

Headquarters Staff Douglas Burton, Krista Karjalainen, Lymhwa Kim, Susan Bouachri, Naokimi Ushiroda, Tom Tanemori, Magnus Larsson and Ayako Heller Share “What the Holiday Season Means to Me”: Part Three

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Christmas Day, God’s Day, New Year’s Eve, and the Day of Victory of Love. Two holidays established in one religious community within the last 50 years and two holidays that have been a significant part of human history for centuries. All four of which, until recently, took place within the span of one week*. With so many festivities to plan in so short a time, what have Unificationists in the United States done to celebrate these holidays? What traditions were blended as a result of being part of a multi-racial, multi-religious, and multi-cultural movement that seeks to uphold the teachings of Rev. and Mrs. Sun Myung Moon, the “True Parents?” Employees at HSA-UWC, first- and second-generation Unificationists from various walks of life, share brief accounts of their holiday traditions below.

*God’s Day, originally celebrated on January 1st, is as of 2010 based on the lunar calendar. God’s Day in year 2013 will take place on February 10th.

Testimonies from the News Team

Douglas Burton, director of Public Affairs: “Our family loves Christmas. We usually purchase a small Christmas tree potted in a bucket, and then around the first of February, we plant the tree in our front yard or back yard. In years past, my wife Keiko went out selling flowers, but thank goodness those days are past. As a family, we go out driving around the neighborhoods to look at the Christmas lights and visit parks. We sometimes get involved with our local church’s Christmas party as sponsors or decorators or promoters of it. God’s Day for our family is not a gift-giving day, but when our children were younger, we gave them some money on January first so that they could go shopping. We were always there at church for the pledge service on God’s Day. Christmas is the fun celebration, and God’s Day is the religious celebration.”



Krista Karjalainen and Preston Moon (spouse) celebrate Christmas in 2011 with True Parents at their Las Vegas residence in what Krista characterized as her "most memorable" Christmas.

Krista Karjalainen, web editor for Public Affairs: “Christmas could be a somber time in our household, because it was associated with hardships my parents went through when they were children. Nevertheless, we would try our best to get a Christmas tree, but we usually couldn’t get one because of financial constraints. One of my most memorable Christmases was in 2008, when my dad wanted to do something special, and we got a Christmas puppy and a real Christmas tree! My family didn’t have much money so we didn’t buy presents, but generally we would follow a tradition of eating orange-flavored chocolate in the morning and we would enjoy going to the local Japanese market, Mitsuwa, which was always open on Christmas and eat Japanese food and cakes.

“Ever since I married Preston in 2009, my Christmases with the True Family have been experiences with new emotional highs and lows. In 2009, I celebrated Christmas with Preston’s family together with the Boston Church community. I remember that he and all his siblings had just wanted to celebrate it with just immediate family and having to celebrate it in public was somewhat of an unwelcome surprise. We understand that it was our public duty to do so – nonetheless, the car ride home was tense. 2011 was my most memorable Christmas, because we spent it together with True Parents in Las Vegas! It was a joyful event filled with delicious home-cooked food and karaoke singing. Preston and I performed our Christmas favorite, “Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer,” for True Parents, and we added silly hand motions and dance moves to the song. I felt so warm and fuzzy when I saw that we could bring smiles to True Parents’ faces, especially True Father’s.

“For God’s Day, my family would pray together, and exchange small gifts. That was our gift-giving holiday. My mom would prepare a glorious feast that was an amalgamation of Japanese and American food. My favorite dish was karage, Japanese fried chicken. We would go to the local church’s midnight prayer, but I dreaded going to that because we were pulled from our beds to attend a prayer that I didn’t understand. In the recent years, what has made me the happiest is visiting Christmas festivals of different cultures, including Finnish and Japanese, which is my heritage, together with Preston. The merriment I experience then is what makes me believe in the joy the holiday season can bring.”



From left to right: A throwback celebration picture of Lymsung (brother), Lymyoung (brother), Lynne (Mother), Lymhwa, Younghi Choi (grandmother), Lymchang (brother), Lymchoong (brother).

Lymhwa Kim, translator: “For me, Christmas was about presents and family! I got a doll house a long time ago – my first doll house! We’d usually have breakfast together on Christmas. In early December, my mom and I would decorate the tree. My four brothers and my dad didn’t like decorating the tree that much – maybe they were just lazy – but they always enjoyed the end result of my mom and my efforts! At our church in Cheonan, young children would sing for their families, but that was it when it came to celebrating Christmas. We didn’t really have a big celebration. For God’s day, we always gathered at the church. Many of the adults would wear holy robes. We would often have entertainment the night before God’s Day, and we would gather at the chapel to pray, bow to True parents, and watch the broadcast of True Parents’ ceremonies in Cheongpyeong with other church members. We would go back home around 3:00 a.m. and would sleep until 8:00 or 9:00 am and then have had a Korean breakfast called Tteokguk, a kind of rice cake eaten during New Year’s. I miss those days.”



Lymhwa Kim at a kindergarten Christmas party in Korea.

Testimonies from Various Departments



Susan Bouachri, director of Human Resources: “On Christmas Eve, my family and I attend an advent service at a local church. It is a small, rustic church. For this special service, the room is lit with candles only, creating a hushed and peaceful atmosphere. The Christmas story is read while the children of the congregation bring up and arrange the characters of the Holy Birth in a large nativity model at the front of the nave. Of course, we sing the most beautiful and moving Christmas hymns. It is really wonderful and a comforting reminder of the true meaning of Christmas.



Left to right: Susan Bouachri's children, Christian, Yasmine and Jared Bouachri take their signature photo in Christmas 2010.

“On Christmas mornings there isn’t so much religious thought around our house! One tradition we still practice is taking a photo of the kids standing in front of the tree with their backs to the camera. This is something my dad always had me and my sister do. I guess the purpose was to catch the awe and wonder of the children standing before the beautiful tree under which their presents sit, waiting to be torn open! I never did quite figure out how the photo expressed this sentiment when, like I said, our backs were to the camera and awe is typically expressed on one’s face! Even funnier – as we got older (and taller), our bodies blocked the view of the tree. That’s the point my kids are getting to now, but we’ll continue to take this photo just as always. Other Christmas traditions include a simple gift in the kid’s stockings they can open on Christmas Eve, a jello dessert called Ribbon Salad as part of the meal on Christmas Day, and of course, Grandma and Grandpa and Aunt Kathy coming for visit.”



Naokimi Ushiroda, pictured with his wife and two children, says that he and his family sometimes Skype with the givers of their gifts while opening presents.

Naokimi Ushiroda, director of Leadership Program: “Since my family has been moving around a lot and I have been involved in many workshops during Christmas break over the past many years, I can’t say that I’ve developed a tradition for my family yet. Last year, however, we did have my immediate family gather at our home to celebrate Christmas and do a gift exchange. I’d like to try that again this year. For the kids, we open presents in the morning together, and sometimes we Skype in with the gift givers to thank them while opening presents. As for New Year’s Eve, I would like to prepare a simple offering table, pray together with my family, and then join in a local church activity or celebration.”

Tom Tanemori, information technology manager: “This cannot be called a testimony, but my family was unable to celebrate God’s Day many years due to my work. It was the busiest time in a year for the familyfed.org website. Members were looking for a new motto, Father’s calligraphy, pictures, video, etc... I was the only person who was checking Korean websites and communicating with various sources. I had to sacrifice my family to bring to the church to celebrate with other Unification Church members.

“I really appreciate that many staff are taking ownership to take care of contents, design, pictures and videos. I am sure that our team is getting very professional.”



Tom Tanemori says that he had to sacrifice spending time with his family during the holidays to facilitate the celebratory events of the church.

Magnus Larsson, insurance manager: “Christmas is a time of expectations starting with the first Sunday of December, which we call ‘Advent.’ A candle is lit for every Sunday until all four are lit up. Growing up we always had a Christmas tree that my father had picked out and then my mother and we kids would help to decorate it. My mother did a lot of things for Christmas from changing the curtains in the house to baking special holiday cookies. On Christmas Day, we used to go to mass at 5:00 AM. This is a Swedish tradition called Jul Otta.



For Magnus' children, Lisa, Oscar and Isak, Christmas means presents from their grandmother arrives and Swedish treats from their uncle.

“With my family in the US I have not been as diligent with the Christmas tradition; I do not get a Christmas tree and my wife does not bake. For my children, Lisa, Oscar and Isak, Christmas means to receive presents and they look forward when a box from their grandmother arrives. My brother also contributes to make it a festive holiday. Every year he sends us a box filled with Swedish treats from IKEA.

“On a more serious note, I want my children to remember whose birthday it is and I explain to them that going to a birthday party without recognizing the person whose birthday it is, would be hurtful and that they certainly would not like that to happen to them on their special day. So the last few years we have attended Christmas mass at one of the churches in the neighborhood. Last year we went to St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City. The church was filled to capacity and with the organ music playing it left us with a feeling that indeed there is something special with Christmas.”



Hanging Christmas stockings for the children is a tradition in the Heller home.

Ayako Heller, director of Japanese Family Ministry: “Early in December we decorate our dining room for Christmas. The Christmas tree is usually the center piece, but I also hang up Christmas stockings for every one of the children and run Christmas lights all around the room.

“The Heller Family has been coordinating ‘Secret Santa’ for about 15 years as a way of exchanging gifts within our family. Our gift budget went up to \$25.00 this year. It was just \$10.00 when we began. My husband, Jorg, and I are the ones who fill up the stockings with small gifts when children were sleeping.

“Coming from Japan and joining our movement in 1972, I spent my Christmas days fundraising at a flower stand for many years. I always felt sorry and sad about the life of Jesus. Although many families in our Home Church area where we have been living came up to our home with many gifts for our children, I somehow could not feel to celebrate Christmas for long time. I was repenting on that day instead.

“But two experiences changed my attitude toward Christmas. When I had an opportunity to visit East Garden for Hoon Dok Hwe around Christmas, all of East Garden was decorated with beautiful lights, and I saw a tall and beautifully decorated Christmas tree! I thought to myself, ‘Oh, East Garden celebrates Christmas!’ After Jesus’ crowning ceremony in Jerusalem, I have been happily celebrating and honoring the birth of our savior, Jesus, even though it is not the exact day of his birth.



Photo left: Jorg Heller (spouse) slices the Christmas ham in the Heller home in 2010. Photo right: Hyo Nam (son), Jorg and Young Nam Heller (son), holding a pet rabbit, Ronen, feel the holiday cheer in Christmas 2011.

“Having a Home Church area in Harlem, New York, made our family aware of the reality that there are many unfortunate families. Therefore, my husband and I did not want our holidays to be centering on just material things and not just centered on our family. We have kept a rather small Christmas tree. I also started a small project of baking cookies with lot of good wish prayer and with a drop of Holy Wine, and I deliver them every year to some households and our brothers and sisters to offer my gratitude. I have been doing this for 12 years.

“God’s Day to me is the day for God. I celebrate this day for God’s joy with True Parents. It is the day to hear the motto of the year from True Parents and my 1st day of the year. My heart goes out to True Mother always on The Day of Victory of Love. It is the day to remind me of the level of love that True Parents pioneered for me through their payments for the victory. I am so grateful to True Parents who inspired my husband to pioneer his family life in Harlem. Here we have had the opportunity to practice ‘living for the sake of others,’ and this life of giving is something that we would like to pass down to our children.”