



Sons of Norway
HERITAGE PROGRAMS



MiniPresentation58

ROMJULA

Romjula

In Norway there is a special word for the period between Christmas and the New Year. It is called *romjula* (ROHM'yuh'lah). For most modern-day Norwegians, romjula means vacation time—or at least shorter workdays than usual. It means that families have an opportunity to spend some time together in addition to the often- hectic Christmas holidays. It means that people—that is, those who live south of the Arctic Circle—have an opportunity to enjoy the very few hours of light that a Nordic midwinter day can offer. Unless you have experienced a Scandinavian winter, you don't know what a difference a few hours of daylight can make!

Norwegian children spend most of that time outdoors, trying out Christmas presents such as skates, skis, sleds and similar winter equipment. Families go skiing together, taking advantage of the Christmas snow and their holiday leisure time. It is becoming more and more common for families who own cabins to go to their cabin for the holidays. For years, a Norwegian's idea of the perfect Christmas setting has been out in the country—to get back to one's roots and traditions and a simple, contemplative lifestyle. Maybe in the future, Norwegians will yearn for a Christmas in a little cabin in the woods, on the hillside or by a mountain lake, especially as an increasing number of Norwegians lose their direct ties to a family farm or a special rural district.

But Norwegian city dwellers have brought some of the old farm traditions with them into the city. Christmas foods such as *porkribbe*, torsk and *lutefisk* still hold their own against turkey and other fashionable foods. The traditional sheaf of grain set up for birds is still found in every second backyard in Norway. And still, Norwegian children get excited in the romjula period because they can dress up and go *julebuk* (YUH'leh'book). They band together in giggling ecstasy, disguised by masks and strange clothes, working hard to change their voices in order not to be recognized by the neighbors and friends they visit.

The fact that romjula, to a large extent, has become vacation time in Norway is very much in line with the old tradition that romjula was a time for fun and play and parties. But especially in earlier times, there were certain social rules to observe. Under no circumstances was the Christmas peace to be disturbed. All living beings were to be well provided for. Crime committed during the holiday season was subject to especially severe punishment. No work involving turning wheels was allowed. This had to do with the pre-Christian belief that the turning of wheels might hinder the turning of the sun around winter solstice.

Southeastern Norway has a delightful romjul-tradition which is adopted from Sweden. In Romjula the “star boys” make their rounds. Groups of boys dressed in white and wearing tall pointed hats go around from house to house, carrying an illuminated star on a long stick. In some areas it is common that the star boys sing a certain traditional song. In other areas they recite a traditional verse. But in modern Norway, the star boys' tradition has to a large extent been

overpowered by the julebukkk tradition. Maybe today's Norwegian kids think it is more fun to dress up for incognito visits, giggle a lot and make a racket. Or maybe the fact that the julebukks are entitled to a treat has something to do with it.

Whatever tradition people prefer, Romjula is a time for great fun. The period doesn't last as long as it used to, though! In the good old days, romjula ended on the twelfth day of Christmas. Since New Year's Day marks the end of romjula as it is perceived today, you only have a couple of days left to enjoy it. So have fun!