

Spring Festival

Spring Festival, also is called Chinese New Year, is an old traditional celebration in the beginning of each lunar year in China. It is normally in the late January or early February. It is more like a family festival. All the relatives will gather to have a special lunar New Year's Eve dinner together. No matter how far away you live away **from** your family, that night you would be there to have the dinner with your family members. The whole celebration lasts for a week.

Spring Festival also involves some old superstitious customs. Most of those customs involve good wishes for the coming year. In the celebration week, no one will cook or clean the house; otherwise it means you will have a hard life in the next year. Or in the New Year's Eve dinner, everybody must eat a little fish, green vegetable and bean sprouts. Those dishes symbolize health, prosperity and peace. The biggest custom is for every family to light fireworks at midnight to scatter the evil spirit "**Nian**".

For fathers, they must start to prepare for the festival at least one week prior. For mothers, even earlier. Preparing for the Spring Festival is not easy job for them. They have to clean the house sparkling clean, prepare the main dinner for the family and enough food for the next week. **After** the dinner, they need clean everything before midnight. By the time midnight comes, they are exhausted.

But for the kids, Spring Festival is the biggest event in the year. Just after one Spring Festival is finished, they already start waiting for the next one. Especially when I

was a little kid, Spring Festival meant so much to children. It meant that they could have special candies they waited for an entire year. They could have new winter clothes and shoes which they only got once a year.

I remember back at that time in China, each person had rationed amounts of pork, eggs and fishes. The government issued the coupons for the different foods with a limited amount on them every month. During the month of the Spring Festival, not only was the limited amount doubled, we also received some special coupons that we could not get during the normal months; such as coupons for chicken, duck, and beef. But we were not guaranteed to have those foods even if we held the coupons, because the amount of supply was limited too. If we wanted to buy all the foods that were on the coupons, we had to go to different windows in different afternoons in the open markets. For example, pork might only be supplied on Monday between **2:00p.m.to 5:00p.m.**, and eggs at **1:00p.m.-3:00p.m.**, chicken maybe was **1:00p.m.-4:00p.m.** on Tuesday. Morning time was only open for vegetables.

No one wanted to waste any coupons. I remember my mother used to get up very early in the morning. She went to the open market to find out which windows would open that afternoon, put baskets in **front** of those windows, and then went back home. Everyday after she came back, I always heard her tell grandma: “ I thought I was very early today, but when I got there, there were many bricks and baskets there already, how could so many people get up so early, maybe I need get up earlier tomorrow”. Everybody wanted to reserve a spot in **front**, otherwise you might miss the chance to buy those food.

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Grandma was busy at that time too. Because my mother took **care** of all the housework and food shopping, grandma could have time to concentrate on making new outfits for me. The selection of children's clothes was very limited in those days. If parents wanted their children to wear something nicer or different, they had to sew their own. My grandma was very good at sewing. She liked to buy a nice flower print to make a top, and buy a solid color to make pants with her own designed embroidery on it. **After** she finished her work, she liked to hide them, and enjoyed hearing my happy screams in the New Year's morning.

After my mother purchased all the foods **from** the coupons, she would start cooking. One of my favorite foods was "Dan Jiao" (egg dumpling). It looks like dumpling but the wrapper is made by egg. It was one of the traditional Spring Festival dishes. Because the shape of "Dan Jiao" looks like old Chinese currency, it symbolizes wealth. It took a lot of time to make them, so we only had them once a year. My mother liked to move the stove to the middle of the kitchen before she started to make the "Dan Jiao", and we would sit around the stove.

We used to gather in grandparents' home with all my relatives in New Year's eve. During the New Year's eve dinner, all the kids would get a red envelope **from** each older relatives, it is called "Hong Bao". Kids could use this money to buy comic books or some candies. After dinner, the whole family sat around the table, talking, gossiping, and eating peanuts, milk candies, and sweet cakes that we only could have them during the Spring Festival.

I like to fill my two pockets with peanuts and candies when the adults were chatting and took my cousin to visit my little friends in the neighborhood. After we called

most of the kids together, we liked to visit one **family** that had five children. Their parents **left** us in their living room, so all the kids could share the snack foods that we brought from each home. We also exchanged the information about how much money we got **from** the red envelopes and planed some activities for the next day.

This little gathering had to be dismissed before midnight. We had been told by our parents to go back home before the midnight, otherwise we could be captured by the evil spirit “**Nian**”, which only came out once a year at midnight. (If the “**Nian**” caught us, he would eat us.)

On the way back home, we saw the adults of each family was busy lining up the big fire crackers in **front** their houses, and the children were holding chains of small **fire** crackers waiting for midnight to come. **After** we got home, we helped my father and my uncle to line up all the fireworks in **front** of grandma’s house. When midnight came, the whole city was engulfed by the noise of fireworks. The whole sky was covered by smoke.

After we used the fireworks to send the old year away, we would post a big red paper signed with a Chinese character “Fu” on it, which meant good fortune, on the **front** door to welcome the New Year. We put all of our good wishes on that red “Good Fortune” sign hoping we would have a better **life** in the coming year.

This is the Spring Festival when I was a little girl, the holiday now is little **different**, such as they don’t have to stay in line waiting for certain food. But the spirit is the same, which is to bring a whole family together, and make a good wish for the coming new year.