

Risa I. – Japan Placed in Colorado

It's 6:45AM. The coffee is on. My husband has already left for work. I rush about the kitchen slapping peanut butter on a piece of toast that I fold in half, to be eaten in the car. While I pull a frozen meal out of the fridge that will be my lunch, I hear Risa shuffling to the bathroom. My son is fast asleep. Risa comes into the kitchen, greets me with a sweet "good morning", and starts unloading the dishwasher as her water for tea boils. "He went down around 8:30 last night, he had a bit of a cough yesterday, so bundle him warm if you go to the library. I'll see you this evening." With my work tote, lunch bag, coffee and toast, I scurry off into the dark dawn.

I get to work and begin reviewing charts for the day and go in to see my first patient. No matter who that first patient is, or what ails her, I can devote my attention to her completely because of Risa. Whether I'm caring for a woman who has just learned she is having a miscarriage, or an elderly woman navigating life's many changes, they get better care from me because of Risa. While I go about my day caring for others, Risa is the amazing tender woman caring for my son. Throughout the day, Risa sometimes sends me a photo of Julius smiling wildly at the park, or covered in finger paints at our kitchen counter. It is a momentary break from my day, when I can look at my son, see his happy smiling face, and not feel guilty for being a full-time working mom because I know he is getting same love and attention I give him as his mother. Sometimes, Risa sends me voice clips of Julius reciting a poem in Japanese, or a sweet "I miss you Mama!" It makes me miss him too; I wish I could be there with them. I also love that he has another adult, aside from me and my husband, who he can trust, who love him, and whom he loves.

I come home from work around 5:30, Julius is in the bath singing a Japanese song while Risa rinses sweet soap bubbles from his thin slippery body. I begin making dinner and Julius runs the house naked laughing wildly as Risa chases him and wrestles him into a diaper and pajamas as they giggle. My husband comes home in the midst of it all and we stand around the kitchen recounting our days.





After dinner, we work together to clean the kitchen, then Risa retires to her room to study, and I climb into bed with Julius to being our nightly ritual of stories and snuggles before he goes to sleep. The next day, the whole thing starts again.

I do this, I choose to work full time as a mother, because life in a city as a family is expensive. Because there are things we like to do as a family: we ski, we travel, we camp, we explore, and these things cost money. I was also a person before I had my son, and that person still exists and has goals, dreams, aspirations. As all working parents know, childcare is a necessity. For many, it is one of the most wrought and emotional

decisions we will make: What to do with our most important, most precious, most dear little person while we are off at work fulfilling our professional goals and securing income to build their future. Risa has helped me manage the mixed feelings and guilt that many working mothers feel by caring for my son with playfulness, gentleness, creativity, and love. She wakes so early in the morning always with a smile on her face. She accommodates our often unpredictable schedule. She has accompanied us on trips as a family and she is so considerate, so thoughtful, so easy to be with. I often feel guilty that she and I don't have more time together, and that she might not know just how grateful we are to her. In the blur of a busy day, week, month, Risa so easily became a part of our life that we feel like has always been there and always will be. What she may not realize, is that this boy who we all snuggle and hug, with his gentle demeanor and sweet smile, who we all think is the greatest child in the world, he is who he is, in part, because of her. Any given week day, she greets him in his bed-headed glory. She stirs his oatmeal, makes his lunch (often of Japanese rice balls with seaweed cut-outs in various shapes), reads him books, straps him on the back of the bike and takes him to the museum. When he misbehaves, Risa corrects him. When he tumbles and falls, she scoops him into her arms. When he is afraid, she snuggles him closely. She nurtures him. Every day, Julius is nurtured by gentle, loving Risa. This will have a lasting impact on him. Whomever he grows up to be, his successes have roots in these first few years in his life when he was so lucky to have the Amazing Risa there, always attentive, always gentle, always Risa. It seems like an award is such a small thing for the amazing work she does. Thinking of her departure in March makes us all quite sad. I don't know if Julius will understand that he will have a new au pair, who will take very good care of him. But I know that she will never be far from us because she is now always a part of our sweet boy Julius.

