

If we believe parenting manuals...

Janet Eldred
English, University of Kentucky

If we believe parenting manuals, there's a long list of issues we need to talk with our children about: drugs, alcohol, smoking, sex, and AIDs. To these duties find that as an adoptive parent, I'm expected to add one more: "adoption issues," including because we adopted internationally, "heritage."

At the beginning, all the heritage projects seemed to me recipes for success, so I did them, faithfully, religiously. Since then, I've lapsed, fallen into sacrilege. Here's what really goes on inside our house. Occasionally, we'll listen to a tape or flip through a book we can't read. More frequently, the books and tapes sit, collecting dust with all our other "collectibles." Our language lessons, after a pretty good start, have come to a pretty good halt. We plan to resume them "when we have time."

I confess, I might be questioning the whole heritage project because I'm not very good at it. I'm fascinated by Russian history and language and culture, but, I'm fascinated by many things as is evidenced by the number of aborted projects in my home: the vintage suit I cut out but never sewed, the dog who's half-trained, the bird who doesn't talk, the multiple book projects half-written (or "in process," as I prefer to say).

But maybe, maybe, in my defense, I have been slovenly because somewhere along the line, I lost faith, began to question the heritage project, or at least the paint-by-numbers kind of heritage project I adopted. I'm a parent by choice, an academic by trade, so maybe some of this questioning is simply the knee-jerk kind of intellectual theorizing most academics do whenever they feel something remotely disturbing. (We read and discuss like other people pop pills. Sometimes we do both.) Still, in my defense, I know

I'm not alone as an adoptive parent; I know I'm not the only heritage project failure.

Why else would the Russian official during our second adoption make me repeatedly confirm that I would dutifully send post-placement reports. "Not just stories," he emphasized, "facts. Like facts from doctors. Teachers." . . .