

IFUW Young Members



...Unity in our diversity

Newsletter of International Federation of University Women
June 2007

Editorial

Manchester is here. We will have the opportunity to network, encourage and plan. Young members should determine to make their mark in the various groups. Let us take interest in things that will unify us despite our diverseness.

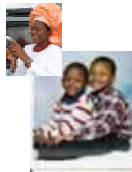
I had the opportunity during the last triennial conference at Perth, attending the IFUW Young Leaders' program. It is an event young members should not miss if you would be at the conference. As it is going to be a guiding post towards that which will ensure your understanding of what the IFUW stands for and how you can fine tune your leadership skills into ensuring that our goals individually and collectively as an organization are met.

I look forward to seeing as many young members who would be at the 29th IFUW Triennial Conference, 10-16 August 2007 - Manchester, England.

This time, I would not be coming with my "brigade" (David was with me and I was 4 months pregnant with Jed during the Perth conference) as that week has been designated a "me" time.

No, I am not expecting another, Thank you!

Evelyn Aremu
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Young members Workshop at the UWE conference in The Hague, September 2006

From 26th to 30th September 2006, the UWE conference, which was simultaneously the 25th anniversary of UWE, took place in The Hague. **The theme of the jubilee conference was "Peace and Power – Empowerment of European Women, building peace or conflict?"**

For us, Eva Nagel, Sandra Zeidler and Janina Zerbock, three members of BoNetzMentoring, a young members' group of the German DAB, it was the first time to attend a UWE conference. We were very pleased to get a deeper insight into interdisciplinary networking among academic women and cooperation in joint projects at an European level.

In two meetings prior to the conference, one in Arnhem and one in Bochum, we had got to know each other and planned the workshop, which consisted of two parts.

The pro group chose the image of a bird, which needs both of its wings (here: the male and the female "wing") to be able to fly as a metaphor for the need of a modern society for equal opportunities. A strong argument against quota, which was put forward by the contra group, was that

The first one was a debate on a current and controversial topic what has an impact on the lives of university women: **"Female academics need quota to increase their job opportunities!"** The participants were divided into three groups, a pro, contra and a jury group. The first two groups then had to find arguments in favor of and against the above statement. Afterwards they had to present their arguments to the others. Finally, the jury had to pick the strongest arguments.



everybody prefers to be judged by his or her qualifications instead of by being male or female in the first place. Consequently, employers should select future employees mainly by quality.

The presentation of the jury group led to a vivid discussion among all participants in the second part of the workshop. The main arguments of the discussion were that first of all political parties should have a 50-50% quota in order to equally represent men and women both of whom apparently form about half of each society. In the job market, the emphasis should be on qualifications. If the selection was purely based on this, women would have equal chances. The question whether a 50-50% per cent quota for each job sector was necessary, was also discussed. **Moreover, the role that women networks can and should play in encouraging (young) (academic) women to take decision-making positions in companies and politics was emphasized.**



The workshop was a great success thanks to the active and lively discussion of the about 25 participants. It was interesting to learn about the ways quota are used in different European countries, what different women think about them and thus broaden one's perspective. We were also given the opportunity to present our results to the other conference participants at the final celebration dinner.

Two presentations in the main conference by a Dutch UNPOL police officer and an officer in the Dutch Navy, who both took part in peace missions in Kosovo and Afghanistan respectively, emphasized the importance to include women in high ranking positions in such missions to help to establish a closer contact to the people in the countries and particularly to women. We learned that the Dutch military institutions are already running a scheme to increase the number of women in decision-making positions and processes since they have become aware of the asset.

We are very much looking forward to the IFUW conference in Manchester in August 2007, where we are going to continue our cooperation with the Young Members from the VVAO. We plan to offer a similar workshop in which we either will go on discussing the quota subject in a more detailed way or we choose a new relevant topic for (young) academic women which stimulates a hot and interesting debate.

- Sandra Zeidler

A difficult time can be more readily endured if we retain the conviction that our existence holds a purpose - a cause to pursue, a person to love, a goal to achieve." - John Maxwell

Enjoy life

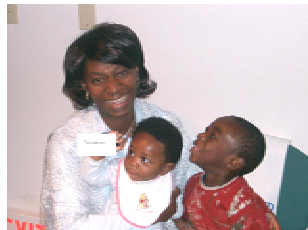
Jesutoyin Derbrah Ajike-King

In these days of ours, life can become so busy that the simple things appear unachievable. Balancing home, work, community and global life is a chore that must be enjoyed otherwise living becomes a drag. I recently became a mother again and having learned from my first mothering experience, I made praising God, spending quality time with my kids, eating a balanced diet, admiring nature and sleeping 5-6 hours priority on my daily list.

There is strength from observing nature and giving praise to the one who made it all possible; God. Appreciating the air we breathe, the fresh rain, the trees and fruits, the animals, the land and the skies is a form of bliss. Being thankful for good family, friends and neighbors is empowering. Being grateful for being alive, thinking healthy, thinking clean, and assisting the needy, resources permit. This is the true joy of life.

This is the true joy of life.

Enjoy your life. Only you can



Always try to help a friend in need





Je m'appelle Cedricia, j'ai 30 ans et j'aime me présenter tout d'abord comme une créatrice culturelle, née à Paris.

Tout d'abord, je remercie l'IFUW de me donner l'opportunité de partager mon expérience. Artiste, chef de chœur, pianiste et compositrice, docteur en Sciences de l'Education musicale, chercheuse et consultante, j'ai de cordes à mon arc, et qui rend difficile me définir sous une étiquette.

Professionnellement, j'ai trouvé tout au long de mon parcours universitaire des obstacles qui m'ont rendu forte et en même temps très fragile puisque je suis tombée malade.

Après trois ans d'envois de candidatures, j'ai travaillé comme une acharnée pour faire reconnaître ma discipline, et me faire connaître dans la recherche.

Comme la plupart de mes collègues français, je n'ai jamais reçue d'aide financière au cours des cinq années de thèse. Pour vivre, j'ai enseigné et passé les concours des conservatoires et de l'Education Nationale.

Le résultat est que je suis docteur, pleins de diplômes français, des publications et un carnet d'adresses bien rempli mais que concrètement, mais sans poste.

Aujourd'hui, je me sens lasse d'envoyer des CV, de remplir des dossiers pour demander des bourses, d'être obligée de me mettre dans un « moule », de payer des formations ou des stages alors que je pourrais les organiser moi-même.

Si je n'avais pas eu l'occasion de rencontrer d'autres femmes au sein d'organisations féminines, d'aide à la création d'entreprise, pour trouver de l'aide, je crois que j'aurais eu tendance à me résigner à abandonner ma passion.

J'ai eu l'occasion de me cogner à ce fameux plafond de « verre » du monde universitaire et musical encore « chasse gardée de ces messieurs ». Affectée quand je suis jugée sur mon apparence physique, mon âge ou mon sexe, je suis favorable au quota pour l'égalité des chances sur les postes à responsabilité. Je me trouve du soutien auprès d'associations comme l'IFUW. C'est une aide précieuse dans mon parcours, j'y puise courage et persévérance pour continuer à défendre les idées féministes, l'accès à la culture et à l'Education pour tous.

Forte des expériences, je trouve un sens à ma vie, en dehors de la filière académique en proposant mes services en tant qu'indépendante. Je donne l'occasion à toutes les personnes de chanter et danser au cours d'un moment de convivialité sur leurs lieux de vie ou de travail. Ainsi, je transmets toute mon énergie dans le plaisir musical partagé !

- Live lively, Love lavishly, Forgive frequently-

Divina Gómez

Every year, I am hopeful that things will get better for me, and millions of women around the world: emotionally, financially, professionally, personally, and in all areas. I consider myself very lucky, because I have a family, and a husband who support me in every way. I have food and shelter, but professionally speaking, I find myself very disappointed and frustrated. In male dominated societies, like the Mexican one, it is very difficult for women to succeed "by herself", or due to "her own professional achievements" without paying a price, give something in return, or without being helped by somebody else. The situation is even worse if you are well-educated, with experience abroad (either working or studying), independent, with high self-esteem, smart, curious and defender of your own human rights. Education is not anymore a "passport" to combat/reduce poverty, or succeed in the social ladder. Women we are being discriminated against for whatever reason you would like to think about: civil status, age, look, skin color, weight, and sexual preference, to mention a few, regardless of your level of education. Nowadays, the employers are taking "only men", for jobs performed in the past for women, like clerical, administrative, etc. And the saddest situation of all is that the Mexican government, even though it has laws and has signed and ratified all kinds of agreements, seems not to apply or follow the rule, at their own convenience, making the situation for millions of women in this country, hopeless. It seems that we still do not have a voice for ourselves, and there is a lot of hate and danger for the ones who try to "speak up", "raise their voice" or "do something good for our gender". Hopefully this situation ends soon...

Take Time

Take time to learn,
It is a sign of greatness.
Take time to think,
It is a source of power.
Take time to plan,
It is the first step to fulfillment.
Take time to work,
It is the price of success.
Take time to dream,
It is the fountain of achievement.

Take time to act,
It is an expression of belief in oneself.
Take time to give,
It is a symbol of maturity.
Take time to smile,
It is the window of the soul.
Take time to love,
It is a gift of God.

Floyd Brown

Women and Men Potters in Cameroon: The New Deal.

Lysette Ngeng

This topic deals with one aspect of my doctorate research: pottery work as made by men and women in some area in Cameroon. The purpose is to show the contrast between the local regulations which defines the scope of women and men responsibility and the diversity of economic demand due to the commercialization of pottery products. It is aimed at describing potters challenge to adapting to new situations, especially women. Data have been collected by participant observation and interviews of both men and women potters in two villages: Marom and Nsei.

Marom and Nsei are two villages situated in the western provinces in Cameroon. Pottery in these areas is a local and economic activity developed by tourists, enterprises and craftsmen or women. Pottery objects are symbols not only of local practices, beliefs and prohibitions, but also of modern life especially, which uses artefacts. There are some practices reserved for women. For example, they teach the craft to their daughters while men teach to theirs sons. Women make pots and few other objects, while men have a wide range of choices (animals, rituals objects, pictures, great figures, etc.), except pots. The idea is that women are responsible of

making objects useful for domestic life. The consequences are that some micro enterprises on pottery are opening. However, women have less opportunity for being engaged, since they lack wide competences needed.



Thus, men are involved in any commercialization of pottery products; they create and reproduce new designs. In the other side, women are confined in what they used to do. There are many ways to get out of this crisis:

Men decide individually to solve the problem by trying new ideas. Collectively, they decided to discuss with traditional authorities and artisan representation.

The result is that some prohibitions have being withdrawn. For example, it is easy to see men teaching theirs daughters these craft. This is rare on the side of the women. These actions, thus, increase the problem of social changes and factors of resistance.

Between Us Girls, Being Sisterly Sachkia Barnes

Believe it or not, my perspective on how I viewed my relationship with other women changed from the most unlikely source. Surprisingly, Tyra Banks greatly influenced the way I now view other women. One afternoon I was home flipping through the television channels when I landed on the Tyra Show. Her topic that day, was *why women hate other women?* Instantly I thought this is just another opportunity for ex-model Tyra Banks to tell us all, *again*, about her drama with Naomi Campbell. Listening to Tyra, her guests and experts on the show, I began to identify with the women on her show. I even felt guilty. According to Tyra, the seven deadly sins of sisterhood are betrayal, manipulation, judgment, envy, gossip, competition and resentment. These sins are often the root causes of many of our conflicts with other women. Realizing the hurt some women felt after being on the receiving end of some of those sins, I began wondering if I was the culprit of another sister's hurt. I began searching my life and it really was not long before I realized they were a couple of persons that I might have not have been just to. So in that moment I decided that I would apologize to a particular coworker for simply not giving her a chance. As I was thinking about it, I removed myself from my experience and tried to imagine what she must be feeling. I felt even more convicted.

At the end of the day, because of a number of things, pride being number one, it took me longer than I had anticipated in offering that apology. I must say, once I finally did, I felt a load lifted off my chest. I felt I could even breathe easier. After we
(Questions and comments please send to sachkia@gmail.com.)

had a long conversation about our then icy relationship, my coworker and I realized that we had a number of things in common. Though the intention is become best friends forever, we mutual for each other. other, we found that we valuable resources.



not to friends gained respect In each have are

We are to each other another person to call on to assist through our journeys. And isn't that what we all need as we strive to figure out our paths in life? Do I believe women naturally commit the seven deadly sins of sisterhood? No, I do not. However, I do believe that we are guilty of falling into certain traps that often cause unwarranted pain to each other. For all ages it might be a combination of many things, including, peer pressures, jealousy, resentment or even betrayal. Whatever it may be, I challenge you to consider the women surrounding you and simply treat them the way you hope to be treated.

Between us girls, sisterhood is something that will not be found in a man's arms, the hugs of our parents or the eyes of children. While all those things are important, I believe sisterhood builds our spirit and confirms our being. The union of women allows each of us to confirm our beliefs, take grandeur in being feminine, learn from each other and grow firmly as daughters, sisters, girlfriends, wives and mothers. Are you the best sister you can be?

A MAYONNAISE JAR AND 2 CUPS OF COFFEE

When things in your life seem almost too much to handle, when 24 hours in a day are not enough, remember the mayonnaise jar and the 2 cups of coffee.

A professor stood before his philosophy class and had some items in front of him. When the class began, wordlessly, he picked up a very large and empty mayonnaise jar and proceeded to fill it with golf balls. He then asked the students if the jar was full. They agreed that it was. The professor then picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly. The pebbles rolled into the open areas between the golf balls. He then asked the students again if the jar was full they agreed it was. The professor next picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up everything else. He asked once more if the jar was full. The students responded with a unanimous "yes." The professor then produced two cups of coffee from under the table and poured the entire contents into the jar, effectively filling the empty space between the sand. The students laughed. "Now," said the professor, as the laughter subsided, "I want you to recognize that this jar represents your life. The golf balls are the important things, your God, family, your children, your health, your friends, and your favorite passions things that if everything else was lost and only they remained your life would still be full.

The pebbles are the other things that matter like your job, your house, and your car. The sand is everything else the small stuff. If you put the sand into the jar first," he continued, "there is no room for the pebbles or the golf balls. The same goes for life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff, you will never have room for the things that are important to you.

Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness. Play with your children. Take time to get medical checkups. Take your partner out to dinner. Play another 18. There will always be time to clean the house and fix the disposal."

Take care of the golf balls first the things that really matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just sand. "One of the students raised her hand and inquired what the coffee represented. The professor smiled. "I'm glad you asked. It just goes to show you that no matter how full your life may seem, there's always room for a couple of cups of coffee with a friend.

Reminders

IFUW Young Leaders Program, 29th IFUW Conference, Manchester 8 – 16 August 2007

The IFUW Young Leaders Program will provide young members' opportunities to build networks, gain leadership skills, play an active role in the Conference and explore the possibilities for their own participation at the national and international levels.

Participation

The Young Leaders Program is open to all young members (under 40) enrolled for the Conference. To participate, you must complete the attached form and return it to ifuw@ifuw.org no later than 15 July 2007.

Challenges Facing Egyptian Women in Parenting their Children

Parenting children is known to be a challenging job especially at the present time. Therefore parents all over the world need guidance and comprehensive education on parenting their kids. Parenting education is a crucial task, if done appropriately; life will be a lot easier for mothers and fathers too. As it has an impact on the child's health, school achievement, social life, and on his/her adult employment position in the future.

Parenting education is currently integrated in various community programs and in child & adolescent psychiatric clinics in the west. Unfortunately this type of activities are not integrated in the Egyptian community health programs, neither on the primary health care level, nor in the more specialized child & adolescent psychiatric clinics. Although Egyptian doctors and health professionals are aware about the subjects needed by Egyptian mothers, still they have no clear work agenda to include parenting education in their clinic programs.

The question now is, why is parenting a more challenging job for Egyptian women than others in the West? How can parenting be integrated in the Egyptian system of health care provision?

Parenting education needs qualified professionals in children's nursing, mental health, children's early education, psycho-social therapists, and in other disciplines too. Those professionals, if trained on parenting education, would be able to construct a multi-disciplinary team. Such multi-disciplinary team can help parents to learn about their child's health, learn about the time and the service to which their child will be referred to. They can also reduce parents' anxiety regarding their children's behavior problems, psychological problems, and school under-achievement. Therefore, training of health and education professionals, are key elements that will enhance the establishment of parenting education in Egypt. This task is a big challenge for professionals working within the Egyptian community and its culture. Therefore the author believes that raising people's awareness about the value of parenting education will be the corner stone in the Egyptian community. At this time, Egyptian women will be prepared for the challenging task of parenting their kids with a better understanding whilst supported by a strong system of health care provision.



MY EXPERIENCE SO FAR WITH THE IFUW

I have been exposed to women of great vision and great ideas.

From within and outside my country I have linked up.

Universal minds have come together through the Internet.

World class Minds coming together to produce great ideas!

I joined the IFUW (International) in the latter part of last year (2006) and did not know how to really get started. However, after getting myself introduced to other members online, the resounding response brought me feedback from all over. Women in diverse fields of endeavors wrote back and made known their various forms of expertise. This includes (but not limited to) women in Management, Law, Medicine, Philosophy, Psychology, and a large number of research fellows.

I narrowed down to local members of which I could count a single-digit membership. Next, was the challenge of us not living in the same locality,

which we are counteracting by putting our useful ideas together through the magic of ICT. Plans are now underway to kick start projects we deem useful to inhabitants (especially females, call it positive discrimination) of our neighborhoods. We start on pilot basis in one community and replicate it in the others, while trying to sensitize other university graduates into joining the IFUW.

IFUW has in the meantime given me exposure to other women of knowledge in different spheres of life. I have since exchanged useful ideas so **I am several times over, richer in knowledge than before I joined the IFUW.**

I have also, through correspondence, dealt with various kinds of personalities and their types of human nature; **this I must say, has enriched in no small measure, my knowledge in the practical aspects of Human Resources Management.**

I therefore, say BRAVO, IFUW and 'AYEKOO' (as we say in one of our languages in Ghana), to all prospective members. Do not hesitate for good times await you at IFUW!

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES/WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AT IJEBU-ODE IN OGUN STATE, SOUTH-WESTERN PART OF NIGERIA

Femi Odunaiké



Nigerians are sociable and have a sense of belonging when they are in the midst of their peer groups particularly those in the southwestern part. Peer groups in this sense may be referred to as people in the same age bracket, or friends of different age groups coming together with the same objectives and goals.

In Ijebu-Ode, a city in Ogun State, southwestern part of Nigeria, we have different social groups and age groups formed by males and/or females. These social clubs, apart from their normal social activities, have their days for coming together to pay homage to the King known as Awujale of Ijebu-land in his palace, during their festival known as "Obanta festival". This usually comes up October each year, While the homage paying for the age group society comes up the third day after eid-el-kabir (muslim festive period).

In the age group society, people from the same age group (three years interval) come together to form a group. Few of such age group society are;

<u>Date of birth</u>	<u>Name of the age group</u>
1950 – 1952	Fuwaji
1953 – 1955	Bobagbimo
1956 – 1958	Bobakeye
1959 – 1961	Bobagunte
1962 – 1964	Bobaniyi

Each group is named by the King for identification purpose as stated against the age interval above. The purpose of the age group society is for both the empowerment of members and the development of the community. Each group wants to be identified with one development or the other thereby creating economic competition among them.

The other type of group is the social club which pays homage to the King during the Obanta festival. There are different social clubs in Ijebu-ode, few of which are: ROTAKS Ladies club of Nigeria, Sisters club, ROTAKS club of Nigeria, Obanta club, Ijebu-Ode club. The ROTAKS Ladies club of Nigeria, of which I belong, is mainly for ladies. It was established in 1992 under the umbrella of the ROTAKS club of Nigeria. Initially established for ladies whose spouses are members of the ROTAKS club, but presently due to pragmatism, the club now intends to accommodate other female people whose spouses are not necessarily members of ROTAKS club of Nigeria. Presently, we have twelve well educated members in ROTAKS ladies club among which are nurses, teachers, administrators etc. The objective of the club is to provide for the needy, which is usually done at least twice in a year. We also assist ourselves as and when necessary by making monthly contribution known as "Esusu" in Yoruba language. We socialize together and meet on the second Sunday of every month. At each meeting a guest lecturer is invited to educate us on interesting topics as it affects women. Ours is an interesting one as empowerment of women and family is our main objective.

Happy Lunar New Year, the Year of Pig, in Taiwan

Ivy Shiue



The Lunar New Year is the most significant festival for ethnic Chinese around the world, wherever they come from. It is a very jubilant occasion mainly because it is the time when people take a break from work to get together with family and friends, just like Christmas for most of Westerners. In Chinese culture, we have another kind of way to count our days, that is by relying on lunar calendar, farmers can know when to breed and to harvest according to the weather divided into 24 types of special days within the year. In each year, we have 13 months with different month going twice in different year. Last year, 2006, we had twice, July, as many people know, a ghost month.

The origin of the Lunar New Year Festival can be traced back thousands of years, involving a series of colorful legends and traditions. One of the most famous legends is Nian, an extremely cruel and ferocious beast that the ancients believed would devour people on New Year's Eve. To keep Nian away, red-paper couplets are pasted on doors, torches are lit, and firecrackers are set off throughout the night,

because Nian is said to fear the color red, the light of fire, and loud noises. Early the next morning, as feelings of triumph and renewal fill the air at successfully keeping Nian away for another year, the most popular greeting heard is gong xi, or congratulations. To me, it means thanks that I see you alive.

The "spring couplets" are hung up around the house. Spring couplets are paper scrolls and squares inscribed with blessings and auspicious words, such as "good fortune," "wealth," "longevity," and "springtime." The paper squares are usually pasted upside down, because the Mandarin word for "upside down," dao, is a homonym of the word "arrival." Thus, the paper squares represent the "arrival" of spring and the "coming" of prosperous times. More often, we as children, used to write them in the way of calligraphy. It takes time to write them well and time to learn them all. It trains us to focus with the words while personally to understand the true meaning from it, the ancient spiritual lessons, more than just write blessing words down.



To keep ghosts and monsters away, prints of Door Gods are pasted on the front of doors. (Courtesy of the Council for Culture Affairs)

On Lunar New Year's Eve, family members who are no longer living at home make a special effort to return home for reunion and share in a sumptuous meal. At that time, family members hand out hong bao, or "lucky money" in red envelopes, to elders and children. They also try to stay up all night to welcome the New Year, as it was long believed that by doing so on New Year's Eve, their parents would live a longer life. Thus, lights are kept on the entire night—not just to drive away Nian, as in ancient times, but also as an excuse to make the most of the family get-together. In addition, some families even hold religious ceremonies after midnight to welcome the God of the New Year into their homes, a ritual that is often concluded with a huge barrage of firecrackers.

The first order of business on Lunar New Year's Day is offering ritual homage to one's ancestors. Reverence is then paid to the gods, followed by younger family members paying their respects to their living elders. New clothes are worn, and visits are made to friends, neighbors, and relatives to exchange good wishes of gong xi fa cai, which means "congratulations and prosperity."

As an occasion for reconciliation, it's a time when old grudges are cast aside amidst an atmosphere of warmth and friendliness. Normally, we give lucky money in the red envelope with even numbers such as NT600 or NT 800 for the younger and NT 2000 or NT 6000 for the elderly. (6 means good luck, 8 means wealth and 12 means a whole.)



For children, the most exciting part of the holiday comes when they receive their hong bao, red envelopes full of cash.

The second day of the Lunar New Year Festival is the day that married daughters return to their parents' home. If she is a newlywed, her husband must accompany her and bring gifts for her family. According to a charming legend, the third day of the Lunar New Year is the day when mice marry off their daughters. Thus, on that night, people are supposed to go to bed early so that the mice can perform their wedding ceremonies. Remember, it is wise to bring 2 gifts on the second day when returning to the wife's parents' home as it means good luck for both the couple and for the wife's parents in the coming New Year.



Markets are bustling with people buying food for the Lunar New Year holidays.

On the 4th day, the favor begins to ebb. In the afternoon, people prepare offerings of food to welcome the return of the Kitchen God and his retinue from their trip to the Jade Emperor's court. The Kitchen God's return signifies the end of freedom from spiritual surveillance, hence the popular saying: "It's never too early to send off the gods, and never too late to invite them back."

Day 5 almost brings the Lunar New Year festivities to a close. All offerings are removed from the altars and life returns to normal. Finally, on the 9th day, numerous offerings are set out in the forecourt or central courtyard of temples to celebrate the birthday of the Jade Emperor, who was believed to have been born immediately after midnight on the 9th day.

As in all such festivals, food plays an important role throughout the Lunar New Year Festival, and dinners tend to be especially lavish. Many of the dishes made at this time are served because they are regarded as symbols of good luck. For instance, fish (*yu*) represent "having enough to spare," garlic chives (*jiou cai*) stand for "everlasting," turnips (*cai tou*) mean "good omens," and fish balls (*yu wan*) and meat balls (*rou wan*) represent "reunion." Auspicious refreshments are also prepared at this time, such as glutinous rice flour pudding (*nian-gao*), which is said to make people "advance toward higher positions and prosperity step by step." People usually have dumplings (*shuei jiao*) too, which look like shoe-shaped gold and are supposed to help those who eat them to amass fortunes and wealth. Mother is always the one who works the most in preparing meals during the holidays.

The Lunar New Year Festival is not all freewheeling fun, however, and certain negative superstitions and taboos at this time have never quite lost their pervasive force. For example, people believe it is unlucky to sweep the floor during the first five days of the Lunar New Year, because one might accidentally sweep one's good luck and wealth out of the house. Bad language and talk of death are severely frowned upon. If a dish is broken, it is vital to say *suei suei ping an*, which means "peace throughout the year," as quickly as possible. Joss sticks and altar candles must be kept burning day and night to encourage longevity; and in some households, knives and scissors are put away so that no one will accidentally cut the "thread of good luck" in the year to come.



During the Lunar New Year Festival, temples are crowded with worshippers burning incense and presenting offerings in prayer for fortune and happiness in the coming year.

A few of these superstitions and rituals have a spiritual aspect to people, and all of Taiwan's temples are usually very busy during this time of year as large numbers of people crowd into them with elevated incense sticks to pray for good luck. Indeed, some of the major temples close their main gates before midnight on Lunar New Year's Eve as noisy and expectant crowds gather outside.

At the stroke of midnight, the doors are thrown wide open and people surge forward in an attempt to be the first to place their incense sticks into the censer, as another long-standing tradition states that the first person to do so will be blessed with good luck throughout the coming year. In my family, we went for several temples for appreciating the good year in the past and for wishing another one in the near future.

Every 12 years is a circle to be named after some animals. They are Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Roster, Dog and Pig in order. It is Chinese zodiac and horoscope as well. I was born in 1982, the year of Dog. This year, 2007, is the year of Pig. Somehow, it represents some personalities of each of us in Chinese culture. Want to know more your encounter you may have in 2007? Keep reading the next newsletter! Last, wish you all happy, healthy and wealthy in the meaning of the year of Pig!

Reference

Lunar New Year in Taiwan (English version), Taiwan government