

Open Forum 2

Web Site Transcript

Chapter 12

A = In-store host

B = Rachel Asher, author

A: Thank you all for coming this evening. As I'm sure you all know, our in-store guest today is Rachel Asher. Ms. Asher is currently touring the country promoting her new book, *Home Away from Home*, based on her experiences raising small children while working for a U.S. corporation overseas. Welcome!

B: Thank you.

A: Can you share with us an example of one of the stories you included in the book?

B: Certainly. One of my favorite stories occurred when my husband and I lived in Tokyo. It involves the Japanese custom of removing shoes when entering the home. We in the U.S., of course, are not normally in the practice of taking off our shoes every time we enter a house.

Now . . . most everyone in Japan and the U.S. knows about the other's customs, but that doesn't mean that your small children are prepared to deal with it . . . and more importantly, prepared to accept both traditions without judgment.

A: Right. Go on.

B: Well, we let our 5 year old know that if she visited a Japanese home for a play date—as we certainly hoped she would—that she would need to remove her shoes, which she found delightful. After a few days at her international school, she was invited over to the home of a classmate. Now, before we left the states, I had just begun to teach my daughter that the floor was dirty—that she should not fall asleep on the floor, that it wasn't a place to eat, et cetera.

A: So how did these two issues—her idea that the floor was a dirty place and the Japanese tradition of removing shoes in the house—come together?

B: Well we went to this home, and everything seemed great at the beginning. I sat down for tea with the girl's grandmother, who was a retired English teacher. A few minutes later, both girls re-appeared and mine demanded to go home . . . and announced, to my horror, that this house and her friend, were "dirty" and she couldn't stay. She and her new friend had been playing dolls, and the Japanese girl—Makiko—had gotten out her dollhouse . . . and things were great . . . until bedtime. It was then

that Makiko placed the family on the floor of their bedrooms.

A: I think I see where this is going.

B: Exactly. My daughter, of course, announced that this was dirty, and that she wasn't going to sleep on the floor. Makiko said that this is how her family slept . . . and Susan told Makiko that her family was dirty . . . and Makiko responded that people who wear their shoes in the house were dirty . . . and soon we had two very hurt and angry little girls.

A: What happened next?

B: I immediately began to explain to Susan that she couldn't say things like that, but the grandmother interrupted, gently, and suggested that we listen to why the girls thought as they did. Luckily, the grandmother took over—never underestimate the wisdom of grandmothers—and listened closely to what my daughter had to say. We realized that they hadn't thought through the reasoning behind the different traditions and ideas of cleanliness. My daughter hadn't considered the fact that because Japanese people don't wear shoes indoors, that their floors might not be as dirty. What I got from this—and what I encourage parents to apply—is that it isn't enough to be familiar with different customs . . . you need to talk with your children about how others think differently . . . and how those ways of thinking lead to different traditions and opinions. You can't cover every topic, but you can develop such open minded patterns of thinking and listening in your children.

A: And we can read this book to discover issues that other parents have dealt with, too.

B: Yes, you can.

A: Well, let's take some questions and comments from our audience . . .