Making ‘Pysanka’ – A Ukrainian Easter Egg
By Elena Morrow, MIS Analyst/Supervisor

Every year before Easter, I get an ‘itch’ to follow my grandma’s Ukrainian tradition of coloring Easter eggs. I look at my family’s last year’s creations, I weigh the success to failure ratio, I sigh, and then I tell myself that this time I’m going to get it right! I get my kids & husband excited about this fun activity, and we start preparations.

Decorating eggs by using a wax-resist process is no easy task. This is not your regular ‘mix water, dye & vinegar’ five-minute adventure, it is an all-day event. So, we find something interesting to watch on TV, get our dye mixtures ready (five to six cups with different colors), cover the table & kitchen floor with newspapers, and pull out the wax, candles & ‘kistka’ (stylus).

In the old days, women decorated eggs at night, in secret - the patterns and color combinations were handed down from mother to daughter and carefully guarded. Today, there are very few people left in the world, who can create a perfect pattern. So, in most Ukrainian families it is a fun family activity with no secrets to guard.

The real ‘pysanka’ or decorated egg has to be hollow. Two small holes are made at each end of the egg; then the yolk is blown out (great time for omelets!). After the eggshell is washed & dried, some hot wax is applied to both holes to close them up. This is done with the stylus – a bit of beeswax is placed inside the wider end of the stylus, which is then heated above the candle flame. Once the holes are covered, the same process is used to make patterns on the eggshell itself. Any bit of shell covered with wax will remain white. Then the egg is dyed yellow, and more wax applied, and then orange, red, purple, black. The dye sequence is always light to dark. After the final color, usually red, brown or black, the wax is removed by heating the egg in the stove and gently wiping off the melted wax, or by briefly dipping the egg into boiling water.

Like any art that involves patterns, the most difficult part of making ‘pysanka’ is to keep the lines of your pattern straight. The masters of pysanka-making use a machine that holds their eggshells in place & spins them slowly. Unfortunately, I do not have such a machine, therefore my kids’ designs are nowhere near the straight lines – they make circles, dots, flowers, etc., which is completely fine with me (it’s the process that’s important, not the end result!). After about the third color (you have to dip the egg in each color for 5-10 minutes for it to take hold & then wait for it to dry) my kids have abandoned the whole affair & are nowhere to be found. My husband will usually last to make one egg, and then he suddenly finds an emergency project in the yard. So, year after year I am left with several unfinished pysankas & beeswax drippings all over the floor. But I don’t mind – like any traditional art form, this one requires a lot of time, patience & persistence. I know that on Easter morning my family will marvel at the beautiful color arrangement, made up of pysanka eggs & traditional Easter bread.
The Story of Passover

Perhaps the best known of the Jewish holidays, the splendid festival known as Passover has a rich and fascinating history. The origin of Passover relates back to over 3,000 years ago when the Pharaoh of Egypt enslaved Israelites about 3000 years ago. The Pharaoh was known as Ramses II and was very cruel and harsh to his slaves. Haggadah, the Book of Exodus, mentions that Moses who was a simple Jewish shepherd felt deeply for the downtrodden conditions of his brother. God instructed him to go to the Pharaoh and demand the freedom of his people. However, Pharaoh ignored his plea. Moses once again warned Pharaoh of the God's wrath but Pharaoh turned a deaf ear to him. God then unleashed a series of 10 terrible plagues on the people of Egypt, one by one and after each punishment, Moses again repeated his plea to the Pharaoh. These plagues were: the water of River Nile turned into blood, frogs, lice (vermin), wild beasts (flies), blight (cattle disease), boils, hail, locusts, darkness, slaying of the first born.

The first nine plagues only served to daunt the Pharaoh’s wild spirit but were unable to make him submit to the will of God. Finally, God ordered the Hebrew slaves to make a sacrifice of the lamb in the Holy Temple of Jerusalem and mark their doors with the blood of the lamb, as an indication to the God to ‘pass over’ their houses while slaying the first born males of the Egyptians. Hebrews followed the word of God and thus, their first born males were saved from the tenth plague. ‘Pesach’ means ‘passing over’ or ‘protection’ in Hebrew. This calamity was a final blow to the Pharaoh and he ordered Israelites to be set free immediately and allow their passage to freedom.

In their hurry to finally be able to live free lives, Israelites did not even wait to let their dough rise and bake bread, but took raw dough instead to bake in the hot desert sun as hard crackers called Matzos on their journey. Moses led them through the desert. The angry Pharaoh sent his army to chase these ex-slaves and kill them all. But with the grace of God, Jews managed to reach the Red Sea, where they were trapped by the vast expanse of water. Moses called upon the God for assistance and suddenly Red Sea parted to give way to the Israelites and thus, they safely passed over to the other side. They were protected forever as the waves closed over the shocked army of the Pharaoh and drowned the whole army at once.

The Jewish people still hold this day dear to their hearts and they still thank the Lord for saving their ancestors the way he did. In the days before Passover, the house is prepared. The house is searched for any trace of yeast products. All products made from yeast are eaten or removed from the house, or given away. All the dishes, silverware, pots and pans are changed for a set that is used only for Passover.

In remembrance of the hardships their ancestors faced in slavery, the Jewish people hold a feast called the ‘Seder’ on the first night of Passover, a custom that has been practiced ever since the Hebrews were free from the slavery. The word ‘Seder’ stands for ‘order’ and signifies the order of historical events recalled in the Passover meal as well as the meal itself. The Seder is of a religious nature with a carefully prescribed ritual that makes the dinner quite unlike family dinners held on civil holidays. The ritual is laid out along with the main story of Passover being retold from the ‘Haggadah’, a special book that is followed during the Seder. The table is set with the finest china and silverware to reflect the importance of this meal.

Dos and Don’ts of Deaf Patient Care

Tips from UCDHS ASL Interpreters

Don’t talk to the patient with your back to a window -- The glare behind you strains the eyes of a lip-reading patient and casts a shadow over your face, making lip-reading difficult or impossible.

Don’t cover your mouth with your hands -- And don’t hold anything with your teeth when talking to a deaf patient.

Don’t turn away in the middle of a sentence -- If you turn your face away from a deaf child while saying, “This injection will make you better, and it’s not going to hurt,” the child is not going to get your message. All he will see is this person with a needle, and you might end up in a foot race for the nearest exits.

Keep your face turned to the patient while speaking -- If several people are involved in a conversation, finish what you’re saying, then turn toward the person who begins to speak. This movement clues the deaf patient to look to the person who picks up the conversation.

Don’t do anything unexpected from behind -- Your usual technique for taking vital signs must be preceded by letting the patient know you’re there. The noise of your arrival or your conversation with another patient won’t alert the deaf patient of your presence. If the patient is turned to the wall, tap on the mattress.

Don’t leave patient in complete darkness -- A deaf person relies on sight and is completely isolated in the dark. Use a night light.

Put him where he can see what’s going on -- The room opposite of nurses’ station is ideal. He can’t hear the commotion, so all he has to do is shut his eyes to rest. But when he is awake he is visually involved.

Don’t restrict a deaf patient’s hands -- Never use I.V.s in both arms. It’s like taping up a hearing person’s mouth. Leave one arm free to enable the patient to talk to you through writing or gestures. Notice whether the patient is right- or left-handed; and if possible keep that hand free.