World-wide birthday traditions

Families honor culture through coming-of-age celebrations

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oodles, pies, and piñatas, oh my! Just like holidays, birthday traditions are unique to different countries around the world.

Similar to America’s “Sweet 16” birthday celebration, in Spanish speaking countries a Quinceañera is held for a girl’s 15th birthday. During the Quinceañera celebration, a girl is given a pink dress and her first pair of high heels. Alongside 14 pairs of young boys and girls, she dances the traditional waltz with her father. For other birthdays in Mexico, a piñata is filled with goodies and the children take turns hitting it while blindfolded to release the treasures inside.

Spanish teacher and Argentinian native Paula Wencek chose a nontraditional celebration for her 15th birthday.

“I chose not to have the traditional Quinceañera. Instead, I chose to go on a trip to Bariloche, Patagonia. Although I didn’t have the big dress and the salon, I still had a party with all of my friends and family,” Wencek said.

Noodles are an important part of birthdays in the Philippines and China. In both countries, noodles represent long life. In the Philippines, birthdays are celebrated with a meal of noodles and cakes of different shapes and sizes. In China, a luncheon is held with the children’s friends and family and noodles are served.

Chinese teacher Joy Powers teaches her students about Chinese birthday celebrations and enjoys sharing the traditions of her home country.

“The Chinese children celebrate with a Western style cake, money from elders in red envelopes, and noodles as long as two feet. The children are allowed to slurp their food on this day in order to not choke on the long noodles which represent long life,” Powers said.

“The color red is also significant on this day. It symbolizes prosperity and happiness. In the rural areas of China, the cake is made in the shape of a peach,” Powers said.

Breaking the status quo, Russian birthdays are celebrated with a birthday pie. The pie is the flavor of the child’s choice and has a birthday greeting carved along the crust.

Junior Ruslana Tkachuk embraces the uniqueness of her Russian culture’s traditions.

“I think it is unique that my family celebrates our birthdays with pies rather than the traditional birthday cake,” Tkachuk said.

“I want to keep my family’s native traditions alive even though we are surrounded by a culture that is much different,” Tkachuk said.