

# SPOON Foundation aims to make

By Jason O'Leary

Cindy Kaplan and Mishelle Rudzinski each adopted their first child from Kazakhstan in 2006. Both were looking to start a family. But they never thought that these adoptions would also inspire the start of a groundbreaking non-profit organization. When Cindy Kaplan and her husband Tony brought home their son, Jady, he was deemed “failure to thrive” — an imprecise medical term applied when a child’s weight or weight gain is “significantly” below that of children of the same sex and age. At 8 months old, Jady weighed just 11 pounds and did not have the strength to lift his head. Doctors in the United States suspected neurological problems and were close to classifying him as a “special needs adoption.” He had endured two prolonged bouts of pneumonia in his first six months, which left him weak and severely delayed. After several months of a higher calorie diet post-adoption, Jady began to develop along a normal trajectory, albeit on a delayed schedule.

Cindy took Jady to nutritionists and feeding experts who did not have experience with adoption, and she quickly became frustrated. The standard approach for a malnourished infant is to feed a high-calorie formula, and continue it past the typical cut-off age of one year, if necessary, but Jady rejected bottle-feeding and most liquids. So, Kaplan turned to books and online adoption chat rooms and trained herself in the techniques and diet tricks that would nourish Jady out of the danger zone.

Around the time Cindy adopted Jady, she met Mishelle Rudzinski, a fellow Portlander who had also recently adopted a child from Kazakhstan. Mishelle’s daughter, Bakha, was 5 years old when she met her and so severely handicapped by an undiagnosed — and fully preventable — case of rickets and anemia, that the adoption agency made her sign papers stating she understood Bakha may

not live to age 18. Within days of adoption, Mishelle suspected rickets and began giving her a vitamin supplement. She started walking, and then running, within weeks. She grew eight inches in the first year home.

As Cindy and Mishelle’s kids began to heal, they couldn’t help but think “what if,” and felt an intense responsibility to the children left behind. They sought out volunteer opportunities but couldn’t find any organizations working to systematically change the rampant problem of malnutrition in orphanages — not in Kazakhstan or anywhere else in the world.

In 2007, a year after their families were born, Cindy and Mishelle gave birth to SPOON Foundation, a non-profit foundation that works to improve the way orphaned, fostered and adopted children around the globe are being nourished. SPOON aims to provide orphans and adoptees with the nutrition they need to grow and thrive, to push research in the little-studied field and to influence nutrition policies and procedures for institutionalized children around the globe.

Since its inception, SPOON has collaborated with a renowned team of experts in international development, neonatology, nutrition and feeding. In 2009, SPOON launched its pilot program in Kazakhstan, home to more than 46,000 children living without families to call their own. The diet of the orphanages, known in Kazakhstan as “baby houses,” was analyzed, and children in 10 baby houses across the country were measured and tested for nutrition deficits. Early analysis showed that the current diet lacked sufficient protein, fats, vitamins and minerals. As a result, a substantial number of these children were stunted or wasting, and significantly deficient in key nutrients, such as iron and vitamin D, that can have devastating effects on the brain and physical health. The implications are especially critical for these children who rely



# a difference in children's health



## **Blini (from Russia and the Former Soviet Union):**

Russian Blini are a delicious, thin pancake traditionally served with caviar, sour cream or smoked salmon. Blini recipes usually call for yeast, but using pancake mix makes preparation easy. Buckwheat contains no gluten and can be eaten by people with gluten allergy. Buckwheat contains protein, fiber, thiamin, riboflavin, calcium and phosphorus. Serve blinis for breakfast, lunch or dinner. Kids will love adding their own toppings. You can experiment with a variety of toppings including jams, fruits, cooked veggies, meat or fish.

- 1 cup buckwheat pancake mix, unsweetened
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 egg
- 1 tablespoon melted butter or vegetable oil
- 2/3 cup milk or water
- Black caviar
- Crème fraîche
- Chives, snipped
- Smoked salmon (optional)
- Minced red onion (optional)

To Prepare:

1. Combine the pancake mix with the salt, egg, butter or oil, and milk or water.
2. Lightly brush another tablespoon of melted butter onto a skillet over medium-high heat.
3. When the skillet is hot, spoon the batter into it a tablespoon at a time.
4. Cook the blinis until tiny bubbles appear, about 1 minute, then flip them and fry until golden brown on each side.
5. Transfer the blinis to a platter and serve warm with desired toppings.

## Vegetable Brown Rice (from China):

serves 2-3

Brown rice and veggies combine to make a delicious and nutritious side dish or snack. Feel free to add eggs, pork, chicken or shrimp to make this a full meal. Brown rice is high in fiber, as well as several key minerals to promote good health, including manganese, selenium and magnesium.

2 cups cooked whole grain brown rice

1 tablespoon sesame oil

1 cup finely chopped vegetables

1 tablespoon wheat free tamari or soy sauce

(carrots, mushrooms, zucchini, green peas)

1 tablespoon

chopped scallions (optional)

1/2 teaspoon grated fresh ginger

1/2 teaspoon minced garlic

Heat 1 tablespoon sesame oil in a medium sized skillet (preferably cast iron). Add garlic and ginger and sauté 1 minute until fragrant. Add 1 cup of chopped vegetables and sauté until slightly tender, about 4-5 minutes. Next add cooked rice and tamari. Stir until well combined and hot. Serve topped with chopped scallions (optional).

*This recipe is provided by TrulyFood, the creation of holistic chef Andrea Livingston of Phytofoods ([phytofoods.blogspot.com](http://phytofoods.blogspot.com)) and nutritionist Andrea Nakayama of Replenish PDX ([www.replenishpdx.com](http://www.replenishpdx.com)).*

on their health for survival in an institution and placement with a family.

Moving forward toward a solution, SPOON piloted a variety of programs in eight baby houses to determine which dietary and nutritional changes will go farthest to protect the health of these children. SPOON's program has already made a difference. The Deputy Minister of Health in Kazakhstan has proposed a new decree to parliament based on SPOON's recommendations, which will establish a new menu — and for the first time ever worldwide — national nutrition norms for baby houses. Soon baby house directors and cooks will be trained by local staff to implement the new diet and best nutrition practices correctly and consistently.

The scope of the program continues to grow. In 2012, SPOON will continue to catalyze change in orphanages internationally, expanding its programs to China, Mexico and Vietnam. And back here at home, SPOON is continually evolving its resources for adopted

and foster families, including a one-of-a-kind website, [www.adoptionnutrition.org](http://www.adoptionnutrition.org).

Now all the tips and tricks Mishelle and Cindy had to figure out the hard way are available at [www.adoptionnutrition.org](http://www.adoptionnutrition.org) and in a new educational brochure, Nutrition Starter Guide for Adoptive and Foster Families, which can be ordered online on the website above, created by SPOON and its partner Joint Council on International Children's Services. These resources were created to help adoptive and foster parents and professionals identify, understand and meet the nutritional needs of their kids — which new research shows often worsen during the first several months post-adoption. While some adopted children come home in bodies that are clearly aching for food, others may appear well-nourished but are similarly suffering from nutrient deficiencies.

Sometimes adopted children are “stunted” — a condition in which insufficient nutrition, often combined with chronic infection and/or

## Quick Injera (from Ethiopia)

This soft, spongy flatbread is used instead of utensils to scoop up stew or vegetables. It is traditionally made with teff flour, a type of grain grown in Ethiopia. You can substitute buckwheat or wheat flour for teff, which can be harder to find. Injera batter is usually prepared like a sourdough — a small portion from each batch is saved and allowed to ferment to be used in the new batter the next time it is made. This recipe uses baking soda and club soda to produce the same bubbly effect.

- 2 cups whole wheat flour (a finely milled type like whole wheat pastry flour works well)

- 1 cup unbleached white flour

- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda

- 2-3 cups club soda

Combine flour and baking soda in a large bowl.

Add club soda, stir well to form a thin batter.

Heat a large non-stick griddle or fry pan to hot. Brush lightly with oil.

Using a large cup or ladle, begin on the outside of the griddle and pour in a circle around the edges until the center is filled. Quickly tilt the griddle back and forth to fill in any holes and to spread thinly and evenly (similar to making crepes).

Cook for 1-2 minutes until surface is spongy and filled with tiny air bubbles. Do not flip the bread, just slide off griddle or out of pan onto a large plate.

Arrange the cooked injera around the outside edges of a large plate or platter so that the centers overlap. Serve immediately with a meat or vegetable stew (place the stew in the middle of the platter) or use in a salad.

Top Tip: Leftover injera can be torn into pieces, brushed with oil, seasoned and baked in the oven to make injera chips.

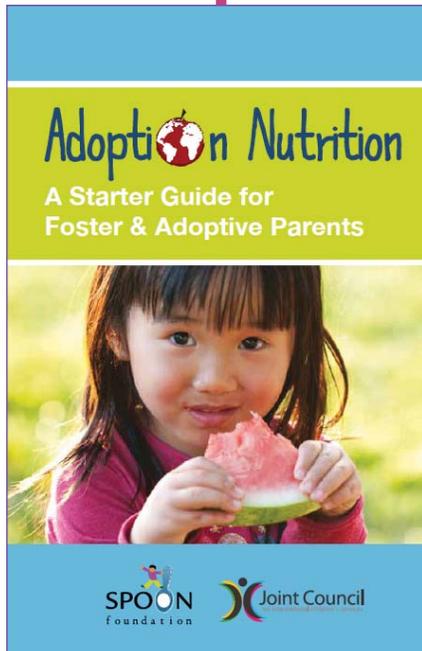
stress, impacts their length more than weight. In these cases, kids will be small but might look chubby because their low weight is distributed across an even shorter body frame. In other cases, a lack of vitamins and minerals may not impact outer appearance but can have a significant impact on brain development and long-term cognitive functioning.

Once a child is home, parents work hard to help him or her adapt to a new life, including a new diet and way of eating. However, it is also important to understand previous eating practices and potential nutritional issues that are common in the child's country of origin. Many families choose to cook foods from their child's native culture, especially on special occasions such as country specific holidays or Adoption Days. The "Nutrition Basics by Country" section of the [www.adoptionnutrition.org](http://www.adoptionnutrition.org) website provides information on some of the countries from which children are adopted.

These pages also contain recipes for favorite dishes of these regions, a couple of which are included. While there is limited research on the nutritional needs of U.S.-born adopted children, health experts suspect these kids are also vulnerable to under-nutrition and should be screened and treated accordingly.

What started with two children will soon give children across an entire country — and around the globe — a better chance. For more information about the SPOON Foundation, visit [www.spoonfoundation.org](http://www.spoonfoundation.org) and [www.adoptionnutrition.org](http://www.adoptionnutrition.org). To contact the SPOON Foundation, send email to [info@spoonfoundation.org](mailto:info@spoonfoundation.org).

*Jason O'Leary is a member of the SPOON Foundation team and has several years of experience working for non-profits.*



## Ajiaco Bogatano (from Colombia)

Colombia's national dish, Ajiaco is a thick, hearty potato and chicken stew. Three types of potatoes are used one of which, papa criolla, is native to the country. This yellow potato breaks down during the cooking process, helping to thicken the stew. The South American herb, guascas, imparts a distinct and authentic flavor.

- ¼ of an onion, sliced lengthwise
  - 1 bunch cilantro
  - 6 scallions, white parts only
  - 1 clove garlic
  - 1 stalk celery
  - 4 quarts water
  - 1 chicken (3½ pounds), skinned and quartered (hint: many meat departments will do this for you)
  - 4 chicken bouillon cubes
  - 4 ears corn
  - 2 pounds red bliss potatoes, peeled and cut into medium slices
  - 3 pounds russet potatoes, peeled and cut into medium slices
  - 2 pounds papa criolla (Colombian yellow potatoes available at Latin American specialty markets frozen or in jars), peeled and quartered
  - 1 packet (0.35 ounces) dried guascas (available at Latin American specialty markets)
  - Salt
  - Freshly ground black pepper
- Garnishes
- ½ cup heavy cream
  - 3 avocados coarsely chopped
  - ½ cup capers, not drained
  - Aji salsa (see recipe below)

On a large piece of cheesecloth, bundle together the onion, cilantro, scallions, garlic and celery. Gather the corners of the cheesecloth and fasten with kitchen twine. Place it in a large stockpot with the water, chicken pieces and bouillon cubes. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer, with bubbles just breaking the surface for about 30 minutes, skimming any foam that forms on the top if necessary. Remove the chicken. When cool, shred the breast meat and set aside. Reserve the thigh and drumstick meat for another use.

Increase the heat to medium-high and add the corn and red bliss potatoes to the pot. Boil for 10 minutes. Add the russet potatoes and cook for 20 minutes. Add the papa criolla and half of the packet of guascas and stir. Reduce heat to low and simmer for 1 hour or until thickened. Remove the corn and, when cooled enough to handle, cut cobs into 2-inch rounds. Return corn to the pot with the remaining half-packet of guascas. Remove and discard the cheesecloth bundle. Add salt and pepper to taste. Ladle the soup into individual bowls. Serve with shredded chicken and other garnishes in separate serving bowls.

Source: <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/recipes/2006/03/01/ajiacobogotano-chicken-and-potato-soup/>