

EQUILIBRIUM SCHOOL NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2025



Gingerbread House Christmas Contest Winners. More on page 9.



Delicious food made by our students. More on pages 18 and 19.
Snjezana's Croatian sweets.



Traditions. Read more on page 15.

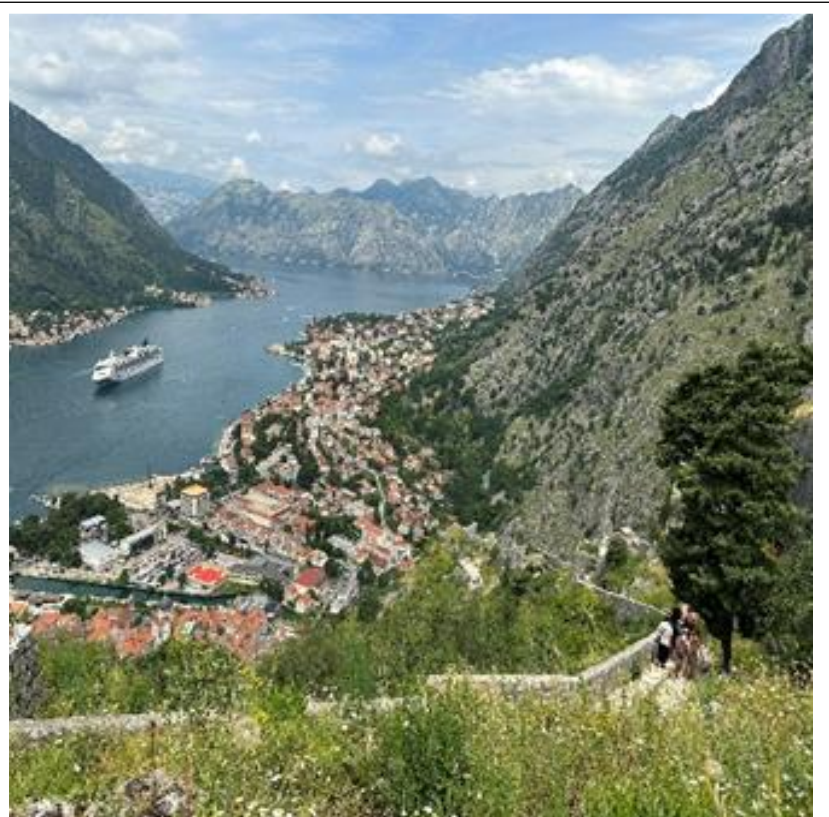


CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS

More on Pages 8-14.

A MEMORABLE DAY IN MY LIFE

Our EAL students' writings. See more on pages 4 and 5.



TRAVEL BLOG

Kotor Bay, Montenegro.
More on page 2 and 3.

TRAVEL BLOG

*Martha and I not only work together, but we occasionally travel too. One summer, while I was back home in **Trebinje**, Martha came to visit and I had the pleasure of showing her some of the places in Bosnia and Hercegovina, Montenegro, and Croatia that are close by. We had such a good time, grabbing lunch in one country and dinner in another, without ever feeling rushed. That's the beauty of Trebinje: you're surrounded by mountains, yet the sea is just a short drive away. It's peaceful, authentic, and full of charm. **I really hope someone else from Equilibrium gets the chance to visit one day and if you do, I promise I'll show you just as much, if not more.***

Dubrovnik, a place that's always felt a bit magical to me. I wanted Martha to see it the way I do, the worn stone streets, the golden light in the late afternoon, the way the sea looks from the top of the old city walls. We spent hours just walking, talking, stopping for coffee in little squares, completely losing track of time. The pictures I'll share can't fully capture the beauty of Dubrovnik, but they can give you a glimpse of it.



Figure 1: The Walls of Dubrovnik, Croatia



Figure 2: Stradun-The most famous street in Dubrovnik.

Figure 6: The stone walls in Slano date back to the time of the Dubrovnik Republic (Republic of Ragusa), which ruled the area from the 14th to the early 19th century. Most of the fortifications and stone walls you see in and around Slano were built between the 15th and 17th centuries, primarily to protect the coastline and the valuable salt pans, which were an important economic asset at the time.

Split, what to write about this charming coastal Croatian city. Split is one of those places where history and everyday life blend together. No photo can truly capture the feeling of walking through Diocletian's Palace, where ancient stone walls now hold cozy cafes and local shops.



Figure 3: Walking through Diocletian's Palace in Split feels like stepping into a living museum. Ancient Roman walls, underground passages, and centuries-old stone courtyards now filled with cafés, shops, and everyday life.



Figure 4: The view of Split from Marjan Hill

On our way to Split we visited **Klis Fortress** (Tvrđava Klis). It's a stunning medieval fortress perched on a hilltop just outside the city, offering panoramic views of Split, the Adriatic Sea, and the surrounding mountains. Klis Fortress has a rich history dating back to ancient times and was famously used as a filming location for **Game of Thrones** (as the city of **Meereen**).



Figure 5: Klis Fortress with the view of Split.

Slano was next on our list, a quiet coastal village that has its charm. As we walked along the old stone walls, we could feel the layers of history that shaped this small town. Just beyond, the salt pans stretched out toward the sea, still active after all these years, glistening under the sun. Of course we brought sea salt back to Canada. I still have some, and it's delicious!

Korčula quickly became one of our favorite stops. Its old town is like a mini-Dubrovnik, but quieter and more relaxed. We spent hours wandering the narrow stone streets, then ended the day with fresh seafood and local wine at a little restaurant by the sea. They say that **Marco Polo** was born in Korčula, and walking through the old town, it's easy to imagine it. It has that



timeless, adventurous feel. Whether or not the legend is true, the island carries a rich history, and there's something special about exploring its streets, knowing they might have once belonged to one of the world's greatest explorers.



We also stopped at **Kravice Waterfalls**, a beautiful, peaceful spot surrounded by nature.

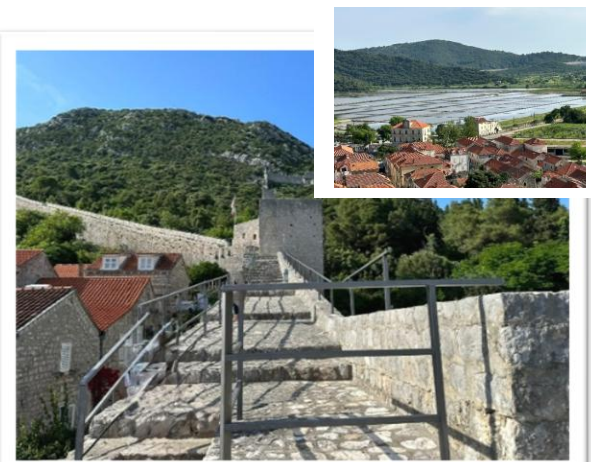


Figure 6: The stone walls in Slano

TRAVEL BLOG

Mostar – The City of the Bridge

In the heart of Herzegovina lies Mostar. At its center arches the Old Bridge, Stari Most, a centuries-old symbol that connects more than just the two banks of the emerald river



View of the OLD bridge, Mostar

Neretva. Mostar was built by the Ottomans in the 16th century. The bridge stood for 427 years, witnessing bustling markets in the Old Town, the call to prayer echoing from minarets, and church bells ringing nearby, until the 1990s, when it was destroyed by shelling from Croat forces on November 9, 1993, during the Bosnian War. Its destruction symbolized ethnic conflict and division, but it was meticulously rebuilt using



Fortica Viewing Point in Mostar offers breathtaking panoramic views of the city, the Neretva River, and the surrounding mountains. It also features a thrilling glass skywalk . Martha was brave to walk on it.

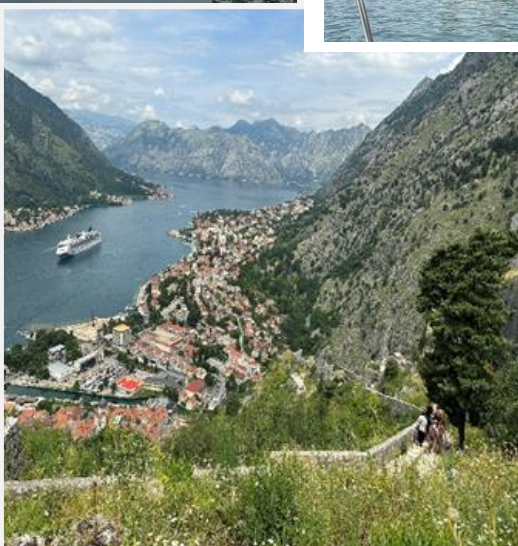
We visited **Šolta**. Šolta is a small island located in the Adriatic Sea, just off the coast of Split, Croatia. Known for its peaceful atmosphere, crystal-clear waters, and traditional stone villages.



Dovidenja!



Montenegro is a small Balkan country known for its stunning Adriatic coastline, dramatic mountain landscapes, and medieval towns like **Kotor** , **Budva** and **Perast**.



traditional methods and reopened in 2004 as a powerful symbol of reconciliation, international cooperation, and multicultural coexistence. Mostar is a blend of East and West: mosques and stone churches, cobblestone streets, craft shops selling copperware and rugs, and cafes serving Turkish coffee in tiny cups with a sugar cube on the side. The aroma of grilled ćevapi mingles with the scent of fresh pita as locals chat in a mix of languages—Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian. Igor was kind enough to make ćevapi for some of you.



If you ever get the chance, visit **Trebinje**. It's a small town in southern Bosnia and Herzegovina, close to Montenegro and Croatia, and it has a very relaxed feel. The old town with its stone streets and Ottoman bridge is beautiful to walk through, and the Trebišnjica River makes the whole place feel calm. People here love their coffee, so sitting in a café and watching life go by is part of the experience. The local vineyards are also worth trying, the wine is excellent. Trebinje isn't crowded or rushed, and that's what makes it special.



TREBINJE

A MEMORABLE DAY IN MY LIFE

By Ron’s EAL Class

The Day My Son Was Born

The most memorable day in my life was the day my son was born because my wife started having contractions very early in the morning. I was at work that day before my wife called me. First, I went to the house, then we rushed to the hospital together, and I stayed by her side the whole time. While the doctors prepared everything, I felt nervous since I had never experienced such an important moment before. Although the wait time was endless, I tried to remain calm so that I could encourage my wife. After several hours, the doctor finally told us that the baby was coming, and when I heard my son’s first cry, my heart filled with joy and relief. Then, the nurse let me hold him, and I felt overwhelmed with love because I had been waiting for this moment for so long. My hands were shaking although I was smiling the entire time. Later, my parents and relatives came to the hospital, and everyone shared tears of happiness as they welcomed the new baby into our family. Finally, when the day ended, I realized that life had completely changed, and I felt proud and thankful. In conclusion, my son’s birth was the happiest and most unforgettable day of my life because it gave me both love and responsibility.

By Ezzy

My Memorable Day

The most memorable day of my life was my wedding day. The wedding was held on January 10, 2015, and first we were astonished to learn that all the arrangements had been made by our friends. From the start, they had been planning every detail in secret. Initially, we were overwhelmed by the idea of over 500 guests attending the ceremony. Subsequently, we realized it was a perfect opportunity to see many friends and family we hadn't seen for years. During the reception, we were delighted to see the bridesmaids and groomsmen surprise us with a planned dance. While the surprise was happening, my wife and I were filled with so much joy. Then, another incredible surprise came when a famous singer came out to perform just for us. Before the reception, we made our vows to each other on the shores of Hayik Lake. That beautiful location made the moment even more special. After the ceremony, the celebrations continued with speeches and dancing. Afterwards, we learned that our friends had covered over 80% of our expenses. It was the most incredible act of generosity we had ever experienced. The wedding was later said to be one of the biggest in the city's history. The day flew by, and later, we couldn't believe it was already over. Finally, we had one last surprise of our own. Lastly, we, along with the entire wedding party, announced that we had volunteered to donate blood. After that, we began our new life together, forever grateful for the day.

By Mesfen

A Memorable Day

Many occasions pass through a person's mind, but some remain etched in their memory. My university graduation day will remain in my memory no matter how much time passes. At the beginning of the day, I woke up early. Then I headed to the barbershop to get ready for the graduation ceremony. Later, I returned home and put on my formal suit and graduation robe. At around 12 noon, my father, mother, and brothers and I headed to a photo studio and took some pictures. After that, we all headed to the university theater, where the ceremony would be held, and the doctors' oath would be taken. Then, the university president, the dean of the college, and the head of the department appeared on the stage. Then the university president began welcoming us, congratulating us, and giving us some advice. Later, the head of the department recited the oath, and we repeated it after him. Finally, the dean of the college called out our names to receive our graduation certificates, and the university president handed them to us. It was a wonderful experience that made me feel happy and proud. In conclusion, the graduation ceremony, in all its details, has remained in my memory, from the beginning of the day until I received my graduation certificate and took the oath. All of this happened in the company of my family, whose happiness was no less than mine.

By Moh’d

My Daughter's First Day of Kindergarten

The emotional event of my daughter Andrea’s first day of kindergarten was a day of smiles and hidden tears. First of all, we began our morning routine early. She was too excited to eat much of her breakfast. After she had put on her new dress uniform and white socks carefully, she posed with her big backpack. I took some photos before we left the house. As her father dropped us off at school, she held my hand firmly. When we entered the decorated classroom, a friendly teacher greeted us and showed Andrea where to hang her coat. She found her box compartment and she immediately noticed a puzzle station, which drew her in. Before I could even say goodbye, she gave me a quick hug and was already engaging with a new likely friend. While I stood there feeling a little lost, another parent smiled at me kindly. After I had left the building, I felt a wave of emotion, realizing my baby was growing up. Later that morning, I always checked the clock, wondering how she was managing without me. When the pickup time finally arrived, I waited anxiously by the gate. As she ran to me, her face was shining, and she directly started a story about playground swings and snack time. After we had gotten home, she talked about every detail, ensuring me she wanted to go back tomorrow. My worries were replaced with enormous satisfaction of her independence. In the end, it was a day that was more challenging for me than it was for her, marking the start of her wonderful journey into the world.

By Sandrine

A MEMORABLE DAY IN MY LIFE

The Day I Became a Citizen

The year before my immigration to Canada in 2012 was the most memorable time of my life, filled with the happiness of beginning a new life and the sadness of leaving my family. First, because I wanted to make my first move easy, I spent months gathering all the information I would need for my first move to Canada, researching everything from housing to job markets. I started by preparing my diplomas which was a crucial step to get my degree officially recognized. After that, I spent a lot of time with my close family, especially my mother and my siblings, also visiting each one of my other family members to say goodbye. Before leaving my native country, I quit my job and sold my car, since the money from these sales helped me gather enough funds to support myself for the first three months in Canada until I could find a new job. Next, I sold all of my household equipment and gave the rest of my belongings to my family, and then I bought new items that would be hard to find in Canada, such traditional things that we can find only in my country. Finally, because I was not yet used to winter weather, I bought plane tickets for me and my wife for April, ensuring to land at the end of winter. All these preparations provided me experience that fortified my resistance and my persistence, helping me to confront my new life.

By Rachid



Truth and Reconciliation is about learning the truth of what happened to Indigenous peoples, especially in residential schools, and working to build respectful relationships going forward. In our school, we are teaching our students about the history and impact of residential schools so we can understand the harm that was done and help create a better future. By learning and talking about these truths, we are taking part in reconciliation and showing respect for Indigenous communities.



D I W A L I

Diwali is a festival of lights mainly celebrated by Hindus, but people from other communities also join in the celebration. Sikhs celebrate Bandi Chhor Divas on the same day, Jains mark the day as when Lord Mahavira attained liberation, and some Buddhists, especially in Nepal, also take part in Diwali traditions. In our school, students from different backgrounds enjoy the festive food like sweets and snacks, sharing the joy together.



Our students are not only great cooks but also great photographers. Photo by our EAL student, **Binder**.

Remembrance Day



We were grateful to have Warrant Officer **Tyler Campbell** from the Canadian Armed Forces join us for our Remembrance Day ceremony. His powerful message helped our students understand the true meaning of remembrance and gratitude. Thank you for your service and for sharing your story with us. Please have a look at the following link to a recent article in the Western Sentinel which is a publication from National Defense and the Canadian Armed Forces.

[Learning the tricks of the trade - Canada.ca](#)

It features our special guests from this year's Remembrance Day observations at Equilibrium and includes a nice shout-out to our school.
I am sure you'll also see more than a few familiar faces!



CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS



CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS



CHRISTMAS SEASON IN COLOMBIA

IMPORTANT DATES

December 7 – Candle Night

We celebrate this day with family and friends in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We light candles and say a prayer, wishing peace, love, and health for the world. We eat *buñuelos* and *natilla*, and we also share food and happiness with our neighbors.



December 8 – Day of the Immaculate Conception

This day celebrates the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, declared by Pope Pius IX in 1854. In Colombia, it is a holiday and very important for the Catholic community. On this day, many children celebrate their First Holy Communion.

December 16 to December 24 – La Novena

During these days, we pray and celebrate the birth of Baby Jesus. From December 16 to December 24, we celebrate *La Novena*. Each day represents the journey of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph before Baby Jesus is born. Usually, families and friends gather to pray, eat, and sing Christmas carols. In Colombia, at 12:00 a.m. on December 24, children receive presents from Baby Jesus and Santa Claus.



December 31 and January 1 – New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day

We celebrate New Year’s Eve with our families. We cook special dishes together to share and to attract prosperity and love. At 11:55 p.m., we turn on the radio for the countdown, sing popular



songs like “*Faltan cinco para las doce,*” and follow some traditions. To travel more in the new year, we run around the house with a backpack. For abundance, we fill our pockets with lentils.

Single people who want a partner may go under the table, wear red underwear, or kiss someone of the opposite gender. Finally, we eat 12 grapes and make one wish for each grape.



January 6

January 6 is also a holiday in Colombia. People usually travel to the coast or another place to enjoy the long weekend.

By Adriana De Los Angeles, Liliya’s LINC class.

DÍA DE LAS VELITAS

(Candle Day)

In Colombia, it is a tradition to light candles and place lanterns on December 7th and 8th.

On December 7th, families and friends light candles to celebrate unity and hope. On December 8th, Colombians celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

It is also common to write a wish or the name of a family member on the candles before lighting them. Lanterns with images or drawings that cover the candles are also very popular.



By Alisson Julieth, Liliya’s LINC class.

COLOMBIAN LITTLE CANDLES DAY CELEBRATION

The Day of the Little Candles is one of Colombia’s most beloved celebrations and symbolically marks the beginning of the Christmas season in the country.

It is celebrated on the night of December 7, on the eve of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary (December 8), a tradition with deep Catholic roots.

Originally a Catholic observance, the Day of the Little Candles has evolved into a uniquely Colombian celebration that blends religion, culture, community, and festivity. Today, it stands as a symbol of light, hope, and unity and serves as the gateway to Christmas in Colombia.

MODERN MEANING OF THE DAY OF THE LITTLE CANDLES

While the celebration still holds religious significance for many, it is now largely cultural, family-focused, and festive.

Family and Community Tradition

- Families gather to light candles and lanterns on streets, sidewalks, balconies, and in parks.
- The lights symbolize hope, gratitude, and good wishes for the year ahead.

Official Start of Christmas

- This celebration officially kicks off the Christmas season in Colombia.
- Homes are decorated, families and friends gather, traditional foods are prepared, and local festivities take place.

Symbol of Unity

- Candles represent family togetherness, remembrance of loved ones who have passed, and gratitude for life’s blessings.
- In many regions, they are also seen as a way to ask for protection and blessings.



By Yamile Andrea, Liliya’s LINC class.

Christmas Baking by Taylor R.

My family has always done a lot of Christmas baking in the month of December. We like to celebrate Christmas and eat lots of good food! One of the recipes my mom always made for us is sugar cookies. I remember baking them with her and spending the afternoon decorating them with lots of icing and sprinkles. It is one of my favorite Christmas memories with her! This year, I decided to continue the tradition with my oldest son, Ben. He loved getting to roll out the dough and choose the different shapes for the cookies. His favorite part was eating lots of the icing, of course! Here are some pictures of us making our cookies. Merry Christmas everyone!



Ben baking Christmas cookies!

CELEBRATIONS IN MEXICO



Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe (December 12)

This day honors the Virgin of Guadalupe. Many people travel to Mexico City to visit the Basilica. They pray, sing, and show their faith. Some people walk long distances to reach the church.

Las Posadas (December 16–24)

Las Posadas is a tradition that remembers Mary and Joseph looking for a place to stay before Jesus was born. Families walk together with candles, sing songs, and visit houses. Inside, they pray, eat traditional food, and children receive sweets.

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day

Christmas Eve is very important. Families come together and eat traditional food like tamales and pozole. Christmas Day is quieter and spent with family.

Day of the Holy Innocents (December 28)

On this day, people play jokes on each other in a friendly way.

New Year’s Eve

Families have dinner and watch fireworks. At midnight, people eat 12 grapes and make wishes for the new year. Some people carry a suitcase to wish for travel.

Three Kings Day (January 6)

Children receive gifts from the Three Kings. Families eat *Rosca de Reyes*, a sweet bread with a small Baby Jesus figure inside.



Candelaria (February 2)

This day ends the Christmas season. Families go to church with candles.

By Juana, Liliya’s LINC class.

Christmas in Eritrea

My name is Meron Adhnom, and I am from Eritrea. Today, I will talk about how we celebrate Christmas in my country.

We celebrate Christmas on December 25th and January 7th. This is because of our calendar and religion. Catholics celebrate on December 25th, and Orthodox Christians celebrate on January 7th. Some Orthodox people celebrate both days. My family and I have celebrated on both dates since I was born.

In Eritrea, we use real trees for Christmas and decorate them with white cotton, candy, and balloons. When we came to Canada, we started using artificial trees, lights, Christmas balls, and ribbons. In Eritrea, streets and markets are decorated, and there are Christmas lights everywhere.

We celebrate Christmas with happiness because it is the day Jesus was born, and it is very special. I wish everyone who celebrates Christmas a Merry Christmas.



By Meron Tesfay, Liliya’s LINC class.

CHRISTMAS SEASON IN ARGENTINA

In December, we experience a very special time, full of light, hope, and family.

December 8th is the Feast of the Assumption of Mary, and we decorate our Christmas tree.

On Christmas Eve, we celebrate the birth of Baby Jesus. We go to church and welcome Christmas by praying for health, peace, and blessings for everyone.

Also on Christmas Eve, children eagerly await their gifts from Santa Claus and all the magic he brings.

At Christmas, the table becomes the heart of our gathering: we light the grill, prepare a delicious barbecue, and come together as a family to share, remember, and give thanks.

As New Year’s Eve approaches, we gather to say goodbye to the past year and welcome the New Year, wishing it to be filled with health, well-being, and, above all, love.



Alis – LINC STUDENT

The Winter Solstice

The Winter Solstice is an important traditional festival in China. It usually falls between December 21 and December 23.

Although the Winter Solstice is not an official public holiday in China, it is a very significant festival in southern China, especially in Guangdong Province, a coastal province in the south. There is a well-known saying among Cantonese people:

“The Winter Solstice is more important than the Lunar New Year.”

This is a proverb that many people in Guangdong grow up hearing.

For people in Guangdong, the Winter Solstice symbolizes reunion and a sense of belonging at the end of the year. On this day, if there are no urgent matters, many employers allow staff to leave work early, or company cafeterias prepare special meals to mark the occasion. Because of this tradition, people often avoid inviting Cantonese friends out for dinner on the Winter Solstice, as they usually prefer to return home to be with their families.

Food plays an important role in the celebration. Besides *tangyuan* (glutinous rice balls), different regions have their own traditional dishes. In the Chaoshan area, people eat *luo tang qian*. The Hakka people prepare *jingmi tangyuan* and *ai ci*. In cities such as Zhongshan, Dongguan, Huizhou, and Yangjiang, there are also unique local foods. All these dishes share the same meaning—reunion, harmony, and good fortune.

In addition to food, there are meaningful traditions. In Chaozhou, there is a saying: *“If you don’t return home on the Winter Solstice, you forget your ancestors.”* This reflects the importance of family and ancestor worship. In Guangzhou, people prepare salted mud carp and store it in rice jars on the eve of the Winter Solstice. This custom, known as *“ya gang,”* symbolizes abundance and prosperity in the coming year.

The importance of the Winter Solstice dates back to ancient times. Early Chinese people measured time by observing the length of shadows cast by a standing pole. They discovered that after the Winter Solstice, the noon shadow gradually shortened, marking the return of longer days. As early as the Zhou Dynasty, the Winter Solstice was considered the beginning of a new year.

For people in Guangdong, the Winter Solstice is not just a festival—it represents respect for tradition, history, and family. It is a cultural heritage that continues to be cherished and passed down today.

By Ping Zang, Liliya’s LINC class.

Christmas and New Year in Cameroon

In Cameroon, Christmas and New Year are family-centered celebrations. Relatives come together to reunite and strengthen family bonds.

Food and Festive Meals

Food plays a central role during the celebrations. Families prepare rich and traditional meals that symbolize generosity and joy.

Common festive dishes include:

- Ndolé
- Poulet DG
- Grilled fish
- Other rich and festive meals

Gifts and New Clothes

Children are especially celebrated during this time. Wearing new clothes and receiving gifts is an important tradition.

- Toys
- New clothes
- Shoes

Spiritual Aspect

For Christians, Midnight Mass is a very important spiritual moment. It marks the birth of Jesus Christ.

- Midnight Mass
- Prayers and religious songs
- Beginning of religious celebrations

Youth Activities and Leisure

Young people enjoy the festive season by socializing and having fun.

- Christmas markets
- Bars and clubs
- Christmas brunches (hotels and restaurants)
- Leisure and entertainment centers

End-of-year celebrations in Cameroon are a time of joy, family togetherness, and cultural traditions. Through festive meals, religious activities, and social gatherings, these celebrations strengthen unity and solidarity. Christmas and New Year reflect the values of sharing, faith, and celebration in Cameroonian society.



By Wendy, Liliya’s LINC class



A Christmas Tradition

A very fun Christmas tradition we do every year is we get matching pajamas. Every year is different and a little crazy, but mostly fun. Every year, we all get in the matching pajamas and go to Bass Pro Shop for a picture with Santa. Even though we look so silly, we have so much fun with it. After we get the picture done, we walk around the mall acting all crazy; the looks we get are so funny. I know this tradition will live on with our kids because they all love it.



Merry
Christmas!

Happy
Holidays!

BY William Surovy

TRADITIONS

By Shayesta – LINC Student

In my country's traditional wedding, the bride and the women in the family wear beautiful cultural dresses with bright colors and special embroidery. These dresses show our heritage, pride, and the joy of the celebration.

The bowls we carry in our hands are used for henna. This is an important part of our tradition. We prepare the henna in these decorated bowls and use it to bless the bride. Putting henna symbolizes beauty, protection, and good luck for the new couple.

This is one of the most special moments in our wedding ceremonies.

Another beautiful tradition in our weddings is the Cup Dance. In this dance, women balance small cups in their hands while dancing gracefully. It shows skill, joy, and celebration, and everyone enjoys this lovely moment together.

By Olena

I asked students to share their traditional clothes to show the diversity of cultures.

Many students talked about the importance of embroidered clothes. Embroidered clothes is primary symbolic, about protection and care. Every pattern may have a special meaning. Mothers often embroidered clothes for



children, putting their love, energy and care into them.

Many people bring their national clothes when come to another country. They bring not just a shirt or a dress, they bring a piece of their land, their identity, their spirit and culture.

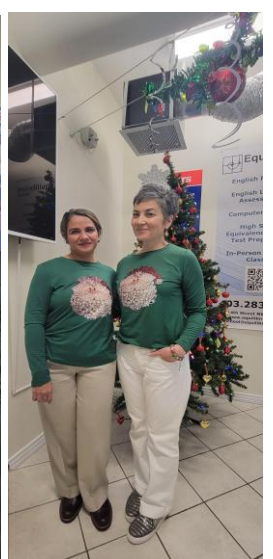




Tina plays cello in an amateur string orchestra (Calgary Community String Orchestra), and they had their Fall Concert on November 25th. The next concert will be in March 2026!

TINA's Concert

Concert was held on November 18, 2025.



Some Christmas photos of Tina's students and others!

Many Calendars, One Hope: Why We Celebrate New Year



At Equilibrium School, we see the world through many windows. Into our classrooms and hallways, we bring different languages, foods, customs, and stories of home. The New Year is one of those special moments many of us share, even if we mark it on different days and in different ways. Some welcome the new year with fireworks in January;

others wait for a spring sunrise, a lunar cycle, the sound of the shofar, flowers after rain, or the quiet of prayer. The details are diverse, but the feeling is universal: New Year is a time to renew our hearts and choose connection as our way forward.

We celebrate not only because a calendar turns a page, but because human communities need pauses. Life is busy. We study, work, care for families, and carry heavy responsibilities. A New Year gives us permission to stop and breathe. It invites us to look back with honest gratitude and look ahead with courage. It reminds us that change is possible and that we can start fresh—not alone, but together. In this pause, we remember what matters most: the relationships that shape us, the elders who guide us, and the friends who stand beside us.

Across cultures, the spirit of New Year appears in simple actions. People clean their homes to make space for new beginnings. They prepare special meals to share with neighbors. They visit elders to offer respect and receive blessings. They reconcile with friends and write down gentle goals. These tender, practical rituals turn love into something visible. They show us that renewal is not just a grand idea, but a set of steady choices—care given today, kindness offered now, and patience practiced over time.

Around the world, traditions welcome the new year with unique rhythms. On January 1st, the Gregorian New Year brings people together with sparklers and shared optimism. In East and Southeast Asia, the Lunar New Year arrives with red envelopes for children, deep cleaning, and respect for ancestors—where love looks like continuity and a table set for everyone. In Persian and neighboring cultures, Nowruz blossoms at the spring equinox; the Haft-Seen table displays symbols of growth, doors open for visits, and spring cleaning clears both rooms and minds.

The tapestry is rich and beautiful. In the Jewish tradition, Rosh Hashanah arrives in autumn with the shofar’s call and apples dipped in honey—a commitment to repair the world and pray for a sweet year. In Thailand, Songkran brings the gentle blessing of water, washing away the old year with respect. In Ethiopia, Enkutatash arrives when yellow daisies bloom, greeting the year with song and gratitude. The Islamic New Year is a quiet time of remembrance and faith, reminding us that love can be steady and calm, not just bright and loud. In parts of South Asia, festivals like Ugadi and Gudi Padwa honor the blend of joy and duty at the heart of family life, while in Japan, Shōgatsu welcomes January with shrine visits and meals arranged with meticulous care.

If we look closely at these varied traditions, a pattern appears. Renewal often arrives with **light**—candles, lanterns, and sunrises. It arrives with **water**—washing away dust to make room for the new. It arrives with shared **food**, reminding us that hope tastes better together. And crucially, it teaches us to **remember**. We honor the ancestors, teachers, and family who shaped our values. This remembrance is love expressed as gratitude; it grounds us in wisdom while we look toward future possibilities.

Why do we celebrate? Because we need beginnings. New Year makes time feel alive—not like a straight line moving past us, but like a circle returning with lessons and promise. It helps us forgive ourselves for mistakes and invite others back into relationships. When communities agree on a moment to pause and hope, it makes it easier for every person to begin again.

In our daily school life, renewal is made of small acts. A clean desk can be a fresh start. A teacher’s encouragement can turn struggle into progress. A class that welcomes every voice becomes a place where belonging thrives.

As we move into a new cycle at Equilibrium School, let us honor every calendar that lives within our community. Let us make room for the many ways people renew faith, family, and friendship. If your New Year comes with lanterns, may your way be lit. If it comes with water, may your spirit feel clean. If it comes with flowers, may your growth be strong. If it comes with prayer or simple silence, may your rest be deep.

No matter the date, the message is the same: begin again with care. May this year be full of patience when days are hard, and kindness that grows across our classrooms. Let us celebrate the brilliance of our differences and remember that we all carry the same human hope—to make tomorrow gentler, wiser, and more caring than today. At Equilibrium School, we keep this hope alive by turning the page together.



By Amin

The Jewel of Mashhad: Pesarân-e Karim

Style Lamb Shanks



For a truly magnificent New Year's feast, few dishes can compare to the celebrated Lamb Shank in the Mashhadi style, a recipe made famous by the legendary Pesarân-e Karim restaurants in Mashhad. This dish is a testament to the magic of slow cooking, transforming simple ingredients into a meal of incredible depth and richness without the use of tomato paste or added water. The resulting meat is impossibly tender, falling off the bone, and coated in a thick, gelatinous gravy created almost entirely from caramelized onions and the lamb's own juices. It is a luxurious, comforting,



and deeply flavorful centerpiece that is perfectly suited for celebrating new beginnings with family and friends.

To begin this culinary journey, you will need to prepare a significant amount of onions, as they are the soul of this dish. For three lamb shanks, you should finely slice four to five large onions. In a large, heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven, heat some oil and add the sliced onions. Sauté them patiently over medium heat until they turn soft and golden. This process, known as caramelization, is crucial as it builds the sweet, savory foundation of the sauce and creates the beautiful color



of the final dish.

Once the onions are perfectly golden, it is time to introduce the star of the show. Place the three lamb shanks into the pot, nestling them into the bed of caramelized onions. You can add a whole, unpeeled head of garlic—simply cut off the top to expose the cloves—along with a stick of cinnamon for a subtle, aromatic warmth. Season the meat generously with salt, black pepper, and turmeric. Now, add the magic ingredient: a generous amount of brewed saffron. Pour at least half a cup of strong, brewed saffron over the shanks and onions. This will not only imbue the dish with its signature aroma but also give it a stunning golden-red hue.

The next step is where patience becomes a virtue. Cover the pot with a tight-fitting lid and reduce the heat to the absolute lowest setting. The key to this recipe is a very long, gentle braise. You will not be adding any water. Instead, the lamb will cook in its own juices and the moisture released by the massive quantity of onions. Allow the shanks to cook undisturbed for at least four to five hours. You may need to check on them occasionally to ensure there is enough liquid and to gently turn the shanks, but be careful not to break the tender meat. After several hours, the meat should be falling off the bone, and the onions will have melted into a thick, rich, and incredibly flavorful gravy. Serve this masterpiece on a large platter, spooning the luscious onion gravy over the shanks, alongside a fragrant platter of Baghali Polo (dill and fava bean rice) for a New Year's meal that will be remembered for years to come.



By Amin

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

My Slow Cooker is My Best Friend

Tina Jensen

My morning class did a lesson where we talked about cooking and nutrition. My students know that although I love food and I love eating, I do not love cooking, and I am not a confident cook. However, I also don't like to eat processed or instant food. So, thanks to my slow cooker, I am able to prepare and enjoy easy, healthy, economical meals. I highly recommend getting a slow cooker - if I can cook, anyone can!

Slow Cooker Tortilla Soup

Ingredients

- 1 pound shredded, cooked chicken
- 1 (15 ounce) can whole peeled tomatoes, mashed
- 1 (10 ounce) can enchilada sauce
- 1 (4 ounce) can chopped green chile peppers
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 cups water
- 1 (14.5 ounce) can chicken broth
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 (10 ounce) package frozen corn
- 1 tablespoon chopped cilantro
- 7 corn tortillas
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil, or as needed

Directions

1. Place chicken, tomatoes, enchilada sauce, green chiles, onion, and garlic into a slow cooker.
2. Pour in water and chicken broth; season with cumin, chili powder, salt, pepper, and bay leaf. Stir in corn and cilantro. Cover and cook on Low for 6 to 8 hours or on High for 3 to 4 hours.
3. When the soup is almost finished, preheat the oven to 400 degrees F (200 degrees C). Lightly brush both sides of tortillas with oil.
4. Cut tortillas into strips, then spread on a baking sheet.
5. Bake in the preheated oven until crisp, 10 to 15 minutes.
6. Sprinkle tortilla strips over soup before serving.



Marowa Kazaleh Chicken and Rice

Basmati Rice (4 cups) 600

Rice Spice

garlic cloves 4
tsp cardamom pods 1
tsp ground cumin 1
cloves 8
dried limes 4
Bay leaves
tsp black peppercorns 1
tsp ground coriander 1
cinnamon stick 1
Paprika (optional)
tbsp salt 1
tsp saffron ½
large onion 1
cup vegetable oil ½

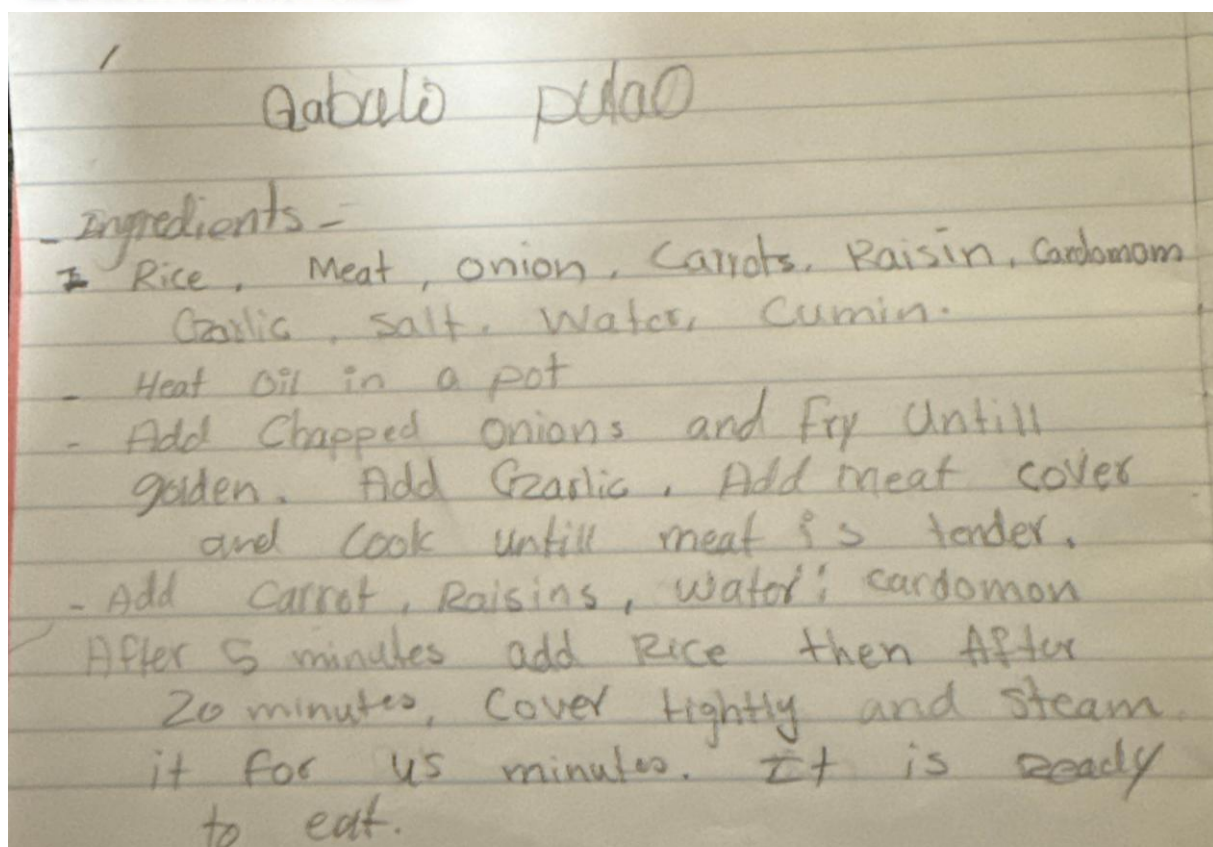
Chicken

cup water ¼
cup vegetable oil ¼
tsp ground cumin ½
tsp salt 1
tsp black pepper ½
tsp paprika 1
tsp mandarin spices 1
tsp turmeric ½



Lida Ahmadi from
Afghanistan shared her
favourite food.

LINC STUDENT



OCTOPUS SALAD

Wash one octopus and cook in a pressure cooker for 15 minutes. Cut the potatoes into small cubes, boil the potatoes for 10 minutes, when cooked, drain and leave to cool. Chop onion. When the octopus is cooked, remove it from the water and chop finely, add the potatoes, onion, olive oil, salt, pepper, a little lemon. Mix everything together and serve.

I wish you happy holidays.

Snježana.

LINC student Snježana shared her
family Christmas pictures and her
delicious Octopus salad recipe.



Our teachers and students love to cook! Here are some amazing foods and delicious recipes for you to enjoy.

Turkish food from **Sevda Kaplan**. LINC students



Zeenat Ismati from **Afghanistan** shared her traditional food.



Qabili , recipe, almond , carrot, raisin, rice and oil.

Marowa Kazaleh cookies pictures.



Mike, Our LINC Student sent photos of some Ukrainian dishes he cooks at home.

'Twas the Night Before Lessons
at Equilibrium (Zoom Edition)

'Twas the night before classes, and all
through the school,
Not a student was stirring, it was quiet and
cool.
The Wi-Fi was humming, the webcams
aglow,
Awaiting the teachers to put on a show.

Anna and Kasia, with spreadsheets in
sight,
Were planning new courses well into the
night.
Slavica, the office queen, calm and
composed,
Had passwords and links neatly color-
coded.

Martha was ready with coffee in hand,
To troubleshoot tech no one could
understand.
Remote teachers logged in from far and
wide—
George, Judy, Patty-Jo (with her dog by
her side).

Roxanne and Dale, with Debbie in tow,
Clicked "Join Meeting" and waited for
"Go!"
In-person heroes—Tina, Philip, and
Darren—
Were warming up lessons with grammar
and sharing.

And Kyle, the social worker, steady and
kind,
Helped soothe the chaos when students
resigned.

When out on the Zoom there arose such a
clatter,
"I'm muted again!"—oh, what's the
matter?
Away to the mic they flew in a flash,
Unmuting themselves with a desperate
dash.

The cameras were frozen, the screens
turned to gray,
"Can you hear me now?" became the
phrase of the day.
Breakout rooms vanished, the chat box
went wild,
Someone's cat walked across—oh, that's
Tina's smile!

With Anna and Kasia steering the sleigh,
Equilibrium soared in a magical way.
So here's to the teachers, the bosses, the
crew,
To learning, to laughter, and dreams
coming true.

May your holidays sparkle, your Wi-Fi stay
bright,
Happy teaching to all, and to all a good
night!

By Patty-Jo with AI assist



My 2025 Reflection

Hi, my name is Kulwinder Sran. I went to India this year after eight years. I saw my family and friends. I saw my new house. I was very happy, and I invited all my relatives and my friends.

I prayed to God, and after a few days, I went to Golden Temple with my husband, my brother, my nieces, and my mother-in-law. I stayed in India for three weeks. This year, I learned new words about traveling. I read magazines and short stories.

I practiced English every day.

My 2025 Reflection

Hello, my name is Rama. I am a new student in the school. My best moment this year was when I started my computer classes. It boosted my confidence, and I learned a lot about computers. And after finishing my computer classes, I started to go to the school to improve my English, and I am really happy about it.

In 2025, I tried really hard to improve my health. I learned how to eat a healthy and balanced diet, and I started to exercise.

In May 2025, I visited my home country, Nepal. It was really good to meet all of my family and friends. In Nepal, I went to visit Lumbini. Lumbini is the place where Lord Buddha was born.

My 2025 Reflection

My name is Jagpal Singh. My best moment this year was when I was discharged from the hospital on January 30. I felt happy when I met my family and friends. One special day was when the doctor told me that my CT scan was positive.

I improved my memory and my health.

The people who I am grateful to are my friends and my family. My friends were very helpful to me. Many times, when my friends are free, they go shopping with me.

We enjoy the lovely moments together.

My 2025 Reflection

Hi, my name is Jivan. My best moment in 2025 was when I bought a car. I felt happy coming to school, and one special day for me was my birthday celebration. In 2025, I lost weight, tried to exercise, and now I feel better. I also learned how to make pizza. During the year, I visited Dubai and saw the Burj Khalifa. I went to school every day, spent time with my friend, and I am thankful because my friend helped me when I needed it.

My 2025 Reflection

Hi, my name is Hagos. In 2025, my best moment was coming to school. Throughout the year, I practiced English and improved my skills by learning many new words in English. I also learned more about Canadian culture and geography. I visited Toronto and saw my sister, and I also traveled to Edmonton. I spent time with my friend, and I felt thankful when my teachers helped me.

My 2025 Reflection

Hello, my name is Mustafa. My best moment in 2025 was starting the English program. At first, English was difficult for me, but I felt happy when I joined the class. With the help of my teachers, I began to feel more confident and enjoyed learning. Throughout the year, I practiced English and improved my skills. I also practiced driving more often and improved my driving skills. I visited Vancouver and spent time with my friends. I am very thankful to my teachers for helping me learn English.

Hasmik's EAL class 2025 reflections

One of the most wondrous things about our school is just how **diverse** the student body is. There are dozens and dozens of countries represented, with their own languages, **cultures, and traditions**. The cultural makeup of our classes is usually reflective of both the makeup of our broader Canadian society, as well as recent migration patterns. Eritrea is one of the countries that has become an important source of immigrants to Canada over the past decade. During that period, more than 50 thousand people born in Eritrea moved to Canada. This may not seem like a large number overall, but Eritrea is a country of only three and a half million people. In relative terms, Eritrea has recently become a top 10-source country for immigrants to Canada. More people have moved to Canada from Eritrea than from the USA in the past 2 years.

Most of our teachers have had the opportunity to teach at least one Eritrean student. Based on the numbers above, there are likely to be more in our school over the next decade. It is very important for us as teachers to have some level of cultural competence. **Cultural competence** increases student engagement, deepens trust between students and teachers, disrupts implicit biases, and strengthens the sense of class as a community. With all these in mind, we (**Fatima and Igor**) decided to visit an Eritrean restaurant on the Friday night just a few hours after our school’s Christmas banquet. Both of us currently teach Eritrean students 1-on-1 and have others in our group classes.

We decided to go to a restaurant called Horeb in the city’s industrial Meridian neighbourhood, and we brought our spouses and some friends along. Eritrean cuisine is broadly similar to other cuisines in the Horn of Africa region, and especially to Ethiopian cuisine. Pork is generally not eaten by either Christians or Muslims, spice mixes such as Berbere and Mitmita provide a flavourful and spicy punch to the food, while a sour fermented flatbread called injera is used as both a utensil to scoop food with and as a counterbalance to the spiciness. We both ordered a succulent dish of beef strips mixed with peppers, onions, and spices called chacha. Our friends and family sampled some of the other items on the menu.

It was a thoroughly enjoyable evening despite the usual frigid December temperatures in Calgary. It was wonderful to spend time together and have some delectable **Eritrean food**. Most importantly, we have a few more pieces of knowledge we can use to relate to some of our students. We find that students react very positively to any and all interest in their culture and traditions. It makes them feel valuable, acknowledged, and welcome. Every little bit helps motivate them and aids their learning.



By Igor and Fatima

Buruk Megbi and bon appetit!

*Sirun (Beautiful)
Hayastan (Armenia)
Kyle Mack*

If you've never been to Armenia, my only advice is to go there! It's an absolutely beautiful and downright enchanting nation with a rich and ancient culture, beautiful natural and historical scenery, and wonderfully friendly and welcoming people. I'll admit that I am a bit biased here (seeing as how my wife is Armenian), but I seriously doubt that anyone who visits Armenia would disagree with me.

I've been to Armenia six times either by myself or with my wife and daughter, and I hope to go back at least six more! I've travelled around most of the country, but I always seem to spend the most time in the capital city of Yerevan which is in the central west of the country and not too far from the border with Turkey. Yerevan isn't a geographically large place, but it has a population of nearly 1.5 million people, which is close to half of the population of the whole country. You'd think this would result in a lot of congestion and overcrowding, but I'd say it actually creates a very lively and bustling urban scene that manages to manage itself, somehow. The mountain you can see in some of the photos is Mount Ararat, which is technically in Turkey, but historically and symbolically a big part of Armenia and the Armenian identity.



Yerevan itself is kind of like a combination of Eastern Europe and the Middle East with an overarching quasi-Parisian vibe that's built upon a culture of endless cafes, live music (everywhere), and nightlife that extends into the early morning. Most of that is also very family friendly and, during the summer, it's not unusual to see the playgrounds full of kids at 12 AM while their parents enjoy coffee and other beverages on nearby sidewalk cafés and patios. At any time of the day, the streets are usually full of people, most of the city is very safe, and there's always something to

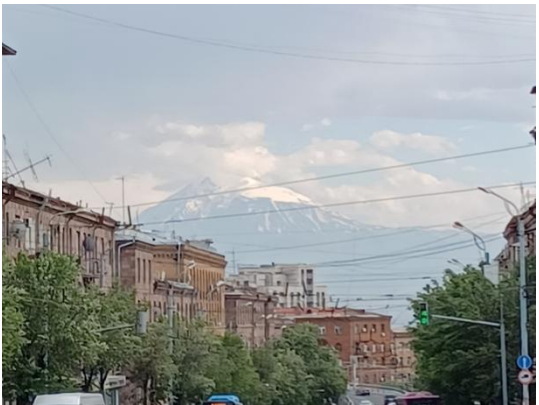


see or do or visit. For a genuine Yerevan experience, it's also worth riding the Yerevan Metro which travels through a backdrop of old (yet very well-maintained) Soviet built stations / architecture.



Central Yerevan after midnight

The food is fresh and fantastic, the coffee tastes like actual coffee, and everything is served up with an elegantly stylish dose of quality that is hard to find in other places. For Canadians travelling to Armenia, you'll also find that your dollar goes a lot farther than it does in a lot of other places, so that's another plus.



A very modest sample of the many culinary delights one can find in Yerevan

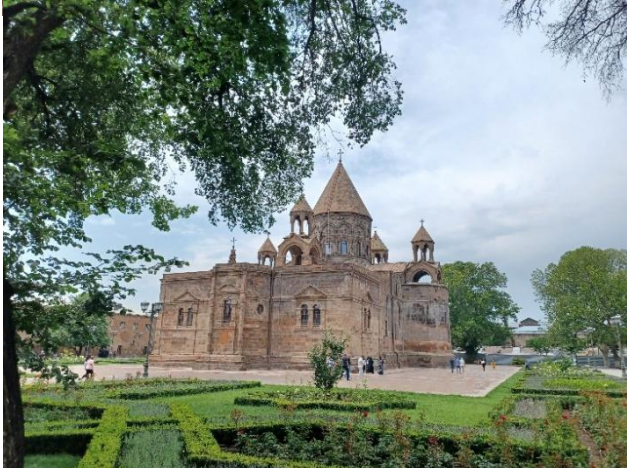
Armenia's history, unfortunately, is not the happiest. The country has endured invasions, occupations, loss of land, communism, foreign aggression, and the first genocide of the 20th century when nearly 2 million Armenians were systemically killed by/in the Ottoman Empire. Because of all this, there are more Armenians living outside of Armenia than in it. This results in a worldwide Armenian diaspora that finds its way back to Yerevan and creates a very international and cosmopolitan feeling.



There are also dozens and dozens of stone-built churches all across Armenian which you can visit for free. Many of these are over one thousand years old and the architecture is impressive.



*Sirun (Beautiful)
Hayastan (Armenia)
Kyle Mack*



In the summer, there are fresh apricots (*prunum Armeniacum*) practically everywhere

One of the highlights of our most recent family trip to Armenia was being invited to dinner at our friend’s family’s acreage. This dinner involved a full Armenian feast (photos below) accompanied by fresh fruit picked directly from the trees (and sometimes turned into homemade wine, brandy, vodka, etc.) and endless toasts to each other and each other’s health!



Until next time, Armenia!



So much food...so many toasts...so awesome!

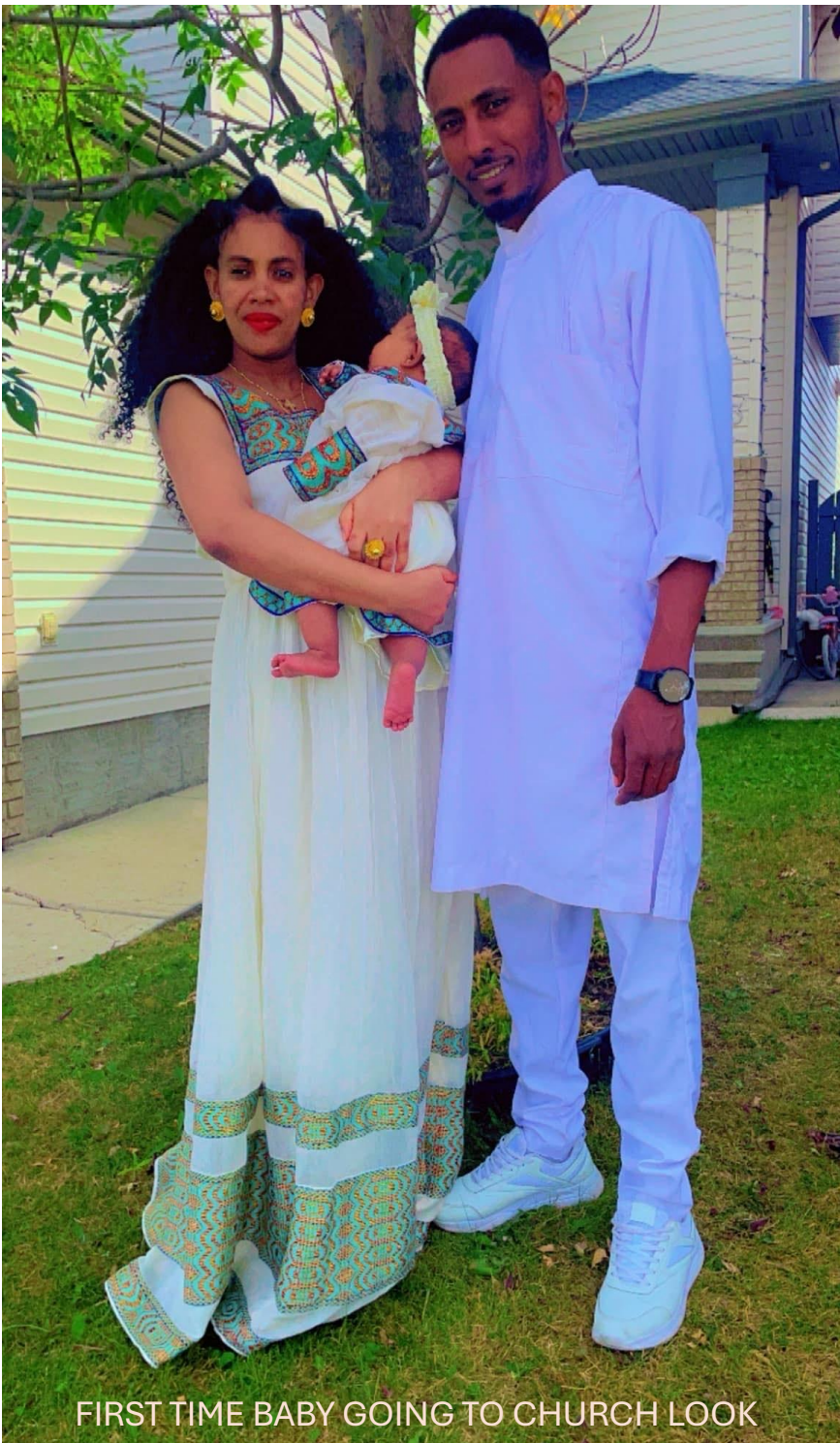
Even though I am not Armenian (just a healthy mix of Scottish, Ukrainian, and Irish), I could absolutely write a lot more about Armenia and the many reasons why it’s a special place to me. However, I am going to leave things here, for now. If any of you decide to plan a trip to Armenia, I’d be happy to offer my support. I might (90% possibility) even come along with you!

On the last day of our trip, the ladies decided to visit the nail salon. I got a haircut.



National clothes

Feven Tesfay – LINC Student



FIRST TIME BABY GOING TO CHURCH LOOK



Family look

CENTENNIAL

Amazing story of Darren's mother.

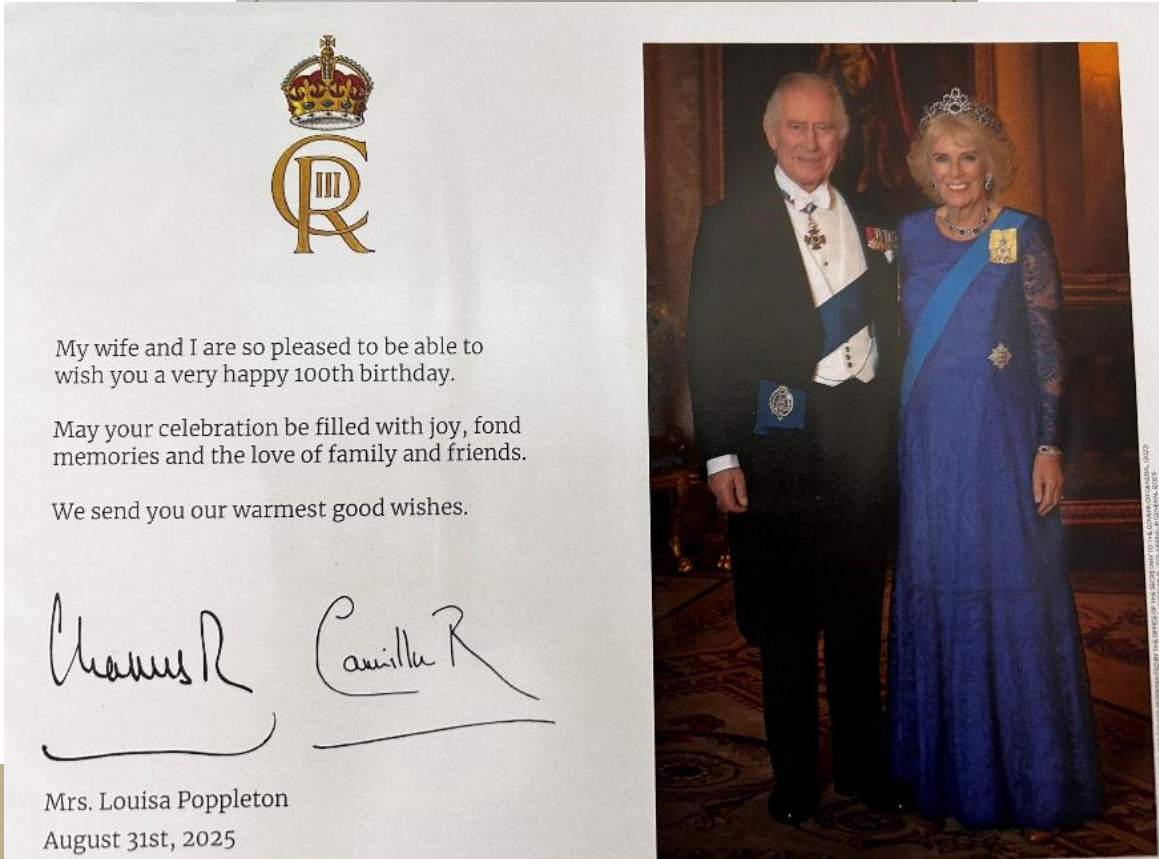
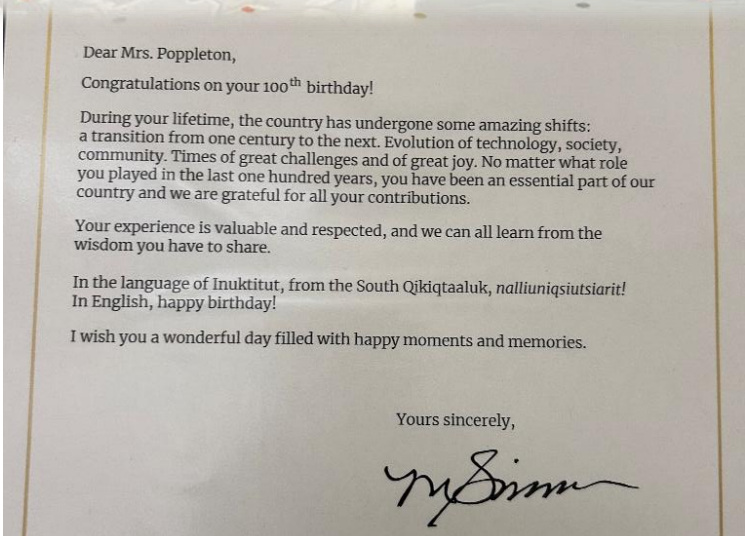
Do you want a letter from the King of England? The Premier of the Province? The Governor General? Well, my mom found out the secret to that is to just wait long enough and you can get those when you turn 100!

My mom, Louisa Poppleton, was born in 1925. The changes she has lived through have been vast. She is older than televisions, nonstop flights across the oceans, and sliced bread, never mind smartphones, space travel and food from all corners of the world. She experienced the Great Depression as a child and the challenges of life during World War II in Canada. Then she travelled to England to be an au pair for some relatives for a couple of years before working on a farm in rural Saskatchewan and meeting my dad.

Married life certainly didn't make her life any easier because raising three children on a half section (~130 hectare) mixed farm was not an easy task. Beyond cooking and baking for everyone, mom also milked half of our twenty cows—by hand! Watching she and my dad work as hard as they did has always been an important part of my approach to my work life because, no matter how hard I work, I'll never work as hard as they did.

Two years ago, decades after my dad passed away and her retirement, she finally stopped living on her own and now lives in an extended care home. While many people become sad about having to give up their independence, she has instead thrived and has made it a point to make those people feel included. She goes to talk to at least a dozen people before each meal, visiting with them briefly and making sure they know there is someone in the home who cares about them. This is another shining example she sets for the world—show people you see them and make them feel seen.

On her birthday this year, our extended family (including my Aunt Edna, who is 97) and many of my mom's friends from over time celebrated her making it to her centennial. There were over 150 people who came to the party, each with an experience that made them care about showing my mom how important she was to them. Her joy at being recognized by these people who are so important to her filled her with great joy.



Tina’s PM students did a lesson from ellii.com on Happiness. Then they wrote their own “Prescription for Happiness.”

Khaterah

- Laugh every day
- Be optimistic
- Get enough sleep and rest
- Watch a funny movie
- Call and meet family and friends
- Play games or other sports
- Practice gratitude
- Go shopping
- Travel and explore new places
- Count your blessings every day
- Cook and eat healthy, delicious food
- Spend time in the park and enjoy nature
- Listen to your favourite music
- Help others
- Exercise or take a walk around your neighbourhood

Yolanda

- Take 2 pills of “Don’t Care About Anything”
- Drink a cup of “Positivity” tea every morning
- Take one shot of Patience with a pinch of sugar every day and night before bed
- If this doesn’t bring results, try again the next day!

Syreneat

- Let yourself have enough sleep
- Keep hydrated
- Do exercise
- Eat healthy food
- Spend time doing things outside of the house
- Be positive thinking
- Spend some quality time for yourself
- Talk to your family, friends or neighbours
- Listen to music
- Travel
- Spend time doing your hobbies
- Be independent with money



OUR LINC STUDENTS ENYOING EACH OTHERS COMPANY



All that food!



WE WEAR PINK ON WEDNESDAYS!

We were surprised with a delicious homemade treat from our former funded student, Olga 🇺🇦
A little taste of Ukrainian cuisine and a whole lot of love. So grateful for moments like these 🤍



Hasmik and Fatima's classes teamed up to create dialogues using past-tense questions!



Margaret is making sure that all the money collected is safely packed away.
Way to go Margaret!

Fundraising for Tery Fox has never been this fun! From games and treats to laughter and teamwork, our school came together to support the Terry Fox Foundation in the best way possible. Thank you to everyone who joined the fun and made a difference.