

Let U.S. Parents Save Russian Orphans

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In retribution for the recent passage of the Magnitsky Act by the U.S. Congress, United Russia has introduced an initiative to prohibit U.S. citizens from adopting Russian children.

Modern Russia not only has more orphans than any other country — 678,000 — but even more than the Soviet Union had during World War II. Over the past 20 years, U.S. citizens have adopted more than 60,000 Russian children. As a rule, those kids are the lucky ones.

Jessica Long was born Tatyana Kirillova in Irkutsk without the bones in her calves. A U.S. couple adopted her when she was 13 months old. Six months later, Jessica's legs had to be amputated below the knee. Today, Jessica Long is a Paralympic swimming champion with 18 records to her name.

Here's another story, of John Lahutski. He wrote an autobiographical book, "The Boy from Baby House 10," with help from one of the men who helped save him, Alan Philips. Lahutski, originally Vanya Pastukhov, was born with cerebral palsy and lived as a child in a Moscow facility for mentally disabled children. He was not taught to eat or speak and simply lay on the floor with other such children. Despite his physical disability, he was an amazingly intelligent boy and learned to speak by listening to adults converse.

When some U.S. citizens wanted to adopt him, a medical commission was convened to examine him. They asked him, "You can cross the street when the light turns which color?" When he failed to answer, he was sent to an insane asylum.

There, he lay not on the floor but in a crib with iron bars. He was drugged into a vegetative state and lay in his own urine and feces. But those Americans still managed to take him away from that institution and adopt him. Now, Lahutski is a regular American guy on crutches, with a big smile and white teeth. His book, already translated into dozens of languages, is gut-wrenching. And by the way, the book names the staff members and officials at the Russian institutions who were so opposed to the boy being taken to the U.S., who wanted him to die in his own feces lying on his back in his iron cage.

And what happens to those who are not adopted? I would like to tell you a story that happened to 10-year-old Sergei Makeyev in the city of Seversk, in the Tomsk region. Just like Lahutski, Sergei was also wrongly consigned to an institution for children with mental disabilities. It happened that Sergei had the opportunity to travel to Spain for the summer. There, the elderly Spanish couple who hosted him, Isabel and Carlos, decided they wanted to adopt him.

But the mayor back home was campaigning for re-election that year under the slogan "children are our strategic reserve." What happened next is just heartbreaking. Sergei, who had studied Spanish for a full year and who felt loved for the first time in his life, fought and wept in the Russian court for the right to leave. The Spanish couple pleaded through tears. But the judge would not let them have the boy. A few months later, Sergei drowned himself in one of the city's canals. The mayor won re-election.

Psychiatrists are well familiar with the "Mowgli phenomenon," in which children who grow up in the company of wild animals are later incapable of integrating into human society. The same thing happens to children who grow up in Russian orphanages and try to assimilate into society at age 15 or 16. Fortunately, 60,000 such children escaped that fate when they were adopted by U.S. citizens.

Yulia Latynina hosts a political talk show on Ekho Moskvyy radio.

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