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Personalized Heritage book Brings New Meaning to Reading

By Susan Frasca

Like many of us in South Florida, Plantation mom Deanna Novak is from someplace else.

Growing up, she was surrounded by her great-grandfather, grandparents, parents, sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins. She cooked with her grandmother, listened to stories about life in Italy from her grandfather and did the things families do as part of their culture and heritage.

After the birth of her first child, Novak's parents and in-laws started sharing their customs and traditions with their granddaughter.



"Suddenly, my mother was even more Italian, and my mother-in-law seemed even more Polish," she said. "It just came naturally, but their heritage really shone through."

Novak received several personalized baby gifts, including one of those popular books that cast her daughter, Samantha, as the main character in the story.

"I remember thinking that it would be such a great gift for her to receive something personalized like that, that would also teach her a bit about her heritage," Novak said.

The idea for My Heritage Book was born. Novak soon realized how many children aren't connected to their heritage, with families moving all over the country. "So much of heritage is lost these days," she said.

My Heritage Book makes cultural explorations personal. The child is mentioned by name throughout the book as he or she learns about the countries of his or her ancestry and traditions immigrants from those countries brought to America.

The stories present details on the country's geography, food, language, music, landmarks and traditions. Colorful illustrations, a letter to the child from the purchaser and space for the child's own family traditions and family tree complete the book, which can include up to four different countries.

My Heritage Book not only instills interest in one's own culture but acceptance for the customs and heritages of others as well. Adoptive parents also like this book as a way of connecting their adopted child to their home countries.