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Oh, the memories

Some of the things that make Christmas memorable to children as they grow older are the customs which frequently are associated with nationalities.

While the American traditions of Christmas trees, Santa Claus, stockings, Christmas cards and mistletoe have combined to be uniquely American, few Christmas festivals are complete without the added touches which many Americans have brought with them from Europe, Africa and other foreign lands.

Although Christmas usually is celebrated on Dec. 25 — even by America's foreign-born — Christmas celebrations in many European countries begin Dec. 6, the Day of St. Nicholas.

Czech and Slovak children believe that on that day St. Mikulas, as he is called, descends from heaven on a golden rope and wanders the earth rewarding good children and admonishing those who have been bad.

The children hang their stockings outside or near the window so that when Mikulas passes by he can drop gifts into them.

Among German children, St. Nicholas Day is a day of gift giving. The night before Dec. 6, children

hang their stockings or put a shoe in front of the window. In the morning it is found stuffed with marzipan, nuts, cookies and other sweets.

As part of the Polish custom, Dec. 6 also retains importance. On that day, St. Nicholas, dressed in the clothes of a bishop and accompanied by an angel and a devil, goes from house to house.

He tests the children's knowledge of the catechism and of their prayers and inquires as to their behavior. Children whose behavior has been unsatisfactory are admonished and put on probation until Christmas.

In the United States, the custom of having St. Nicholas visit the home is seldom practiced. Instead, Polish children write letters to St. Nicholas telling him what they want for Christmas. The letters are placed on the window sill or by the fireplace where he can get to them easily.

Despite the popularity of St. Nicholas Day, Christmas Eve and Christmas celebrations have assumed even a greater number of traditions which are adhered to by America's foreign-born. The common bond among most nationalities

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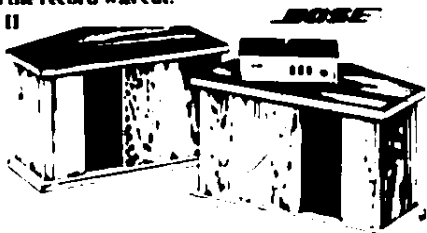
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