

Couple takes in six children



KEN KOONS/STAFF PHOTO

John Carver laughs as his daughter Lindsay pushes off of him with her feet. The family spends time playing together before the children's bed-time.

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By David Simon, Times Staff Writer | [0 comments](#)

Four-and-a-half-year-old Ksenia, wearing a candy apple dress with white tights, stands out against the otherwise drab background of the St. Petersburg, Russia orphanage in a 1998 home video.

On that cold February day, Ksenia kept her eyes fixed on the floor as she was led to meet her future parents - a Westminster couple that was unable to have a child of their own.

As she shuffled forward, caretakers at the detsky dom - Russian for "children's home" - began explaining to Ksenia that Tammy and John Carver would be her new mother and father.

Ksenia, gripping an orphanage worker's hand tightly, briefly glanced at her new parents and then returned her eyes to the floor. She didn't say a word.

A gift the Carvers had brought from home - a Minnie Mouse doll - seemed to brighten Ksenia's spirits and, for the first time, she smiled.

Ksenia would soon be renamed Rebecca and be brought to the United States, where she would begin a new life.

As the minivan carrying the newly-formed family pulled away from the detsky dom, Rebecca waved goodbye to her friends and her life with a mittened hand. She was smiling again.

In the next couple of days John Carver tried to explain, in broken Russian, to his new daughter that he was her father. Carver kept repeating to Rebecca, Vanya, the Russian equivalent of "John" and "papa," pointing to himself.

Rebecca wasn't the only child the Carvers would bring back with them from Russia during that trip. The Carvers wanted both a boy and a girl, so after they got Rebecca, they went to pick up 2 1/2-year-old Ivan, who would later become Matthew.

Rebecca and Matthew went through a difficult adjustment period upon arriving in the United States.

Although the children had plenty to eat in their new home, they often took food from the dining table and hid it in their rooms for later, a response to the limited amount of food they received in the orphanages, Tammy said.

When Tammy went to take Rebecca swimming for the first time, the child, accustomed to harsh Russian winters, couldn't understand why she was being asked to take a bath in the back yard.

The Carvers eventually went on to adopt three more children from other countries and are now awaiting a sixth adopted child.

"It was that seed that got to me when I saw Rebecca's orphanage for the first time," John said. "I wanted to change another life."

The Carvers' adoption of Rebecca and Matthew was preceded by about eight years of trying unsuccessfully to conceive on their own. They began seriously thinking about adoption in the mid-1990s and began looking into international adoption agencies.

Tammy said she wanted to adopt a child from another country because in the United States, a birth-mother can still try to gain custody of her child after another couple has adopted him or her.

"It's more predictable," Tammy said of international adoption.

The Carvers eventually decided on Nightlight Christian Adoptions to help them through the process.

"It's like finding a doctor," Tammy said. "You have to trust them and be comfortable."

The first step for Tammy and John was to create a dossier of their lives that would be used to determine if they were fit parents.

The dossier - which took about four months to put together - included an inspection of their home, fingerprint checks, tax forms, fire inspections and motor vehicle records.

The cost to adopt a child is about \$20,000, John said. But some of that money can be refunded through adoption tax credits.

But the cost of adoption was not the focus of the Carvers' attention. Nine months after returning home with Rebecca and Matthew, they began thinking about taking in a newborn baby.

"We wanted to go through the late-night bottle feedings and the diaper changes," Tammy said.

The Carvers adopted 6-month-old Lindsay in December of 1999. During the trip to Russia to pick up Lindsay, John got the idea to eventually come back to the detsky dom with toys and clothing for the children.

A short time later, while shopping for these items, John got a call from Nightlight Christian Adoptions asking him if he would like to adopt one more child.

His first response was that the family was broke and couldn't afford to take in another child. But when the Carvers found out that the child's birthday is the same exact day as Lindsay's, they decided to take in 2-year-old Timmy.

"That is bizarre," John said. "In my view, things happen to people for a reason - you have to be dumb as a brick to not notice something was going on."

After four adoptions, the Carvers thought they were finished. But after adopting Timmy, John began flipping through a photo book of orphans at a gathering of families looking to adopt children.

An infant named Juliana caught John and Tammy's attention because she was cross-eyed, just like Timmy. The Carvers decided to take her in as well.

Finally, with five adopted children, the Carvers believed they would not take in any more. But another chance occurrence would put them on the path for a sixth child.

An office worker in Juliana's baby house in Minsk, Belarus, recently cross-checked Juliana's name and discovered she has a sister who is about to turn 5 years old.

John said he and his wife couldn't knowingly keep siblings apart, and immediately started the process to adopt Svetlana.

The Carvers expect to add Svetlana to the family by the middle of next year, John said.

Tammy said the economic cost of six children isn't as bad as some might think.

"Your car payment is still the same; your mortgage payment is still the same," she said. "We save clothing for the next child."

The Carvers are also home-schooling their children, a practice that both saves money and helps with the adjustment period, Tammy said.

The Carvers are now turning their energies to helping other couples adopt children and are in the early stages of organizing a get-together for people looking to take in children.

"It's a passion to help children who have no hope and no future," John said. "These kids have no one to tuck them in at night."

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Or check the Web at:

www.hrw.org/children/abandoned.htm

www.adoption-research.org

www.eeadopt.org

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