

NEW YEAR'S 2002 In Ukraine

What a wonderful experience this New Year's Eve was! While we in America have combined the secular and the religious into one holiday which we call Christmas, the Ukrainians have separated the two. New Year's is the secular holiday and their Christmas on Jan. 7 is the religious one.

This week it really seemed like the holiday season. The stores were full of ornaments, decorated evergreens, colorful wrapping paper, bright ribbons and shoppers. On Saturday the tree went up at our house, complete with the usual tinsel, glass balls and lights.

My host mom began cooking for this holiday on Sunday. She had to work part of the day on Monday but she came home at noon and spent the rest of the day preparing traditional Ukrainian dishes. I don't know the names of the things she prepared, I just know the table was loaded with food just for our family and her parents.

We usually eat our evening meal around 8 o'clock so I expected the same on this day. But when it got that time, she sat out a couple of things and said we would just eat choot-choot, meaning a little, a snack. After that everyone dressed in "Sunday" clothes. The men had on suits and ties and my host mom and her mother both were in their best togs with hose and make-up, etc.

The children were dressed in the costumes they had worn at their school programs. Igor was a gnome in a bright gold top and cap all decorated with tinsel. Sveeta was in a dress of white organdy with lots of frills and also trimmed in tinsel, white hose and white shoes.

I learned that we could not begin eating until after 11 o'clock. The table was up in the living room, which is normal for parties. She and her mother began carrying in food from the kitchen and placing it on the table until there was no room for more. Sometime after 11 we sat down to eat. We ate slowly and had our usual toasts to the new year, happiness, etc. (I really don't know what was said since I only catch a word now and then.)

At midnight the champagne was popped and more toasts. Then the host father left while the children were anticipating the arrival of "Deet Morose" or Father Frost. (Yes, the children were still up and wide awake.) They kept looking out the window to see if he was arriving. Soon the doorbell rang and in he walked. He was dressed in a long red satin robe trimmed with fur or actually cotton, I believe. (Our Santa Claus is an adaptation of that, it seems.) He had a bag with gifts for everyone. The children were so excited. I was so fortunate to be in a family with small children. I have always said Santa Claus was for children and the same goes for Father Frost.

Next the host mom said we will eat again. I was already full, but I managed a few more bites, especially of the sweets she brought out. After 1:30 the little boy and the grandparents went to bed - they spent the night. And about 2 a.m. I decided I should go to bed also. The little girl was still up so I don't know what time she went to sleep.

The table was still set up and this morning, when I got up, we sat down and ate more of the same from last night. Only this morning we had cake and jello for dessert. I've never had a New Year's breakfast like that one, for sure.

This was certainly the most unusual New Year's Eve I have ever had and one I will always remember.

