



THE SUNDOWN KID

Written by Barbara Bietz

Illustrated by John Kanzler

Come Friday nights, Shabbat dinner could feel a little lonely out in the Wild West. “Too much soup,” says Mama. “Not enough family.” That’s where the Jewish tradition of hachnasat orchim – welcoming guests – comes in handy. And who says the guests have to be Jewish? Not this family.

JEWISH CONCEPTS

Shabbat (the Sabbath) is the Hebrew name for the seventh day of the week. In the Jewish calendar, days begin at sundown and end the following night; thus, Shabbat lasts from Friday evening to Saturday evening. Shabbat commemorates a very special event, which can be found in *Bereshit* (Genesis), the first book of the Bible. It gives an account of God’s creation of the world, which took place over six days. On the seventh day, Shabbat, God rested from the creative work and “blessed the seventh day and sanctified it because on it He abstained from all His work which God created to make” (*Bereshit* 2:3). Later in the *Torah* (first five books of the Bible), God enjoins the Jewish people to make Shabbat a day of rest in remembrance of creation as part of a unique covenant.

The story of *The Sundown Kid* shows some of the activities that can be done to enhance the special nature of Shabbat. It is traditional to bathe and put on one’s best clothing in honor of the holy day. There are songs to welcome Shabbat, blessings for wine (or grape juice) and bread, and delicious meals, like Mama’s famous chicken soup. It is a special time for families to be together after a long week of work, and it is also a blessing to invite guests over for meals. Shabbat is a beautiful opportunity to set aside the routine pursuits of the week and to remember what is truly important in life.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

In today’s busy, non-stop world, it can be difficult to imagine setting aside one day a week where business as usual grinds to a halt. However, observing Shabbat can bring sorely needed physical, emotional, and spiritual refreshment that is well worth the change in routine. Your family will also benefit from this quality time together. Use the following suggestions to bring more Shabbat into your home:

- Make special meals together as a family in honor of the day. Encourage each person to choose a food s/he really loves, and involve everyone in the cooking. After reading this book, you may be inspired to make a delicious chicken soup!
- Unplug for the day: Turn off phones, computers, and televisions. Use the calm quiet to connect with and listen to each other. Play board games and read, and take a Shabbat nap if you get sleepy!
- If the weather is nice, enjoy the outdoors together. Go for a leisurely walk around your neighborhood, and take a route that you’ve never explored before.