

Podcast 52 - Christmas in Our House

by Rob McCormack - Friday, December 19, 2014

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Podcast Number 52 – Christmas in Our House

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Hi,

Christmas is a very special celebration for most Australians. My family is no exception. Christmas is a time when our family gets together to exchange gifts and enjoy some special meals together. I guess it's really a celebration of family life and family ties. It's also a very special and magical time for families with young children, because of the tradition that 'Father Christmas', also known as 'Santa Claus', brings gifts for the children. Of course, Christmas comes from the Christian story of the birth of Jesus Christ, so for those Australians who are practicing Christians, Christmas has a religious meaning because it celebrates that special event. For them, going to church on Christmas day will also be a part of their celebration.

So what's it like at Christmas time in our house? Of course, I can only speak about Christmas at our house. I'm sure there are many different Christmas traditions in other Australian households, especially for those who have emigrated from another country, or whose parents emigrated. Their Christmas celebrations will usually include many of the Christmas traditions from the country of their origin. For example, my wife emigrated from Austria, so some of the fun Christmas things we did with our children when they were young came from my wife's own childhood in Austria. Christmas traditions in Europe are a little different to those in Australia, so it was great that our children could get some of those experiences in their childhood too. Now that our children have grown up, our Christmas experience is somewhat different. In this podcast, I would like to tell you a little bit about our family's Christmas time, especially when our children were young. I hope it will give you some insight into how Australian families celebrate Christmas.

As Christmas time approaches in November, the first thing that happens is that the shops put up Christmas decorations and start playing Christmas music. Everybody is thinking, 'Christmas already? Where has the year gone?' At the same time, summer is coming, people are playing cricket and the temperature is getting warmer. Yes, in Australia we have a hot Christmas, sometimes very hot.

One of those European traditions which my wife introduced to me and to our children was the idea of Advent calendars. These are a large card the size of a large book, with 24 small windows or doors each corresponding to the dates from December 1 to December 24. Advent is a Christian term for the 4 week period leading up to Christmas day. Starting from the 1st of December, the child would open the first window on their Advent calendar and there would be a small trinket or a chocolate. Every day after that they would have the joy of opening the next window and so their excitement would build as Christmas

day approaches.

Some time in early December, my wife or one of the children says, 'It's time to put up the Christmas tree.' In Australia it is quite common to use a real tree. In fact, many of the volunteer organisations in Australia such as Rotary or the Scouts movement will often sell trees at Christmas time in order to raise money. Nowadays there are also companies that can deliver a real Christmas tree direct to your door. When we were first married, I can remember getting a real tree for the first few years, although now we have an artificial one. Certainly in my own childhood we always had real Christmas trees at home. Of course the tree must be decorated and it was always part of the family tradition that the children helped to put up the decorations. No Christmas tree is complete without a set of colourful flashing lights. We leave ours switched on overnight so as to provide a colourful display for those passing on the street.



As Christmas day gets closer, we need to make sure all our Christmas presents have been purchased. There was a special sequence of events for Christmas Eve, the 24th of December. First, with our assistance, the children put out a drink and a piece of cake for Father Christmas right next to the tree, as a reward for his 'hard work' dropping off the presents. For his reindeer, we also left a carrot or two. The children went to bed at the usual time, or perhaps a little later because of their excitement. When we knew they were asleep, we wrapped all the presents, put them under the Christmas tree and then sat back while 'Father Christmas' and 'the reindeer' ate the small snack the children had left. Then we were off to bed, hoping not to be woken up too early.

On Christmas morning, the children always woke us up early, usually by around 6.00 am or 6.30 am. They were always so excited to see all the presents under the tree, and of course the drink, cake and carrot were gone! Father Christmas had visited during the night. Once we were all out of bed and dressed, we gathered around the Christmas tree, with all the presents placed around it. Father Christmas had conveniently put the presents in a pile for each person. With the camera ready, we started opening the presents. The camera was always working overtime, either in the hands of myself or my wife. These pictures are such wonderful memories to look back on.

Lunch is the big meal for us on Christmas day. In our situation, my wife and I live in Melbourne, while the rest of our extended family, including our parents when they were alive, lived far away in other parts of Australia or overseas. So our Christmas lunches were always just with our family. For many Australian families however, extended families of grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins often get together for Christmas lunch or Christmas tea. I can remember such Christmas lunches when I was a child and they were great family events. Our tradition has been to cook a large turkey as well as a variety of salads and some hot vegetables. Plum pudding is the dessert we love to eat, along with some ice cream, always much appreciated as the weather is mostly warm.

Now that our two children are adults, our Christmas morning is a little more subdued and starts much later. But we still gather around the tree in our home and take pleasure in watching each other open our presents. Plenty of photographs are still taken. My wife and I are looking forward to the day when there will be grandchildren with whom we can, once again, share the joy of a young child's Christmas day.

If you have a question or a comment to make, please leave it in the comments box at the bottom of this page. Or, you can send me an email at rob@slowenglish.info. I would love to hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. I will write back to you, in English of course. If you would like to take a short quiz to see if you have understood this podcast, you will also find it on my website. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

Vocabulary

appreciated = when someone likes something or is thankful for something

approaches = ways of doing things

artificial = not real, fake

Austria = a country in Europe, next to Germany

build = gets bigger

carrot = a type of vegetable, orange in colour

celebration = when you are happy and have a party
conveniently = when something suits you, when it make your job easier
corresponding = when two things match
decorations = things which make something beautiful
deliver = when someone brings something to you which you have bought
dessert = the last part of your meal, usually sweet. For example, ice cream
different = the same
direct = straight
display = a sight which looks good
emigrated = to move from one country to another country and not return
exchange gifts = when people give something to somebody else
experiences = something you have done before
extended family = your parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunties, cousins
flashing = when a light goes on and then off and so on
gathered = to come together with other people
household = a family living together in one house
insight = an understanding
introduced = to learn something for the first time
magical = when something feels very special, almost unreal
no exception = when something is the same
origin = the start, where you came from
pile = when things a put together on top of one another
practicing Christians = people who actively believe in and follow Jesus Christ
presents = gifts
purchased = bought
raise money = when you ask people for money
reindeer = animals which live at the North Pole. They pull Father Christmas's sleigh.
religious = something to do with a religion like Christianity, Buddhism, Islam or Hindiusm
reward = to be given something because you have done something good
sequence = when one thing follows another thing, and so on
situation = how things are
snack = a very small meal
somewhat = in some ways
subdued = quiet
switched on = when lights start
temperature = a measure of how hot or cold it is
ties = when you have the feeling that you belong to a family
tradition = something which has been done for a long time
trinket = a small object which you like. For example, jewelery
turkey = a type of large bird, often eaten on special celebrations
variety = different types of
volunteer organisations = groups of people who do things to help others, without being paid
woken = when you wake up from a sleep
working overtime = working hard
wrapped = when paper is used to cover something

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