

Podcast 59 – A Birthday Celebration in Australia

Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia,
with Rob McCormack

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Hi,

There is something special about a birthday. Recently I had my birthday and, as is our family tradition, we had a small family celebration. I'm sure this is the case in most Australian families, although the type of celebration depends on what age you are. For example, generally speaking, we make a bigger fuss of a birthday for a child than we do for an adult. For adults however, there are certain birthdays which are seen as more important and for these, often a special larger celebration will be held. In this podcast, I would like to tell you a little about how birthdays are usually celebrated here in Australia.

Children love their birthdays. In Australia, a child's birthday often means they will have a party and receive many presents. I can remember some of the parties we had for our children when they were young. The most traditional thing to do is to have a birthday party at your home, where many of the friends of your child can come along to celebrate with the birthday boy or girl. As we found out, this means a lot of work for the parents, but the children have a great time. These sorts of parties work best for children who are in the 6 to 9 years age range. Usually, around 10 children or more are invited and it can be very hectic and noisy. Each child brings a present for the birthday boy or girl and the children take part in some organized games and activities for half an

hour or so, after which they all sit around a table and eat some wonderful traditional birthday food. Then the birthday cake is brought out decorated with lighted candles, one for each year of the child's birthday. This is the best moment of the birthday party and the one where the parents always have the camera ready. Everybody sings the Happy Birthday song and the birthday boy or girl blows out the candles. All that remains is for the cake to be cut and for each child to receive a piece. The first cut to the cake is always made by the birthday boy or girl, and this is also another great opportunity to take photos. After that, it's usually time to go home and the parents of the guests will come to pick up their child.

I can remember as a child having a birthday party at home which my parents organized. I guess I was around 7 or 8 years old at the time. I'm sure my mother worked hard to make all the party foods. That was over 55 years ago, but many of the children's party foods are still the same today. Sausage rolls, cup cakes, small hot dogs with tomato sauce, sandwiches, fairy bread and chocolate crackles are all the order of the day.



I must say the sandwiches weren't very popular. The sausage rolls and the hot dogs were always the first to go. Today, there would also be potato crisps and other snack foods out of a packet, in a variety of flavours. These types of snack foods just weren't around when I was 8 years old. Of course, all these party foods are not very healthy but, since it is a special day, I think most parents feel it's okay to let the children have them. It's their birthday, after all.

One of the new trends in birthdays is to have the birthday cake specially made to show something about the hobbies or interests of the person having the birthday. I can remember when our children were young, it was popular to make or buy a cake which had the colours of your favourite football team. For example, our youngest son loved the Essendon Football Club, a team in the Australian Rules Football competition. He is still an Essendon fan today. Their colours are red and black. So we had the baker make a special cake with a picture of a football on the top, with all the icing in red and black. Our son loved it. Now that our boys are both grown up, I must admit that I miss seeing the joy on their faces

when they first saw their special birthday cake.

Birthdays for adults are not quite so special, although, in Australia, there are some which are considered important. For example, the 18th birthday is when you legally become an adult in Australia. You can enroll to vote in government elections.

You can sign a contract such as buying a house or a car. You can take out a loan from a bank and also you can legally drink alcohol. These birthdays are celebrated often with a big party, often at a special venue such as a restaurant or a function centre. Such birthdays can cost a lot of money and can have 50 or more guests. Other special birthdays include the 40th, 50th and 60th birthday. These are sometimes accompanied by a bigger than usual party, or perhaps with something extra special if it is just kept within the family.

My older brother had a gigantic party for his 60th birthday. It was fantastic. His children and his wife put together a wonderful slide presentation showing photographs from throughout my brother's life. It was excellent. That was a fantastic party and all his friends and family were there.

For my 60th birthday, I didn't want anything out of the ordinary, but my family still managed to do something really special. They had a special cake made which was a model of my Yamaha motorcycle. It took us about a week to eat it all. That was really special.



Birthdays are also often celebrated in many work places in Australia, within each work team. Somebody on the team will buy a birthday cake and everybody stops work for about 15 or 20 minutes while the cake is brought out and everybody sings the Happy Birthday song. Then the cake is cut by the person having the birthday and everybody eats a piece. No presents are given at such celebrations. After that, it is back to work. Yes, even on your birthday you have to work.

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

Podcast 59 Quiz - Did you understand the podcast?

You can take the quiz as many times as you like.

[Start quiz](#)

Vocabulary

accompanied = to go with

activities = things to do

adults = people who are grown up.

age range = between two ages

baker = someone who makes bread, cakes, etc

birthday = the day you were born. It comes once a year

blows = to push air from your mouth, in order to blow out a candle

brought out = when someone brings something from the fridge or a cupboard

camera = used to make photographs

candle = stick of white wax with a wick. The wick burns to make light

celebration = when you meet with your friends and family and have fun

chocolate crackles – Rice Bubbles covered in chocolate

competition = when people or teams try to win in a game

contract = when you agree to do something. For example, to buy a house

crisps = a type of snack food made from potatoes

cup cakes = small cakes which you can hold in your hand
decorated = when something is made to look better. For example, by adding colour
enroll = to put your name on a list which allows you to do certain things
fairy bread = bread covered with butter and 'hundreds and thousands' (tiny balls of coloured sugar)
fantastic = wonderful, very very good
flavours = different tastes
function centre = a place where you can meet with many people. For example, have a party
fuss = when you show that you care about someone
generally speaking = is usually true, but not always
gigantic = very large
healthy = things which are good for your body
hectic = when there is a lot happening
hobbies = things you like to do in your free time
hot dogs = like small sausages, red in colour
icing = the sweet topping for a cake. Made from sugar
invited = when someone asks you to come to a party or some other event
legally = allowed in law
lighted = burning
loan = when the bank gives you money so that you can buy something. You must pay it back together with a fee
model = a small copy of something
motorcycle = like a car, but with only 2 wheels
noisy = when there is a lot of sound
opportunity = when you have a chance to do something which you can't do at another time
organized = to make things happen step by step
out of the ordinary = when something is special, different from the normal
packet = a container made from plastic or paper to hold food
party = when people meet together to have a celebration or just to have fun
piece = a part of something

presentation = to talk about a topic to a group of people, usually with pictures or slides

presents = gifts

receive = to get

recently = when something happened not very long ago. For example, last week or last month

sandwiches = a food made with 2 slices of bread and a filling between them

sausage rolls = a type of food. Mince meat wrapped in pastry and baked. Yum!!

slide = when you show a picture up on the wall using light

tradition = something which has been done for a long time

trends = when something becomes more popular

variety = many different types

vote = to chose someone

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