

Family finds their Angels waiting on the other side of the world

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GARLAND—Like most teenagers, Stacy and Grace Jenkins love summer. But one unique highlight for the Garland teens is the opportunity to use their native Russian language to give a special group of visitors a big Texas welcome.

David and Marla Jenkins already had raised two children, Landon and Anna, when they decided to open their home to two Russian teenagers—Stacy and Grace. “We were kind of bored with our empty nest. We felt we had enough energy and love left to share with a child,” David Jenkins said.
(PHOTO/Russ Dilday/Buckner International)

The girls volunteer as interpreters for Angels from Abroad—the same program that gave them their first experience of America when they were still orphans from St. Petersburg.

“It is a lot of fun getting to know the kids from Russia and helping them enjoy themselves,” said Stacy, 19. “I was 14 when I visited Texas through Angels from Abroad. People were so friendly, so nice and always smiling. They do not smile that often in Russia. Texas was really different.”

A group of Russian orphans, ages 6 to 12, will arrive in Dallas July 30 for a

two-week visit with American host families as part of this year's Angels from Abroad program, administered by [Dillon International](#) through its affiliation with [Buckner International](#). The program provides older children a chance to learn about American culture, share their Russian culture and experience living in a family. It also helps raise awareness about the need for adopting older children.

"With more than 750,000 estimated orphans in Russia, there is a tremendous need for adoptive families, especially families for older children," said Russia Program Director Irina Shytova. "About 75 to 80 percent of the children available for adoption are 5 years old or older. Older children in Russian orphanages face a bleak future if they are not adopted."



Stacy Jenkins, a certified dog groomer and high school senior, said: "The Angels from Abroad experience changed my life. My whole attitude changed. Now, I have the family I always wished for." (PHOTO/Russ Dilday/Buckner International)

At age 17, children are forced to leave the orphanage system and many fall into alcohol, drugs, prostitution and crime. It is estimated nearly 10 percent commit suicide within the first three years.

“The Angels from Abroad experience changed my life,” Stacy said. “My whole attitude changed. Now, I have the family I always wished for.”

David and Marla Jenkins saw Stacy’s picture on the [Angels from Abroad website](#) in September 2004 while conducting research on international adoption. Just one month earlier, Stacy had been staying with her Angels host family less than a mile from where Marla Jenkins worked.

As former mission workers in Romanian orphanages, David and Marla Jenkins—parents of adult birth children Landon and Anna—were ready to pursue international adoption and open their hearts and homes to an older child. “We were kind of bored with our empty nest,” he recalled. “We felt we had enough energy and love left to share with a child.”

The couple’s confidence in moving forward to adopt an older child was also boosted by the opportunity to talk with Angels from Abroad host families and social work staff who knew Stacy during their trip to America, he added.

Language was the main hurdle to overcome when Stacy arrived home, Mrs. Jenkins recalled. “We labeled everything in the house with English words. We had sticky notes everywhere.”

Patient instruction and a network of friends from church, as well as friendships with Angels from Abroad host families and children adopted from Russia, has helped the transition for Stacy, now an outgoing young woman with her own part-time dog grooming business.

It was the family’s ongoing connection with Angels from Abroad that eventually led them to their youngest daughter, Grace, 17.



Grace, an introspective academic who participated in the Dillon/Buckner Angels from Abroad program in 2006, was adopted just months before her 16th birthday, the age where children are forced to leave the orphanage system in Russia.

(PHOTO/Russ Dilday/Buckner International)

Stacy introduced Grace to her mother while the two were attending an Angels from Abroad swimming party. Grace, who was 14 at the time, was staying with another host family as part of the program. Stacy said she was excited to see her friend again, as the two girls—who both share the Russian name “Anastasiya”—were roommates and classmates at the orphanage in Russia.

Months later, word spread among their network of Russia adoptive families that Grace’s 16th birthday—the age when children no longer are available for international adoption—was fast approaching. Mrs. Jenkins recalled how she and her husband told friends and church members about Grace. “Then, we finally decided, ‘Well, what’s our excuse for saying ‘no.’”

Thus, Grace—an introspective academic with a thirst for detective novels—joined the Jenkins family one month shy of her 16th birthday. “When my social worker told me Stacy’s family would be adopting me I was

so happy and surprised," she recalled.

Today, the Jenkins household is filled with the exuberance of two high school seniors enthusiastically making college plans. "Adoption has given us a tremendous amount of joy," David Jenkins said. "We have stayed in close contact with a number of adoptive families over the past several years. As I observe those families as well as my own it is evident that the providence of God completed each family."

Stacy said that many of the children who visit through Angels from Abroad ask her if it is a good idea to be adopted. "I tell them, 'Yes. It is the chance of a lifetime.'"

For more information on becoming a host family for the Angels from Abroad program, contact Dillon International office at (214) 319-3426. To learn about the ways you can help support the program financially, call Buckner Foundation at (214) 758-8050.