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SECOND ADOPTION PLANNED

Two siblings from Ukraine reunited for month

By Peggy Conrad

Staff writer

Cheryle Roberts of Wilkins Township can't believe what she and her husband, Ted, are about to do.

After all the hassle, time and expense it took to adopt their daughter, Diana, from an orphanage in the Ukraine three years ago, they are about to go through it all again and adopt a brother they never really expected to find.

Diana, 12, and Yuri, who will be 15 next month, were reunited on July 10 after many years apart, thanks to the Roberts.

"When he first got off that plane, he was holding her hand like he was worried she was going to go away," says Cheryle. "He was just so happy to see her."

The whole family was overcome.

"We cried, she cried, I cried; I couldn't even take the pictures. He looked like a little orphan," she says.

The pair did not stop hugging for about three days. They then began acting like typical siblings, but weeks later they were still enjoying each other's company immensely.

"We play and we swim together, and I'm excited he's here," says Diana, (pronounced De-on-ah).

Although she does not remember any Ukrainian, the language barrier has not posed much of a problem. Yuri knows a little English and the family often refers to a Ukrainian dictionary or hand motions.

"We do a lot of charades sometimes," says Cheryle.

Diana also has been giving her brother English lessons, using her dry erase board. Her eager student is picking up the language quickly.

His first English words, spoken shortly after arriving, were, "Stop it, Diana!" as he mimicked the Roberts in an effort to get his rambunctious sister to stop tickling him.

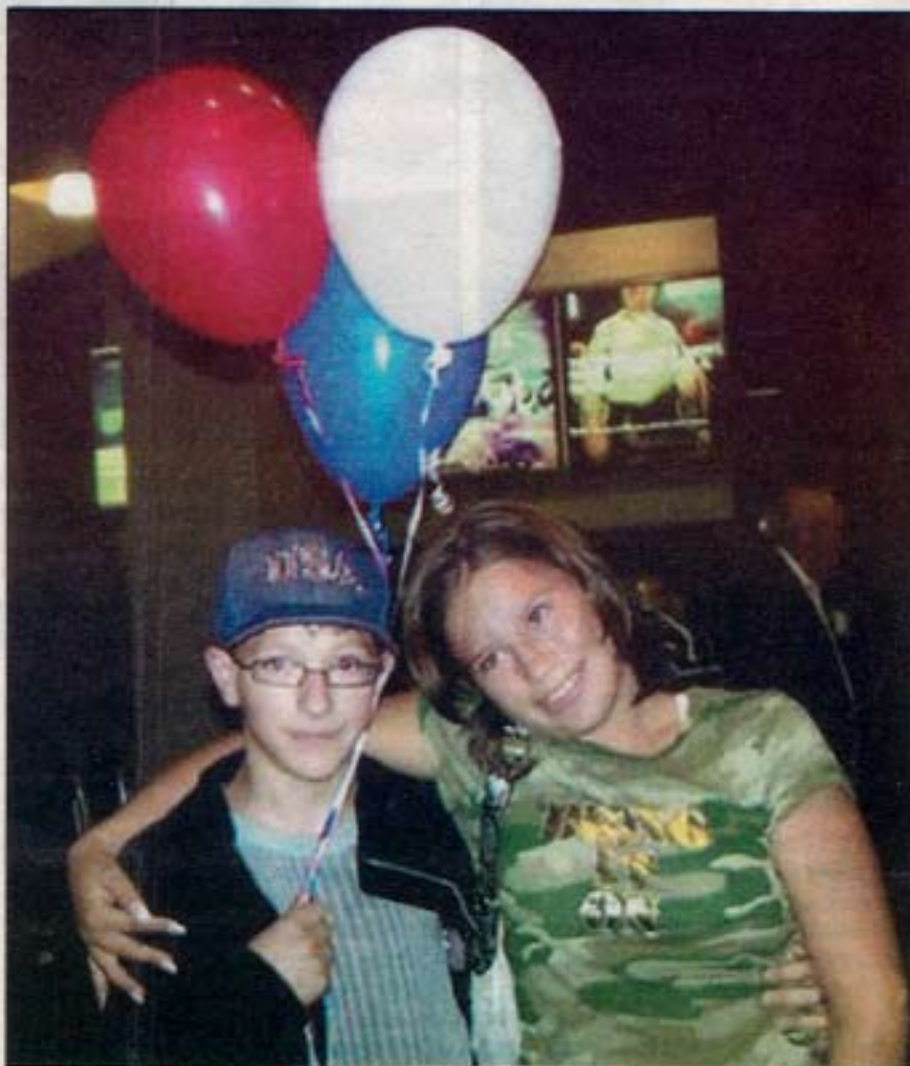
"Everything's great. He's a really good kid," says Cheryle.

Unfortunately, Yuri has to return to his orphanage in the Ukraine on Aug. 20. The family is hoping to go there in January to bring him home for good.

"It just breaks my heart to have him go back," says Cheryl a few weeks before his departure. "I'm dreading it already."

She did not expect to become attached to Yuri so quickly.

"How can you fall in love with a



THE AIRPORT reunion was full of smiles and tears for the siblings, who had not seen each other in many years.



DIANA AND Yuri relax in the Ukrainian room at the Cathedral of Learning in the University of Pittsburgh.

child when he walks off an airplane?"

To the best of her knowledge, the siblings were orphaned when Diana was about 1 1/2 and Yuri was 3 or 4. They were in the same orphanage for four or five years, then he was transferred to a different institution.

When the Roberts were in Kiev in their attempt to adopt 9-year-old Diana, they were told she had no siblings. At her orphanage, however, they learned of her brother, who was in Holland for medical reasons.

Upon returning home, Cheryle began the long search to find Diana's brother. She finally obtained the name of the Ukrainian orphanage where he lived and wrote a letter to him, using an online dictionary to translate it into Russian.

She mailed it more than a year and a half ago but did not hear anything back until last September, when the family received a letter from Yuri that came through Life 2 Orphans, a volunteer group in Oregon, by way of Texas.

"It somehow ended up here."

Cheryle had e-mailed the group asking for help in finding information about Yuri. The group connected her with a volunteer in the Ukraine who visits orphanages there, and she began corresponding with him.

Unlike Diana, who rarely, if ever, left the orphanage, Yuri has spent recent summers with a family in Holland. Cheryle asked if he could visit his sister, now in the States.

The answer was "Yes," but he had to travel with a companion and they needed money for Visas and transportation. The airfare alone for Yuri and his school director was \$3,000.

The director, who came along for a week to make sure Yuri would be in a safe environment, stayed with Paul Arent, a close friend of the Roberts who lives next door to their Eastmont home.

Inexplicably, Yuri had never been registered to be adopted. The director registered him in December after the Roberts' inquiry, but Ukrainian law dictates he must remain eligible for one year before he can be adopted.

"He's been asked 101 different ways (if he wants to be adopted) and he has said 'Yes,'" relates Cheryle. "He wants to come live in the U.S."

He is already calling his (hopefully) future parents "mom" and "dad," or "tato." In response to every question

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DIANA AND Yuri enjoy a game of "Go Fish" with Cheryle Roberts, who hopes to adopt Yuri.



YURI AND Diana spend many summer days playing and staying cool in the family's backyard pool.

Yuri says he wants to come live in United States

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FYI

Adopting foreign-born child

The first step to adopting a foreign-born child is contacting a licensed agency that specializes in international adoption. Many agencies can be found on the Internet and in the phone book.

The cost of foreign adoption is approximately \$20,000 and up, depending on fees and travel required by different countries, according to Debbie Cohen of Adoptions from the Heart.

Adoptive families are eligible to receive a \$10,630 federal tax credit, as well as benefits from employers, she says. There also are two banks in the area that are "very adoptive-friendly" and offer home equity and personal loans and lines of credit to adoptive families.

Adoptions from the Heart specializes in foreign adoptions from

photos of the children.

"You don't have any idea; you go over there blind."

They spent six weeks in the Ukraine and five days in Warsaw to visit the U.S. Embassy. The Roberts did not know if they would find the right child when they began the journey.

"It's a flying leap of faith; you just hope and pray."

They did not plan on adopting a 9-year-old, but they knew Diana was the one when they saw her picture. Ted

Ukraine, Russia, Kazakhstan, China, Vietnam and Guatemala. It takes an average of one year to adopt, from initiating the process to bringing home a child.

The agency, which also deals in domestic adoptions, provides free information on the requirements of each country. International adoption is more flexible concerning the ages of prospective parents and may be more predictable than domestic adoption, says Cohen.

Adoptions from the Heart holds free informational group meetings, as well as individual meetings, on international adoption. The next group meeting is Sunday, Sept. 10, at 7 p.m. in its Greensburg office, which serves the Pittsburgh area.

For more information, call 724-853-6533.

cried when they first met the shy, little girl who had waited so long for someone to love her.

When they brought her home, there was a long period of adjustment to family and modern life. Diana had never ridden in a car, seen a microwave or washer and dryer or watched much TV.

"She would microwave bananas and tomato juice ... she was so fascinated by it," says Cheryle.

It took a while for Diana to under-

stand family dynamics and the concept of parental authority. At first, she "was on sensory overload" and "overwhelmed by it all."

It took her only about three months to learn English, thanks in large part to her ESL teacher, who has been working with her for three years. She made the honor roll in fourth grade and is eager to enter fifth grade.

"**She is** just a joy to be around," says Arent, who became fast friends with his young neighbor.

"She is funny, curious, always pleasant and ready to do anything from athletics to crafts."

Yuri loves sports and likes to wear his new Pirates hat and T-shirt, although he doesn't know much about baseball. But like most of his generation, he is naturally techno-savvy.

He immediately figured out how to use Cheryle's digital camera and is now the photographer in the family. He even installed the wireless keyboard and mouse on her computer that nobody else could figure out.

"**I don't** know what he did or how he did it," says Cheryle. "He knows all about the computer in any language."

The Roberts expect the adoption process to be easier and the transition to be smoother this time around.

"I swore I'd never go back, I'd never do this again. But there is no way that I can leave this child over there knowing that he has no future," says Cheryle.

"We lived 15 years with no children. Now I can have the best of both worlds ... It can't get much more perfect."