Yuvi’s Candy Tree
written by Lesley Simpson illustrated by Janice Lee Porter

Can a place be “home” if you’ve never been there?

On a Wing and a Prayer
Thousands of Ethiopian Jews were airlifted to Israel between 1984 and 1991. The relocation process involved two major airlifts: Operation Moses, which carried 8,000 people (including the real-life Yuvi), and Operation Solomon, which brought more than 14,000 people to Israel in 36 hours. The flights out were the easiest part. As Yuvi’s story shows, getting to the planes was far harder — but worth the risk. The Hebrew word for Jewish immigration to Israel, aliya, literally means “going up.” (Aliya also refers to the honor bestowed on those invited to recite blessings before and after reading the Torah in synagogue.) Yuvi and her family actually do ascend into the air as they make their way to Israel, but no matter how immigrants arrive, they are greeted with social programs intended to make the transition a little easier, such as help with housing, finding work, learning a new language, and countless other small details that arise. The orange trees? Those are just a happy surprise — but for Yuvi they are a sign that her wishes have indeed come true. To learn more visit pjlibrary.org/yuvi.

A Dream Come True
Beta Israel, the community of Ethiopian Jews that includes Yuvi, has existed for centuries. Scholars believe this group of Jews arrived in Ethiopia sometime between the first and sixth centuries CE. Members of Beta Israel developed their own customs and traditions over time. One example is Sigd, a holiday that has been adopted as an official national holiday in Israel, just as many traditions and practices from other parts of the world have been woven into the rich fabric that makes up the Jewish homeland. For centuries, Sigd was a day to pray for the community’s return to the land of Israel. That prayer has been answered, so today Sigd is an opportunity for thanksgiving. Similar to Yom Kippur, the Jewish day of atonement, Sigd is observed with fasting and prayer, followed by a joyful breaking of the fast.

Movement of the People
Yuvi’s story is unique, but it’s also familiar: A family makes a dangerous journey to a faraway place in search of a better life. The Torah (the first five books of the Bible) is filled with accounts of families and even entire communities making such moves. The story of the very first Jews, Abraham and Sarah, was about their leaving home to make the long trip to Canaan (ancient Israel), and the Book of Exodus recounts how the Israelite slaves made their way from Egypt back to that same land. Jewish people have lived in every corner of the globe, but with the founding of the modern state of Israel (roughly the same place Abraham and Sarah and the ancient Israelites went!), many families now leave those countries in order to go “home,” just as Yuvi does in this story. “We are going to our real home, to Israel,” says Yuvi’s grandmother in the story. “In Jerusalem, your wishes will come true.”

TALK IT OVER WITH YOUR KIDS
Can you imagine how Yuvi feels when armed thieves threaten her family?
How does Yuvi’s family stay hopeful on such a hard journey?
What would you find challenging about moving to a country where everything was different?