



Cultural Spotlight Holiday Edition 2015



International Student and Scholar Services

Thanksgiving at the White House:

Pardoning the Turkey

Melissa Chin

Every Thanksgiving, the President of the United States saves two lucky turkeys from the fate of becoming someone's dinner. Although the Thanksgiving Turkey Pardon has become an annual presidential tradition, the White House's original Thanksgiving-season event, the "National Thanksgiving Turkey Presentation," did not used to have such a happy ending. In 1946, the National Turkey Federation and the Poultry and Egg National Board began sending a large turkey to Washington, D.C. every year to serve as the main course at the White House's annual Thanksgiving Dinner. That year, impressed by his gifted turkey's humongous size, President Truman began the tradition of showcasing the presidential turkey through a formal presentation that ended with a commemorative photo, having every intention of devouring the turkey soon afterward. It was not until 1963 that President John F. Kennedy, overcome by guilt, first pardoned a presidential turkey and sent it back to its farm to live out the rest of its days. The Thanksgiving Turkey Pardon finally became an established annual tradition when George H.W. Bush made it a permanent part of the White House's Thanksgiving

season agenda. You can watch footage of President Obama's 2014 Turkey Pardon here.



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Celebrating the Joy of the Christmas Season at the White House

Jennie Avery

One of the most recognizable symbols of the Christmas season is the evergreen tree, decorated with shiny ornaments, sparkly garlands, twinkle lights, and sometimes strands of cranberries or popcorn. All across the USA families gather to decorate and light trees, in one of the most popular traditions of the Christmas season. In 1923, President Calvin Coolidge began the tradition of decorating and lighting a National Christmas Tree on the White House lawn. This tree was to be a symbol of peace and joy for the entire nation to share. At its inception, the National Tree Lighting was just that, lighting a Christmas tree outside of the White House, however, over the years, the celebration surrounding this tradition has grown. Franklin D. Roosevelt added a holiday message to the lighting that was broadcast throughout the country. In later years, the "Path of Peace" was added, which consisted of small trees leading to the National Tree, each representing one of the States.

Today, the celebration includes not only the tree lighting and a presidential address, but also a number of musical performances by famous artists throughout the month of December. More information about the National Tree Lighting celebration can be found on the official website: <http://thenationaltree.org/>. You can also get updates from the National Tree on Twitter by following: [@TheNationalTree](#).



Thanksgiving: Eating Your Way Across the USA

As you probably know, Thanksgiving in the US is about family, food, and of course, thankfulness. But as big and diverse as the US is, Thanksgiving looks different in every region, and even in every family. Three ISSS staff members share information on Thanksgiving in their region, as well as some special traditions and memories from their own families.

Thanksgiving in the Midwest—Jennie Avery

The leaves begin to change color, temperatures start to fall, and everyone prepares for the days of puffy winter coats, scarves, mittens, and hats that are just around the corner. All of these are signals that Thanksgiving in the Midwest is quickly approaching. The common themes of a traditional Midwestern Thanksgiving, can be summarized with three “Fs”: food, family, and football. Families gather to eat too much and watch football with their belts unbuckled to accommodate the expansion of their midsections resulting from overindulgence in turkey, mashed potatoes and pie, but all of these things are only expressions of the celebration of togetherness and giving thanks for the blessings in our lives.

Of course, all families have their own unique traditions that make the holiday special to them, and the Avery family is no exception. Thanksgiving with the Averys is ALWAYS celebrated at my parents' home in rural Wisconsin. The last time the family celebrated outside of my childhood home was when I was nine months old, and my mother got food poisoning at a hotel in Chicago and swore never to leave her house for Thanksgiving again. And she hasn't.

In most households, Thanksgiving is a one-day affair, but for my family, it lasts several days, beginning on Tuesday with initial preparations of foods that can be made in advance. Thanks to the bitter cold that has usually descended on Wisconsin by late November, all dishes prepared in advance can safely be stored outside on the porch. On Wednesday, my mother and I drive to the meat market to collect our 26 pound turkey. On Thanksgiving Day itself, unlike many other families in the Midwest, we usually ignore the football games after supper, opting instead to construct a jigsaw puzzle. No one in the family is allowed to return home until the puzzle is complete. And on one very special Thanksgiving in 2013, the holiday fell on the first night of Hanukkah (a Jewish holiday that usually falls in December). In honor of this rare coincidence, my family celebrated “Thanksgivukkah,” adding the miracle of Hanukkah to the things we had to be thankful for that year.



Happy
Thanksgiving



Thanksgiving in the South and at the Dunn Household—Nick Dunn

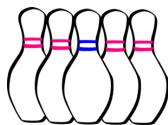
Thanksgiving in the Dunn household is very much a Southern affair, but we put our own twist on it. Family tries to arrive at the old ancestral home in Valparaiso, Florida, by Wednesday. Between catching up with extended family, taking pictures, and playing down on the floor with any new additions to the family, we've got lots of pies to make. In addition to the traditional Southern dessert staples of pumpkin pie, sweet potato pie, and pecan pie, we usually make a chocolate fudge pie or two. And no, we didn't forget that most American of pies; Aunt Suzzie will bring an apple pie the next day. Now, in my neck of the woods, Thanksgiving morning marks the start of the main deer hunting season. Since many men are out trying to take a deer or two for their families to eat over the winter, Thanksgiving cooking is often considered women's work. Not so in the Dunn household. We don't hunt, and the head chef at our home is always my dad. His role as chef is more to keep the operation running smoothly, not to plan the meal; everyone's contribution to the cooking process has been settled into a routine for years. Amid laughter, storytelling, and the occasional sharing of half-truths, different elements of the feast begin to cover every horizontal surface in the kitchen. All the pies grace the sideboard in full view of the table. Green beans, baked dressing, fried dressing, Aunt Kathy's macaroni and cheese, sweet potato casserole, bread, cranberry sauce, fruit salad, and more. We'll often have a ham, just in case. Oh. And deep-fried turkeys. For a good while, we fried six whole turkeys in oil out in front of the carport: two to give to families we knew without the wherewithal to make their own, two to take to my parents' workplaces, and two for the family on Thanksgiving day. The turkey skin is crisp and well-seasoned, the meat is juicy and tender, and just about everyone needs a nap afterward. After a prayer and sharing what we're thankful for, we dig in. We feast, thankful that we have the opportunity to do so, and mindful of those who don't. We linger at the table longer than usual, downing after-dinner coffee so we can continue reveling in each other's company. The Dunn Family Thanksgiving really is something to be thankful for.

Northeastern Thanksgiving Traditions: The Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade—Melissa Chin

Every year on Thanksgiving Morning, the streets of Manhattan fill with millions of people who have gathered to witness one of the most famous Thanksgiving traditions of the Northeast: the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. Sponsored by Macy's Department Stores, this parade has been held in New York City every year since 1924. The parade, which has a 2.5-mile route that spans from Manhattan's Upper West Side to Macy's Flagship Herald Square store on 34th Street, attracts 3.5 million spectators every year and has an annual TV audience of over 50 million people. While famous singers, Broadway performers, and marching bands provide entertainment for the parade's audience every year, the event's biggest attraction is its lineup of massive floating balloons. These balloons, which are in the shapes of famous mascots and cartoon characters that will this year include Pikachu, Hello Kitty, and SpongeBob SquarePants, can float to heights of up to 50 feet. With such impressive spectacles, this event is loved by children and adults alike. If you will be in New York this Thanksgiving, learn more about how you can attend the parade [here](#). Otherwise, you can catch the TV broadcast on the NBC channel this Thanksgiving Day at 8 AM central time.

The Chin Family Take on Thanksgiving

In my household, Thanksgiving is a transcultural affair. With my family being from Jamaica, we use Thanksgiving as an opportunity to give thanks for where we have come from in addition to giving thanks for what we have now. We express our appreciation for both Jamaican and American cultures by eating traditional Jamaican foods, such as rice and peas, fried plantains, and jerk pork alongside our turkey, stuffing and cranberry sauce. Still, it's not officially Thanksgiving until my mother makes a huge batch of sorrel, a Jamaican holiday drink made from steeped Roselle hibiscus flowers, ginger, cloves, sugar, and allspice. It's safe to say that nobody leaves our table unsatisfied!



Bowling with Nick

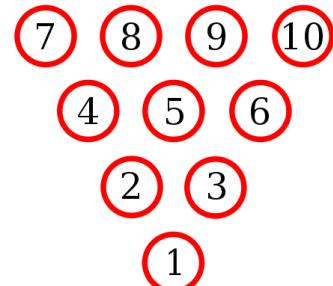
Nick Dunn



Bowling in its various forms is one of the oldest and most popular games in the world, and one you simply must try while living in the Midwest.

The rules and gameplay of bowling are deceptively simple. The bowler rolls a ball about 60 feet down a long wooden track called a lane in an effort to knock down upright pieces of wood called pins. But from this rather simple definition, a beautiful and frustrating universe of possibilities emerges.

Take just the varieties of bowling in North America. The most popular form of bowling is simply called "bowling." The ball is heavy (children and novices may use as small as an 8-pound ball up to a maximum of 16 pounds) and has three holes drilled for the thumb, third, and fourth fingers to enter and hold the ball. The ten pins are the funny shape you see above, and set in the triangular pattern of rows of 1, 2, 3, and 4 pins you see to the right. The other North American forms of bowling all use a small ball with no holes. The Canadian "five-pin" game uses roughly the same size pins as regular bowling, while candlepin bowling, popular in Canada and New England use, well, "candlepins," which are long and skinny and notoriously hard to knock down.



European nine-pin bowling is purposely omitted, as it is almost unheard of in the US, there are no local facilities to play it, and my cursory research shows the rulebook and game lengths rival that of cricket.

Bowling is a unique game in that it rewards the novice and the enthusiast alike. With regular practice and laser-focus attention to detail, most any bowler can one day bag that most elusive prey, the 300, the perfect game, 12 perfectly thrown balls in a row, no pin left standing.

Bowling is a very accessible game; novices, children, and others often use "bumpers" to ensure the ball will inevitably travel the full length of the lane, likely striking pins. Bowling is also an incredible sporting activity for people who are blind, use a wheelchair, or have other physical issues. The American Wheelchair Bowling Association, the Special Olympics, and our own Champaign-Urbana Special Recreation provide excellent opportunities for such competitors, as well as for volunteers.

Perhaps the best reason bowling is so popular is its potential for bringing people together. It is played exclusively indoors, making it a perfect pastime for the long Midwestern winter. And bowling centers (sometimes called bowling lanes) make it easy for folks to come and stay and play awhile. You may purchase equipment there, use a "house" ball for free, rent special bowling shoes, or bring your own equipment. Bowling alleys almost always offer food and beverages as well. A tip: eat greasy food with your non-bowling hand to prevent embarrassing injuries and misses! It pays to bring extra quarters as well, since many bowling alleys also have arcade video games, foosball, and billiards.

Friends, fun, food, games, all inside and out of the snow? You just can't beat bowling in the Midwest. Check out local alleys, or just stop by the Illini Union Rec Room!

Special Report!

ISSS wins Indoor Football Match against Illinois International 3-3

Nick Dunn

In a special exhibition match during this semester's International Indoor World Cup, staff of International Student and Scholar Services played the team from Illinois International Programs to a 3-3 tie. ISSS got out to an early lead and never trailed, thanks especially to Martin McFarlane's powerful forward play and Amira Al-Mutairi having an incredible first outing as goalkeeper. Gutsy effort from IIP kept them in it, with Grant Brewer's stellar solo drive yielding the equalizer with just 12 seconds left in the match. Which team has what it takes to win? Find out at the Spring Indoor World Cup!

ISSS Holiday Song Picks

Music is an integral part of holiday celebrations in the USA. From traditional hymns to instrumental pieces to more modern songs, the ISSS staff shares the holiday songs that help them get in the mood to celebrate the season.

Amira

Holiday by Madonna—This song appeals to my holiday senses because it's an upbeat, non-denominational song about the universal need for everyone to take a day to celebrate! Plus, the song includes cowbell usage, which is one of my favorites!

Briaunna:

The Christmas Song by Mel Torme, performed by Nat King Cole—This song brings back so many wonderful memories of my childhood. Christmas was always so special and exciting for my family. We had a lot of traditions including going to cut down our own Christmas tree, decorating it together as a family, and enjoying hot chocolate and cookies by the lit tree and real wood fire. All of those traditions included lots of Christmas music playing including this song and others by the Temptations, Jackson 5 and more!

Carol

In the Bleak Midwinter and Let it Snow—The first one is English, but nearly all our Christmas songs come from Europe. I don't like songs about Santa or presents, but rather ones that deal either with the religious meaning of the holiday or the beauty of the season. And I really love snow.

Dylan:

Mr. Grinch

"Editor: You like Mr. Grinch?

Dylan: I've got two ears and a heart, don't I?" - Adapted from 30 Rock

Helen

Oh Holy Night—Such a beautiful piece of music – always brings a tear to my eye.

Jennie

River by Joni Mitchell

I used to listen to this song when I was far from home during the holidays. It's quite sad, but beautiful in the way it conjures up the mixed emotions that many people have during the holiday season.

Martin

White Wine In The Sun by Tim Minchin—I'm not Australian, so whisky in the rain is far more likely than white wine in the sun. But that point aside, I love the lyrics.

Melissa

Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays by *N Sync—An original Christmas classic by the greatest boy band of all time. The video also shows late 1990's U.S. hair and fashion at its worst/best.

Winter Song by Sara Bareilles and Ingrid Michaelson—This song might make you cry, but it reminds you that if you can't be with the people you love this winter, you aren't alone.

Nick

The Friendly Beasts

My favorite holiday song is the 800-year-old Christmas classic, "The Friendly Beasts." I have a deep personal connection to this song, because I sang it several times a night to my first child when she was a newborn. Check out Sufjan Stevens and his friends singing it!

Patrice

Carol of the Bells—I love the musical arrangement for this version of the song and it gives me a warm, cheerful feeling for the holiday season.

Stephanie

Silent Night—This song brings back memories of attending Christmas Eve Service with my family. Silent Night is always the last song at service, and during the song, we light candles and sing as the lights are shut off in the church. It's always such a peaceful way to end Christmas Eve.

