

Generations

Easter traditions from around the world

Today is Easter Sunday for a great many readers and, aside from the holiness of the holiday and the true reason we celebrate, my memories go back to when us gals used to wear traditional Easter bonnets to church.

Mom always tuned in to the Easter Parade on TV to watch New Yorkers and out-of-town, bonnet-clad ladies walk from Fifth Avenue (49th Street) to 57th Street.

There would be colored cellophane baskets for us kids to wake up to on the kitchen table with that green confetti grass in the bottom that would find its way all over the house. The colorful straw baskets would be filled with jelly beans, marshmallow ducks; and a large, hollow chocolate bunny that we would have to hide from Dad.

Once we tore open the cellophane and snuck in a jelly bean or two, it was time to hunt for the brightly colored, hard-boiled, two dozen eggs that Mom hid and Dad cautioned that we had better find or risk a pungent odor in the air after a couple of days. Egg salad then became our staple for school lunch.

I did the same for my kids, but I wonder how people in other countries celebrate the holiday and, courtesy of a Women's Day article written by Alexis Hobbs, here's a couple that I thought were interesting.

Beginning with Florence, Italy. The locals celebrate a 350-year-old Easter tradition known as Scoppio del Carro, or "explosion of the cart." An ornate cart packed with fireworks is led through the streets of the city by people in colorful,

15th-century costumes before stopping outside the main church;



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the Archbishop of Florence then lights a fuse during Easter Mass that leads outside to the cart and sparks a lively fireworks display.

The meaning behind the custom dates back to the First Crusade and is meant to ensure a good harvest.

Children in Finland dress up like witches and go begging for chocolate eggs in the streets with made-up faces and scarves around their heads, carrying bunches of willow twigs decorated with feathers.

Pouring water on one another is a Polish Easter tradition. On Easter Monday, boys try to drench other people with buckets of water, squirt guns or anything they can get their hands on. Legend says girls who get soaked will marry within the year. The tradition has its origins in the baptism of Polish Prince Mieszko on Easter Monday in 966 AD.

Don't forget to carry a fork if you're in the southern town of Haux, France, on Easter Monday. Each year, a giant omelet is served up in the town's main square. The omelet uses more than 4,500 eggs and feeds up to 1,000 people. The story goes that when Napoleon and his army were traveling through the south of France, they stopped in a small town and ate omelets. Napoleon liked his so much that he ordered the townspeople to gather their eggs and make a giant omelet for his army

the next day, and the tradition lives on today.

And don't stand under a window on the morning of Holy Saturday on the Greek island of Corfu, because it's time for the traditional "pot throwing" ceremonies. Everyone throws pots, pans and other earthenware out their windows, smashing them on the street. Some say the custom derives from the Venetians, who on New Year's Day used to throw out all of their old items. Others believe the throwing of the pots welcomes spring, symbolizing the new crops that will be gathered in the new pots.

"Sprinkling," a popular Hungarian Easter tradition, is observed on Easter Monday, which is also known as "Ducking Monday." Boys playfully sprinkle perfume or perfumed water on girls. Young men used to pour buckets of water over young women's heads, but now they spray perfume, cologne or just plain water, and ask for a kiss. People used to believe that water had a cleaning, healing and fertility-inducing effect.

Thank goodness our kids only munch on jelly beans and don't take to buckets of water or expensive perfume, because parents would be refereeing a kerfuffle or two after Jack threw a bucket of water at Jill, who worked for hours to get the perfect mussed-up hairdo so popular today.

And on that note, happy Easter, everyone.

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