NEW YEAR TRADITIONS
As a kid, Jimmy remembers feasts on New Year’s Eve which included special foods like goose, taro, tofu soup, oysters, lettuce and tay (sweet pastry.) New Year’s Day started with a bang. “They have fireworks,” Jimmy recalls, “at 5 or 6 o’clock in the morning!”

Parents and grandparents also gave children red envelopes with money inside, along with a traditional greeting of good luck and prosperity: gung hay faat choy.

In China, the new year is based on the lunar calendar, which follows the phases of the moon. Chinese New Year falls on the second new moon after the winter solstice, which occurs between mid-January and mid-February.

In Jimmy’s village, the celebration lasted for days. Family members took time off work to be home for the holidays. On the second day of the year, a lion dance was performed to scare bad spirits away and bring prosperity to local businesses. The holiday often ended with a parade led by a dragon, one of the 12 animals in the Chinese zodiac. The dragon is believed to bring wisdom and good fortune in the coming year.

BEING UNIQUELY AMERICAN
When Jimmy came to the U.S., he joined the Wong Family Association, a social network that helped Chinese immigrants adapt to their new country. The group hosted an annual New Year’s Eve banquet on December 31, and celebrated again for Lunar New Year.

Jimmy continued many traditions from his village, which he celebrates to this day. In 2014, Chinese New Year falls on January 31. Jimmy looks forward to spending it with several generations of his family, including his great-grandchildren, and handing out lots of lucky red envelopes!

LOOKING AT YOUR OWN FAMILY TRADITIONS
What family traditions do you celebrate? Next time you observe a family tradition, make sure you ask your parents or an elder in the family about the history and meaning behind the celebration!