



The Perfect Blend

My husband and I come from very different backgrounds, but we're bent on raising our son to appreciate every aspect of who he is. **by WANDA MEDINA**

BEFORE I became a mom, my Latina credentials left much to be desired. When I was growing up, my parents emphasized the importance of keeping our Hispanic heritage alive, and I loved our Cuban-Puerto Rican traditions, but I often yearned to be as American as the blue-eyed, blonde-haired girls in my hometown of Yonkers, New York. I wanted to fit in with my social circle of mostly Anglo friends—so, like them, I'd zone out to American television and music, and I'd bury my nose in Nancy Drew mysteries. As I got older, I spoke Spanish only with elder family members out of respect, and I rarely cooked a Latino meal.

But the second my son, Augustus, was born, almost three years ago, my husband, Eric—who is of Italian, Irish, and Norwegian descent—and I decided to bring him up in a bilingual environment. While he's essentially being raised by two

burger-loving, English-speaking Americans, we immediately made an effort to maintain our family traditions—I began soothing Augustus with the same Spanish lullabies my mother sang to me when I was an infant, such as “Arroz con Leche” and “Duermete Mi Niño.” Because I’m fluent in Spanish, Eric and I agreed that I would speak to the baby in español

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and read him both *Goodnight Moon* and *Buenas Noches Luna*, *The Giving Tree* and *El Árbol Generoso*, and that Eric would amuse him with elaborate tales of his Viking and emperor ancestors. As we began hosting family functions, our meals became a mishmash of flavors from opposite sides of the globe: *pasteles* and *pasta*, *lechón* and leg of lamb, *flan* and *cannolis*.

But immersing a child in this medley of cultures doesn’t come without its dilemmas. When I hear Augustus speak in English with that familiar Spanish accent—the same one that occasionally made me the target of mean-spirited kids—I agonize that he’ll be teased if he says “jello” instead of “yellow” or “sangwich” instead of “sandwich.” But I know that the benefits of raising a culturally diverse child, one who is bilingual and globally aware, will outweigh any of the inherent challenges.

Thankfully, Eric and I have help carrying out our multicultural mission. My mom and dad babysit Augustus, feeding him *sopa* made with *vivero* chicken and telling him stories of their own childhoods growing up on separate islands. And my in-laws have been diligently preserving family photos and heirlooms that will help our son appreciate his European lineage.

As for any issues that may crop up, I know they’ll work themselves out. After all, I turned out okay. ●



The author, her husband, and son at the St. Patrick's Day Parade

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