

Mission of Mercy Brings Vowels to Kyrgyzstan

by Con Chapman

BISHKEK, Kyrgyzstan. As a C-40A military transport plane touched down on the runway at Bishkek International Airport here today, tears streamed down Askar Bakayev's weather-beaten cheeks. "Me—I am too old for help now," he says. "But perhaps it is not too late for them," he continues as he takes in his son and two daughters with a wave of his hand. "They are the future."



The precious cargo arrives.

Kyrgyzstan, a land-locked country in Central Asia, has survived since 201 B.C. on an orthographic diet based largely on the vowel "y," the least nutritious form of this common speech sound. "It was fine for my father, and his father before him," Bakayev says. "In today's world, it is not enough."

"Daddy, Gyzk ate all the y's!"

The plight of Bakayev and other Kyrgyzstanians like him is beginning to attract the sympathies of western hearts through the efforts of rising Hollywood starlet Victoria Caine, who has made three trips into this mountainous terrain since 2006 and has filed papers to adopt a Kyrgyzstanian orphan, Klyzk, an adorable two

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year-old boy. “We are so fortunate in America,” Caine says in a voice tinged with both sadness and anger. “We have vowels we don't even use. Whenever I hear someone say ‘I shouldn't have a second piece of cake’ I tell them ‘That silent ‘o’ and ‘i’ you just threw away could make a little boy or girl in Kyrgyzstan very happy.”

Victoria Caine: She's made the Kyrgyzstans' plight her own.

Kyrgyzstan declared its independence from the Soviet Union in August of 1991, and by December of that year it was free of seven decades of Russian rule. “Everything happened so quickly,” says Kurmnbk Kznetsov, a reporter for the Bishkek *Daily Glz* at the time. “The Russians were just sitting there with an ‘o,’ an ‘i’ an ‘e’ and even a ‘u’ in the words ‘Soviet Union.’ God what we could do with those letters today.”



Kyrgyz Republic: It's in there somewhere

Kyrgyzstans are a hardy people who must endure extreme temperatures and winds off the *steppes* that reach over a hundred miles an hour, forcing families to secure what few vowels they have against the elements. “I tell Gyzk—he's my oldest—‘Get your a's in the tent, the wolf is coming,’” Bakyv says, lapsing into the figurative speech that characterizes his nation's *rgyszs*, a six-line poetic form that resembles a cross between a Japanese *haiku* and a six-pack of beer.

Kok Boru All-Star Game

The Kyrgyzstans are a nation of horsemen, as their native pastimes amply demonstrate. The national sport is *Kok Boru*, meaning “blue wolf,” a game in which two teams attempt to drive the headless carcass of a goat into their opponent's goal. Other popular sports include *Tyiyn*, picking a coin off the ground from horseback at full gallop, and *Kkyrysh*, riding a horse through the express lane of a *yrghysh*, or convenience store, with more than twelve items in one's saddlebags.

“You are so generous to donate six vowels—we really appreciate it!”

Caine, the Hollywood actress, says she will make her support of the Kyrgyzstan people personal this year when she donates an “a” and an “i” to the cause in exchange for a “y” that was removed from an elderly Kyrgyzstan man who died in an avalanche. “I really don't need to be ‘Victoria’ like I'm some kind of queen or something,” she says with a self-effacing smile. “I'm shortening my name to ‘Tory.’”

