FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Picture Books

Rebecca's Journey Home
Brynn Olenberg Sugarman
Michelle Shapiro, illustrator
Kar-Ben Publishing
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Any day now Jacob and Gabriel Stein will be big brothers! The yearlong adoption process has finally come to a fruitful end. “Is today the day?” they wonder, fully aware that their mother’s suitcase has been packed for several weeks awaiting her trip to Vietnam to pick up their infant sister. When the family meets Le Thi Hong, they decide to give her an English name, Rebecca Rose. After her conversion to Judaism, she is also given a Hebrew name, Rivka Shoshanah. “She was Vietnamese, American, and Jewish. ‘And she’ll be many more things someday,’” her mother assures the family.

Based on the author’s experience adopting a Vietnamese baby, this debut picture book tackles the complexity of racial, cultural, and ethnic identity within a warm, reassuring family unit. The author earned a B.A. degree in creative writing from the State University of New York’s Binghamton University and an M.A. in English literature from Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She has published poetry in a number of journals.

Whether depicting a close-knit family welcoming Shabbat, two brothers beaming with pride while looking at photos of their baby sister, or a father embracing his daughter as she prepares for the mikvah, the ritual bath, the pastel-colored cartoon-like illustrations convey excitement, anticipation, and affection. The few scenes in Vietnam are questionable, however, as most of the characters appear to look alike. The illustrator holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Florida. She has provided art for newspapers, magazines, and corporations, and she illustrated the cover of *The Mommy Chronicles: Conversations Sharing the Comedy and Drama of Pregnancy and New Motherhood*

Rebecca’s birth parents are not mentioned specifically, but the text does state: “There were so many babies and children in the world whose parents had loved them but could not take care of them.” There is a vague reference to an orphanage in Vietnam and to Mrs. Stein’s

“touring the country and shopping for interesting gifts” while she waited for the baby. When she meets Rebecca, the illustrations depict love at first sight.

Rebecca’s Journey Home joins the ranks of other heartfelt adoption stories such as *Tell Me Again about the Night I Was Born*, *Allison*, and *We Wanted You*. The family’s devotion to religious practices and affirmation of various aspects of Rebecca’s identity makes this an important story to share with children. Its messages about unconditional love and the beauty of diversity will console adopted and biological children alike.

Kaavonia Hinton