

The uncharted
journey of our first
Christmas together
etched a road of
heart-warming
traditions

We've Always Done It That Way

by Rose Godfrey

When we stepped off the airplane in San Francisco, we had two goals: to take showers and to collapse into comfortable beds. But our long-term goal was more important: We wanted to become a family. Technically, we were—we had filled out mounds of paperwork, met with the social worker, flown to Russia, met our children, talked to the judge, taken the requisite picture in front of St. Basil's, and flown home. Now we were here, charting a future on an unknown course.

Parents of infants and toddlers find that traditions develop as the children grow. But Katia and Edward, then 10 and 9, were our first children. They plopped into our lives with no more of an idea of how to become a family than we had, but we quickly learned that they yearned to be a part of something larger than themselves.

The children soon discovered the colorful flyers that arrive with the Sunday newspaper. Each weekend, sprawled out in the living room and surrounded by ads for toys, they looked for the best deals. As Christmas approached, they clued me in on where to find these great bargains. For Edward, that meant a Buzz Lightyear.

Ed had discovered a talking Buzz at the store, and he chattered enthusiastically in Russian and English while he tested all the features. When he saw the \$30 price tag, he became quiet. "Too much," he declared. Time went by as he continued scanning the flyers for a lower price until, one day, he came up with plan B. Ed marched into the living room and announced: "Mama, you no worry Buzz," with a proud smile. "Me ask Santa." Then he sat down and wrote a letter.

The kids wrote a lot in those first few months. We were eager to preserve their memories, to validate, as best we could, the part of their lives they left behind. I suggested that they write autobiographies, which became treasured gifts for family and friends.

With the help of a translator, I explained that they would be writing the story of their lives, and that they could start at any point and go from there. Katia's life story began on the day she was dropped off at the orphanage. For my son, the beginning of his history was the day his Mama and Papa arrived at the orphanage to take him home to America.

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They drew a series of pictures depicting the most important events of their lives, then dictated to me the story behind each one. I typed their words into the computer. Together, we went back over each page, and I rewrote their stories in Standard English. Along the way, I checked the concept of each sentence, to make sure I was accurately recording the story they intended to tell. Because their ability to understand was far beyond their ability to speak, they were able to confirm or change any part of the story. I scanned their artwork into the computer and pasted their words at the top and my translation at the bottom. Finally, we made copies, and Edward and Katia bound them into books. For the first time, they had Christmas gifts to give.

Every year, my husband, Brian, sang in a Christmas ensemble at our church. Practice and performance took up precious family time. As we got busier and busier, we found it easier to do all of the preparations ourselves and shoo Ed and Katia outside to play. There was not much the children could do to help prepare our Christmas dinner, featuring complex recipes handed down from my husband's Italian grandmother.

Our son was especially hurt by this, and on Christmas Eve his frustration boiled over. My sweet, loving boy became angry and refused to be comforted. He mustered enough English to proclaim that he was going back to Russia. He had done without Christmas before, he yelled, and he could do it again. Hours of tears, hugs, and reassurance restored my son enough to join us in making fudge. Mouth and heart full, he then returned to his flag football game.

On our arrival home from the church service, we added a new family tradition. We prepared hot chocolate and cookies, turned down the lights, and sat together on the floor around the Christmas tree. My husband read the Christmas story from the second chapter of Luke in the Bible, the lights from the tree illuminating the text.

The next morning it took two hours to open all the presents. Many people wanted to be a part of this first Christmas for the children, and had dropped off gifts in order to make this a memorable day. Ed eagerly tore into the gifts from Santa, only to find that the man in the red suit had let him down. There was no talking Buzz. And then something amazing happened. He opened a gift from his new Mama and Papa and there it was: a Buzz Lightyear of his own! It was the proof he needed. He was loved.

One year later, the children were again looking forward to Christmas, but this time they were confident, both in their place in the family and in what to expect. I overheard my son explaining Christmas Eve to a neighbor. "First we'll go to church," he said, "then we'll come home, and Grandma and Grandpa will come over. After that we'll sit by the tree and have hot chocolate and cookies, and Dad will read from the Bible." He paused a moment, then continued, "We've always done it that way."

Rose Godfrey lives in California. Her family has grown to include seven great kids—so far.

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Post-Adoption Services

has more resources @

www.parentsplaceonline.org/resource-library

Library additions (check 'em out)

Raising Children Compassionately

Parenting the Nonviolent Communication Way,
by Marshall B. Rosenberg, PH.D.

and

In Their Own Voices:

Transracial Adoptees Tell Their Stories,
by Rita J. Simon & Rhonda M. Roorda

These books and many more are available
to check out from our library. Stop by anytime and
browse or ask our staff for recommendations.

Post-Adoption Services
sends a warm

THANK YOU
TO:



for their generous contributions to our
events! They are open to the public for lunch
and dinner and offer catering and banquets
at exceptional prices.

1100 Valley House Drive, Rohnert Park
707-665-9472

Post-Adoption Services Celebrated National Adoption Month at Forget Me Not Farm





Post-Adoption Press

Serving families formed by adoption in Sonoma, Lake, Mendocino and Napa Counties

Winter 2011/2012 Calendar

Petaluma Parent Support Group: First Tuesday of each month, 5:45 – 7:45 pm, at B'nai Israel Jewish Center

December 2: *The Power of Positive Parenting*, a Triple P seminar with Amy McIntyre, MA

January 6: *Raising Confident, Competent Children*, a Triple P seminar with Amy McIntyre, MA

February 3: *Raising Resilient Children*, a Triple P seminar with Amy McIntyre, MA

Santa Rosa Parent Support Group: Third Wednesday of each month, 5:45 – 7:45 pm (Free childcare)

December 21: *Circle of Security*, an attachment-based approach to understanding the needs of children

January 18: *Touchpoints*, a presentation by Mary Hirsch, MFT on behavioral and emotional development

February 15: *Trauma, Brain and Relationship: Helping Children Heal*, DVD and discussion

First Fridays for Teens: Monthly social activities for teens, 6:00 – 8:00 pm with pizza and snacks!

Third Fridays Teen Movie Night: Monthly showing of PG/PG-13 rated movie for teens, 6:00 – 8:00 pm with popcorn!

Socialization Group for Young Children (6 – 9): Help children develop healthy social skills and talk about adoption. Ten sessions on Tuesdays 3:30 to 5:00 pm starting January 24 and ending March 27.

Creating Your Child's Lifebook (parents only): Create a Lifebook for your adopted child. Two Monday evenings per month, 3/5, 3/19, 4/2, 4/16, 4/30, 5/14, 5/21, 6/4, 6/18, & 7/2, 5:30 - 7:30 pm. Required Introductory meeting February 6.

**Please call Liz Jimenez (707-303-1509) for more information or to sign up for the above groups! RSVP required
Unless otherwise noted, all events take place at Parents Place, 1360 N. Dutton Ave., Suite C, Santa Rosa**

Post Adoption Services are funded through a grant from California State Department of Social Services Post Adoption Services @ Parents Place (PAS) offers a variety of services for families formed by adoption. From one-to-one crisis intervention and counseling to support groups for children and parents, we have something to support you and your children. We also provide parent and professional trainings on a variety of topics throughout the year to help build skills and knowledge regarding adoption related issues. Our goal is to be here as a resource for you and your family. We have a free lending library filled with informative books on a variety of parenting, adoption and attachment issues. Our staff and clinicians are knowledgeable and caring. **MSW Intern Carla Schwarz has joined Post Adoptive Services and has a number of services available. If interested please call her directly at 303-1526.**

Post Adoption Services at Parents Place
1360 North Dutton Ave. Suite C
Santa Rosa, CA 95401



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