

ON THE HORIZON

The latest news & information from Wide Horizons For Children

Happy Holidays!

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The holidays we celebrate and the way we celebrate them, are an important part of our culture. They say so much about the history, values and beliefs of the people who honor these traditions.

Many of our children, born in one culture and raised in another, have a dual identity, as in "Colombian-American" or "Ethiopian-American". Our children will learn what it means to be American through many sources; what they learn in school, their religious practice, food they eat, music they hear as well as from the everyday sights, sounds and smells that surround them.

Many American parents have immigrant grandparents, great-grandparents or great-great grandparents. We may have heard a different language spoken in our homes or celebrated holidays and eaten foods "from the old country". These were among the many ways that we learned what it meant to be Italian, Polish, Greek and so on.

Many families continue traditions that were handed down from generation to generation. For the family formed through international adoption, how will the learning of ancestral culture take place when there are no ancestors to "hand them down"?

Some parents might wonder if "birth culture" matters when their child is being raised in America. Think of it this way, your child will spend the rest of his life answering "Ethiopia, China, India, etc" when asked, "Place of birth". How many times have you been asked "place of birth" in your life time? (and you may well look similar to your parents or relatives). What if you were brown skinned and the rest of your family was light skinned? More reason to be asked, "Where were you born?" or "Where are you from?" No way around it, your child's country of birth is part of who he is.

Most celebrations are joyful...a time to eat, sing, laugh and enjoy the company of family and friends. Finding a way to bring celebrations from your child's birth culture into your family is a way of celebrating that child. It is a way of saying, "we love all of who you are".

There are many books written about the various ways that countries around the world celebrate. Many in the US are familiar with the Chinese New Year and Rosh Ha-Shanah, the Jewish New Year, but did you know about Enkutatash, the Ethiopian Orthodox New Year that celebrates new life, the blooming of maskal and the end of the rainy season?

World Book's "Celebrations and Rituals around the World" series offers a colorful look at the way a variety of cultures bring in the New Year. Follow the link below to a list of books that you may want to read with your children or use to gather ideas for ways that you can bring a celebration from your child's country of birth into your family's holiday rituals. Start a new tradition, one that is special and unique to your family! Have fun!



Wide Horizons Post Adopt Education and Support Team

***Pat ~ Barb ~ Betsey ~ Christine
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CELEBRATING FAMILY: The Role of Holiday Rituals



Most families have rituals over the holidays. Some are simple and unspoken, some are elaborate with the finest details. Some families come together and fill a house with the hustle and bustle of gifts, laughter, and high energy. Some families celebrate quietly and the peace of the season brings family members an inner, beautiful joy. However your family honors the season, the holidays are opportunities to foster attachment and build family cohesiveness and this is especially important for adoptive families. Something as simple as planning a holiday dinner menu together can pull family member into a ritual that becomes a full sensory experience. In many ways, family identity is as important as individual identity. Family identity can be like the rich soil from which your child's identity grows and develops.

This season, take a look at what your family already does, before, during and after the season. Are they experiences that involve sight, sound, touch, taste and smell? Most likely, they do. Are there ways you can build on these routines or traditions? This is the first place to start. For example, if you make ham dinner on New Year's Eve, include the kids in deciding what to make for side dishes. Plan fun kid friendly desserts that they can help with and prepare a day ahead of time with them. This gives them a sense of family, connection to the celebration, and a sensory experience in touch, smell, taste, sight, and maybe even sound (for example, playing a certain CD while baking). The richer the sensory experience, the richer the experience is and this creates an opportunity for children to connect through the activity. Even for children who are connected on deep emotional levels, sensory rich activities build wonderful memories!

There are three important types of rituals to consider including in your holiday season.

- 1. One tradition that has been passed through the generations in your family. This can be as simple as a song, a favorite dessert, or a story that is read as a family.**
Keeping one tradition alive from your family incorporates your personal heritage into your child's experience and identity. In America today, most of us have some sort of blended heritage and a ritual that recognizes your family lineage gives a strong message that history is important and everyone in the family has a heritage that is important.
- 2. One tradition from your child's country of origin. Whether you are parenting by birth, foster care, adoption, or guardianship, your child's heritage is important. Incorporate at least one tradition that honors your child's culture.**
Finding a tradition from your child's country of origin is something that many adoptive families do very well. Whether your child's lineage is rooted in the US or another country, this is especially important for children. It sends the message quite directly that your child is important and their roots are essential in the family. It can be a fun, engaging process to choose a specific ritual that honors your child's heritage.
- 3. One tradition that you create as a family. You are a unique family and creating a ritual together is not only fun but is also very important. Pick something that represents the whole family and be sure to have each member of the family contribute ideas.**
A tradition that you create as a family: what fun! Enjoy this one and consider many possibilities. Together, discuss the options. This can be simple or elaborate. Think about what your family enjoys the most. Are you an active family or creative and artistic? Is making cookies or creating home made holiday gifts something that sounds like a blast? Or, going on a sleigh ride and cutting down the holiday tree more exciting? Putting on your favorite family holiday music and reading together one evening? The possibilities are endless.

There are a wide variety of resources, in print and on the web, to help you create holiday family rituals. Bring rituals into the holiday; a fun but playful way to bring family together and a foolproof way to build stronger connections.

References

Everyday Traditions: Simple Family Rituals for Connection and Comfort, by Nava Atlas, 2005

Rituals for Holidays & Everyday, by Meg Cox (Author), Sarah McMenemy (Illustrator), 2003

I Love You Rituals, by Becky A. Bailey, 2000

www.familyfun.com

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/holiday/factsfun.htm>

www.adoption.about.com

One Family's Holiday

Holidays are a special time... family gathers around and traditions begin. TRADITIONS... that magical word that can result in the creation of memories. Memories that we want for our children so they can always look back on them, smile, and reminisce.

Upon choosing adoption, our family motto has become a quote from Maya Angelou:

"Families are held together by choice. Members are alike and unlike yet there is comfort in the sameness and excitement in the differences. When we respect and relish BOTH conditions we can call ourselves FAMILY."

That said, how do we respect our family and our nationalities? In the beginning we started out simply with food and we incorporated them into our holidays. We celebrate Christmas with the Seven Fishes meal to honor my Italian roots. We added Korean foods such as Kimchi and Bulgogi (YUM!). And our family members (immediate and extended) have quickly come to crave bulgogi! The next year we added a little music to the mix: Italian, English, and Korean. It grew from there. Santa now brings our children a Korean gift each year and it is usually something that the whole family can share and grow from. The children have received Korean books, games, name chops, maps, and musical instruments honoring their heritage. We now seek out special Korean festivals during the holidays to attend. It usually means a little traveling, but it is all well worth it. We all gain so much from it. And it has resulted in us wanting to join in on festivities celebrating a variety of nationalities! Last year we were so excited to have been told about a special Christmas event going on at the Korean Presbyterian Church in Hopkinton. We were filled with Christmas spirit and joy from the Korean community.

This year we are creating a special Christmas tree with Korean flags, colors, and ornaments. We are having fun creating some of the ornaments ourselves! While some things remain as a tradition, we have begun to incorporate Korean music, books, games, and food into our every day lives. We have tried to learn some Korean songs to also sing along with our traditional American songs. And the children have begun to help us write letters to their birth families.

The holiday season is such a magical time filled with hopes and dreams of the children. For our family, this is an opportune time to commemorate their beginning place.

Happy Holidays!
The Powers Family

BOOK IDEAS: Celebrations Around the World

Celebrating Birthdays in China and Celebrating Birthdays in Russia by Cheryl Enderlein, 1998

A Calendar of Holidays of the World, by Cherry Gilchrist, 2006

Celebrations Around the World: A Multicultural Handbook, by Carole S. Angell, 1996

Kids Around the World Celebrate: The Best Feasts and Festivals from Many Lands, by Lynda Jones, 1999

Children Just Like Me: Celebrations!, by Anabel and Barnaby Kindersley, 1997

Totline Small World Celebrations: Around-the-World Holidays to Celebrate with Young Children, by Jean Warren, Elizabeth McKinnon, Marion Ekberg, 1988

Celebrations of Light: A Year of Holidays Around the World, by Nancy Luenn, 1998

Birthdays Around the World, by Mary Lankford, 2002

Christmas Around the World, by Mary Lankford, Karen Dugan, Irene Norman, 1998

Celebrate! Connections among Cultures, by Jan Reynolds, 2006

World Book's 'Celebrations and Rituals around the World' Series: New Year's Celebrations, by Alison Milbank, 2002

Resources for purchasing books online:

Children of the World — www.childrenoftheworld.biz

Barefoot Books Stallholder — www.barefootbooks.wordpress.com

BOOK REVIEW: The Marvelous Journey Home

Written by John Simmons

Review written by Vicki Peterson, LICSW

In his book "The Wonderful Journey Home," John Simmons has written what he describes as a "thinly veiled" work of semi-fiction based on the adoption of two children that he and his wife brought home from Russia in 2005. Mr.



Simmons has written a credible and heartwarming story that conveys many of the challenges experienced during an adoption process. The story is told from the vantage point of the adoptive couple, Mike and Laura Knight as well as through the eyes of the two little girls they eventually adopt, Katya and Luba.

The story begins at five year old Katya's Russian orphanage. Simmons aptly describes the living conditions in this facility and the different personalities of caretakers, ranging from attentive and loving to aloof, cold and threatening. In reality, this range of care is not uncommon. The author deserves praise for not painting a picture that is black and white, but rather a range of colors.

While trying to care for many children, the truth is pointed out - most orphanages deal with understaffing, little funding and poor medical care. Yet, even with such conditions, orphanages have caretakers like Sophia, the tenderhearted care giver who has an affectionate nickname for

little Katya and tries impressing her with hope for the future. Then, too, there is the gruff Nastya, who doesn't want children to waste her time or look forward to a better future. She reminds Katya that parents are hoping to adopt a "perfect child" and this little girl with a burn scar on her body doesn't meet those qualifications. "There's less disappointment that way," she tells young Katya.

As the story progresses, Simmons touches on all aspects of the pre-adoption process, from the anxiety of prospective parents, to meetings with a social worker, filling out endless paperwork, and the challenge of producing required documentation for inter-country adoption. Written in 2006, factual information in the story given by the Knight's social worker, Kristin, is not completely current with what is happening today because so many changes have occurred during the past two years. Nevertheless, Simmons has put together a well scripted and mostly true-to-life story that portrays inter-country adoption as most people would still experience it, with its many ups and downs. To characterize it in an overused but accurate phrase, it's an "emotional roller coaster ride."

Like many who adopt a child from Russia, the Knights go through the turmoil and grief of not being able to adopt the first child presented to them. Also, like many others in real life, they become more flexible in their willingness to consider children outside the range of a healthy baby. The same can be said of hurdles they go through during the adoption process in Russia, where they meet up with unexpected challenges. There's the unfriendly and suspicious judge, inaccurate paperwork, and bureaucratic last-minute requirements that drive the husband from impatience to anger. As anyone knows who has adopted or worked in the field, this is a true-to-life portrayal of what can occur during an inter-country adoption. On a more positive note, the Knights meet up with many helpful, warm-hearted Russian people and are successful in bringing into their family two wonderful daughters who fit in well and bond closely with their new parents, brothers, and other family members.

Towards the end of the story, there is much written that leads up to the death of a grandparent. I would have ended the story earlier. It seems extraneous and has a religious bent that may not have much interest or appeal for many readers. There are also a few rough edges in the story. Russian words are not translated for the reader. I was aware of a lack of explanation regarding a name transition for the youngest daughter after arrival in the U.S. The book appears to be self-published, which may account for what appears to be a lack of more careful editing. Nevertheless, Simmons is a good writer and up until close to the end, he keeps the story flowing well.

Because Simmons has written a book based on his own recent experiences adopting from Russia, what is missing from this story are long-range post adoption issues that are a normal, expected part of the process. I would be interested in an update of this story further down the road. Will the children have any learning disabilities when they are in school and if so, do they receive help? Will they have any adolescent identity issues, as experienced by many adoptees? How will Katya deal with the knowledge that she has older birth siblings in Russia and will she want to do a search for them? What about other long-range and complex adoption issues that may develop as children grow up?

For the most part, "The Marvelous Journey Home" is a splendid and realistic description of one family's experience during a heartwarming, tug-at-your-heartstrings, Russian adoption process. It will have particular appeal for those starting their adoption journey. It's a worthwhile read and will help people understand and prepare for the journey ahead.

The book can be purchased through www.whiteknightpublish.com.

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