

Welcome to the latest issue of Connections, a newsletter for the Literacy Volunteers of Somerset County community, prepared by the Student Outreach Committee.

In this issue LVSC students have submitted stories about the holidays – memories, recipes and even a poem. Many thanks to all who have contributed.

So please enjoy the stories. We wish you and your family wonderful holidays.

Thanksgiving Apple Pie

Written by Jiyoun Kim



I spent time with all family gathered during holidays in my home country. We had a great time with making dishes, and sharing them. I have been in the U.S. with my husband and two daughters since December, 2019. For that reason, This Thanksgiving was the first one that my family had. Unfortunately, it was in situation that it was cautious to travel, and go out

somewhere, so I could not make any exciting plans for the holiday. However, thankfully, I got inform that is about apple pie making class from LVSC. I signed up without any hesitation because I wanted to do something that my family have never tried before, and feel American holiday's mood.

I took a class, and it was really helpful. I looked forward making apple pie with my family. On Thanksgiving, we made it successfully. My girls said that it was the best they had ever tasted. My family had a happy holiday with homemade apple pie.

I would like to say again that thanks to LVSC for planning special class for the holiday.

Polish traditional Christmas Day

Written by Artur Gawkowski

Our Polish traditional Christmas day is very busy. The day before we are always making all the dishes for example, pierogi with mushroom and cabbage, fishes and many other foods that aren't any kind of meat. Every Christmas my daughter and I, we are packing presents for the younger kids in our family. In the morning my wife and my daughter are making cakes or any kind of desserts. Before afternoon my family is meeting up in a big group eating delicious dishes, and singing Christmas songs. At the end of the day I am the one who is dressing up as a Santa and giving the Christmas presents to my nephews and the rest of the family.



Tracy's Family Christmas

Written by Tracy Ho



Every year at Christmas time, I decorated a Christmas tree in my house when I lived in upstate NY. I do celebrate Christmas regardless of the religion. What I like best about Christmas is that it is the time to show your love to your family and friends. I love to see how happy and excited children are when they open their Christmas presents. I also love to see outdoor decorations with the various pretty lights and a strong festive mood. I even went to Manhattan, NY to see the Christmas tree decorations. Although the weather was very cold, I enjoyed the experience.

Merry Christmas and happy New Year!

A beautiful poem and a special recipe from Andrea

Written by Andrea Serrano

Key Lime Pie – No Bake Holiday time

Ingredients:

2 cups honey graham cracker crumbs
6 Tbsp butter
½ cup whipping cream
1 package cream cheese
3 Tbsp sugar
1 can sweetened condensed milk
½ cup key lime juice
1 Tbsp lemon zest



Preparation:

1. Start by mixing honey graham cracker crumbs with melted butter until all is moistened. Place in freezer for 15 minutes.
2. Press cracker crumb mixture firmly on the bottom and sides of a pie plate.
3. Whip ½ cup heavy cream until stiff peaks form, set aside.
4. In another bowl, beat together a block of cream cheese and the sugar until combined.
5. Add in a can of sweetened condensed milk, key lime juice and lime zest. Mix until smooth.
6. Add in the whipped cream.
7. Mix again until smooth.
8. Pour the filling into the prepared crust. Smooth the surface and chill for 6 hours.

Christmas! What a beautiful happy holiday

by Andrea Serrano

Christmas! What a beautiful happy holiday
Cool and beautiful nights announce the
beginning to the end of this year.

Christmas! What a beautiful happy holiday
Everybody get ready, fill your heart with joy and peace,
hug your loved ones and feel great about this holiday.

Christmas! What a beautiful happy holiday
Forget your sadness, sharing your happiness,
Think about good things coming every day.

Christmas! What a beautiful happy holiday
Family gathering around the table,
talk about what happened this year,
help you to grow up and understand
what is really important every day.

Christmas! What a beautiful happy holiday
Do not worry, do not stress your soul, remember
This beautiful holiday is a time to enjoy your family
And feel blessed.



Yorleny's Thanksgiving Day

Written by Yorleny Fuentes

Thanksgiving is one of my favorite holidays. It's not just about a feast or a cornucopia centerpiece. It's more about family, gratitude and gratefulness. If I had to count my blessings I couldn't write them all, because they're innumerable. I'm truly, truly thankful for my resilient and outstanding son, my exceptional husband, my lovely and extraordinary family and of course, for my rambunctious puppy Chanel. I'm also extremely grateful for all my caring and empathetic friends and for LVSC who got me out of my shell. Wow! How lucky and blessed am I!



This is Chanel, Yorleny's puppy.

Fabulous Cranberry Sauce

Written by Sunny Lee

Hi friends!

I want to share two recipes of cranberry sauces with you.

One is that I've learned from Barbara Wiskowski who is my English teacher, neighbor, and friend for a few years ago, and the other one is from Karen Brown who is also my English teacher and leader at "Chat with Karen" Zoom meeting.

Even though Thanksgiving Day already passed, I think you **MUST** make it before the end of this year. There are many reasons why you should make it, but I want you to know just three things.

First of all, we can buy fresh cranberry not frozen one from any grocer for a cheap price now. The second, it's very easy to make it but the taste is super-duper. You would make simple sandwiches with the sauce for your kids or you would make special canapes with the sauce and some cheeses for your appetizer or wine side dishes. If you make the sauce, you could use in it your various desserts. The last one, it's very helpful to build your immune system during this pandemic. Cranberry contains Vitamin C,A,K,E, calcium, manganese, and etc. Please enjoy!

I wish you and your family have a wonderful time and stay healthy.

Merry Christmas and happy New Year!

You should prepare as below,

A medium Saucepan

1 bag of fresh cranberry (12oz)

½ cup of water

1 cup of sugar

½ cup of squeeze juice from fresh navel orange (or product of orange juice, but I recommend fresh navel orange strongly)

1. Put sugar, water, and orange juice in a medium saucepan.
2. Bring to boil, add 1 bag of washed fresh cranberry and return to a boil.
3. Reduce heat and boil gently for 10 minutes with stirring occasionally.
4. Turn off the gas and cover.
5. Cool completely at room temperature, and then keep in the refrigerator until serving time.



Cranberry & peanut butter sandwich

Karen's cranberry orange relish with ginger sauce

Provided from Karen Brown

12 oz. fresh cranberries (or frozen)

$\frac{3}{4}$ c. sugar

1 orange, medium size, no seeds (I use a naval orange), wash well

fresh ginger root – about 2-inch piece

$\frac{1}{4}$ t. ground cloves (optional, could also use cinnamon)

dash cayenne (optional, to taste)

Rinse and drain the cranberries, discard any brown rotten ones, but a little soft is okay. Put cranberries

and sugar in a 2-quart saucepan.

There are two ways to do the orange and ginger:

Option 1 – The white of the orange (the pith) makes this option a little more bitter and not as beautiful.

For me, this is the easiest option.

Finely chop the whole orange, peel and all. Finely mince the ginger root. I

use a food processor,

cutting the orange into chunks and the ginger into small pieces before processing into mush.

Add to the saucepan.

OR

Option 2 – The result will be clearer with a smoother texture.

Grate the orange zest into the saucepan.

Then cut the orange and squeeze the juice into the saucepan.

Grate the ginger into the saucepan.

Add the cloves and cayenne to the saucepan. Cook, stirring often, over medium heat until the mixture

begins to bubble. The sugar will dissolve, and the cranberries begin to burst. Reduce heat as needed to

simmer, stirring occasionally, for about five to 10 minutes more until most of the berries have burst and

the sauce is thickened. The sauce will thicken more as it cools.



Decorating a cake for Christmas

Written by Kathy England

I love to decorate cakes for Christmas. This tells you how to make an easy decorated cake. You need to start with a cake. You may have a cake recipe that you like, or you can buy a box cake mix in the grocery store, or even go to a bakery to buy a cake with white frosting. Then you can do this simple decoration.

You will need almond M&Ms, Mike and Ike candy, a can of white frosting, green food coloring, and some piping bags and tips. You can get all these in the grocery store.



Pick out the green Mike and Ike candies and cut them in half. The cut edge will be sticky. Push it up against the fat end of an almond M&M. This will look like one of the lights on a Christmas tree.

Prepare about 12 of these and spread them around the top of the cake near the outer edge. Put some of the canned frosting in a bowl and mix in green food coloring until you have the color that you want. Spoon the frosting into a piping

bag and use it to draw lines on the top of the cake representing the electric wire on the lights. This is what it will look like:



If you want an additional decoration, take a plain ice cream cone, turn it upside down and pipe on some of the frosting dyed with green food coloring. When the cone is covered, sprinkle some confectioner's sugar on it to represent snow. You can put that on the middle of the cake. Enjoy!



Kavarma (Bulgarian Cuisine)

Written by Monica Kim

My name is Monica Kim, I love to cook from every country in the world. Today I introduce special menu that my family like to eat specially during Christmas season.

Kavarma is a delicious slow cooked stew that is typical of Bulgarian cuisine.

Ingredients

- 1 ½ lbs. pork tenderloin cubed (you can use chicken tenderloin)
- 1 onion diced
- 4 green onions cut into rings
- 5 medium sized mushrooms sliced
- 2 carrots sliced
- 1 red pepper diced
- 2 medium size tomatoes chopped
- ½ cup white wine
- ¼ cup oil divided
- ½ teaspoon oregano
- 2 bay leaves
- Salt and pepper to taste



Instructions

1. Rub thoroughly all over the pork tenderloin.
2. Heat ⅛ cup of the oil in a heavy bottom skillet and brown the pork cubes on all sides. Add in the wine to deglaze the pan, lower the heat to a simmer for about 5 minutes. Remove from skillet and set aside.
3. Heat the other ⅛ cup of oil and sauté the onions, mushrooms, pepper, and carrots for about 5 minutes. Pour ½ cup water into the pan and cook approx. 10 minutes over medium heat, until the vegetables are soft and most of the liquid has been absorbed. Add in the chopped tomatoes and simmer 5 minutes.
4. Combine all the ingredients together and transfer into the earthenware pot, add the green onion.
5. Cover the dish with its lid and place in a preheated 250 degree oven for three hours or so.
6. You could easily do this in a crock pot instead of the oven.
7. Serve hot.

My First Thanksgiving

Written by Alvaro Serrano

My first Thanksgiving day in the USA, I was in Houston. I came with a group of engineers from Venezuela to work with a Houston company in a project for Venezuela.

On that day there was a Christmas Lighting festival in Post Oak Boulevard. We arrived there at 6:10 PM and decided to buy some beers. We went to a food truck and asked for beer. The owner explained that he had a permit to sell beer only until 6PM, so he could not fulfil our order. We were leaving the place when the owner called us and said: Legally I cannot sell beer after 6PM, but I can certainly and legally give you some beers for free and wish you a happy Thanksgiving. We each got two for free and enjoyed the Christmas Lighting.



With his grandchildren

The New Year

Written by Amira Ahmed

The New Year is a fresh start to achieve certain things for my family. I wish this year to be better than last year. To start the year, we will have a pot luck dinner where everybody makes a dish. My best friend, she will bake cookies. My husband will make a decoration for the festival with the neighborhood children. All the people enjoy a happy time with their friends. They are eating and playing a lot.



This picture is traditional Egyptian dishes.

Polvorosas (Venezuelan cookies) Recipe

Written by Glorys Villarroel

My first formal Christmas in the United States was in 2019 – the year I moved in to my new home. Since it's a relatively new community, we have all taken part in different social activities to get know each other. One of my neighbors came up with the idea to swap cookies. The cookies must be hand made. The proposition was a big challenge for me because American Christmas cookies are known for their creative decorations and delicious taste. Making Christmas cookies is a tradition that I can imagine comes loaded with family stories, family recipes and technical know-how.

I decided not to challenge myself with such a big task being a newcomer, so I made and shared a typical Venezuelan cookie named "Polvorosas". We eat "Polvorosas" all year round, for example with a caffe latte as an afternoon snack. I think, most of the time, we eat them without a special reason, only to indulge ourselves. It's said that during the colonial period nuns brought the recipe of the original cookies from Spain. I hope you try my recipe and like it.

Polvorosas Venezolanas



Ingredients (for 20 to 24 cookies)

- 1 cup of vegetal shortening
- 2 ½ cup of all-purpose flour
- 1 ½ cup of white sugar
- 1 teaspoon de baking powder
- 1 teaspoon of cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon of vanilla. (optional)

Preparation

Prepare a baking sheet with a silicon mat or wax paper.

Preheat the oven at 320 F.

Put all the ingredients, except the vanilla in a bowl. Using a fork or a paste cutter, start to break the shortening to make the dough. Add the vanilla. Then, using your hands, continue working the dough until you create a compact ball that easily separates from the walls of the bowl.

To make the cookies, I use a spoon to measure the dough and to make sure the cookies will be approximately the same size.

Put a spoon of dough in your hands and make a small ball. Flatten the ball a little; then curve and smooth the borders with your fingers until get the desired shape. (Approximately, diameter: 1.5 inch and height: 0.8 inch). Put them on a baking sheet and repeat this step until the dough is finished.

Then, with a sharp knife, draw a cross in each cookie. This is a traditional decoration in my country, but you may skip it, if you desire.

Bake for 20- 25 minutes, until the base of the cookie starts to look brown.

Rest for 5-10 minutes.

Don't worry if at this moment the cookies look fragile. After cooling down, they will be firm.

Carefully put the cookies, one by one, in a cooling rack until they cool down.

Sprinkle icing sugar.

Store them in a container. They taste fresh and delicious for approximately a week.

“Nacimientos”: Venezuelan Christmas Decoration

Written by Glorys Villarroel

In my country, Venezuela, December is the most cherished time of the year. Although we also celebrate the end of the year with parties, foods, and the emotional happy hugs and kisses during the first minutes of the new year, the most important date in December is definitely Christmas.

Like in the United States, we decorate the house, cook seasonal dishes, and gather with family and friends. One the most traditional decorations to add in a special place of your home is a “Nacimiento”. The “Nacimiento” is a representation of the

moment of Jesus Christ's birth with small figures representing Mother Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus. There are numerous types of "Nacimientos". I have some of them. My favorite one, I bought in a typical market in a town located in the Andean region of my country. It's made of clay and painted with vibrant colors; the figures' faces have a unanimous expression of joy. What I think like the most, though, is that it includes the 3 Wise Men on top of representing baby Jesus' family. The tradition says that they came from far away to meet the newborn and offered presents such as gold, incense, and myrrh. But in this Venezuelan conception, the 3 Wise Men offer typical Venezuelan Christmas food instead. I share with you a photo of my favorite "Nacimiento".

I wish you all Merry Christmas and Happy New Year,



Christmas in New York City

Written by Maria Novoa



It has always been my dream to spend Christmas in NYC. I have been to New York other times but never in Christmas. I remember that it felt like all those Christmas movies have come to life. It was unbelievable. Lights and decorations adorned almost every single building, and amazing window displays. We walked amazed from **Tiffany's** on 5th Avenue to see the chic luxury displays. Those were an attraction by itself taking the holiday spirit. It was magical! We passed through **Times Square** to **Rockefeller Center** to see the giant and marvelous Christmas tree. The most famous Christmas tree in the world was about 75ft tall, 45ft wide tall, and 11 tons. We took millions of pictures. Also, we visited some holiday markets. One of the most popular is Bryant Park Holiday Market where there is an ice skating and a lot of small stands selling ornaments, arts, and crafts. Also, there was a bright carrousel plenty of colored animals. I felt like I could spend all day long there watching the lights, the decorations, and listening the Christmas sons. But later I found my favorite indoor market at **Grand Central Station**. Here we could find handmade clothing, accessories made by recycled materials, natural bath, and body items, pretty collecting toys and miniatures, holiday items, local food and many more. Besides, with the help of an audio tour, we could learn all about the station and its history. To put a special end to the day, we booked tickets for the Radio City Rockettes. A chorus line show in the Radio City Music Hall. For almost a century, the Rockettes have been an American icon. I was impressed with the show because I was expecting to see dancers kicking their legs during ninety minutes, but there were singers, skaters, a

Santa show, and more. It was a magical day in New York City, where the holiday season is one of the most festive and beautiful times of the year.

New Year's Dumping Soup

Written by Soojung Lee

Do you have any special food you have on New Year's Day?



Koreans celebrate the New Year by eating rice cake soup or rice cake and dumpling soup. Koreans consider themselves a year older when they have that soup. The dumplings have a variety of flavors depending on the ingredients each family puts in them. My mom made the filling with kimchi, various vegetables and two kinds of meat (beef and pork). then wrapped it in wheat flour and boiled the dumplings in the soup. When I was young, I have memories of gathering together on the first day of the New Year and making dumplings together. It's always a good memory and I miss my mom when I make dumplings for my family.

My Christmas in Brazil

Written by Sarah Ferreira

Hello dear reader, my name is Sarah. Today I will tell you a little bit about my life. I will talk about how I celebrated my Christmas in Brazil.

When I was in Brazil I couldn't wait for Christmas because I love when my family is together. We did not decorate our house like other people did because since I was little I learned in my house that the true meaning of Christmas is the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that was the gift that God, our Heavenly Father sent us. Also the love of God and what unites us makes us happy and brings us peace. My mother, my sister and I went to the church to celebrate this moment. In my mother's family we love to prepare foods like turkey, pork roast , rice , and salad with mayonnaise and a mix with vegetables. For dessert we made chocolate trifle cake and another like a mix of colored gelatin. For fun we did "secret friend". It is like exchanging presents with family and friends. We talked about many things and laughed and ate a lot.

And so it was our Christmas celebration in Brazil. And now my Christmas has become even more special in the USA because I have my own family (my husband and my son). In my house now I decorate it with the Christmas tree. For me this is a new custom and I love it!

My teacher is Silvia Sorace



Sarah's Family



O arroz de natal



Christmas in Ecuador

Written by Johana Henriquez Ch.

In our country, Ecuador, at Christmas people usually decorate their home with the tree and the Nativity of Jesus display. During the month of December, at advent, the families reenact the traditional "looking for an inn": the people go to relatives' house and knock on the door remembering when Jose and Maria asked for an inn but could not find one, but, in this replay, the door is opened, and all the people entered the house singing Villancicos around the Nativity of Jesus. There are some organizations who decide to do charity, especially foundations to help special children. They often came to the institution where I was working. The children wore costumes representing Jose, Maria, and the shepherds. For me it was very nice. Christmas Day is a day long awaited by the children. We all met at my grandmother's house and together we went to church. The children could open the gifts only after the mass, not before. How many gifts did they receive? That depended on whether they behaved well. Why do we celebrate Christmas? Because it is the day when our Savior was born.



The image was copied of google.

On this day the families had a special dinner: turkey, panettone, and chocolate. I must say that the turkey was very expensive.

The people also did fireworks: the families loved looking at all the colors in the sky. It is the most special day! I miss those days.

QOYLLUR RIT'I

Written by Monica Oblites

One of the most rewarding experiences in my life has been the pilgrimage to the Temple of the Lord of Qoyllur R'iti. This allowed me to know and delve into the feelings, beliefs, and customs of the people of the mountains of my country Peru. This pilgrimage is a majestic and impressive event, and it is celebrated every year between the months of May and June and lasts 3 days. It is held between two mountains or Apus: Ausangate and Sinakara located in Cusco.

This festival is a fusion of the different beliefs of the people of the mountains. The Andean people celebrated the stars and their relationship with the next harvest. They also paid homage to the spiritual and sacred mountains or Apus; and the Christians worshiped the sighting of Christ in the place where the sanctuary is located.

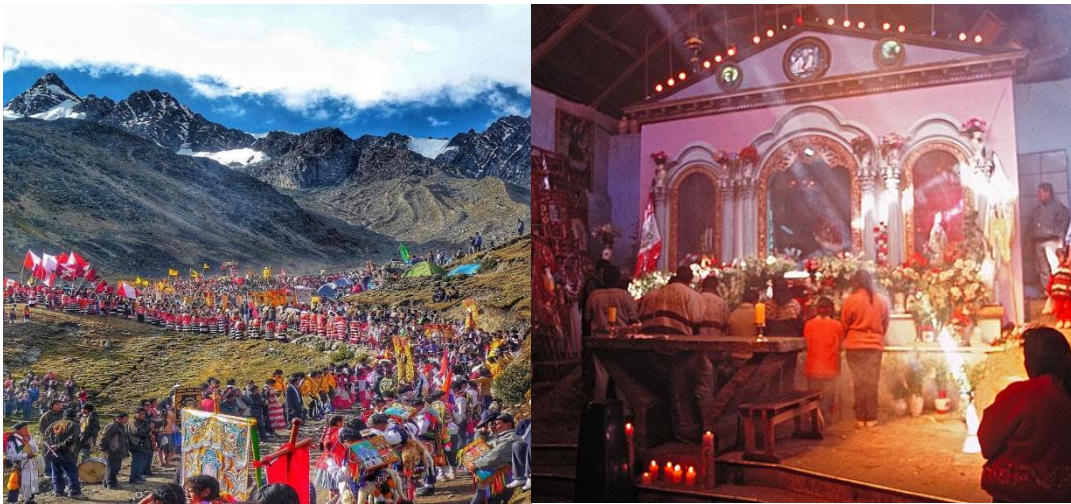


Photo by: @unesco. Mountains and people are the same.

Popular belief narrates that in 1783 the infant Christ appeared to a highland Andean shepherd boy and they became friends, and when the infant Christ disappeared in the mountain left only a stone with an image of the Jesus Christ. In that place was built the Qoullur Rit'I Lord Temple. To start climbing up to the temple, which is at the base of Ausangate mountain, you must walk 8 km. or 5 miles uphill until they get to the temple.

Each village presents its group of dancers called "cuadrillas". They practice out of the temple before they get into it taking turns and offering their dance as a signal of respect and devotion.

There are a group of people called “PABLUCHAS”, who represent creatures that are half man and half alpaca. They are intermediaries between God, the Apus, and men. The last day of this festival, Pabluchas only dressed in their customs go up to the Mountain until 6362 meters or around 20800 feet, in pursuit of the Snow Star, which is represented by an ice block. They put it on their back and carry it downhill. All this symbolize the irrigation of their lands and the purification of men in the world with holy water from the Ausangate Mountain.



During the festival there is an Illusion Fair, in this fair people play to make their dreams come true, so they buy, sell, or change all they want: houses, cars, business, cattle, judgment, divorces and marriages. According to their beliefs and to make it happen, you must go three times or three years to this festival.

Here my husband Renato and I played to marry, and we went there three times, so our wish came true and by now, we have over twenty-five years together.



In recent years there has been a rapid growth in the number of foreign tourists, raising fears that this pilgrimage is becoming too commercialized.

By the way, the festival and the pilgrimage are an UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage since 2011.

Until When?

Written by Kelly Kwon



Last Christmas was our family's first Christmas in USA.

At that time, our family went to a trip to New York.

On 23th December, our family was about to leaving a trip. My girls were taking in our car, and then, I put the Christmas present boxes in front of the tree quickly.

During the trip, on the morning of Christmas Day, our couple gave a present to each girl. And they wondered if Santa Claus would have come to our house or not.

When we arrived our house, they rushed home, and found the present in front of the tree.

Even though my first girl was 9 years old, she was sure Santa Claus was here.

After that event, whenever she talks about Santa Claus with other people, she says what happened then.

But this Christmas, it's too hard to prepare some event, and I don't know how long I have to prepare my girls to believe in Santa Claus.

It's a big project to me.

Just hope be healthy Christmas.

My Thanksgiving Recipe

Written by Dezheng Li

This thanksgiving is my first thanksgiving after I moved to United States to be close to my daughter. In ESL class I learned the traditions how Americans celebrate the holiday. We have a small family here so we chose to roast a chicken instead of a turkey. To go with the roasted chicken, we made a shrimp and tofu soup dish which is my favorite Chinese dish.

The recipe is really simple. The main ingredients are 2 tomatoes chopped, a quarter pound of shrimp chopped very fine and 1 container of tofu and some chicken stock. Heat a pot with a 1 tablespoon of oil, add some chopped garlic and stir. Once the garlic aroma rises, add the tomatoes to stir together for a minute and then pour in the chicken stock mixed with water. Cut tofu in small cubes and add to the soup base. Wait till the soup boiled, season the soup with salt and let it simmer for a few minutes. Season the chopped shrimp with salt and pepper and mixed in an egg white and stir thoroughly. The final step is to use a spoon to scoop the shrimp into balls adding to the boiling soup. Continue to let the soup to boil for two more minutes with the lid on and that will be it. This delicious shrimp and tofu soup is done. This hot dish is complementary to roasted chicken and it completed our thanksgiving dinner.



My –never-forget Christmas Present

Written by Amy Lee

Hello! My name is Amy. I am from Korea 7years ago.

When the Christmas season is nearer, I recall the present which I received when I was an elementary student. It was a hot, trendy, and fancy pencil case.

I kept praying to Santa to get it at that time .Of course I knew Santa was my mom. When I opened my eyes on that Christmas morning, I was so happy with my present, the pencil case. That was 3 times bigger than any other ones. A dozen of pencils could be fit in, special room for an eraser, and as soon as I opened it I could see a school schedule. It also had a mirror inside. Furthermore a pretty princess and a handsome prince was printed in the front side.

There was no other presents I had ever wanted more than this one in my life.



I couldn't find the past pencil case on the internet, so I downloaded a similar one from google.