KAZAKH AUL OF THE UNITED STATES

- A nonprofit membership organization inspired by the spirit of traditional Kazakh communities
- Dedicated to building a bridge to Kazakhstan
- A Kazakh cultural resource

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News from the Aul

Volume 2, Issue 2 **Spring-Summer 2006 * Double Issue**

Zhailau Gets Bigger!

As we go to press, the excitement among the heritage camp planning committee members is palpable here in the Northeast. We are working hard, talking every week, restoring and preparing the yurt, scheduling, emailing, shopping, planning, organizing, writing, and researching, And, to top it all off, in the last month, some additional Kazakh people have come forward and will be joining us to conduct traditional Kazakh dance classes, perform, teach Kazakh crafts, and work as counselors at our heritage camp August 14th-19th. It is amazing and wonderful how these talented young Kazakh women only recently learned about our Aul, yet want to partake in our celebration of their culture and heritage.

Just last week, Gulsaya Tuleubayeva confirmed that she will come to Zhailau to perform and give Kazakh dance classes. Gulsaya will generously donate her services to the Aul. She really wants to join us for Zhailau to teach our families traditional dance — We are so lucky!

Last month, we learned about two Kazakh college students, Karina Kudaibergen and Assel Kapalova who are both here in the US for the summer and who feel passionate about their Kazakh heritage. Karina is staying in New Jersey with a Kazakh adoptive family, as is Assel, who is living with Aul member Marcia Day and her two children Fahrah and Jamie in western Massachusetts. Both young women wanted to come to Zhailau to work as counselors; however, with no room in the budget, we didn't know how to make this happen. Karina's host mom, Colene Belli, mentioned fundraising, and then Susan kicked into high fundraising gear, selling Daniyar Baidaralin and Audrey Englander's Kazakh Aul Counting and Coloring Book from last summer's Zhailau. Thanks to the purchases and generous donations specifically for the Karina/Assel Zhailau counselor cause, in just two weeks, we raised nearly all the money needed to pay for both young women to come to camp. Now that's the power of an Aul! Thank you to everyone who purchased a coloring book and/or made a donation to help bring these two special young women to Zhailau.

The addition of Assel, Karina, and Gulsaya makes our already full program even better! And to top it all off, two Kazakh college students are working for the summer at our host site, the Geneva Point Center, and will be helping our group with Geneva Point programming that includes canoe and kayak lessons, swimming, a canoe trip, nature hikes, campfires, games, and more!

We are thrilled! Here is a summary of the Kazakh programming that will be offered at this summer's Zhailau:

- Dombra lessons with Assylgul Dalabaeva
- Kazakh dance lessons with Gulsaya Tuleubayeva
- Kazakh culture talks with Daniyar Baidaralin
- Kazakh crafts with Assylgul Dalabaeva
- Kazakh craft with Karina Kudaibergen
- Dombra concert and traditional singing with Assylgul Dalabaeva and Assel Kapalova
- Traditional Kazakh ceremonies including *Shahshu* and Tree of Life
- Kazakh cooking with Assylgul and Assel
- Kazakh language games
- Kazakh story night
- Raising a Kazakh yurt

There are still a couple of rooms available and plenty of room for camping, if you are interested in joining us, or if you know someone who is. Day rates are also available. Information about rates and registration materials is available to download at the Aul's website at www.kazakh-aul-us.org.

Letter from the Administrative Executive Director

I write this letter at a truly exciting time for our Aul. In a few short weeks, we will begin our Zhailau Kazakh Heritage Camp for Families at the Geneva Point Center on Lake Winnipesaukee, New Hampshire. As noted in the article on page 1, our Zhailau programming has broadened, and we are nothing less than thrilled that we will have additional Kazakh counselors and teachers join us.

These past few months have been an intense time of planning. Planning obviously for Zhailau, planning for this newsletter, general planning for the Aul, and a lot of hard labor repairing the yurt. Daniyar Baidaralin, myself, and the entire Aul Board have been working diligently on a variety of projects and, boy, are we looking forward to our vacation at Zhailau!

On a serious note, I would like to point your attention to the article on page 5, "Maintaining the Aul's Treasure," that describes much of the work that has gone into taking care of the Aul's yurt. All the yurt repairs have put a tremendous strain on the Aul's budget and, simply put, we need help.

Nonetheless, I am pleased and proud to present this special Spring/Summer *double* issue of the Aul newsletter. Highlights of this issue include a 3-page *Ask Daniyar* column, a Kazakh folktale translated by Mary Lou Masey called, "The Woodcutter's Daughter," about a strong Kazakh girl who saves the day, and an article by Texas A&M anthropologist Cynthia Werner about the traditions of feasting and gift giving in Kazakhstan. Cynthia has lived in Kazakhstan, and when I first contacted her was on her way to Mongolia to study ethnic Kazakhs there. She graciously gave the Aul permission to reprint her work in our newsletters, and I am thrilled to have the opportunity to do so.

This newsletter also includes a wonderful recipe for Beshbarmak provided by Vera Kurmasheva, and we are privileged to have articles written by two Aul members, Heather O'Toole and Jill Updegraph. Heather writes about her experiences on the Aul Board in ""It's All About the Kids, Right?" and Jill writes about how she incorporated her daughter's strong heritage into a recent birthday celebration in "A Kazakh Warrior Princess Party."

All in all, I am very excited about this double issue of the newsletter, and I hope you are, too. Please feel free give us your feedback and suggestions — we would love to hear them! We all want to make this newsletter a resource that you enjoy and learn from, so please let us know your interests. You can email me at ssaxon@kazakh-aul-us.org.

Finally, I would like to clarify something.: Many people assume that I am a stay-at-home mom, but I am not. When my daughter was little I stayed home, and I loved being home with her very much. However, please know that I work full-time outside the home, and believe me, if I didn't love the Aul, I wouldn't be doing all that I do. Similarly, Daniyar also works full-time, and we have had many many late-night planning conversations and lunch planning meetings. We both agree that volunteering for the Aul is a labor of love for us, one that could easily be transformed into full-time work. And, we both wish it could!

It has now been nearly two years since Daniyar's father Zhanat first approached me with the idea of providing Kazakh cultural programming to families on a large scale. What an opportunity for families with children from Kazakhstan! I am truly honored to be able to help bring Kazakh culture to you. Long live our village, the Kazakh Aul of the U.S., Association for American & Kazakh Families!

Warmest wishes,

Welcome to the Newest Aul Board Members

We are pleased to announce that Tammy Young of Enfield, CT, and Maria Decore of Cohoes, NY are the latest additions to the Aul's Board of Directors. Both Tammy and Maria joined the Board in April, and we are very grateful that they have found the time to generously donate to the Aul.

Tammy is our new Board President, and the consensus among the rest of the Board is that she is doing a great job and is a wonderful facilitator on our conference calls. Tammy is married to Marc and together they are parents to Nicholas (4, from the Marshall Islands) and Jamison (6, from Almaty). She has spent her professional career working in the IT field, but is currently transitioning to being a middle school teacher.

Maria is married to Patrick, and together they are parents to two very active 3-year olds from Karaganda, Patrick, Jr., and Shinara. Maria works in the mental health field, and together with her family, has not missed one Aul event. Maria is now a dedicated and enthusiastic participant on our Board.

Celebrating Nauryz in Metro Boston

ARLINGTON, MA. On March 26, 2006, the culture of Kazakhstan came to Arlington, Massachusetts when nearly 100 people came together to celebrate Nauryz, the Kazakh New Year. The event, produced by the Kazakh Aul of the US, Association for American & Kazakh Families, attracted families from several northeastern states, including New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts.

Under the Shanyrak

In the spirit of a traditional Kazakh Aul, the celebration was a true community event, for each and every one of the attending families who participated worked together to make it all happen. Some families came early to set up, others stayed late to clean up, and throughout the afternoon, parents worked together to make sure activities and games for the children went smoothly. And, they pulled it off: this Nauryz Festival was a rousing success as reported by everyone in attendance.

Dilara, Arman, and Dos Sarbassov

Highlights of the celebration were the traditional Kazakh-style decorations, designed by Almaty native Daniyar Baidaralin. Colorful fabrics were hung from a *Shanyrak* on the ceiling, and draped outwards to create a cozy yurt-like space in the middle of the gym. In addition, oriental-style carpets were placed on the floor below the *Shanyrak*, thus completing the yurt effect and creating a comfortable place for people to gather, eat, talk, and just hang out, reminiscent of the homes of the ancestors of most of the children in attendance.

Amy and Leah Davidow

The Kazakh Aul of the US provided a talk for the group that described the meaning of Nauryz and its important place in nomadic life. Participants learned that Nauryz was a joyous time for nomads who welcomed the coming of spring after a harsh winter. They also learned how to wish each other *Happy Nauryz* in Kazakh. Children participated in traditional Kazakh games, including "horse" races on toy stick horses and sack races, and an arts and crafts table was available for use throughout the afternoon.

Many of our Aul's youngest members enjoyed the crafts table.

Every family contributed delicious food for a group meal under the Shanyrak, and some families even cooked Kazakh cuisine. The Plov was a hit! In addition, Aul member Dilara Sarabossova, a native of Almaty who now lives in Massachusetts with her husband Dos and 2 young sons Daniar and Arman, treated us to traditional tea, Beshbarmak, and Baursaks.

Indeed, this celebration went beyond being the commemoration of a new year. This was also a celebration of a great culture. Above all, it was a true celebration of the sons and daughters of all the families in attendance. *Nauzyz Birghe Bolsyn!* Happy Nauryz!

Emily Bisordi

Zhailau Preview: Felting and Making Toy Yurts at Owens Sheep Farm

By Susan Saxon

PELHAM, NH, APRIL 22, 2006. A group of Aul members, including the Zhailau planning committee, and their children traveled to southern New Hampshire for a feltmaking workshop conducted by Caroline Owens of Owens Sheep Farm. Caroline regularly gives feltmaking classes to children and draws upon Mongolian traditions when she teaches, so it was a natural leap for her to think about another Central Asian nomadic culture with strong felting traditions. Also, she was delighted to learn about our Aul and gladly accommodated our request that our project be to make felt toy yurts. Caroline will be doing this same workshop at this summer's Zhailau heritage camp, and this April's excursion was considered a dry run.

I made this appointment way back in January and the reason for the late April date was that Caroline thought it would be fun for our group to come at peak lambing season. And, it was! The children and their parents were charmed by the very many cute lambs. There were also baby chicks, and the children were able to pet lambs, sheep and chicks.

The workshop lasted two hours, and Caroline took us through the many steps of wetting, rubbing, massaging and rolling the wool, until lo' and behold, we had made cute little yurts! Please enjoy the photos.

Sara Remmler, Sasha Westrick, and Kairat O'Toole meet a lamb.

Caroline Owens shows Lance LeRoy and his mom Lisa the right way to rub the wool.

Daniyar Baidaralin and his mom Vera Kurmasheva practice their feltmaking skills.

Say, "Baaaaa!" The children show off their completed yurts. Pictured to the right, sitting, are Alina O'Toole, Kairat O'Toole, Sara Remmler, Daviana Englander, and Lily Martin. Standing are Darya Updegraph and Melissa, Carline Owen's daughter who is holding the sheep.

Maintaining the Aul's Treasure

By Susan Saxon

Yurts represent so much in Kazakh culture and are the center of cultural celebrations. We are truly honored that Leila Bassenova lent us an authentic Kazakh yurt—a most wonderful symbol of our children's strong heritage! Our yurt is nothing less than a treasure for our aul, and to have it here in America is something we never imagined was possible when we founded the Aul a short one and one-half years ago.

Bakhtiyar Baidaralin, Heather O'Toole, and Susan Saxon ready to start cleaning and bleaching the Uyks in April.

Here at Aul home base, this past year has been an intense education in learning what is involved in maintaining and taking proper care of a yurt. When Leila generously loaned us the yurt and shipped it from Almaty last year, we were so thrilled, but little did we know what a huge responsibility we had taken on.

Unfortunately, the wood of the yurt got termites last year, and sadly, damage was done. Daniyar and Bakhtiyar Baidaralin treated the wood last summer; however, this spring we discovered more termites, so they treated the wood again. We were able to save most of the wood, but many pieces are permanently damaged. We vowed to take better care of the yurt, and began the process of full wood protection for all 120 *Uyk (*lovingly referred to as 'hockey sticks,' due to their distinctive shape) and the walls of the yurt, the collapsible *Kerege*.

We had to seal the wood, which meant painting every piece, but first it all had to be cleaned and prepped. To prep the wood, we bathed it in a bleach-like liquid chemical solution over two days in April; Daniyar and Bakhtiyar, Heather O'Toole (MA), and Susan Saxon (RI) all worked together at the Baidaralin's house in Rhode Island. About a month later, after all the rains that drenched the northeast this spring had finally passed, a group of Aul members gathered once again at the Baidaralin's house to paint the *Uyks*: Terri Sperber (NY), Charlie and Maggie Lattmann (CT), Susan Saxon, Norman Remmler (RI), and Daniyar Baidaralin. Audrey Englander of MA volunteered to do childcare while the other adults worked all day. In June, Susan and Daniyar spray-painted the *Kerege* (and also accidentally portions of the Baidaralin's driveway and some of their house, too).

Norm Remmler, Maggie Lattman, and Charles Lattman painting Uyks in May

Most recently, in early July, Daniyar and Bakhtiyar worked together to fix the *Shanyrak* and to begin to even out the length of the *Uyks*. Our yurt unfortunately has *Uyks* from two different sized yurts, which when the yurt is raised, place a tremendous strain on the integrity of the yurt. Dan and Bakh raised the *Kresege, Shanyrak* and *Uyks* to determine which *Uyk* need to be to cut in length. In the coming weeks before Zhailau, Dan and Bakh will shorten 95 *Uyks*.

Hooray! Maggie Lattman, Charles Lattman, Daniyar Baidaralin, Terri Sperber, and Susan Saxon celebrate at the end of a long May day of painting all the Uyks.

As you can gather, this has all been incredibly time-consuming and labor intensive. The Aul is now nearly $1000 into the process, spent on necessary supplies that included 6 gallons of anti-termite solution, 7 gallons of toxic chemicals to prep and clean the wood, 15 gallons of paint, rollers, tarps, brushes, saw horses, and on and on. Zhanat Baidaralin and Vera Kurmasheva graciously donated the use of their home to store and repair the yurt, and to store all the supplies (and have paint on their house and driveway to prove it). Two Aul members, Leah Russell and Sara Libou, both made monetary donations to help pay for the yurt restoration, and we are tremendously touched and grateful. In addition, hundreds of hours of labor were donated, a large proportion donated by Daniyar Baidaralin, many of which were back-breaking. As Dan's father, Zhanat cracked to Heather O'Toole after one particularly grueling day bathing the wood (and ourselves) in toxic chemicals, "So now you know how it feels to work like a nomad!"

All this hard work has been a labor of love for us all because the yurt represents so much and is so central to traditional Kazakh culture. Nonetheless, we realize that despite all our hard work, the wood of the yurt, damaged as it is, will not last forever, and we must plan for the inevitable. We are currently exploring ways to replace the *Uyks* and *Kerege* in the coming years, either by commission here in the U.S., or perhaps by purchasing them directly from Kazakhstan.

Unfortunately, the Aul's resources are limited and monies raised from annual memberships do not cover all our expenses, particularly unexpected ones such as yurt repairs and extensive maintenance. Thus, we are dependent on donations. If you are able, please consider making a donation to help cover the Aul's yurt expenses so that we may all benefit from it in the years to come. Please help the Aul keep our treasure!

The work continues: Daniyar and Bakhtiyar Baidaralin fixing the Shanyrak in July.

Ask Daniyar

Our Ask Daniyar column is a regular feature of this newsletter devoted to your questions about Kazakh culture. Daniyar Baidaralin is a 27-year-old Kazakh man, born & raised in Almaty. He currently lives in Rhode Island, & is excited to answer your culture questions. Please submit your questions to Dan at askdaniyar@kazakh-aul-us.org.

Hi Daniyar,

When my daughter was in the baby home in Kostanai, we were told she was in a room that was called "White Camel" or "White Camels." I'm wondering if the white camel has any special significance in Kazakh culture.

Thanks,

Elana Peled
Geortgetown, MA

Hi Elana,

Thank you for your question! Yes, the White Camel (*Akh-Nar*) was a very important and significant animal in Kazakh culture. The white camel is a very rare natural phenomenon occurring approximately 1 in 100,000, Therefore the owner of a white camel was considered to be really blessed. The white camel is also recognized as the Khan's Camel, because only very rich people could afford to keep a camel that was worth a few regular camels. It was like keeping a Rolls-Royce; a luxury that only few could afford. White camel wool was very expensive and used to make festive clothes, ropes for Khans' yurts, or very expensive blankets.

White camels were very rarely used as a saddle-camels for riding. Because they are such unique creatures, they were thought to have extra natural abilities. For example, any camel's wool was widely used as a wrap for injures, bruises, contusions, fractures, cure from arthritis etc (it really works!) - Can you imagine what people believed a white camel's wool could do?!

Also white camels were thought of as Animal-Keepers (similar to angels), that the Spirit of Ancestors sent to help the Khan. There are legends about white camels that were sent to different rulers of the Great Kazakh Steppe to protect them and show the Signs. Every khan wanted to have his own white camel as a symbol of his power. For example, the famous White Camel of Ablai-Khan (one of the most powerful Kazakh khans, national hero, his face appears on Kazakh currency-the 100 tenge note). The legend was that the camel showed up from nowhere in Ablai-Khan's aul and didn't let anyone get closer, until the Khan himself tried to pet him. Then, the White Camel bended his knees and became Ablai-Khan's White Camel. Since then, Ablai-Khan always kept the camel next to him. When Ablai-Khan needed to make important decisions, he would always ask his White Camel for advice. For instance, if he had choice between two routes and doubted both of them, his White Camel would show the right way by turning his muzzle to the right direction and Ablai-Khan followed it.

Thus, the White Camel is a sacred and magical animal, a supernatural creature, the Khan's Camel, the Animal-Keeper, the Healer, the symbol of a Khan's Power, the sign of wealth, strength, a material helper sent by the spirits of ancestors etc. The fact that your daughter spent some time in the "White Camel" room is a very good sign. Who knows – maybe her ancestors sent this sign to help her in her future. If so, she will grow up to be a happy, healthy, and wealthy person, and may be blessed with some extraordinary abilities!

Regards,

Daniyar

Hello Dan,

I would like to know more about the importance of genealogy to Kazakh people. I understand there were many tribes or clans in Kazakhstan, not to mention all the nationalities and ethnic groups who were moved there during the Stalin years. How can adoptive parents find out what clan their child might have been from? Spiritually, what are the implications for children who do not know who their ancestors are?

Marcia Day
Greenfield, MA

Thank you, Marcia! You just touched upon one of the most important questions about Kazakh society! Yes, genealogy used to be extremely important to Kazakh people, and a discussion of the topic will show you how the nomadic lifestyle created the need for knowledge about our genealogy.

I always compare the significance of genealogy among the Kazakhs to that of the Jewish people who date their genealogy back to the 12 tribes of Israel. Other examples of nomadic societies include the Bedouins of Arabia and Gypsies. Like the Kazakhs, Gypsies are also organized by clans, although a blood line is not the only criteria required to belong to a certain clan. Most nomadic peoples had specific tribal principals incorporated into their societies. Kazakhs, as well as other post-nomadic nations of Central Asia & Siberia, still recognize their tribal system. Historically, there were three major conglomerates of tribes, the *Three Zhuzes,* and within these conglomerates were included all of the Kazakh tribes.

There is still a lot of disagreement in historical circles regarding the *Three Zhuzes*; however, the most popular version is that *Uly Zhuz* (Elder Zhuz) was mostly located in the south of Kazakhstan, *Orta Zhuz* (Middle Zhuz) covered central and northern Kazakhstan, and *Kishi Zhuz* (Little Zhuz) was located in western Kazakhstan.

Each *Zhuz* was its own independent, highly organized administrative region replete with many formal social structures, including a Khan, a supreme court of *Bees* (a *Be* was a judge), a customs service to protect its borders, and an army. In times of war, all three *Zhusez* united under the power of the Khan of *Uly Zhuz*. Khans from *Kishi Zhuz* weren't allowed to lead united armies of all three *Zhuzes*.

There is an old Kazakh proverb: "*Uly Zhuz* – Wealth, *Orta Zhuz* – Knowledge, *Kishi Zhuz* – War craft." This signifies the overall characteristic of each Zhuz. For example, at the time of the founding of the Kazakh Khandyk in the 15th century, the *Kishi Zhuz* was the first line of defense against the very aggressive *Abylkhair* Khan who was a former ruler of the Kazakhs; he wanted to destroy the first unified Kazakh state and punish the Kazakhs for abandoning him.

The *Orta Zhuz* was the command center of the Kazakh Khandyk. The

Ask Daniyar (continued)

majority of Kazakhs' wealth (mostly cattle herds) was contained in the *Uly Zhuz*. In fact, the wealthiest of the *Uly Zhuz* gave the Kazakh nation many powerful politicians and businessman. The Middle *Zhuz* gave us many scientists and writers, and the *Kishi Zhuz* produced many warriors.

The story of the forming of the Three *Zhuzes* is very long and complicated, and much has yet to be learned. We know that many tribes were included or excluded after the formation of the *Zhuzes*, and many were combined during the *Dzungar* Invasion and under the rule of Russian Tsars. During Soviet times, there was no official recognition of the Three *Zhuz* system; it only existed unofficially among the Soviet Kazakh elite.

In modern times, with the loss of the nomadic lifestyle among most of the Kazakh people, the tradition of remembering one's tribe is losing importance with the speed of sound and will probably disappear within the next 10-30 years. Most Kazakhs who live in cities do not even recognize their "*Zheti-Ata*" ("Seven Fathers"), the traditional mandatory knowledge of the past seven generations of one's ancestors.

When Kazakhs were still nomads, the *Zheti-Ata* and *Shezhire* (Family Tree) laws had incredible importance in social life, for this was the major tool against crossing of blood, or in-breeding. By making every member of society know his/her own seven past ancestral generations and all their cousins, and prohibiting marriage within this family tree, the nomads kept their blood very clean and healthy (that's why Kazakh children are so healthy – the result of genetic selection).

How did *Shezhire* work practically? The whole nomadic system was based on it. The smallest unit of Kazakh society was the family. A group of related families comprised of a father' family plus his sons and their families roamed together to form an aul. A group of auls (cousin's auls) formed a kin. A union of kins formed a tribe. The conglomerate of tribes, roaming within the same administrative area formed a *Zhuz*.

People were closely related within the kin and tribe, not to mention the aul. In times of war, all auls of a tribe would unite and provide warriors, supplies etc. A combined tribe patrol would protect auls from enemies, while the auls moved to safe places. The tribe acted like one unit, people selected their leaders (elders with proven experience) and obeyed them. In times of famine or cattle-plaque, people of the same kin would share in the care of their herds, and together protect their cattle from wolves and starvation. When the danger was over, all of the auls would spread widely again, until the next time of need.

Thus, the knowledge and obedience of the laws of *Shezhire* was not only a beautiful tradition, but also was the only way to survive in a tough, hostile and constantly changing environment. Without following the *Shezhire* laws, nomads would have been condemned to fail and disappear. Only a network of related families, auls, kins, and tribes provided an efficient way to stay alive. And this system existed with only minor changes for more than 2,000 years, demonstrating its efficiency.

As you can see, nomads were not a "wild" or "primitive" culture. Based on the *Shezhire* tradition we can say that nomads: a) knew their history, b) knew human nature, c) knew how to survive and organize their society in geographical areas, which in my humble opinion are signs of a high alternative civilization.

Even though the Communist Party spent a tremendous amount of effort to dilute Kazakhs with other nations (to weaken Kazakh resistance and bind Kazakhs to the USSR) it didn't really work well. The machine of nomadic society was too powerful to change even for 75 years. (the Chinese Communist Party does the same things to Kazakhs in China). Even in contemporary times, Kazakhs still prefer to marry Kazakhs, or at least people from other Turkic nations. And, here belonging to a certain tribe plays a role. It is not as important as it used to be, but questions about kin/tribe will usually be asked.

Kazakh society is very uneven from city to aul and geographically across the country. In big cities (especially in Northern areas, close to Russia) people are very westernized and don't obey Kazakh traditions. In rural areas (especially in the south), tribalism is traditionally strong. People of southern rural areas will judge a Kazakh person based on his/her knowledge of Shezhire and tribe. Ignorance of traditions, lack of knowledge about *Shezhire*, and the Kazakh language will put the Kazakh person in a position of contempt among traditional Kazakhs.

Kazakh children adopted by Americans are a special case. I can't imagine any situation where a Kazakh person (anywhere in the RK) will show them signs of contempt. It is not like if they were Kazakhs of Russia, China, of Syria or Turkey. They are too special. They are Americans.

Nonetheless, any knowledge of Kazakh culture and history that your children have will be a huge surprise for native Kazakhs, regardless of region. We would be incredibly pleased to meet an American Kazakh who knows even a little about our heritage. Any knowledge will be taken into account, because while it is expected of people raised in Kazakhstan, it is "extra" for any foreigner Kazakh.

Unfortunately, *Shezhire* and *Zheti-Ata* were strictly oral traditions. They were passed by through generations by elder members of families. In Soviet times, the government practically wiped out this information from people's memory, by switching the Kazakh language to the Cyrillic alphabet and then even replacing Kazakh with the Russian language. The terabytes of oral information were lost, mostly forever. This was a common strategy of the Party in all 15 Soviet Republics which helped the pro-Russian government to instill in the people of the USSR the notion of the "superiority" of the Russian nation compared to the "primitive" history and heritage of all other republics.

So to answer your question *"How can adoptive parents find out what clan their child might have been from"* – I can say that only elder relatives (or professional genealogy detectives, if there are any in Kazakhstan) can provide American parents with this information.

Regards,

Daniyar

Dear Dan,

What is the significance of the wolf in Kazakh culture?

Heather O'Toole
Upton, MA

Thank you, Heather – this is my favorite topic! The wolf is my personal most-loved wild animal (I once wanted to become a zoologist).

In the nomadic culture of Central Asia, Mongolia, and Siberia, the wolf is a significant character. The wolf myth dates back to ancient times before

ASK DANIYAR, continued next page

Ask Daniyar (continued)

the Turkic *Kaganat* (pronounced kha-gha-*nhat)* in the 6-8th centuries. I can't really tell you how old the myth is, but it is very ancient. The story says that enemies destroyed the whole tribe of proto-Turk nomads, except one 10-year-old who survived and escaped the slaughter. He was saved by a she-wolf, later had children with her, and all of the Turkic people are offspring of that union.

This myth has a lot of similarities to those in other cultures. For example, Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome, were also saved by a she-wolf in early childhood who gave birth to all of the first Romans (the Capitoline she-wolf legend). Another example is old India's myth of Mowgli, recorded by Rudyard Kipling in *The Jungle Book*. These are all examples of the so-called totemic myths (myth of animal-ancestry) that can be found in any native mythology of the world, and are supported by a natural tendency of she-wolves to save and raise human children.

But, why the wolf? Why not the bear, badger, tiger, lion, beaver, etc.? I think, and it is a very common opinion among Kazakh historians, that wolves and nomads are the most similar creatures in the world. Both are good hunters and warriors, both are independent and tough, both adore the harsh romanticism of nature. Wolves howl at the moon, while nomadic music is full of pain and is eternally melancholy. Both are hated by all other dwellers in their worlds.

The greatest similarity between wolves and nomads comes from their lifestyle and social structure. While strongly independent and individualistic, both nomads and wolves are sacrificially committed to their families/wolf packs. This inner antagonism leads them to create special, constantly changing, yet very stable relationships within their society. Wolves are mostly lone hunters, very anxious about their territory and ready to kill any other wolf that intrudes. However, in times of hunger, wolves unite into packs, hunting together. A big wolf pack is much more dangerous than a single lion or tiger, or even a bear. No creature can successfully defend against a wolf pack attack; even a tiger, lion or bear would give them the right-of-way. A wolf pack will attack a bear and make it run like a dog, even leaving its prey to the wolves. No deer, moose, or bull can escape being killed and eaten by a wolf pack. When wolves attack a herd of sheep they kill every single one, even though they can't eat them all. Although wolves are territorial animals, they are pure nomads. They roam huge territories; their daily run might be up to 40 miles. They migrate seasonally following the herds of herbivorous animals. The hierarchy of the wolf pack is what we would call in human terms a "military democracy." The strongest, most experienced, and most talented wolf will lead the pack with iron discipline and control.

Those who are familiar with Kazakh culture will notice that I just practically described nomadic tribe structure. By simply replacing some words, I can change the description of the wolf pack to a description of the nomadic tribe: "migrate seasonally following herds of herbivorous animals," "military democracy," "territorial animals (people), they are pure nomads. They roam huge territories," "lone hunters (nomads), very anxious about their territory and ready to kill any other wolf (tribe) that intrudes… ..No creature (nation) near a wolf (nomad) habitat can defend against a wolf pack (nomads' army) attack," etc. Of course, any human society on this planet is much more complicated that any animal society, but there are a lot of similarities.

Also, the diet of Turkic nomads consisted of meat and milk products. No other nation in the world could survive this ration, but nomads did for thousands of years. There is a Kazakh proverb: "*The second place meat-eater after the wolf is the Kazakh."*

The image of the Wolf appears in many aspects of Kazakh culture. The handles of sabers or swords, elements of décor on pots, shields, rings, and most importantly, flags. There was a popular poetic phrase "*My banner is wolf-headed.*"

In the old Kazakh language there are a few definitions of wolf. The word "*kaskyr*" (pronounced khas-*khyrr*) is a simple description of the biological species, while the word "*Bori*" (pronounced bor-*ih*) is more lyrical and mythical. There are other words, rarely used in our day, which point to the wolf as a very important character in Kazakh mythology.

Some modern writers contrast the relationship between wolves and dogs with the relationship between nomadic and agrarian cultures. For example, in "The Kazakh Erotic Roman" by Berik Dzhilkibaev, the author describes a constantly roaming, hunting, independent, free, unpredictable, and blood-thirsty wolf who symbolizes the nomads and the harshness of the steppe that I described earlier. Meanwhile a dog, human's best friend; a loyal, easily-trained, dependable, social, friendly, and disciplined character who was believed to be given to the people by the Mighty Sky, represents settled agrarian people. Dzhilkibaev points to this symbolic contrast between the wildness of the wolf and the "civilized nature" of the dog. In real life, wolves and dogs always hate each other and fight, and will do so forever, just like nomads and settled nations did for thousands of years.

Expanding this topic a bit, we can also consider the legend of the werewolf. In old myths of many nations, especially in Central Asia, humans would turn into wolves or other animals and then either threaten other people or help them. These beliefs originate in Shamanism, an old nomadic magical practice, that still exists in Altai, Siberia, and Mongolia. Many historians believe that European mythology is strongly influenced by Indo-Aryan legends, and also linked to proto-Turkic mythology. This connection occurred when Huns from Mongolia moved toward Rome, triggering the Great Migration of People from the East (4-8th century). Many modern Western European peoples are descendents of these Indo-Aryan "barbarians" (including Germans, Goths, Vandals, Franks and Slavs), who conquered the Western Roman Empire and brought with them many Central Asian traditions, including werewolf folklore.

Back to the original question of the wolf: For me personally, and for many other Kazakhs the wolf is a nomad, our great and mysterious ancestor.

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A Kazakh Warrior Princess Birthday Party

By Jill Updegraph

Note from Susan: I had planned to write an article on how Kazakhs celebrate birthdays, but after talking with Daniyar and doing my own research, I learned that yearly birthday traditions were born in western culture. The nomads celebrated particular birth milestones, but not yearly as we do here in the west. Today, many modern Kazakhs celebrate yearly birthdays, an artifact of their years under the Soviets and Russians. Coincidentally, at the same time I was learning these facts, Jill Updegraph found a way to incorporate her daughter's birth culture into an American birthday celebration, and was happy to share their story here.

My daughter Darya insisted that her fourth birthday party would be a "bad guy" birthday party since she turned three in May, 2005. When asked what she meant, Darya said, "I be Spiderman, and I put all my friends in jail!" Now, this was not terribly surprising coming from a girl whose Halloween costume choices consisted of Ninja, Batman, Spiderman, and Power Ranger, and for whom no matter how many beautiful princesses she saw in Disney movies, she always wanted to be the King! I was not disappointed with Darya's developing independent and strong self-image. Kings had all the power in the Disney stories, while princesses lay in waiting, waiting for princes to somehow happen to find them and make them happy ever after. It was fine with me that my strong-willed daughter would escape the "Cinderella complex" that afflicted so many of my generation.

Therefore I was stunned when last March, Darya announced, "Mom, I don't have to have a bad guy birthday party. I can have a princess birthday party, because it's prettier!" At the time, I was reading a book called, *Hardball for Women,* which proposes that there are specific disadvantages faced by women in business by virtue of how they may have been socialized as children. For example, playing with dolls instead of competing in team sports, or making nice instead of going for the kill and then going for pizza with the "enemy." This message was in the forefront of my mind when Darya made her announcement, and I was not going to let her succumb to this pressure.

Darya Updegraph in front of her Kazakh Steppes cake made by Heather O'Toole.

"Princess" Darya after a recent dance recital.

Instead, I suggested that we could have a "Mulan Warrior Princess Party." "YEAH!" Darya shouted! Then, I realized that since Darya is Asian, and since Mulan is Chinese, people would likely assume Darya is also Chinese. So, I modified the party theme to, "Mulan, the Kazakh Warrior Princess" to which Darya cheered with even MORE enthusiasm. Thus, we solved the problem of my strong-willed, independent, little girl feeling like she needed to give up her power in order to fit in. But, *just how was I going to create a Kazakh Warrior Princess Party?*

Luckily, the Aul's own Heather O'Toole came to the rescue! Heather created masterpiece, work-of-art, Kazakh-themed cakes for all Aul events I've attended since its inception, and she agreed to make a cake for Darya's birthday party. Heather told me that all I had to do was find some plastic camels and horses to put on the cake. That was a huge relief! And, it also meant that Heather's children, Alina and Kairat, would be there to celebrate with us. This would be Darya's first birthday celebration where any of her Kazakh friends would be there.

With the cake taken care of, I had to figure out what to do to implement the Kazakh warrior princess theme. I didn't want to simply buy plastic weapons (even though plastic swords and other weapons are both plentiful and inexpensive in toy stores). After several helpful suggestions from my nurse practitioner and the genius who owns the local hardware store, we figured it out. We bought eye masks (some black and some white) and cut shields out of white plaster board. Then we bought hundreds of stickers of all varieties, including superheroes, princesses (that way, they got a choice – warrior OR princess, or warrior AND princess) along with flowers, animals, sports heroes, Disney characters, flags, wizards, fairies, etc., so the kids could each decorate a shield and face mask with whatever decorations that moved them, and they got to take these masks and shields home with them later. We fashioned handles on the backs of the shields, and bought pipe insulation that we cut in half, for swords.

Depiction of a Mongol Warrior bearing a Central Asian shield.

We had what we needed for the kids to get creative and then have a harmless sword fight. The theme allowed Darya's girlfriends – the ones with no brothers and who had never experienced the thrill of the battle - to do so, if only for a day. And as a side benefit, the black and white masks provided the backdrop for the kids to play out the duel of the Light and Dark Spirits, an ancient nomadic dance that was introduced to us by the Baidaralin family at the Aul's first Nauryz festival in 2005.

We also had other activities prepared just in case, including a piñata filled with candy and small toys, and a "Pin the Tail on the Camel" game; however, the true highlights of the party were the shield and mask decorating and Heather's Kazakh cake. Heather's cake was a true work of art, with frosting made to look like the landscape of the Kazakh steppes, three small yurts, and a winding river in honor of the fact that Darya's name means "river" in both Russian and Kazakh. This beautiful cake helped us share with Darya's friends some of the history of her nomadic ancestors. We also showed the kids a small, felt yurt that we brought home from Kazakhstan, ornately decorated and fully furnished inside, and explained how Darya's (and Alina and Kairat's) ancestors traveled hundreds of miles at a time carrying these dwellings on oxen and camels before setting them up as their homes. I also explained that the cake's river symbolized what Darya's name means in the country where she was born.

My husband thought that perhaps the kids were not listening; that they were mostly tolerating the lesson while waiting to eat their cake (which was absolutely delicious), but I knew they had listened because as we cut, they did not just ask for chocolate part or a white part, but they also asked for river parts and/or house parts! All in all, the party was a huge success, and we felt like we got to celebrate and share Darya's rich heritage in a fun way. Thanks again to Heather, without whom this party would not have been what it was!

It's All About the Kids, Right? Things I've Learned About Myself as a Member of the Board of the Kazakh Aul of the US

by Heather O'Toole

While growing up, I was taught (not always by example) certain morals and values with the intent of shaping me into an adult who demonstrates… well, just that- certain morals and values. I was taught to smile genuinely when greeting others in my community, to share my gifts and time when I can with those around me, to take some risks in life, to challenge myself physically and mentally, and to listen to my instincts and demonstrate leadership skills. I learned some of these values in school, some in church and some from various members of my family. Like many people, I struggled to meet these high standards throughout high school, college and well into my late 20's. Indeed, I still struggle with much of it today.

My early 30's was the most challenging time in my life. I desperately wanted to be a mother and longed for a sense of purpose. I enjoyed my job in the retail industry but had little sense of long-term goals. I was friends with my co-workers but knew very few people in my local community. I felt as though I had no time or energy to volunteer. I felt uncomfortable in leadership roles. At times I was sure that if I could just be a mother, all would be well. Looking back now, I know that it wasn't quite that simple.

My husband and I finally were able to form our family when we adopted Alina (now almost 5) and Kairat (5 ½) in August of 2002. Suddenly I had two toddlers to care for, nurture and keep safe. It wasn't all about me anymore. For the first couple of months I spent most of my time on the floor of the playroom or nursery with my children, happy to be "at their service" 24 hours a day.

"The reasoning behind this cliché is that if we as parents try to remind ourselves that "it's all about the kids," then the details in which we tend to get caught up (often for our own sake) seem less important and the focus becomes smiles, laughter and love. Well, this sounds very sensible. It would be great if it always worked out that way, wouldn't it? I've learned since then that maybe it isn't just all about the kids after all."

Since that time, I have often heard from those around me in the adoption community and in other areas that, "*It's all about the kids.*" The reasoning behind this cliché is that if we as parents try to remind ourselves that "it's all about the kids," then the details in which we tend to get caught up (often for our own sake) seem less important and the focus becomes smiles, laughter and love. Well, this sounds very sensible. It would be great if it always worked out that way, wouldn't it? I've learned since then that maybe it *isn't* just all about the kids after all.

By November of 2002, the weather was getting chilly and the days were getting shorter. I realized I needed to get out and meet some people. I started with the Mom's Club in my town and met many other stay-at-home moms like me who wanted to connect. I also joined KAFN, the Kazakhstan Adoptive Families Network of MA and RI, founded in 2002 by our Aul's own Susan Saxon. This not only gave me the opportunity to meet other parents of young Kazakhstani children, but also served as a cultural connection for my family. My children formed friendships in this group, which may in fact last a lifetime.

Susan and I became close friends. One day she expressed to me that although KAFN was a great social experience for her, she was yearning for something that would provide a more in-depth cultural experience for its members. In fact, she had been approached by Zhanat Baidaralin and was in the process of starting a new organization called *The Kazakh Aul of the United States, Association for American and Kazakh Families.* Susan wanted to extend an invitation to me to join the Board of Directors. She told me that the Aul would help to create a bridge for our kids to their country of birth with the goal of helping them understand their unique place in this world. She thought I would be an asset to the organization.

My first response was to begin a personal rollercoaster ride of feelings that ranged from terror at the thought of leading a national organization to excitement at the sheer challenge of doing so. However, after pondering for some time, I realized that this was a calling for me to face some of my own fears and make a difference for my children, the adoption community and for Kazakhstan. I decided to listen to my heart, and so I joined the board of the new Aul.

Within a few short months, it seemed to me that the Aul was on roller-skates heading down a fast slope. People across the U.S. were discovering us and wanted to be part of something that could connect them to their children's heritage and teach them about the art, language and culture of Kazakhstan. People were signing up, and fast!

I recall our 1st annual Nauryz in March of 2005 at the Audubon Wildlife Sanctuary in Topsfield, MA. One of my jobs for planning this event was to contact all new Aul members who had committed to coming. I was to welcome them to the Aul and to find out whether they would like to participate in any way to help make the event a success. The job seemed daunting to me, but I had offered to take it on, so I gave it my best. As it turned out, it went pretty well; I got lots of offers to help and I made many connections with new members. Since then, I have offered to undertake this responsibility when we plan Aul events, and have really enjoyed it.

It's All About the Kids, Right? (continued)

Another task I took on for Nauryz 2005 was to decorate a Kazakh-themed cake. I decorated cakes in previous jobs, but it was much more rewarding to do one for the Aul! And, this helped me realize that I had strengths that I could offer the Aul to help fulfill its mission of educating families and creating this bridge between the two cultures.

As summer approached and plans for Zhailau 2005 were underway, time became the gift most needed for the Aul, and Board conference calls became lengthy and frequent. At one point I was asked to *supervise* Zhailau and I declined. I felt that I was not prepared to take on anything called *supervise*. Nonetheless, I worked really hard along with the other board members at the time, Audrey Englander, Jill Updegraph, Susan, and Daniyar, and we pulled it off! Zhailau 2005 was a huge success and we knew it. We also learned from some mistakes and took diligent notes so we could refer to them in our planning of future events. After all, this is just one big learning experience for us and we are indeed a unique organization!

Soon after Zhailau 2005, the Aul began to go through a transition stage. We had decided to apply for federal 501 (3)c designation as a charitable association, which would give the organization tax-free status. To do this we had to write by-laws defining the structure and governing rules of the Aul. It was tough to nail down the details when the structure of the Aul was changing from one day to the next! Fall proved to be a rough road and conference calls continued to be lengthy. Somehow we survived. It took months and months to complete those by-laws, and now we can finally say DONE!

"I have made so many discoveries about myself by participating on the Aul's Board that I could not possibly mention all of them."

This past year has been a bit of a roller coaster ride for me as an Aul board member, and I'm sure for others on the board as well. Nonetheless, I remain very excited about Zhailau 2006, which will be at the Geneva Point Center along Lake Winnipesauke in New Hampshire. The plans are underway and I am confident that everything will go smoothly. I am working with the board to come up with a plan for the week so that everyone can relax, laugh, learn about Kazakh culture and connect with other Kazakh-American families. I have seen Geneva Point and I believe that it will serve as an ideal setting for our families to gather and celebrate our common bond. I am excited to meet native Kazakhs who have traveled here to work at Geneva Point for the summer, as well as Assylgul, a native Kazakh woman who is coming to the U.S. to join us at Zhailau and teach us Kazakh crafts, music and cooking. My family and I are looking forward to a nice vacation with the benefits of a culture camp included.

So, to go back to where I began, *it's all about the kids, right?* **NOT**! I have made so many discoveries about myself by participating on the Aul's Board that I could not possibly mention all of them. I have rearranged some of those priorities that were mixed up earlier in my life and, although I have a long way to go, I'm pretty happy where I am right now. I have faced many of my fears and I am ready to take more of them on. I have learned that no matter how hard you work, you need to remember to have fun. That is what makes it all worthwhile.

The gifts I have given the Aul are far outnumbered by the rewards I have received. I can't say for sure where I see myself in the Aul in years to come, mostly because the Aul is forever changing. I do know that I feel a strong purpose here and whether the times are tough or smooth sailing, I plan to do all I can to meet the challenges ahead. When I became an adoptive parent four years ago, I thought it was *all about the kids*. Boy was I wrong!

Kazakh Aul of the U.S. Volunteer Opportunities Available

There are many ways to help your Aul. Nearly everyone who volunteers also works full-time outside the home, and people donate as much or as little time as they are able. We have needs for people who are passionate about learning about Kazakh culture and for developing learning opportunities and cultural activities for our community all over the U.S. In addition, if you are interested in committing to serve on the Board of the Aul, the Board has twice-monthly conference calls on Wednesday evenings at 9pm (Eastern time).

To learn more about volunteer opportunities with the Kazakh Aul of the U.S., Association for American & Kazakh Families, please contact Susan at *ssaxon@kazakh-aul-us.org*. If you are interested in volunteering on the Board, please contact Heather at *heatherotoole@charter.net*.

The Dynamics of Feasting and Gift Exchange in Rural Kazakstan

By Cynthia Ann Werner

(In *Contemporary Kazaks: Social and Cultural Perspectives*.
Edited by Ingvar Svanberg. London: Curzon Press, 1998, pp. 47-72.)

***About Cynthia Werner:** Dr. Werner is a socio-cultural anthropologist at Texas A&M University who specializes in economic anthropology. Her research is focused on the economic and political transition in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. Dr. Werner lived outside of Shymkent during the mid 1990s, and recently returned from a trip to study ethnic Kazakhs in Mongolia. Dr. Werner has graciously given the Aul permission to re-print excerpts of her work in our newsletter. Thank you, Cynthia!*

The entire Zhailau [summer camp] talked only of their impressions of Bozhei's memorial feast.... It went down as an event that was unequalled throughout the region. The generosity and friendliness of the hosts would indeed serve as an example to many generations. Garrulous old men, eager and excited youths, women and children, all kept talking of the event. The tales and stories were endless, enough to last all summer, all autumn and well into winter. Who would ever forget the names of the champion wrestlers, the horses that had won the baiga, the side-splitting jokes and those who had distinguished themselves for their wit and eloquence during the festivities.... The fame of the memorial gathering spread throughout the Chingis, over the broad zhailyau, across the valleys, ravines and gullies. The names of those who had distinguished themselves for generosity and hospitality, for rich repasts and devoted attention to the guests floated upon the tide of general acclaim and acquired a glorious lustre The names of the sponsors - Baidaly, Baisal and Suyundik - were particularly prominent, and yet young Abai had won even greater renown than they.

From Mukhtar Auezov's *Abai: A Novel*

In Mukhtar Auezov's celebrated novel about the Kazak poet Abai Kunanbaev, the young Abai distinguishes himself as a praiseworthy individual by gallantly assisting his kinsmen in their efforts to host a large memorial feast for Bozhei, the leader of a neighboring tribal lineage. His efforts are doubly respected because his own father, a man of equal standing and an occasional nemesis of the deceased Bozhei, chose not to participate in the events. In the eyes of the public, Abai's magnanimity helps compensate for his father's insolence.
This event is just one of many in the biographical novel which illustrates the dominant values and cultural practices of the Kazaks in the pre-Soviet period. In a society without formal political offices, tribal leaders gained the respect of their followers and hence maintained their political authority by regularly demonstrating their generosity and hospitality. Feasts held in connection with life-cycle events provided several appropriate opportunities to demonstrate these cultural ideals. Although these ideals probably helped curb the greed of those in power, displays of generosity were not necessarily unilateral. In another scene, the young Abai is disillusioned when he realizes that his father's considerable wealth ultimately derives from the lavish "gifts" of his followers.

While the above-mentioned memorial feast took place in the mid-nineteenth century, displays of generosity and hospitality during feasting events have continued to play a central role in Kazak social life. After decades of Soviet rule, certain aspects of feasting have undergone change, but the cultural ideals and the nature of exchange associated with feasting have remained largely intact. As before, successful feasts become the topic of frequent conversation, as well as the standard for competitive comparison. Moreover, feasting still provides an avenue for individuals and families to acquire respect and prestige, in addition to political and material support. Although acts of generosity are highly idealized, economic and political motives often lie beneath a thin veneer of pure altruism. For this reason, feasting and gift exchange are best understood by looking at the broader political and economic context. As before, those who appear to be the most magnanimous also seem to be the ones who benefit the most politically and materially from feasting activities.

This essay examines the dynamics of feasting and gift exchange in a rural region of post-Soviet Kazakstan. In the post-Soviet period, the turbulent transition from a command-administrative economy to a capitalist market economy has had a devastating effect on rural Kazak households. The persistence of extreme inflation (approximately 1200% in 1993), coupled with low and delinquent monthly salaries, has led to a sharp decline in the average standard of living. At the same time, the introduction of a market economy has led to several new opportunities for investment. In some respects, it seems remarkable that these factors have not brought about a temporary suspense in feasting activities. Despite the perception and reality of economic hardship, rural Kazaks are continuing to expend a large amount of financial and labor resources on life-cycle feasts and gift exchange. Among the Kazaks of Southern-Kazakstan (formerly Shymkent) province, monthly household expenditures on ritual feasts and gift exchange often outweigh all other combined expenses, especially during the summer and fall months. In the average household, over half of the family income is spent on feast gifts, most of which are perceived to be a counter-gift for some previous exchange.

Despite the visibly high financial costs of feasting and gift exchange, rural Kazaks gain several advantages from sponsoring and attending these feasts. After describing the central features of a successful feast, this essay offers several explanations as to why the Kazaks are so dedicated to feasting and gift exchange.

An Extraordinary Feast:
In the village of Qyzylqum, dozens of large feasts are held each year. The late summer and early fall is the most popular time for feasts because the weather is nice, the livestock are fat, and there is a great variety of fruit and vegetables. Every weekend (during the summer and fall), several different households sponsor their own outdoor feast (toi) to celebrate the life-cycle event of one or more household members. While the largest feasts are held in honor of a younger son's circumcision or an older son's wedding, feasts are held for a variety of other events, including the birth of a child, the marriage of a daughter, and the fortieth or sixtieth birthday of a family member. Some families save money by sponsoring a single feast to celebrate two separate occasions, such as a son's circumcision and a grandmother's sixti-

The Dynamics of Feasting (continued)

eth birthday. (In addition to these joyous feasts, two different types of memorial feasts - one somber, the other festive - are held on the anniversary of a family member's death.) The large joyous feasts are usually held during the evening and last for several hours. Since the sponsoring household usually invites their entire network of relatives and friends to join the festivities, most feasts are attended by several hundred guests. Although the sponsors of each feast are careful not to schedule their feast on the same night as a close relative's feast, many of the guests are nevertheless invited to attend more than one feast on the same evening.

All of the feasts are the subject of local gossip. The number of guests, the presence of prominent individuals, the quantity and quality of food, the quality of entertainment, and the magnitude of gifts, among other things, are discussed and compared, both before and after a feast. During the summer of 1995, one feast in particular was lauded as one of the most impressive ever to be held in the region. This feast excelled in all of the categories mentioned above. The sponsor of this renowned feast, Serikzhan, was the middle-aged director of a state farm. He organized the feast in order to celebrate the circumcision of his youngest child and only son.

Preparations for Serikzhan's feast began a few months in advance. In May, his wife, Nazipa, traveled to Iran in order to purchase a number of items for the feast. Although most villagers had never left Kazakstan, this sort of trip was not entirely unusual for Nazipa, as she and a friend occasionally traveled to Moscow in order to buy consumer goods, which they would later resell for a profit. On this particular trip, she purchased goods for the feast, as well as goods for trade and furniture for her home. Her feast-related purchases included an assortment of decorative serving trays, several dozen packages of foreign candies, and an array of cloth and clothing to be presented as prizes for dancing and as counter-gifts for certain guests. After this trip, she continued to purchase similar goods in the local markets.
In late June, one month before the feast was held, Serikzhan's five-year-old son, Zhanibek, was circumcised at home by a local doctor. In Kazakstan, boys are generally circumcised between the ages of five and eight. It is very common for two or even three boys, usually brothers or cousins, to undergo the procedure on the same day. As the only son, however, Zhanibek underwent the operation alone. In southern Kazakstan, it is customary to commemorate the circumcision with at least two events: a small gathering on the day of the circumcision and a much larger feast a month later. Wealthy families may also host a third event, a day of competitive horse games complete with livestock prizes for the winners. On the day Zhanibek was circumcised, Serikzhan invited a relatively small number of guests - a few dozen relatives and close friends - to his home. As soon as they arrived, each of the guests entered the room where Zhanibek was lying in recovery beneath a simple white sheet. In addition to congratulating the young boy for becoming a Muslim and commending him for his bravery, each guest gave him a small amount of money as a gift. Zhanibek and his young friends spent most of the day counting and recounting all of the money he had earned. After spending a few minutes in the recovery room, the guests were ushered to another room where they were served food and alcohol. One of the guests was a mullah who recited prayers to thank God for the successful outcome (qudaigha shukir).

It is important to note that many of the celebrations associated with circumcision have been revived and reinvented in recent years. For decades, the Soviet state outlawed circumcision as part of a comprehensive campaign against Islamic practices. Russians do not circumcise their sons, and the Soviet Russian rulers did not agree with the Central Asian argument that circumcision had practical, as well as spiritual, benefits. Throughout the Soviet period, most Soviet Muslim families, including party and government officials, continued to have their sons circumcised. However, men in powerful state positions, such as Serikzhan, would not sponsor a large feast to publicize the fact that their sons had been circumcised. Now, as in the pre-Soviet past, the powerful and wealthy are the ones holding the largest circumcision feasts.

After Zhanibek's circumcision, Serikzhan and his wife devoted much of their time to the many feast preparations. They invited two of the province's distinguished musicians, a female singer and a male dombra player, to perform at the feast. And, for the important role of feast announcer, they invited a man who was famous for his wit and charm. In addition to these arrangements, they ordered several hundred paper invitations which were later hand-delivered to people's homes. This took a lot of effort as some of the more than six hundred invited guests lived in distant regions.

In the weeks before the feast, it was also necessary to recruit all of the people who would be setting up the feast area, preparing food and serving the guests. One day, nearly a dozen of Serikzhan's closest friends and relatives met for dinner and discussed the logistics of the feast. Each person was selected to supervise a particular aspect of the feast, such as invitations or guest seating. Besides finding people to fill these leadership roles, Serikzhan and his wife recruited about thirty more volunteers, both men and women, to help with a variety of tasks. The volunteers were recruited from several different social groups. Close relatives, who were members of Serikzhan's tribal lineage (ru), hardly needed an invitation to help out. Many people in this category were also neighbors, so their assistance was not only expected but heavily relied upon. The women who married into the lineage (collectively referred to as abysyn-azhyn) contributed the most in terms of female labor. In addition to tribal kinsmen and their wives, classmates, neighbors and friends were also recruited. By performing these services, the volunteers were able to perpetuate a relationship based on mutual indebtedness with Serikzhan's family.
Labor contributions varied by gender, among other things. Several men were assigned to mark off the feast area in Serikzhan's yard by constructing a simple rectangular fence (approximately 40 x 20 meters). Large spotlights were attached to each of the corners to provide lighting. The fence posts were then covered with white sheets. In the center of the feast area, a tall pole was constructed and a number of thin white streamers were attached from the top of the pole to various points along the fence. The entire feast area was supposed to resemble the inside of a round felt tent (kiiz ui), the traditional home of the formerly nomadic Kazaks. At some feasts, this visual effect was completed by actually covering the feast area with burlap tent material. But, at Serikzhan's feast, the feast area was left uncovered. Inside the feast area, the men arranged twenty-five long wooden tables and benches. And, after the center pole was in place, the

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The Dynamics of Feasting (continued)

men positioned three video monitors on a platform which was mounted on the middle of the pole. This unusual feature made quite an impression on the guests who enjoyed watching the simultaneous video-recordings of the feast. Besides constructing the feast area, the men's responsibilities included slaughtering and butchering the livestock, setting up the large cooking kettles, and cooking barbecued shish-kebabs (shashlyq). Younger men and boys even helped with some of the food preparation by chopping several kilograms of carrots for the pilaf dish.

The women's responsibilities were equally cumbersome and time-consuming. Most of the women's work centered around food preparation. Although some meat sausages were prepared in advance, most of the food preparation did not begin until a few days before the feast. Then, the women started to bake fresh flat bread, dinner rolls and cakes. They also prepared a variety of pastries, including fried dough pieces (bauyrsaq) and small meat-filled pies (samsa), and an assortment of appetizers which were served cold, such as potato and egg salad, fried fish, and boiled chicken. On the day of the feast, some women spent the entire day preparing and cooking the main dishes: soup, pilaf, steamed dumplings (manti) and boiled dumplings (pelmeni). In addition to preparing meals for the evening feast, the women were obliged to prepare and serve meals for the volunteer workers, as well as a large number of elderly guests who chose not to attend the late evening's activities. And, when the feast was over, the women did the bulk of the cleaning up.

Some of the feast labor was performed jointly by men and women. A few hours before the feast was scheduled to begin, the men and the women helped each other set the tables. Each table was covered with a plastic tablecloth and then loaded with an assortment of food and drink. The foods included bread, pastries, cakes, chicken, fish, sausage, fruit, salads, nuts, cookies and candies, while the drinks included vodka, cognac, beer, fermented camel's milk, mineral water, cola and powdered drinks. Throughout the feast, the men and the women again worked together to serve the hot dishes, as well as a constant flow of hot tea.

Obviously, a lot of money was needed to cover all of the feast expenses. While a modest feast requires about 50,000 tennge, or about 800 dollars, for food, alcohol and other expenses, Serikzhan's feast probably cost about ten times that amount. In order to pay for these expensive feast, most families are forced to take several short-term, interest-free loans from relatives and friends. Since the total value of gifts received usually exceeds the total costs of sponsoring a feast, the borrowers manage to repay these loans by converting a portion of the gifts they receive into cash. For a typical feast, about three or four sheep and one cow are slaughtered to provide meat for about three hundred guests. Although meat is an essential ingredient for every course, it is not uncommon for poor families to cut costs by serving a plate of pilaf or a bowl of soup with only a few small pieces of meat per person. Poor families also tended to avoid meat-intensive dishes, such as shashlyq. For Serikzhan's feast, however, there was an overabundance of meat. Twenty-five young lambs, one cow and one horse were slaughtered to provide meat for the feast. Serikzhan was pleased that a sheep head would be presented at each table. The guests were very impressed with the quantity of meat and with the wide assortment of drinks which were served. While vodka, camel's milk, mineral water, beer and tea are customarily served at feasts, the average family cannot afford to provide cola and powdered drinks for a large number of guests. Serikzhan and Nazipa also spent much more money than the average household on prizes and counter-gifts. For example, instead of giving an inexpensive kerchief as a "prize" to a woman who danced well, they presented such prizewinners with three meters of an expensive cloth.

As the moment approached for the feast to begin, Serikzhan's yard began to swell with the arrival of guests. They stood around and chatted with the volunteers as they waited for the announcer to call them to their seats. At this point, Serikzhan, Nazipa and Zhanibek had all changed into their feasting attire. Serikzhan was dressed in a well-fitting European-style suit, while his wife was wearing a white silk dress. The young Zhanibek was dressed in the more traditional circumcision outfit - a black velvet suit with gold trim and a matching hat. They stood by the main gate greeting all of the guests. The guests were also dressed in their finest clothes. The older men wore suits or dress slacks and shirts. Some of them also wore a pointed, black-and-white felt hat or a round Uzbek-style cap. Instead of wearing suits, the younger men and boys were dressed in the latest fashion - nylon jogging suits. The women, on the other hand, wore bright silk dresses and floral print cotton dresses. On top of these dresses, some women also wore a "traditional" black or red velvet vest with gold embroidered patterns. Interestingly enough, many women who routinely cover their heads with kerchiefs at home choose not to wear a kerchief while attending a feast. While the kerchief is typically worn by married women and thus serves as a symbol of marriage, it has long been associated with the custom of veiling. In Muslim communities where women veil, they are more likely to veil in public than in private. Therefore, it is somewhat strange that the women would prefer to wear the kerchief in private at home, but not in public at a feast. Although the adult guests all stopped to congratulate Zhanibek, he was mostly interested in playing with his friends. Meanwhile, many of the guests were intrigued by the three gift automobiles prominently displayed in Serikzhan's courtyard. The bestowal of these three automobiles brought prestige to both the recipients and the donors. I was told that the donors, who were state farm directors or equally powerful men, had probably received a similar gift from Serikzhan in the past. These were not the only impressive gifts. In the days before the feast, many guests had their gifts delivered directly to Serikzhan's house. This was particularly the case for large, unwieldy gifts, such as a camel or a foal. Serikzhan's corral was already filled with numerous camels and horses and dozens of sheep on the day before the feast. Some of the guests arrived bearing even more gifts, such as carpets, suits, and money. One of Zhanibek's uncles arrived with a beautiful white horse. The horse was immediately saddled, so Zhanibek could be paraded around for the guests.

Finally, the announcer started to direct the guests to different tables, depending on their social status and their relationship to the hosts. The best table, at the far end of the feast area, was reserved for the most influential guests, including the local governor and the directors and former directors of the region's state farms. Like all other Kazak feasts, men and women were seated together. As soon as the guests were seated, they were served tea and encouraged to start eating the assorted appetizers and breads.
After all of the guests were seated, the feast activities began. At weddings, the first event is the formal entrance of the bride and groom,

who are slowly led through the aisles and eventually to their table by a couple of dancers who are moving to a fast-paced wedding song (zhar-zhar). Similarly, at a circumcision feast, the young boy is paraded through the guest tables while mounted on a horse or young camel. Thus, Zhanibek was paraded through the crowd on the large white horse, while the guests threw wads of money at him and stuffed money into one of the saddlebags. When the brief ride was over, Zhanibek stood by his parents while his grandfather recited a brief prayer. His grandfather was then rewarded with a horse, and he too was forced to mount the horse and parade around the tables.

After this event, Zhanibek was free to play with his friends, and the focus shifted towards the guests and their hosts. The servers started to bring out the first hot dish, a mutton soup. And, the announcer, armed with a microphone, started to invite the guests, individually and in small groups, up to the announcer's table. Over the course of several hours, each and every guest was summoned to the front. At most feasts, the announcer jokes and teases the guests and then persuades them to say a few words in honor of the occasion. Since most of the speeches are repetitive, the general audience does not listen attentively. Instead, most tables maintain their own rounds of toasting complete with alcohol consumption. In order to create a different atmosphere, Serikzhan and Nazipa decided to entertain their guests with music, rather than with the repetitive toasts. Thus, rather than forcing each of the guests to give a toast, the announcer joked with the guests and then asked the professional musicians to perform a song which Serikzhan and Nazipa had specially picked out for them. The announcer encouraged the honored guests to join the musicians by dancing. The words to various Kazak songs were intentionally changed for some of the guests.

In addition to bypassing the toasting format, Serikzhan's feast was unusual in yet another way. At all feasts, the host household receives a relatively large number of gifts but only gives away a relatively small number of gifts. The hosts typically present a few counter-gifts to individuals who helped out a lot and to individuals who provided unusually large gifts. The counter-gifts often consist of cloth or factory-made coats. They also present prizes, such as a kerchief or a shot of vodka, to some of the guests for their dancing abilities. At Serikzhan's feast, the magnitude and value of the counter-gifts and prizes was incredible. Some of the guests received horses, while others received expensive, "imported" coats. Most of the counter-gifts and prizes were piled on a table near the announcer's stand before the feast began. Whenever the announcer invited a new group to the front, Serikzhan and Nazipa would shuffle through the gifts to find suitable gifts and/or prizes.

And so the feast continued for hours and hours. The volunteer servers brought out one hot dish after another. They made sure the guests had plenty of hot tea and the tables were loaded with drinks and appetizers. Besides eating large quantities of food, the guests kept busy socializing and drinking with each other. The announcer and the musicians maintained a festive, light atmosphere with their jokes and music. The guests were also entertained by the video monitors, which displayed the live filming of the feast by two of Serikzhan's daughters. Finally, after the last course was served and the last guests were summoned to the front, the feast was over. Memories of this extraordinary feast, however, will long persist in the village of Qyzylqum.

Gift Exchange and the Art of Household Networking:

Although Serikzhan's feast was remarkable in many respects, it was only one of the many feasts held that summer. The members of some households were invited to dozens of other feasts. And, for each, they were expected to come up with an appropriate gift. The gifts exchanged at feasts are not just simple tokens of friendship. In Qyzylqum, gifts are the single largest household expense and they are the primary means by which households maintain strong social networks. When asked why they spend so much on feasts and gifts, rural Kazaks give two different, yet complementary answers. The first answer is associated with a fear of public shame. It would be shameful if a family decided not to celebrate their son's circumcision, or to provide their daughter with an elaborate dowry, or to sponsor a memorial feast on the one-year anniversary of the grandfather's death. Similarly, failure to present an appropriate gift at a neighbor's or relative's feast would bring shame to both parties. The second explanation entails a need or desire for reciprocity. As one woman put it, "We need to take a gift to their wedding today to ensure that they will bring a gift to our son's wedding in the future." The logic of this argument also involves a desire to avoid the shame that her family would likely incur if nobody were to bring gifts to their son's wedding.
In the post-Soviet period, however, it has become more and more difficult for the average family to afford these expenses. The persistence of inflation (approximately 1200% in 1993) coupled with low and delinquent monthly salaries, has put extreme burdens on household economies. In a survey of one hundred households, the overwhelming majority acknowledged that their economic condition were much better five years ago. Given this disturbing fact, it is fascinating to see how households are able to muster up the financial resources to participate in these ritual events. But, the more compelling question is not how Kazaks manage to afford these seemingly excessive feasts, but rather why they bother to do so. The stated fear of public shame only illustrates the perceived detriments of not participating in feast activities. But, what are the advantages, if any, of doing so? In this essay, I argue that feasts and gift exchange provide multiple opportunities for households to maintain and extend social networks, which are crucial for survival in the post-Soviet economy.

Feasting and gift exchange are primarily household activities, not individual activities. In other words, gifts are exchanged between households, not individuals. When Kazaks calculate the relative value of favors and gifts, they consider the balance of favors and gifts between households, not individuals. The gifts (and favors) exchanged by individual household members on behalf of their household create social bonds which are then at the disposal of all household members. For example, if Member X of Household A provides Household B with labor during a feast, a member of Household B might return the favor by helping Member Y of Household A get a job. Finally, even though a feast might be held in honor of an individual family member, such as Zhanibek, a successful feast enhances the reputation of the entire household.

Prior to a feast, the members of a household mutually decide what type of gift they should present to the host household. There is a wide range of standard gifts, including clothing, material, woven rugs, felt rugs, livestock, jewelry, electronic goods, and cash. The gift is

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presented as a gift from the entire household. If elderly parents or married children who live in the same household receive a separate invitation to a particular feast, then they would be expected to provide a separate gift. Although the decisions are mutual, women are usually the ones to present the gifts, especially if the gift is clothing or jewelry.

The nature of gifts in Kazakstan differs from those societies where gifts and commodities are distinct and non-transferable. Unlike the armshells and necklaces of the Kula exchange in the South Pacific, the goods exchanged in the Kazak ritual economy are not exclusively and eternally gifts. All of the objects exchanged have some use-value. They all can be recycled. And, they all can be converted freely from a commodity to a gift, and from a gift to a commodity. Numerous times, I have observed Kazak couples as they try to decide what they will present as a gift during an upcoming feast. More often than not, they choose to recycle something they already have on hand, such as an unused coat or a sheep. When making their decision, they consider whether the object's value is appropriate for the recipient and the occasion. However, the original source and the future use of the gift are irrelevant. The meaning of the gift lies in the transaction, not in the object.

The spirit conveyed by gifts in Kazakstan entails varying combinations of interest and disinterest, instrumentality and generosity, calculation and benevolence. As in China (Yan 1996) and Japan (Befu 1966-67), on one end of the spectrum, there are the "expressive gifts," or gifts without any ulterior motives. This type of gift includes the "good news" gift (suiinshy), which one person presents to the first person who told them a piece of really good news, such as a new birth. On the other end of the spectrum, there are "instrumental gifts," of gifts which are exchanged directly for favors and services. For example, many job opportunities in Kazakstan, such as a position on the police force, are secured through the exchange of a large monetary "gifts." The typical feast gift lies somewhere in the middle of the spectrum between the purely expressive and the purely instrumental gift. In other words, feast gifts convey multiple messages. On one level, these gifts do represent personal ties of affection between two households. But, at another level, the gifts carry meanings which relate to prestige and status. For example, the members of the three households who presented Serikzhan with an automobile knew that their own social status would be affected by such a gift. Finally, the gifts presented at feasts have yet another meaning. They are all given in full expectation of reciprocity. Thus, the gifts are instrumental in the sense that they help perpetuate a relationship of mutual indebtedness.

The gifts exchanged at ritual feasts symbolize social relationships between households (Mauss 1990; Marx 1973; Werbner 1990). In most cases, the giving household and the receiving household have already exchanged gifts on other occasions. The current gift simply demonstrates that the giving household seeks to continue the relationship in the manner of gift exchange, as well as other forms of social cooperation. The feast provides an opportunity to confirm this social relationship.

As Werbner (1990) and Marx (1973) note, it is also possible to terminate a social relationship by not providing a gift at the appropriate time. This rarely happens. It is not uncommon, however, for Kazak households to give less than what the receiving household expects. Sometimes, this is done intentionally, while other times, it is for purely economic reasons. Regardless of the cause, these unbalanced exchanges are a recurring subject in women's gossip, as well as a source of inter-household conflict.

Despite rhetoric to the contrary, Kazaks are very concerned with determining the value of a gift so they can pick out the appropriate counter-gift in the future. Like Americans exchanging gifts during Christmas (Miller 1993), Kazaks have culturally informed notions of quantitative equivalence in gift-giving. There is no specified gift to give for a certain occasion. The type of gift often depends on what the family has on hand. The value of the gift, though, depends on gifts received from the other household in the past, and on gifts or services that may be needed in the near future. On the one hand, mutually exchanged gifts of equivalent value signify relationships based on equality. On the other hand, an excessive gift may be used to establish a degree of power over the receiving household. For example, a household that repeatedly gives more than it receives in material gifts may expect the receiving household to help out with gifts of labor. This is even the case when the excessive gifts are perceived to be acts of altruism by both households because the exchange partners are close relatives living under different economic conditions.

Through the constant exchange of services and gifts, life-cycle feasts provide many opportunities for rural Kazaks to reinforce their household networks. In Kazakstan, feasting is the primary method used to build and maintain household networks. The labor and gifts exchanged at feasts are reciprocated in future feasts and in other aspects of life. All gifts, including services, are given in expectation of some return. Just as these informal networks are celebrated during ritual events, they are manipulated in daily life. Throughout the Soviet period, personal connections were helpful in a variety of contexts: to obtain consumer goods, to secure employment, to go on vacation, to receive quality health care, to get children into a university, and to advance in one's career. In the post-Soviet context, as in the Soviet past, access to goods and services are often obtained through personal acquaintances, rather than financial means alone. In rural Kazakstan, personal connections are still used in a variety of contexts: to obtain employment, to get children into the university, to acquire private land, to guarantee special medical attention, to receive doctor's excuses, to get discounts on goods, and to bypass the normal fee for a number of services.

Social Factors Affecting Feast Participation:

Although every household has a reserve network of kin and some households have inherent demographic advantages, household networking should be regarded as an activity that requires decision, choice and skill. For example, a household with limited resources may decide to provide labor help and a minimal gift during the circumcision feast of a relative so they may provide an expensive gift for the local administrator's son's wedding. Feasts and gift exchange are not simply traditions that the Kazaks blindly follow. Instead, the feasts and gifts are opportunities for actors to manipulate their standing in the social hierarchy. And, for this reason, Kazaks invest a lot of

thought, time and energy into their feasting habits.

Naturally, different households participate at varying levels in the continuous circuit of feasts. The adult members of all households are routinely invited to the feasts of close relatives, neighbors, colleagues and classmates. There are two factors, however, which influence the frequency of household feast attendance. The first factor is related to the demographic life cycle of the household. Households headed by middle-aged couples tend to be more active than those at other stages. Beginning with the circumcision of their sons and accelerating with the marriages of their children, middle-aged couples need to have strong social networks in order to pull off successful feasts of their own and to survive in the non-ritual economy. They maintain their networks by providing labor and gifts for others' feast and by frequently inviting guests to their homes.

Younger couples are just beginning to develop their own independent social networks. Economically, they are still dependent on their parents. They have less time and money for feasts and usually attend only the weddings of their classmates and close relatives. If the couple lives with the boy's parents, the young wife often remains busy at home completing household chores and caring for their children and their husband's younger siblings while their husbands' parents attend feasts. Like the younger couples, elderly couples are largely dependent on middle-aged couples for their survival needs. As a result, they no longer have the same economic motives for participating in the ritual economy. For the elderly, feasting is mostly a social activity. Moreover, around the age of sixty, an older couple will sponsor their last feast, perhaps for their sixtieth birthday or for their youngest child's wedding. A few years later, most elderly stop attending the evening feasts. Instead, they arrive at the host household during the afternoon and enjoy a few hours socializing and eating with old friends.

The second factor influencing the frequency of feast attendance is social position. People with power and influence, such as local government leaders and the new class of wealthy entrepreneurs, have the largest social networks. Their networks even extend into surrounding regions and into the nearby cities. As a consequence, they are the most vigorous feast attendees in the community. Since they are considered to be wealthy in the village, they are expected to provide a larger gift than the average person. During a feast, these individuals are always ushered to a position of honor at a head table in the "back" of the feast grounds. This parallels the position of honor (tor) within Kazak homes, which is always the furthest position from the door. These special guests are also among the first to be invited to share a toast. In the summer and fall, it is not uncommon for such people to juggle invitations to several different feasts on the same day. The duration of their stay at any one feast is an important indicator of the host household's status. If influential guests leave early, most likely to rush off to another feast, it negatively affects the reputation of the feast by implicitly suggesting that the other engagement is more important.

Since wealthy villagers are constantly giving gifts, it seems likely then that they would suffer economically. However, the contrary is true. To begin, their expenses on gift exchange are balanced by material gains they receive from their positions of power. More importantly, the wealthy generally make a handsome profit when they hold a feast of their own, for all of their generous gifts over time must be reciprocated. Unlike the gifts received by the poor, which may or may not match the feast expenses, the gifts received by the wealthy go well beyond covering the expenses for the feast. As a case study, gift exchange in Kazakstan stands in opposition to the famous potlatch exchange in Northwest America. Descriptions of the potlatch feasts consistently emphasize that the feasts serve to redistribute goods from the wealthier members of the community to the poorer members of the community. Rather than redistributing wealth, the feasts in Kazakstan promote the accumulation of wealth.

Economically, poor Kazak households are at a great disadvantage. In the post-Soviet period, they are continuing to sponsor feasts, but their feasting patterns are changing. Their feasts are becoming smaller and less expensive than before. And, they are presenting other households with gifts of lesser value. They are also delaying their wedding feasts for longer stretches of time, as well as having a greater number of combination feasts. Among poor families, I often heard expressions of regret and resentment concerning the high cost of ritual exchange. They are aware that the financial resources they expend on ritual are needed for basic survival. But, they also realize that participation in the feasting provides them with social benefits and preserves their family pride. So, like the elite households, they continue to attend and sponsor feasts.

Although they are invited to fewer feasts and are permitted to give gifts with smaller economic values, the resources poor households expend on ritual exchange are more likely to come at the expense of the family's basic nutritional needs. In this regard, young children suffer more than their parents because they are rarely included in the festivities and only receive a handful of candies and peanuts that their mother brings home. And, when poor households need to sponsor their own feast, the gifts they receive are less likely to meet the costs of the feast. As a result, poor households are forced to rely on their relatives to come up with the necessary financial resources. These debts serve to further relations of inequality among related households.

Socially, it is possible to argue that poor households enjoy some benefits from feasting. On the one hand, feasts provide them with the opportunity to increase their social standing, albeit gradually. But, more importantly, feasting reinforces values of cooperation, reciprocity and communal responsibility. By helping others prepare for their feasts, they maintain important social bonds which they need for economic survival.

Consumption, Exchange and Identity at Feasts:

In addition to strengthening household networks, ritual feasts offer occasions for Kazak households to negotiate their position within the community. According to Kazak custom, social status and power is achieved largely through displays of hospitality and generosity. During feasts, both host and guest households have the opportunity to demonstrate their generosity and thus recreate their social status. Host households present their guests with large quantities of food and entertainment, in addition to providing counter-gifts and prizes. Guest households present their hosts with gifts and congratulatory toasts.

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As they evaluate the relative success of a feast, rural Kazaks routinely compare the quality and quantity of food and gifts to local cultural standards. Expectations vary according to the social status and the wealth of the host household. In order to maintain their prestige, the wealthy are expected to be more generous in both their hospitality and their gift-giving. The host household thus actively seeks to provide as much food as it can possibly afford in order to maintain or improve its social status. Its tribal kinsmen also have some stake in this matter so they readily offer their physical labor and financial aid. In general, the wealthy invite more guests and serve more meat per guest. The wealthy also serve some factory-produced goods, such as candies, cookies and alcohol, while poor households tend to buy or make home-produced foods in these categories.

In the post-Soviet period, the wide availability of imported goods has had a significant impact on local consumer preferences. During the Soviet period, the selection of consumer goods in rural areas was not very large and the goods were almost exclusively of Soviet origin. In the post-Soviet period, many of these Soviet goods, the majority of which are produced outside of Kazakstan, are no longer available. Instead, the rural Kazak consumer is now faced with a huge assortment of imported goods from China, Turkey, Pakistan, Iran and India. In general, Kazaks believe that the quality of imported goods, with the notable exception of Chinese goods, is much higher than their Soviet counterparts. Several Kazaks told me that the flood of new and interesting products in the local bazaar is one of the few positive changes resulting from the fall of the Soviet Union. Accordingly, rural Kazaks are adapting their food and gift preferences in ways to accommodate these new items. The wealthy, in particular, place a high value on the consumption and exchange of these new imported goods.

The meanings attached to the use of these new foods varies within the community. On the one hand, those who consume these products take great pride in their purchases and relate the use of such products to their family's material success. During the present period of economic transition and social stratification, it is especially important for the elite to demonstrate that its place in the social order has not changed. The conspicuous consumption of expensive imports provides one avenue for maintaining their image. In this regard, the behavior and reputation of the Kazak elite, in both urban and rural areas, mirrors the image of the "New Russians." As in Russia (Humphrey 1995), the consumption style of the Kazak elite, in both urban and rural areas, has provoked suspicion and criticism from those who can no longer afford to buy basic necessities. It is not uncommon for individuals who cannot afford foreign goods to ridicule their consumption. For example, several people told me that imported candies come in nice little wrappers, but the taste is inferior to Soviet candy. Even though the Soviet Union no longer exists, Kazaks continue to refer to Soviet factory goods as "ours" (*bizdiki*) and to all other goods as "imported" (*importnyi* or *shetelden*). In a study of consumption in Moscow, Caroline Humphrey (1995) suggests that the strong distinction between Soviet and non-Soviet goods can be explained by Soviet ideology which "insisted on the citizen's conscious identification with the activity of the state."

Consumption in rural Kazakstan, however, cannot be reduced to a simple dichotomy between the "haves" who desire foreign goods and the "have-nots" who can only afford local goods. In the middle, there are numerous status-conscious households which try to emulate the behavior of wealthier households, but do not have the financial means to do so. These households, for example, might purchase the same package of powdered drink mix, but in order to save money they will add much more water than specified on the label. The final product appears to be the same as the sweet drinks consumed by the wealthy, but the taste is the same as water.

While imported goods are beginning to change the content of feast foods, the nomadic heritage of the Kazaks has continued to provide an element of stability in contemporary cuisine. Although the Kazaks were forced to settle in the 1930s, many of Kazakstan's collective and state farms are primarily devoted to the production of livestock. In addition, most rural households continue to raise a small number of privately-owned livestock. Meat from pastoral animals is the essence of all Kazak dishes. The highest cultural preference is bestowed on horse meat which is believed to have special curative powers. While horse meat is restricted to specific dishes, beef and mutton can readily substitute for each other in any meal. The heads of sheep and horses are routinely presented to male guests of honor, and specific cuts of meat are sometimes offered to culturally determined categories of relatives. Horse and camel milk is also served at wedding feasts.

In addition to "traditional" Kazak meat dishes, chicken and fish, which did not play a significant role in the pre-Soviet diet of nomadic Kazaks, now occupy a unique place in Kazak cuisine. They are not considered to be main entrees, nor are they served on a daily basis. Boiled chicken and fried fish are reserved for ritual events where they are served as cold appetizers before the hot meaty courses. Finally, eggs are consumed daily by the families that raise chickens, but they are viewed as a poor substitute for meat and they are never served at ritual events.

The gifts exchanged during feasts are also used to display and negotiate difference in social status. Wealthy households and status-conscious households are more likely to give commodities or cash than home-produced goods, such as felt rugs or livestock. Like food, the nature of gifts and dowry items form an important part of village gossip. Neighbors rigorously compare the gifts assembled for a dowry (*zhasau*) or a matchmaker party (*qudalyq*). Before and after these gifts are bestowed, they are routinely shown to visitors who are asked whether the goods are sufficient. Imported goods, which were highly coveted but rarely available in the past, are now expected by the more affluent. Foreign, factory-produced rugs and clothing provide preferred substitutes for local handicrafts and Soviet-produced clothing. In many respects, these new goods are filling a niche previously occupied by certain Soviet factories which were renown for producing higher quality goods. With the independence of Kazakstan and the concurrent economic upheaval throughout the former Soviet empire, many of the old goods no longer reach the bazaars of rural Kazakstan. So, the Kazaks are now replacing the prestige items of the past with new Asian and European imports. Another example is cash gifts, where American dollars are viewed as a much more prestigious gift than their equivalent in Kazak tenge.

The consumption and exchange of imported goods at feasts is primarily associated with the wealthier households. The meanings attached to the consumption of imported goods, however, varies within the community. In the post-Soviet period, the use of imported consumer goods has intensified the level of competition in feasting and gift-giving among the local elite. Meanwhile, middle-level households are seeking to emulate the consumption patterns of the wealthy in hopes of gaining status and prestige, while the poorest households are finding it more difficult to continue participating in the feasts.

In conclusion, this essay offers a variety of explanations to explain the why the rural Kazaks devote so much time, energy and resources to feasting. First, feasting and gift exchange provide multiple opportunities for rural Kazaks to maintain and extend household networks which are manipulated in other contexts. Second, although the feasts appear to be very expensive, most sponsors break even, and some even profit from hosting a feast. Finally, through conspicuous exchange and conspicuous consumption, rural Kazaks manage to recreate their social status and identity through feasting and gift exchange.

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The Woodcutter's Daughter

From *Stories of the Steppes: Kazakh Folktales Retold by Mary Lou Masey*
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Continuing from last issue, here is another excerpt from Mary Lou Masey's wonderful collection of Kazakh stories that was originally published in 1968. With a very warm thanks to Mary Lou's husband Jack Masey for giving the Aul permission to print his late wife's work in our newsletter.

Once upon a time, in a smoky dugout in the barrenmost part of the steppe, there lived an aged woodcutter and his little daughter. The old woodcutter was wretchedly poor; for goods he had only a chipped axe, and for livestock, a broken-down donkey and a miserable old ox. But wisemen say, "The happiness of a rich man lies in his flocks; the happiness of a poor man, in his children." And truly, the woodcutter had only to look at his daughter and all his troubles would vanish.

His daughter was named Aina. So beautiful, so wise, and well-behaved was she, that whoever saw her fell in love on the spot. Children came from faraway auls to play with her, and grown-ups came just as far to chat with her. One day the woodcutter loaded his bundle of wood onto his tired old donkey and bade his daughter farewell.

Dear Aina," said he, "I going to the bazaar and I will not be back until evening. You must not be lonely without me. If I manage to sell the firewood, I will bring you back a beautiful shawl."

"May all go well with you, father," answered his daughter, "and may you have good luck! But I beg you to be careful. The bazaar, it is said, is the worst place on earth, for there fortunes are made by some and lost by others. Come back as soon as you are able. I will keep your supper warm on the fire for you."

The woodcutter gave the donkey a nudge and set forth. When he arrived at the bazaar, he tied up the donkey to one side and began to wait for someone to buy his firewood. Time passed, but no one approached them. At last a rich young man came wandering through the bazaar, pluming his fine black beard and preening his silken robe. He saw the ragged old man with his firewood and decided to play a trick on him.

"Say there, old man, is that firewood you are selling?" he asked.

"It is," answered the woodcutter.

"What are you asking for that bundle there?"

"One piece of silver."

"And are you selling firewood for this price 'as-is'?"

The woodcutter did not understand the words of the young man, but seeing nothing wrong with him, he answered, "Yes."

"Very well," said the young man, "here is your silver piece. Drive your donkey after me."

When they reached the rich man's palace, the woodcutter began to untie the cord to take down the bundle of firewood. But suddenly the rich man hit him a blow on the chest and cried for everyone to hear: "What do you think you're doing, you stupid old man? Don't tell me you want to take your donkey with you? Didn't I buy the firewood from you 'as-is'? That donkey belongs to me! You got your price and now you are trying to cheat me!"

The woodcutter began to object, but the young man would have none of it. He shook his fist in the old man's face and yelled louder than ever. Then, seizing the old man by the sleeve, he dragged him off to the judge. Wisely is it said, "A crooked rich man can make a racehorse out of an old nag, and a crooked judge somebody else's out of what is yours."

After the judge had listened to both sides, he stroked his beard, taking in the silken robe of the rich man, and announced his verdict: the woodcutter had already received everything that was his due, and it was his own fault if he had agreed to the conditions of the buyer. The rich man chuckled over the judge's decision and was very well pleased with his joke. But the woodcutter wept bitter tears and went grieving back to his aul.

While waiting, Aina had more than once to put wood on the fire to keep her father's supper warm. When at last he came stumbling wearily over the doorstep, and Aina saw the tears in his eyes, her heart went black as coal. She threw herself into her father's arms, begging him to tell her the reason for his sadness. The woodcutter told his daughter his tale of woe, and she, with tender kisses and wise words tried to comfort him. But only at dawn did she manage to wipe away the last of her father's tears. In the morning, exhausted with weeping, the woodcutter was in no condition to go to work. Aina caressed him, saying, "Dear father! Today you are not well and you must stay in bed. Let me go myself to the bazaar. Perhaps I will be luckier than you and will sell the firewood for a better price."

At first, the old man would not hear of it, but at last Aina convinced him to let her go. "Go, my child, if you really want to," said the old man, "but know that I will have no peace until I see you again at my side."

And so Aina loaded onto the old ox the bundle of firewood and set out. At the bazaar, Aina soon saw in the crowd the young man with the fine black beard and the silken robe, strutting about, his nose in the air. When he spied the girl with the firewood, he laughed slyly to himself and went up to her.

"Hey there, little girl!" said he, "is that firewood you're selling?"

"It is," answered Aina.

"What do you want for that bundle there?"

"Two pieces of silver."

"And will you sell the firewood for that price, 'as-is'?"

"I will, but only if you give me the money 'as-is'!"

"Agreed, agreed," said the rich man hastily, smiling into his beard. "Drive the ox after me." When they came to the rich man's house, Aina said, "Now show me where to tie up the ox."

The rich man was surprised, but he pointed to a post in the middle of the courtyard. Aina tied up the ox and asked for her money. When the rich man held out two silver pieces to her, she said, "But uncle,. You bought my firewood 'as-is', and I gave you the ox along with the firewood. You promised to give me the money also 'as-is'. I want not only the two pieces of silver, but your hand as well!"

The rich man was struck dumb. When he came to his senses, he began screaming and cursing, but no matter how he threatened her, Aina stood firm. Finally, there was nothing to do but to go off together to the judge.

The judge listened, but this time though he could stroke his beard and stare at the rich man's silken robe all he wanted, he could not think of a way to let the rich man off. "It is my decision," he said at last, "that the buyer must give the maiden two pieces of silver for the firewood and fifty pieces of gold for his hand."

At this the rich man flew into a rage and was ready to give up the firewood, the broken-down donkey, the miserable old ox, the chipped ax, and all, but it was too late. Handing the money to Aina, he said, "You may have outsmarted me this time, wretched girl, but don't think you are going to go bragging to anybody about this. I'm still smarter than you are, and just to show you, let's make a wager. I'll tell the most fantastic thing that ever happened to me, and you do the same. Whoever's story is more fantastic, and whoever does not call the other a liar, wins. Do you agree to these conditions? I will wager fifty gold pieces and you can wager whatever you wish."

"I agree, uncle," answered Aina. "I will wager you my own head. If you win, you can do what you will with my life. And as you are older than I in years, you must begin." The rich man winked at the judge and began his story.

"One day I found three grains of wheat in my pocket. I threw them out the window and in no time there appeared outside my window a wheat field so tall and thick that people on camels and horses could ride about in it for days. And one day, what do you think happened? Forty of my best goats strayed into the field and got lost. I called them and called them, but the goats had vanished without a trace. Fall came, the heat ripened. My workers harvested the wheat, but the bones of the goats were nowhere to be found. They threshed the wheat, and still there was no sign of the goats. One day I asked my wife to bake me some bread, and while I was waiting I sat down to read the Koran. My wife took the bread from the fire and handed it to me. I bit off a piece and began to chew. Suddenly there was such a shrieking and bleating in my head that my mouth flew open, and out leaped forty goats, one right after the other! Before my very own eyes they began capering about on the Koran. And so fat were they that each was as big as a four-year-old bull calf!"

When the rich man had finished his story, even the judge shook his head reproachfully, but Aina was unmoved. "Uncle," said she, "I see that your story is the purest of truth. Clever men like you often have even funnier adventures. Now listen to my story." And Aina began her tale.

"One day, I planted in the middle of my aul a tiny cotton seed, and what do you think happened? The next day on that spot there appeared a cotton plant, which reached to the clouds, and its shadow was as long as a three-day journey. When the cotton ripened, I picked it, cleaned it, and sold it to a poor woman I know. With the money, I bought forty of the best one-humped camels, loaded them with precious cloths, and sent my eldest brother to take the caravan to Bokhara. It has been three years now since my brother left and I have not yet had word from him. But not long ago, I heard it said that he was overtaken on the road and murdered by some blackbearded villain. I did not hope, uncle, ever to find that villain, but fate has been kind to me. I see that you are the murderer—for that is my brother's silken robe you are wearing!"

When Aina said these words, the judge leaped from his seat, and the rich man fell flat on the floor. Now what was to be done? To say the girl was lying meant to give her the fifty gold pieces; to say that she spoke the truth would be even worse, for then she would demand recompense for her murdered brother, and forty of the finest one-humped camels, laden with precious goods, besides.

Finally the rich man could bear it no longer. "May your tongue stick to a stone!" he cried. "It's all lies, lies, lies, you wretched girl! Take your fifty gold pieces, take my robe too, only get out of my sight before I wring your neck!"

Aina took the gold, wrapped it in the rich man's robe and ran home to her father as fast as her legs would carry her. The woodcutter, anxious at his daughter's long absence, had come out into the steppe to look for her. Soon he caught sight of her running toward him. He threw his arms around her neck and cried: "Aina, my little beaver hat! What happened to you? Where have you been for such a long time, and why isn't the old ox with you?"

"May blue skies always shine upon you, father," Aina answered, "I have returned safely from the city where I sold the ox to the blackbearded rich man 'as-is'."

"My poor child," moaned the woodcutter, "the hard-hearted rich man has deceived you. Now we are lost and it is all my fault."

"Father dear," said Aina, "do not be so quick to despair. I received a very good price for firewood and the ox." And she held out to her father the rolled-up silken robe.

"That is a beautiful and costly robe indeed," said the woodcutter sadly, "but what good will it do to me, a poor woodcutter? Without the ax, the old donkey, and the ox, we will have to live on alms." Then Aina, saying not a word, unrolled the silken robe, and from it fell the fifty gold pieces and the two pieces of silver. The woodcutter looked in amazement, first at the glittering coins, then at his daughter, and could hardly believe it was not a dream. The girl threw her arms around his neck and told him everything that had happened in the town.

The woodcutter laughed and cried as he listened to his daughter. Aina finished her story with these words: "O father, where the rich man is sly, the poor man is wise. The blackbeard received his just desserts, and with his fifty gold pieces, we shall live happy and content to the rest of our days."

Kazakh Recipe: *Beshbarmak, the Kazakh National Dish*

Courtesy of Vera Kurmasheva

Here Vera provides a classic Kazakh recipe with an American-style shortcut for our busy lives. Instead of making the dough by hand, Vera uses Chinese egg roll sheets. Also, she stresses that all components of this dish (except the meat), need to be cooked at the same time, so everything is hot and fresh when served. Enjoy!

Serves 4

2 lbs. boneless lamb meat
2 onions (medium)
2 potatoes, peeled (medium)
1 pack of egg roll sheets (Found in the produce section of the supermarket. Egg roll dough comes in two sizes and it is preferable to purchase the smaller size, 3" x 3". If you buy the larger size, you will have to cut the squares down to 3" x 3".
Salt and pepper

Fill a 4 liter pot halfway with water and add the meat. Bring to a boil, and continue boiling, Foam will appear, remove the foam and throw it out. Once the foam is all removed, reduce heat to simmer and cook for one hour.

While the meat is cooking, boil the potatoes in a separate pot until cooked, Drain, cut into bite-sized pieces, and set aside.

After one hour, remove the meat and cut it into bite-size pieces. Save the water.

Slice the onions into rings and place them in the bottom of a small pot. Add salt and pepper. Add "two fingers" of the water that was used to boil the meat. "Two fingers" literally means that you measure the amount of water by placing two fingers together across the bottom of a measuring cup. (For example, Susan's fingers are about 1/2 a cup). Boil the onion and water mixture slowly for about 10 minutes to make *Tuzlyk (*pronounced tuz-*likh)*.

Boil the water that was used to cook the meat for a second time. Then, drop and stir in the egg roll 3" x 3" sheets one at a time. Boil 8-10 minutes, until done. Remove the noodles and put them on a serving plate. Arrange the potatoes around the noodles. Place the meat on top of the noodles, in the center. Put the *Tuzlyk* on top, and serve. The water that was used to cook the meat and noodles may be drunk separately.

Kazakh Aul of the U.S. *Gifts for Sale*

Zhailau Kazakh Counting Coloring Book

by Daniyar Baidaralin & Audrey Englander

This book was a hit when we presented it at Zhailau. Your whole family or friends can enjoy counting to ten in Kazakh using Daniyar's transliterations in English. And, any child will enjoy coloring Daniyar's wonderful graphics! We've improved the book since the summer in that we added a spiral binding (as opposed to old fashioned staples). Produced on the Aul's own color laser jet printer with front and back

Give the Gift of the Kazakh Aul of the US

An Aul membership is a great way to share Kazakh culture and community with your family and friends. For each gift recipient, please send us all the important details, and we will happily send each person a personalized gift card. Annual memberships cost a minimum of $40.00, and more information is available on our website at www.kazakh-aul-us.org or contact info@kazakh-aul-us.org.

All proceeds from the sale of the Zhaliau Kazakh Counting Coloring Book and Aul memberships will go towards the support of the Kazakh Aul of the U.S. Please mail checks or money orders payable to the Kazakh Aul of the U.S., 247 Cypress St., Providence, RI 02906.

The Kazakh Aul of the U.S. gratefully acknowledges its donor base, including the following members who graciously donated during the past quarter. *Thank you so much!*

Azamat	*Susan Clegg*
	Decore Family
	Finkel-Feldman Family
	Sara Libou
	McGill Family
	Reeb Family
	Terri Sperber
	Kirsten Tuttle
Zhomart	*Russell-Donovan Family*
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	Jerry Wheelock
Ardakteh	*Daley Family*

A warm welcome to the following new Aul families

Marylyn and Zhana Aglubat
Heliena Fox, David and Kendra Shadd
Cari Gallap and Dennis Kemp
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Mary HIndsale, Debrah Lyons, and Aaron Hindsale-Lyons
Mary Anne Kiernan, Robert Lazeski and Anzhelika Mary
Ann and Paul Martins
MaryEllen McLaughlin
Alicia, Bruce, and Saida Riddell
Kelly and Kennis Rogers
Heather and Hannah Steiner

Your Aul Needs You! *There are many ways to help*

*With members in 25 states, our Aul is growing and there is lots to be done to keep providing Kazakh cultural programming, family gatherings, this newsletter, and more. Please consider helping the Aul - **no matter where you live**. You can do as much or as little as you like, any effort will be greatly appreciated!*

Please give the gift of your time, expertise, or passion to your Aul

Very few of us here at the Aul live close to one another and still we get a lot done via email and conference calls. Everyone involved donates his/her time, and most of us have full-time jobs outside the home. Nonetheless, we are a passionate bunch who are committed to the Aul's mission.

If you have a special skill or expertise, or simply the passion, we would love to have you join us! We currently have a wide variety of needs that include:

- Accounting
- Publicity and outreach
- Quarterly mailings to adoption agencies
- E-list moderating
- Publicizing the Aul on Internet discussion lists
- Newsletter writing, editing, and layout
- Development/fundraising
- Web design and maintenance
- Researching local chapter development & administration
- Starting local chapters
- Event and Heritage camp planning
- Legal advice for non-profits

If you are interested in contributing your time in any of these or other ways, please email Susan at ssaxon@kazakh-aul-us.org.

A hearty thank you to all who are able to help out with a gift of time or with a monetary donation.

THANK YOU!!

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Our Mission

The Kazakh Aul of the United States, Association for American & Kazakh Families, aims to establish a cultural center dedicated to educating and enriching the lives of children from Kazakhstan who were adopted by loving American families and who are now growing up in the U.S. Together with their families, children will participate in Kazakh heritage camps and cultural education, to develop a deeper sense of knowledge and understanding of their birth culture, how they fit into both the Kazakh and American worlds, and to develop skills that in the future may be used to contribute to both their mother-countries, Kazakhstan and the U.S. The Kazakh Aul of the United States will serve as a cultural bridge to bring together the children of the two countries, helping them be citizens of the world and thereby promoting cross-cultural understanding that will sustain through the generations.

Zhailau 2006—Kazakh Heritage Camp for Families to be held August 14-19 on Lake Winnipesaukee, New Hampshire

Information plus much more inside

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