

PICNIC GATHERS BULGARIAN CHILDREN ADOPTED IN CANADA

With the help of Loving Heart International, 25 children from Bulgaria find new homes in Canada

Twelve Bulgarian children, adopted by Canadian families, met during an annual picnic on July 31, 2004. More than 20 families, some of which had traveled for hours to attend this event were gathered in a picturesque park in the beautiful town of Dundas, near Toronto.

Children, parents, and grandparents with Bulgarian and Canadian flags in their hands, with hats in white green and red (the colors of the Bulgarian flag) and name tags on their clothing formed happy, noisy and friendly company. Everyone had prepared for the feast bringing Bulgarian food – traditional kjonpoulou (eggplant dip), Shopska salad, Banitsa (pastry with feta cheese), Bulgarian breads and spices. Of course, the famous Bulgarian kebabche, provided by the organizers, were anxiously anticipated and quickly demolished.

Host and organizer of this touching event was Loving Heart International Adoption Agency. The main driving force and tireless organizer as well as acting director of the Agency is Elena Georgiev who was born in Bulgaria. She is a person with big heart and endless love for children. Elena works in the field of Infertility for the Toronto Institute for Fertility and Sterility. After arriving to Canada, Elena, a mother of three children herself, dedicates her life to the purpose of bringing abandoned children love and happiness and to the adopting families – the gift of parenthood. The agency is licensed in Canada with authorization to facilitate adoptions of Bulgarian children by Canadian citizens. During the period of more than two years, 15 Bulgarian children have been adopted by Canadian families. Some Bulgarian families living in Ontario have also adopted children from Bulgaria with the assistance of Loving Heart International Adoption Agency.

“We are like an extended family which expands each year,” said Elena Georgiev while admiring her boisterous “children” with love and pride. She knows about the past of each one of these children and their adopting families. Elena is familiar with each family’s happiness and sorrow overcoming obstacles in order to earn the privilege of becoming parents, to carry the responsibility for the future of each abandoned child and to make this child happy.

“The adoption procedure is lengthy and difficult,” explains Elena. The adoptive applicants have to jump through many hoops before they become approved. They have to have a psychological profile, their family and health histories are thoroughly studied. The opinion of many professionals is involved in assessing the family’s suitability for adopting and raising a child. The adopting family’s dossier also includes criminal checks, financial report, and recommendation letters from guarantors. In addition, each family attends seminars preparing the couple how to take care of a child and to be good parents. During the preparation period and after the adoption of the child, a social worker visits the family and observes the child in his or her new home. The social worker also provides support for the parents throughout the adoption process. If a problem should arise, it is always resolved in the interest of the child. The procedure in Bulgaria is also difficult and rigorous. Canadian citizens and all other foreign citizens can adopt a Bulgarian child only after the child has been included in the Adoption

Register in Bulgaria for at least 6 months and has not been accepted by a Bulgarian family. The Adoption Department of the Ministry of Justice in Sofia (Bulgaria) has the authority to make the decision which child is to be placed with the family. The guiding rule for this decision is also the best interest of the child.

Canadian families have a lot of love, patience and their hearts are open for the abandoned Bulgarian children. The children of ages 2 to 4 unconditionally accept the warmth of their new, loving families. The adoptive parents are proud of their children and boastfully exchange stories about their child's development. All of the parents are impressed by Bulgaria's natural beauty and the intelligence of the Bulgarian children. With great concern and compassion, these parents talk about the poor conditions in the Bulgarian orphanages and express willingness to help the children there with anything they can.

Charles, who left for Bulgaria on the day of the picnic to adopt the 14-year Mihail and bring him to Canada, brought 32 blankets as a gift to the orphanage. During his previous visit to Bulgaria, Charles brought donations of money which paid for the renovation of the leaking roof of the orphanage. Charles is a teacher and is proud with his knowledge of the Bulgarian language, which he started learning when he first applied to adopt a child from Bulgaria.

Isaac, the proud father of Noia, told everybody how only a week after her second birthday, which was celebrated in the orphanage in Kurdzhali (Bulgaria), Noia left for Israel to meet her new family and started speaking Hebrew, the language of her adoptive family. Isaac and his wife Anat are amazed at their daughter's ability to learn new things and adapt to the new environment. Both parents have decided to sign up Noia for kindergarten so she does not feel the absence of her friends in the orphanage in Kurdzhali. "We have two dogs which Noia likes to play with but apparently they are not enough friends for her," jokes Isaac. "In kindergarten she will learn English without any problems," adds the father. "If everything goes well, she can also learn Bulgarian." Noia's parents have bought many Bulgarian videotapes, books and music. This way Noia will grow up aware of her Bulgarian background along with the traditions, customs, and love of her parents Isaac and Anat.

Another Bulgarian child, Jamie, had severely damaged hearing when he arrived in Canada, but after an operation and a lot of care from his parents he is feeling great. Jamie has a new toy piano and is exercising his musical talent, shared his proud parents. Alia has been in Toronto for only two months and in addition to two loving parents she also has a loving 13-year old brother, Ryan. He was the most impatient one in the family to meet his sister and now he is very happy to help her in learning English. Ryan takes Alia for walks and tells her a lot of funny stories. The mother of Marcus, yet another Bulgarian child, gave birth to twins shortly after Marcus arrived in Canada. Now Marcus is the proud older brother of the two newborns and helps his mother to push the stroller. He is very well-behaved and mature boy. Grace, Julian, Marcus, Valentina, Vesta, Chloe-Margarita, Michaela, Ana-Maria are just some of the Bulgarian children whose fate brought them to Canada to find love, support and a real family.

Each of the 25 Bulgarian children adopted in Canada will have a unique life. They will have their Bulgarian heritage in common in addition to the opportunity in the onset of their lives to grow up in loving homes, to develop their talents, to realize their dreams, and to live without

the worry that they have been abandoned. The adoptive families are constantly communicating with one another. Some of them have become friends and visit each other regularly. They encourage their children to become friends, teach them about their Bulgarian heritage and give personal example on how to love and respect unconditionally.

It is hard to determine who experiences more happiness as a result of adoption - the parents or the children.

Article by: Paulina Bachvarova