 12 days of Christmas song which has Pohutakawa and Pukekos (a native bird) in it!

Christmas with us in Switzerland by Hilary Diouf APEU

We are not in the Alpes but in the Jura mountains, but we still have snow.
We aren't Christian we're Bahai, but we still celebrate Winter.

In winter time we go for long racket walks across the snow, eat hot roasted chestnuts and drink creamy hot chocolate. winter is really a wonderful wonderland under a blanket of glistening snow. Of course you can make the usual snow angels by lying down and waving your arms and legs in and out. What ever we do outside in the crisp fresh air, my favorite part is returning home and snuggling the kids up in warm wooly socks, slipping under a big blanket and sipping our hot chocolate with melted marshmellows on the top. Delicious!

Not every day is an outdoor day, some days the cosiness of the indoor glow of lighted candles (unfortunately we don't have a fire) is too strong to resist. a long story book, you never get the time to read to the end, is just perfect for the day. The odour of freshly baked bread made together lets us know its time to tuck into to a hearty soup. a long hot bath together- or as many as can fit into the tub takes the chill out of the bones.

As you can tell I adore winter, it makes you so much more adventurous than summer where playgrounds, bicycles etc take the inventiveness out of play.

Have a wonderful winter every one
blessings
Hilary

Christmas tree of Hands for Advent from Anne Ryan – APEU Ireland

- Get lots of green paper, glitter glue, sequins, foil/shiny paper and glue for decoration, plus a large piece of sugar paper, poster paper or left over wall paper to mount the "tree" on.
- Draw round the hands of everyone in the family on the green paper and cut out. You will need 24 hands. Decorate the hands with a number from 1 - 24 - you could use glitter glue, or felt pens. Then make some extra decorations to add to the tree when it is assembled.
- Draw a pot and tree trunk at the bottom of your piece of sugar/poster paper.
- Working from the bottom upwards, each day from the 1st of December stick on one hand with the fingers pointing downwards like leaves.
- As you work up, make each row shorter than the one below and overlap it slightly so there are no gaps. The idea is that you should finish with one hand at the top of the tree and a nice roughly triangular Christmas tree shape.
- As you go along also add lots more decorations.
- The star or angel on the top can be added on Christmas Day

And…….

Ice Candles

Materials needed:

- Small plastic tub or bucket (a summer beach bucket is the ideal size).

- Tin can or small plastic cup.

A few strategically placed ice candles can turn your back garden into a winter's evening wonderland. Ice candles are easy to make, and best of all, cost next to nothing.

The trick

The first step to create an ice candle is to make a mould. This is done by filling a bucket with cold tap water and placing a tin can or cup in the centre. Weigh it down with enough small rocks to almost, but not quite, sink it.

Place the bucket outside (if it’s cold enough) or in the freezer (if the freezer is big enough) until the water is frozen solid. Carefully remove the block of ice from the bucket (you might need to loosen the ice by running warm tap water over the bucket's surface for a few moments). Once the ice is free from the bucket, the next step is to remove the tin can or plastic cup from the centre of the block. (If the can or cup seems locked in the ice you can fill it with warm water to make removal easier.)

Once the ice has been removed from the bucket and the cup from the centre of the block, you've got your basic ice candle. Just place a small candle at the bottom of the well where the cup used to be. Bingo! You've just made an ice candle!

Hints

To keep the can or cup from "drifting off centre" you may want to anchor it in place by placing a stick across the top of the bucket and taping the cup or can to the stick. An inverted sauce pan lid will also do the trick -- the knob at the top will prevent the cup or can from drifting too far from the centre.

Rainbow ice candles

Essentially you follow the steps outlined above, except you will build your candle in stages. Fill your bucket with 1/2 inch cold tap water and let freeze. When your first layer has frozen solid, add another 1/2 inch of VERY COLD tap water and add several drops of food colouring. Freeze and repeat the process with a different food colouring for each layer. Don't forget to put a can or cup in the centre to make space for your candle.

Observations from a Large Family
December in Ireland…..

Last year we graduated to two trees, one in the dining room and one in the sitting room, the boys felt that as we ate in the dining room, a tree needed to be there for decorative purposes and the sitting room one was the REAL tree.
In our house we have always told the boys that we buy the presents. We don't go and see Santa and my sons call any Santa they see around and about a 'fake' one.
Another big part of December for us is deciding which charity they are giving €20 in their own name. The envelope with the thank you note from the charity of choice ends up in the stockings on Christmas morning. Last year they ranged from Aware Ireland (Depression support charity) to The Blue Cross (animal rescue). A second big event before Christmas is the Toy Redistribution where the boys pack up toys they no longer need, want or play with and we donate them to charity. I always felt they needed to know about other people and how their doing these actions can help another person enjoy their festive season too.
The main event is about food for us. Most of the children spend at least 3 weeks prior to Christmas watching the food channels on Sky television deciding on the feast for the day. Hors d'oevres, main courses, side dishes, sauces, vegetables and the most important one – desserts (3 at least!).
Once the feast has been planned by all we make a huge list and go shopping. Everyone is involved in the food here and we cook up a storm for 3 entire days. The favourite foods have become Crown of Turkey, stuffing terrine, brussell sprouts with bacon and sesame (yummy!), chocolate mousse and Pavlova (thanks Rachel!!)
The older children and I go to midnight mass (I cry through it!) and we are woken on Christmas morning at around 7am to joyous screams and shouts (my husband and I have been up until 3am wrapping presents!). All is distributed and then it's a chocolate breakfast.
The remainder of the day is spent cooking by all of us and eating too. The noise is overwhelming sometimes but the atmosphere is fantastic!

Merry Christmas / Noallaig Shona Duit!

Waiting for Christmas Eve in Norway – the first 23 days of December by Rachel Haug APEU - Norway

Our Christmas celebration starts early. In fact, the entire month of December is part of our celebration. The first 23 days are named Advent – the period of waiting for Christmas Eve on the 24th of December – and is the anticipatory stage of the celebration.

On the night before the 1st of December, our family takes down all the advent and Christmas decorations we have from the attic. The children are thrilled and excited as several boxes are brought downstairs, and Santa's and angels and stars and candles are brought to life again from their bubble wrap environment in boxes the past 11 months. The Christmas China is taken down as well, and used ever single day throughout the month of December, and the children's Christmas stockings are placed on the wall empty for the next 23 days. In addition, the mandarins bought the same day, and refilled every single week, are placed in bowls in the living room and kitchen.

The most important element brought to immediate life, however, is our Christmas star. This is placed in our living room window and is lit for the entire month of December, to represent the trip taken by the three holy kings in search of baby Jesus. The Christmas crib is then placed on the table beneath the star, with all figures except baby Jesus in place.

The children are given their choice of Santa's and can place them wherever they want to around the house. Santa's are placed in the bathroom, the toilet, living room and the kitchen and any shelf that has room for one, and we are all smiling with happiness as we slowly see our home transformed into a beautiful Christmas home.

The tables get purple table coverings, to represent the Advent period, and the advent a candelabrum with four purple candles is placed on the living room table. On the four Sundays of December, one candle after another is lit, and a verse is sung or spoken when we light it, with the fourth Sunday of December being the day when all four are lit together. This is also the day when we let the candle burn down – since the period of waiting by then is over.

The candles are the adult's way of marking the waiting period, lighting a candle a week for four weeks. The children, however, are given an easier task for these 24 days – advent calendars. These come in all shapes and forms, and are different from each family, so I will only describe ours. Both our sons have a calendar that is based on opening a small gift every day for the 24 days before Christmas Eve. These gifts are small items that bright a smile to their faces – such as a set of pens one day, and a pack of gum another or a CD on a special day. These gifts can also be little favors – like "today we bake cookies together" along with some new cookie cutters, or" today we to the pool" etc. Your imagination is the limit. They get to open one gift every morning and it is something they dream about at night, and on the 24th, there always is a "bigger" gift for them.

Around the 15th of December, we decorate the Christmas tree together. We always do this on a weekend, preferably a Sunday, around this date and it is one of the highlights of December for us and the children. The last items from the attic boxes are brought out – the decoration. The children both have their own decorations that they have received as Christmas gifts over the years, and they eagerly look for these as the boxes are opened, and with reverence place them on the tree. We spend a few hours doing this, before we sit back on the sofa and just admire our Christmas tree. It is important to note, however, that this is not the tradition of all Norwegian families. Norwegian tradition would normally proscribe that the tree be brought in on the 23rd of December, with the adults decorating it after the children have gone to sleep so as to give them the joy of watching if finished when they wake up on Christmas Eve, with all the presents

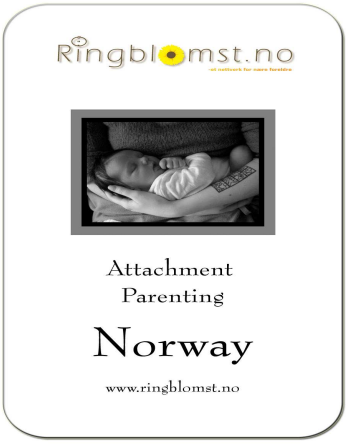
underneath. Our family has chosen not to follow this tradition, as we wanted the children to be part of the decorating of the tree, and we wanted to enjoy the tree for a longer period of time.

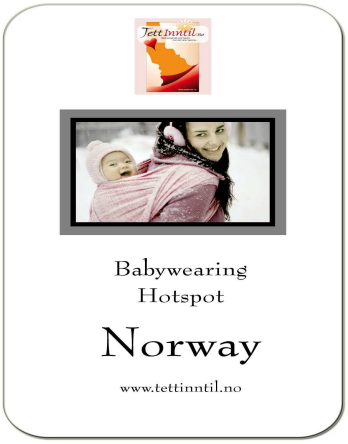
The next days, before the end of the Advent period is spent celebrating the holidays more, with the making of more decorations, baking of gingerbread cookies and other kinds, and the lighting of candles as often as possible. We also spend time preparing gifts for friends and family, and speaking about the history of Christmas and reading Christmas books and singing songs together.

We don't put the presents under the tree until the 23rd, however, but then too, the children are involved and loving it. But all families are different – but we have chosen our own version of the traditional Norwegian Christmas celebration with regards to the decorating of the Christmas tree and the placing of the gifts. The children get to go down to the basement and take upstairs all the presents that have arrived for the entire month and that has been in storage. With great reverence and care are the presents placed where the children feel they fit the best and after all the gifts are placed, we sit back again and just admire the scene.

The children then go to bed, and find new pajamas on their pillows, every year. These are much cherished gifts and it is with great excitement that they understand that soon, very soon, they will be able to go upstairs and it will be Christmas Eve. They go to sleep, and my husband and I pour ourselves a glass of red wine, and start preparing the children's stockings, that also need to be filled with fun gifts for the following day. These are items meant to make the day not last as long for them, so gifts such as games, DVDs, coloring books etc are good for this purpose. In addition, they get Christmas comics; a great tradition in Norway in comic book loving Norway. All comics have their Christmas issue, and the children will get one each in their stocking.

We then sit back, relax, knowing that we are done with the Christmas shopping for now. We have been to the store and bought the ingredients for our dinner the following day, and for a few days ahead. We have bought the special edition Christmas soda and beer, and all the sidings for all the meals we are preparing the following week. We have also changed all the purple on the tables with bright red, representing the transition from Advent to Christmas Eve. Before we go to bed the 23rd, we place baby Jesus in his crib, knowing the children will be looking for him first thing in the morning.





Christmas in England by Pendella Buchanan APEU Solent, England

As a multicultural society it seems we are either going more diluted each year to save isolating the non-Christians or getting more into it as we celebrate everyone's big festivals through the year! However, it's very hard to ignore Christmas here as everything stops for the day! The run up is a shopping frenzy where stores start selling festive fare from September and by December people are already a bit tired of the stock Christmas tunes in the shops! Children open advent calendars through December, many now picturing television characters rather than nativity scenes and usually containing chocolate treats in the windows rather than pictures! Trees and decorations are put up in homes and offices as early as the start of December and so can appear a little jaded by the big day itself, but this way we get value for money and extend the season a bit further! Christmas cards are sent to friends and family to wish them season's greetings. Christmas Eve is traditionally spent either at midnight mass at church singing Christmas carols or in the pub drinking with friends.

Christmas day is usually spent with close family in a food fest. Many people fill stockings with gifts for the children and put them on the ends of beds on Christmas Eve and then other gifts are scattered under the tree or fill huge sacks. Presents are opened early Christmas morning by over excited children who have usually spent the year afraid of being naughty in case Father Christmas wouldn't bring them gifts! Lunch is then prepared and seems to take up most of the morning while the children play with their new toys and fill up on the chocolate they found in their stockings! After lunch some sleep in front of the Queen's annual TV speech and the more energetic walk off the Christmas pudding before coming home to prepare more food for the evening! The television is also usually quite a focus for many households over Christmas. A bumper edition of the TV guide is pored over for weeks before to plan the viewing for the whole family. Boxing Day is a day to visit other relatives and is usually centred on filling up on even more food and exchanging more gifts. Probably the most popular tradition which hangs on in there regardless of modern living is the mince pie. We have a custom that you make a wish on the first one of the season. After that you try to eat at least one for every day of the twelve days of Christmas, which will then bring you good fortune for the twelve months until next Christmas. Another custom is to offer and accept a mince pie in each house you visit over Christmas. Not to offer these is bad manners, and was at one time thought to be so inhospitable as to bring bad luck on the house for the rest of the year! To refuse them when offered was to turn away good fortune. I personally alternate between loving and hating Christmas. Since the arrival of our daughter though, it has regained its magic. With our new baby due just before Christmas this year, it will hold a whole world more meaning than ever before and so I await it eagerly and wish everyone a peaceful and magical time.

For more info on English Christmas customs:
http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/customs/Xmas/xmas.html

Christmas in Germany by Aileen Flynn – APEU Germany

As an Irish mother living here, I have always thought that the Germans were exceptionally good at Christmas. Christmas here is the stuff of cards and chocolate boxes, all frosty sparkles, woolly hats and scarves, roasted chestnuts and carol singers. The Christmas markets run for the four weeks of Advent with carousels, mulled wine, sugared almonds and little wooden huts selling handcrafts and beautifully intricate handcarved wooden crib figures. In many towns there is a trumpet chorus from the top of the church tower, an unforgettably beautiful experience on a crystal clear, frosty evening.

The main Christmas celebration in Germany is on the 24th December. Traditionally, the Christmas tree is brought in to the "good" sitting room during the afternoon and decorated by the parents, often with real candles. The children are not allowed into the room until everything is ready – my husband still talks about the excitement as a child of having the door opened and seeing the room transformed into a wonderland. Presents are exchanged (and everyone takes time opening each one so the rest of the family can watch and appreciate), followed by a family meal, carol singing or storytelling.

As an Irish-German family we try to combine the best of both traditions. We have some beautiful Christmas CDs which are unpacked at the start of Advent and get played non-stop until after Christmas. I love to put up the tree a couple of weeks before Christmas, which caused consternation among our neighbours the first time they saw it. I always light a candle in the window on Christmas Eve to light the way for Mary and Joseph (an Irish tradition which I always found particularly beautiful).

We attend the children's Christmas ceremony at our local church on Christmas Eve afternoon and do our own little carol service at home where we read the Christmas story and the youngest child puts the baby Jesus into his mother's arms (yes, we have an AP crib!) We exchange family presents on Christmas Eve, but Santa Claus still comes down the chimney on Christmas morning (we have to remember to leave the door of our wood burning stove ajar before we go to bed), and finds beer and biscuits and a carrot for Rudolph, just as he did when I was a child in Ireland.

Above all, we try to make Christmas a stress-free zone, with as little commercialism as we can get away with and with the focus on being together, enjoying family time and building memories with our children and their grandparents.

Christmas in Italy by Chiara Stucci – APEU, Italy

Our family's preparations begin at Saint Ambrogio's day, when we go downstairs and we take our crib and Christmas tree. Every year we put a new statue in our crib. Our children love this little tradition, a special thing in our house is from the toddler age of Mattia, that our crib changes position every day: the children love to play with this! We're a catholic family so the crib has a strong significance for all of us. On the morning of the 25th I put the baby Jesus in the crib. The children, before opening gifts, say a prayer to Jesus with a candle.. We love to make homemade gifts. Last year for example we made a family calendar marked with important dates to our family origin.

During 24th evening my family with Alessandro's family spend dinner with our grandparents, aunt and cousins,..(we're 14 in all) and the day after we're in the same place (Alessandro's family home) with my parents, sister, cousins,....(we're 14 too). Alessandro's mother is a chef and every year she changes the menu .....pardon,,, MENU! In Italy every family eats the PANETTONE or PANDORO with cream. We didn't cook it, but we buy it at supermarket or at a bakery. Another thing every family busy is TORRONE. Generally it is common to have a crib and sometimes uncommon to have a tree. Children begin their holidays on the 20th December until 6th January. We say "the woman who according to the legend brings children their parents at the Epiphany, take with her holidays too.