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ABOUT OUR COMMUNITY FOR OUR COMMUNITY

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## FAMILY TIES CROSS THE BORDERS

LONG WAITS, UNEXPECTED  
EXPENSES AND RED TAPE PAY  
OFF FOR THESE FAMILIES.

By VERONICA JAMES  
HERALD TRIBUNE CORRESPONDENT

When some Inland Empire couples decide to adopt a child, they're looking beyond U.S. borders to find the special youngsters to complete their families. Some say it's too difficult to adopt American children. Others see a way to combine their desire for a family with a desire to help others in need. However, international adoption has its own set of challenges.

From her orphanage in a remote Russian village, five-year-old Ekaterina dreamed of someday owning an American Barbie doll. Last year, her dreams came true in more ways than she had imagined when she received not only a Barbie doll, but also an American family.

Ekaterina, now seven-years-old and known as Katie, is the proud daughter of Randy and Kathleen Berk of Pomona. With four older adopted brothers, Katie is the Berk's only daughter, the daughter they had always wanted.

"She's very much all girl," said Kathleen Berk, who teaches at Azusa Pacific University and Mt. SAC. "She loves to play with Barbie dolls, dress up and look pretty. I just love the lace and ribbons, fixing her hair, the pretty clothes and dresses. That's part of what I was looking for all those years."

The Berks decided against domestic adoption for many reasons. The foster care and legal systems as well as the risk of a birth parent coming back into the picture were some of their concerns.



Bret Morris and his wife's, not pictured, family includes three children. Front row, Chandra, 12, from India, Andrew, 7, from Mexico and, 2-year-old Amber from California.  
Photos by Veronica James.



In the Berk family of Pomona, all five children were adopted. Seen here from left are, front row, Benjamin, Katie, from Russia, Jonathan and Jeremy Berk and, back row, father Randy Berk, mother Kathleen Berk and James Berk.

"The kids here have been through so much by the time they get adopted," said Kathleen Berk. "It's a riskier thing. Also, we were over 40 and already had four children, so our chances were exceedingly poor anyway."

The Berks first considered international adoption after watching a television report on Romanian orphanages.

"The first time I saw that I knew why we didn't have a girl," said Kathleen Berk, "because we were supposed to do that."

Their plans to adopt from Romania fell through when Romania curtailed adoptions in order to revamp the system. The Berk's adoption agency, Adoptions Unlimited in Chino, recommended considering Russia because "the children are just as needy and there are just as many children" who need homes.

Ironically, the Berks completed the lengthy process of qualifying to adopt Katie just as Russia put a moratorium on all its international adoptions to reorganize the system there.

"We were on hold a whole year past when we thought we would get her," said Kathleen Berk.

During that time, perhaps in response to international criticism, Russia changed many of its adoption laws and created a computer data base. Each adoptable child must now be listed in the data base long enough to thoroughly check for living relatives or Russian families who may want to adopt him or her.

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