

The Importance of Slovak Cultural Heritage

Traditions are what keep every culture alive and thriving in today's world. They define a lifestyle and help others to open up their minds and see what else has been going on around the world. Many people in America have families that come from all around the globe and they all keep up their own traditions so that they never forget where they came from. Slovaks are no different; we live so far away from our home country and the only way to feel back at home is to keep doing the things that were done throughout history. If Slovak families didn't have traditions, everyone would completely forget their past and the once thriving culture will soon dwindle.

Slovakia is such a small country and some people in America still don't know that it is independent of the Czech Republic. Some people don't seem to care what is going on all around world, especially in small countries, and traditions change that. In order for everyone to realize that there are important things that happen outside of North America, cultural heritage has to be taught and people need to be open to learn about other cultures. If Slovaks don't educate others and do at least a few things like they are still being done in Slovakia, our culture will be lost and no one will remember how people used to live.

It's very important for me to have family traditions because I didn't grow up in Slovakia and I don't know how it felt to be raised on a completely different continent. My parents moved to California with my sister more than 20 years ago and I am the only person in my entire family to be born outside of Slovakia. Sometimes the fact that I was born in America makes me feel as if I was raised in a much different way than the rest of family. Later on I learned that my parents raised me almost as any other child in Slovakia would be. My parents read me books in Slovak, cooked meals like my grandmother did, and taught me the language of my ancestors so that I could talk to the rest of my family. If my parents didn't teach me things that they did back home, I would be growing up fully American and with absolutely no knowledge of how my family was brought up.

As society around us is changing, Slovakia can enrich the rest of the world with deep-rooted family values and hard work principles. These characteristics were born and nourished from the difficult life conditions of our ancestors. The fact that Slovakia was not ruled by it's own people for most of history meant that rugged

individualism was needed just to survive. I think a lot of people in the world could use this distinguished quality today. As a Catholic nation, religion played a big role in Slovak history and helped the people get through hard times. There would be a lot of happier and better people if they followed the faith based lifestyle of our ancestors and lived with good family values.

On a personal level, I am glad that my parents try to keep most of the traditions that they grew up with. Starting with small things like opening Christmas presents on Christmas Eve instead of Christmas morning and eating traditional Slovak foods; then moving on to larger things like speaking the Slovak language at home. My friends are constantly asking me about our traditions and how to say some Slovak words which makes me feel like I really am keeping our cultural heritage. I know many Slovak teenagers who don't know how to speak the language and I'm glad that my parents made sure I became a fluent speaker. I benefit from this by easily being able to communicate with the rest of my family and also knowing that it can help me with future careers in business. Maintaining my Slovak cultural heritage has helped me learn more about my past and will hopefully help me throughout the rest of my life.

Cultural heritage can easily be lost if new generations don't keep their traditions alive. It is important for younger generations to preserve their heritage so that no one will ever forget where they came from and how their ancestors lived. I want to be able to tell people how my parents grew up and how things used to be in Slovakia and that's why I think it's important to preserve our culture.

Thank you for allowing me to take part in this scholarship contest and for taking the time to read my entry.