From Russia with Love

The story of the Young family’s quest to adopt two young boys from Russia who captured our hearts one wonderful summer.

This story is dedicated to our family and friends that provided support, prayers, and love during this long, but rewarding adoption. Without you, the process would have been much more difficult and much less enjoyable. It is also dedicated to Jack and Alex who’s courage was inspiring and who opened our eyes and hearts to the idea of expanding our family.

July 2004 to October 2005
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Introduction

To our friends and family,

As you all know, Marylin, the girls, and I are in the final stages of adopting Ivania and Vitia from an orphanage in Russia. The process has been long and difficult, but our entire family is excited that the day is approaching quickly when we will be able to officially welcome the boys into our home!

As a part of the process, I will be traveling to Russia for our first of two trips, leaving on August 28th and returning on September 3rd. Unfortunately, I will not be bringing the boys home on this trip, however, our final trip to pick up the boys should be 4-5 weeks after I return.

The reason you are receiving this email is that Marylin and I felt that you would want to receive update messages on our travels. I have set up this email address for use over in Russia because it will be easier for me to get yahoo access from an internet cafe. I hope to send multiple updates during my trip that include information on where I am and what I am experiencing.

Please let me know if you do not want to be included in these emails. In addition, please let me know if there are others who you know that would like to receive them.

Please keep our family in your thoughts and prayers as we journey to the other side of the world to bring our new sons home!

Love,

Scott and Marylin
From Russia with Love

Trip 1 – Day 1

All,

Greetings from Tver, Russia!

I made it in this morning at about 2:30 am EST. So far, it has really been a blur. The flights were good and I was able to learn quite a bit about Russia from the guy that sat beside me on the plane. He works for the US Consulate office in Moscow.

Customs was surprisingly quick. I met 3 other families who were adopting while I was getting my bags. Two of them were on their 2nd trip to Russia and were ready to take their kids home. The other couple was adopting from Siberia and had another 7 hour plane flight ahead of them. This made me really glad that Marylin and I are adopting from close to Moscow.

The driver and interpreter were waiting for me and we started right on our 2 1/2 hour drive from Moscow to Tver. They are both very nice and helpful.

The drive from Moscow to Tver was pretty fast. The roads were surprisingly good. There were many cars and trucks broken down along the side of the road. I guess they just don't build them as well as we do in the USA.

The climate and terrain reminds me of northern Quebec. There are mostly pine and white birch trees. It is very green here though.

We passed through many small towns and villages during our drive. Most of the homes were very run down and in need of significant repair. Most of them have metal roofs because it is cheaper for them.

Along the road there were many small vegetable stands (sometimes every 50 feet). Each stand had only a few items, but they were all attended by an old man or lady (mostly looked like the grandmother's job). They had melons (lots of watermelons), potatoes, tomatoes, and cucumbers. They also had some canned vegetables for sale.

Gas is about $2 per gallon. Some places it is less.

There were many people hitch hiking. This doesn't happen much in the states, but there are many people who do it here and many people pick them up.

Funny thing, many of the songs on the radio are from America. I heard Brian Adams, the Bee Gees, and Michael Jackson on the way to Tver.

Tver is on the Volga River (one of the largest in Russia). For the fishermen on this email list, they catch Pike, catfish, bass, and Sturgeon in the South.
There are many busses and electric trolleys in the city. The city is very run down. None of the lawns are mowed. Many of the buildings are in disrepair. It looks like a city that has been neglected for many, many, years. Very few of the apartment buildings would be livable under US standards. Some of the buildings do not have running water. I saw some people carrying buckets of water from a central hose into their apartments.

There are some large empty factories here. There is a large textile plant and a train passenger car factory that are still very active. The median salary for a worker in Tver is 6000 rubles per month (72,000 per year) this is equal to about $3,000 per year in USD. To put this in perspective, I got 47,000 rubles exchanged in the Atlanta airport to bring with me. Poverty is pretty common here.

I feel pretty safe on the streets during the day. I took about a 3 hour walk around the hotel. It is tough for me (being the shy guy that I am) to not be able to communicate at all to anyone. I had to find a restaurant this evening that had pictures so that I could point to what I wanted. Two cabbage rolls, potatoes, a chicken leg, and a beer for 170 rubles (about $7). The food was very good!
I am glad that I came alone this time so that I can have everything figured out before Marylin comes with me. It is clearly a different culture and a different way of life here. Everyone is friendly though.

The hotel has internet access from one central computer. It is 200 rubles per hour (about $8 per hour). They have a wireless network too, but it is protected. Seems like everyone has cell phones, at least anyone under 30 does.

I saw a building in Tver today that was built for the 1980 Olympics. It was built to be a hotel for the athletes, however, it was designed with a very small base (it got skinnier as it went down from top to bottom). The Russian government built it (about 45 floors) and then deemed that it was too unsafe for people to live in because it had such a skinny base. Since day one it has sat in the same spot empty. Wonder if the architect ever got paid?

It is sad to see all of the poverty and to see all of the people living well below the average standard of living in the US. Even our poor around Cleveland are living a better life than many in Tver. It makes me feel good that we are taking Vitia and Ivania out of this and giving them a better life. If this is the way the average people are living in Tver I cannot imagine how they live in an orphanage.

Seems like everyone on the streets is walking around with a beer in their hand. It is like Marti Gras in New Orleans. I can see why they say that they have a real alcohol problem here.

I will be going to the orphanage at 7 AM Russia time tomorrow morning to see Vitia. I am very excited about it.

I miss the US, but this is a great experience for me. I look forward to the rest of my week and seeing the orphanage. I will keep you posted.

Love,

Scott

PS: Please feel free to pass this along to anyone that I have missed.

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**Trip 1 – Day 2**

All,

As with the entire adoption process, there are always surprises around each corner. Today's surprise was that Ivania and Vitia do not live in Tver. Instead, the orphanage is in Kalyazin which is 2 1/2 hours North East of Tver. Therefore, I jumped in a van at 7:00 and "headed out
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on the highway" to see them. As I was jumping in the car, I heard Led Zeppelin's "Mad Dog". I guess Russia likes their classic rock too.

We drove for 2 1/2 hours through terrain that looked like Northern Canada. Mostly short thin pine trees and white birch. The land was much less populated than yesterday. There were a few small villages, but for the most part, it was uninhabited. There were a few areas where there were very large, empty buildings. The translator said that these were from the time when the Russian State ran all of the farms. They had very large farms where there may be 100 people working on the state land. The state would then provide them with "their needs" in return for the work and the produce. Communism at it's best. Now that these programs are no longer in place, these large state farms are gone and the farmers are farming for themselves. Like the USA, however, the younger generation wants to live in the city, so there are fewer small farms too.

I asked the driver about the old ladies that sit by the road with their vegetables. He said that they sit out there from sun up to sun down waiting for someone to stop. Some days they will sell everything and other days nothing. They may only make a hundred rubles ($4) on their best days. Most days they make much less.

Kalyazin is about 15,000 in population. It sits right on a river that eventually flows into the Vulga. It is an extremely poor town. Most of the buildings there look uninhabitable by even the poorest US standards, however, they are all full. There is very little industry in this town. The roads are in some areas almost impassable.

We stopped at a small 20x20 foot store to buy the Orphanage employees a gift of coffee (instant Nescafe is their favorite) and a box of candy. When we approached the orphanage, the road was almost impassable for the van. We pulled up beside a brick and stucco building. I would guess that the total area of the one floor building was about 80 by 80. We walked inside and right into the director's office. The director was not there, but she was called on the phone and came right over. It was a woman by the name of Svetlana, who Marylin and I met last summer. She is a wonderful woman and Marylin and her struck up quite a friendship even though neither spoke the other's language. She gave me two hugs and said that one was for Marylin.

The interior of the building was mostly tongue and groove pine boards with a stucco ceiling and a vinyl floor. It seemed to be clean, but the inside of the building did smell a bit. We sat at some chairs in the office as they prepared tea and cookies for us. They were excited that I was there and they prepared for me like I was a king or something. We started sipping tea and then Vitia came in. He smiled at me and came over and said "Hello papa". He gave me a hug and sat down to have his tea. The Director said that they just woke up so he was still a little groggy. There Vitia sat smiling in clothes that none of us would ever let our children wear (I will talk about the clothing of the children a little later). I was able to speak to Vitia through the interpreter and he would answer in Russian, but he would throw in an occasional English word if he could remember.
A few minutes into the conversation, the Social Worker, Gladinia, came into the room. She was in her early fifties and looked very business like. At first she didn't smile at all. She just sat down politely and started to ask me questions through the interpreter. After a few questions she really seemed to let down her guard and it all went very well. She asked about our intentions, our family, our home, our schools, whether we were serious about the process, how we would care for our boys, if our girls got along with them, etc. I think that the questioning went very well and she really took to me and our family. Svetlana spoke up early in the questioning and said through the interpreter that she believed that we were meant to have the boys and that she fully supported it. At the end, the Social Worker and I seemed like old friends that were just separated by language. She said that she would be willing to "lie" on the documents to state that I saw both Vitia and Ivania on this trip so that it would ease our process on the second trip (As most of you know, Ivania is away at a summer camp this week and I will not be able to see him). This little "lie" will really help us in front of the court.

She also stated that both Ivania and Vitia want to be adopted by us and that they support it happening.

Vitia then interrupted and asked if he could take us on a tour of the building. We got up and went on one of the most eye opening tours of my life. The building is made up of the office that we were sitting in; a sleeping room for the older girls; a sleeping room for the younger girls; a common room for the girls; a sleeping room for the older boys; a sleeping room for the younger boys; a common room for the boys; a kitchen; a dining room; and a bath room. The bath room only has two toilets and two sinks. This is very small accommodations for 50 children! Each of the bed rooms holds about 12-15 children. They sleep on single beds or bunk beds. Each bed was made and they all had identical blankets on them. There were no personal items in any of the rooms. They were almost empty except for the beds. The common rooms had some toys and other items in them, but very little. They mostly had a few chairs and beds. The dining room was extremely plain. It just had about 10 small tables and chairs around each of them.

Everything in the orphanage was pretty clean, but I must say "hunting camp clean". This means clean enough that it is healthy, but nothing more. There was no clutter though because they do not have anything to clutter with. Most people reading this letter would have a real issue with the bathrooms and would probably prefer walking out behind the building instead of using them. Everything in the building was old and many things were in disrepair.

The children all came out to see me. I was interesting to them because I was a new face. They all were wearing clothing that would be thrown out of the Salvation Army store for junk. The shirt that Vitia was wearing was so old you could see right through most of it. Nothing matches (either that or they put together outfits like I do). One of the young girls that came out to see me was Narmina. Marylin will recognize her as one of the other "Kidsave Kids" from last summer. She remembered me and gave me a hug. Unfortunately, her adoption fell through and she is still there.

The orphanage has a common area for clothing where you pick out what you want to wear. There is also a common area for shoes. It is "first come, first served" at the shoe stand. I saw
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one little boy wearing a pair of shoes that were at least 3 sizes too big for him. He must have woken up late or something that morning.

The back yard is very unkempt, but you can see that they use it for their playground. The terrain is very rough and it would be tough to play there. There are no toys back there. There is just a old and broken down volley ball net that they use.

There is a "Traditional Russian Bath" back behind the building. They heat the water in the building on stoves and then pour it into large tubs. There are no showers, just tubs.

The entire building is heated by a coal / wood furnace that is in the same building as the bath.

I don't want to paint too bad of a picture about the children. They all seem to be happy and they seem to be cared for very well by the women that work there. I just can't describe the poverty that they live in though. The women do the best with what they have and care deeply for the children.

Most of those that are reading this message would not ever live in these types of conditions. For those that know our cabin down at the Allegheny National Forrest, it would be like living in a larger version of "the camp" with 49 of your closest friends.

Sorry that I digressed a little bit about the conditions of the orphanage, but it was even worse than I had thought it was going to be. They are just an extremely poor town and the orphanage is not their highest priority I am sure.

Once we got back into the room, they had Vitia go play so that we could talk about his family history. Most of what we knew was true. Their mother has been out of their lives for the most part over the past 7 years. Even though she lives nearby the city, they haven't seen her for 2 years and she has given up her parental rights. Their father killed himself two years ago. They have a sister, Katia, who is 18. She also supports the adoption and I will meet her tomorrow. All of the relatives on their mothers side are deceased. On their fathers side they have both grandparents who are in their 70's. They cannot care for the boys and support the adoption. I will see them tomorrow also. This will be a really neat experience because they are very poor farmers and they live in a very small cottage. They also have an aunt that they have not seen. She also has signed a letter of support of the adoption. Tomorrow will be an extremely interesting day.

They also let me know that both boys are healthy and that they are doing well in school, however, the orphanage school is not as difficult as a normal school so they will need to adjust.

When Vitia came back in the room he stood there and hugged me because he knew that it was about time for me to go. I gave him the candy that I brought to share with the others and the toys that I brought for Vitia and Ivania to share. Even though we would have considered the toys that I brought small and cheap, they were better than any of the toys that I saw there. I think that Vitia really loved seeing me and he wants to come to America to live with us.
Before we left, Vitia had to show me Ivania and his fishing poles. They were literally long 8' sticks that they had tied a piece of monofilament line on the end with a hook. That was it. They do "True Fishing". He was so proud of the poles and said that he caught lots of small fish to feed the orphanage cat. Seeing the poles brought a tear to my eyes. I can't wait to get them out on the boat with real equipment.

After spending a few hours at the orphanage I wanted to bring each and every one of the kids home with me. Even though they seem very happy, they still do not have many of the most basic things that we take for granted back in the states. The poverty here is immense and wide spread. I guess as my dad use to say that if you don't know what the rest of the world has and you have the same as those around you, you feel pretty darn good about what you have. This is true here.

In the drive back, my main contact said that he is shooting for a court date of October 14th. We will need to come a few days earlier. They have also started requiring adoptive parents to have full physicals here by Russian doctors. Not sure if they don't believe our doctors or if they just want more of our money before we leave. I guess just more red tape.

When I returned this evening I went walking through Tver again to see more of the city. I stopped at a small restaurant and pointed at something on the menu. Not sure what I had, but it clearly belongs to that "Some kind of meat" category. It did come with home made noodles though.

Tomorrow will be a busy day. Out at 7:00. To the orphanage, to the grandparents, to the notary, and to the courts to file some paperwork. At the end of the day, we should have our court date finalized.

I will also speak to Vitia about names. Most people change their names to be more Americanized so that they don't get picked on. However, because they are older than 10, they need to approve their names. If they will accept a new first name they will be: Jack Ivan Young and Alex Victor Young. If not, they will be Ivan Jack Young and Victor Alex Young. Pretty amazing process.

That is all for now. I hope all is well in the states. I miss you all.

Love,

Scott
From Russia with Love

Trip 1 – Day 3

All,

Day three was another amazing day. It started promptly at 7:00 with the 2 1/2 hour van ride back to the orphanage. When I arrived, Vitia was there to greet me with a hug. He thanked me for the gifts and said that the other kids at the orphanage also liked them. Narmina (the girl that I mentioned yesterday) also came out to see me and brought some of her friends. She took me into their room to show me the two Barbies that they were playing with. She said "America Barbie". The funny thing about it is that the Barbies actually had clothes (none of the ones at my house seem to ever have clothes on) and their hair was perfect. My translator, Olga, said that they keep them in good shape because they are the only two that they have. 20 girls and 2 Barbies? My daughters probably have 20 naked ones in the basement...

I then met with the Social Worker to go over some of the questions that she had regarding our paperwork. Nothing major, but they do go through it with a fine toothed comb. She wanted specifics about our home, my job, our church (the only religion here is Russian Orthodox so I had to explain what Methodism actually is -- I think I may have described a new religion, but I am not sure).

Soon afterwards, Ivania and Vitia's sister, Katia, came into the room. She is 18, blond hair, slender, and looks very much like Ivania and Vitia. You can really tell that they are brother and sister. I could tell instantly that she is very close to Vitia and Ivania. The social worker said that she acted as their mother when their real mother left 7 years ago. By the way, I did find out that their mother lives in the same city and they haven't seen her in more than 2 years. She has a very heavy drinking problem and has given up her parental rights to the children.

Katia is in trade school studying to be a seamstress. She has one more year of studies. I spoke with her through the interpreter and she seemed to be very smart and articulate. She read the letter that Marylin wrote to the boys and she got tears in her eyes. The translator said that she knows that this is the right decision for them, it is just scary for her and she wants to make sure that they are being adopted by a good, loving family. I think that I was able to put her to ease. She looks forward to meeting Marylin when she arrives here. She read through our home study (the translated version) and said that she was happy with what it said.

Once again, they made tea and had sweets for me. It is truly a great custom that they have. When guests come into your home, you invite them for tea, coffee, and sweets (candy, cookies, cake, etc). In addition, each time that I come to the orphanage or when I visit their grand parents, I take a box of tea and chocolates or a cake with me. It is a great way to make your guests feel very welcome.
Soon after, we left to meet their grandparents. They live about 10-15 KM outside the town. As we get further out of town, the roads get much smaller. We drove up to a small grouping of about 10 "traditional Russian farm houses". All of the 1 story structures are very similar, but they all have their own "flair" that consists of ornate carvings around the windows and trim along the houses.

As we arrived, the grandmother (Babushka) and grandfather (Dadushka) came walking out of the side door. The Babushka is 69 and the Dadushka is 70. Close your eyes and imagine what a Russian farmer and his wife look like and you are probably have a good picture of them. I could tell that they were dressed in their finest clothes to greet their guests. The Babushka had on a brightly colored dress and the Dadushka had on a pair of flannel pants and a button down shirt. His hair had been combed and "greased into place".

We went in through the back door into a small porch. I could see about 20 or so 1/2 gallon jars filled with milk. I asked the social worker and she said that they have one cow. They milk it 3 times a day and then sell the milk, cottage cheese, and sour cream that they make from the milk. The Babushka milks the cow 3 times a day "because it is women's work" (I know that sends a shooting pain down the spines of the independent women that are reading this email!).

Their home consists of only two rooms and the back porch. The main room is about 16X20 and acts as their bedroom (a small single bed sits in one corner), their living room (a couch sits in the opposite corner), and their dining room (in the center of the room). The Babushka proudly gives me a tour of their home through the voice of the social worker. They are most proud of the "furnace" that is in the kitchen. It serves as their main heating source for the home and an oven for baking. It reminds me of a large brick pizza oven. It is about 12 feet deep and the fire area is 12x2x4. It is very large. They have long handled tools to push and pull pans in and out of the oven. They also have a sink and a stove in the kitchen.

The home was built by the Dadushka, Ivan, when they got married about 45 years ago. They have electricity, but no running water. They have a well out front (that they are very proud of because they get clear water from it -- however, it looked really cloudy to me) and a little outhouse in the back past the barn. The home is clean, but pretty bare. They live an extremely simple life. All of what they have is either made by them or bought by the money that they earn from selling the milk or vegetables. I also think that they get a small stipend from the government, but it is very small.

I asked about their cow and they said that it was due in from the fields any time now to be milked. Sure enough, their cow, along with about 6 others soon came lumbering down the road. No one was guiding them, but each of them looked like kids going home at night. They each, one at a time, broke off from the group and walked back to their owner's barn. They have all been doing it this way for years and they are now trained. During the summer, three times a day, they come in from the fields without any human intervention to get milked. They have no fences, just really smart cows.
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As I took the tour, the ladies set up for our "meet and greet snack". They set up the table and added the extension so that we could all sit there. They brought out their "fine china" and plates of food. The food consisted of sliced meats and cheeses, tomatoes and cucumbers sliced in sour cream, bread, cookies, and the cake that I had brought. We all sat there and ate and talked. The grandparents know that they cannot raise the boys, they just want to make sure that they are taken care of. After dinner, Katia brought over a photo book so that I could see some of their family pictures. It had pictures of the grandparents with the 3 kids, pictures of their parents, and pictures of them as they were growing up. They only had about 30 pictures, but they were wonderful. Their mother and father look like very normal people and there are pictures of happy times like holidays. The social worker said that alcohol can kill the happy times if you drink too much. The kids pictures are very cute. They seem to be very happy in them and it seems as if the three of them are very close.

I think that I won the Dadushka and Babushka over. When I left they seemed happy with me and they look forward to meeting Marylin on our next trip. Svetlana always puts in some extra words for Marylin! She really likes her.

As I left, I shook the grandfather's hand and the grandmother gave me a very big hug and a kiss on the cheek. I think that it will work out just fine.

When we arrived back at the orphanage, we had lunch - yes I was tired of eating, but I never turn down a good meal. Svetlana wanted me to know that we were eating the same meal that the kids were eating that day. It consisted of a simple soup made with beets, cabbage, and potatoes; mashed potatoes; tomatoes; and what looked like hot dogs. She said that they have much better food in the summer than they do in the harsh winters. Fresh vegetables are a special thing that they only get during the summer and early fall.

After lunch we spoke to Vitia and Katia about the names being changed. Vitia said that he would like the name Alex and felt that Ivania would like the name Jack. So the paperwork tomorrow will state Alex Vitia Young and Jack Ivania Young. These will be put on their new birth certificates.

It was soon time to leave for our ride home. I exchanged addresses with Katia so that she would have our home address. I also gave Katia some rubles as a gift which made Vitia very happy. I told her that we would take good care of her brothers and that she would always be able to be in contact with them. She knows that once her grandparents are gone, she has no other relatives other than Vitia and Ivania. Family is important and it would be a terrible thing to feel as if you don't have any on this planet.

Vitia and I said goodbye for the last time on this trip. I will not see him again because the rest of the paperwork and meetings will be done in Tver. We were both sad, but we both know that the next trip will be the exciting one. He is such a good boy!

After the drive home, I walked around Tver a little bit and found the one and only pizza place. Their pizza is nothing like the pizza from home, but it clearly reminded me of home just the same. A young Russian student saw that I spoke English and asked if he could talk to me to
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practice his English. He is going for a joint degree of Economics and English Interpretation. We spoke for about 30 minutes. It was nice to be able to speak English for a while.

Well that is all for tonight. Tomorrow I am off to get some paperwork notarized.

Love to all,

Scott

Trip 1 – Day 4

All,

Day 4 did not start quite as early so I was able to have a Russian breakfast at the hotel. Unfortunately, it was very similar to the Russian lunches and dinners that I have been served. The main part of the breakfast was breads, sliced meats, and sliced cheeses. There was also sliced fruits and vegetables. The only real breakfast items were hard boiled eggs and blintzes (super thin pancakes). I enjoyed a couple cups of coffee, which was very good.

The translator and the driver met me at 8:45 to take me over to the notary office for a 9:00 appointment. The translator, Olga, warned me that we are working on "Russian time" and that our meeting will not be on time. Sure enough, we waited in the small notary office until after 10:00 until they got to us. We filled out all of the paperwork for my court appearance tomorrow along with the official request for birth certificates for Jack and Alex (kind of weird not calling them Ivania and Vitia). The notary was using a standard PC running Windows and just as it always seems to happen, the PC locked up while she was typing in word. She hadn't saved any of the documents so she had to re-boot the computer and start at the beginning. The curse of Bill Gates extends all the way to Russia!!!

A side note on the computer use in Russia: All of the computers that I have seen run a Russian language version of Windows. Everything looks the same, just with Russian words. They run all of the normal Office products, but when the access the internet, they use Mozilla. I guess IE is not the browser of choice over here. I can't complain though, having internet access (even though it is expensive) has been very nice.

After each document was completed, the translator would read them to me and then both of us would sign them. The documents were pretty straight forward and the process took less than one hour. I am ready for my first Russian court date, tomorrow morning at 10:00.

After the visit to the notary, the driver dropped Olga and myself off at the edge of the Volga river so that she could give me a walking tour of the city. She took me on a long walk along the Volga river and then down through the heart of the city. She spoke about the hardship that the city had faced during it's 800+ years of existence. In the early years Tver was
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Moscow's chief rival and some thought that Tver should be the capital of Russia. However, it had a very difficult existence because it was pillaged by many groups including Ivan III, Ivan the Terrible, the Poles, and many bands of thieves. The only thing that really kept Tver on the map was that Catherine the Great made Tver her stop over place between Moscow and St. Petersburg. She built a very large building here that she used to rest on her trips. It was amazing in it's time, however, it was let go and was even bombed during WWII. The city has been working to rebuild it over the past 10 years, but I don't see much progress. Even the scaffolding that surrounds a lot of the building is in disrepair. It is truly sad.

The bad part about Catherine the great is that she did not allow any buildings (other than her large palace) to be built out of anything other than wood. She did not want the buildings in Tver to compete against the amazing buildings in Moscow and St. Petersburg. This really impacted Tver when in 1763 the Polish army seized the city and burnt every building to the ground. Therefore, the only really old building in the city is Catherine the Great's stone palace. Pretty amazing.

There is a very large "City Park" at the edge of the river. It has a permanent amusement park with some small rides. It is only open in June, July, and August. They also have a large beach on the edge of the river, but because the Vulga river is so deep, the water is only warm enough to swim in during July and August. Most of the year the water is 60 degrees or colder.

The apartment buildings in the city are very broken down and in significant disrepair. They are either dated to Stalin times or Kruschev times and the Russians call them either Stalin or Kruschev apartments. They are all very small and the Stalin apartments have 1 bedroom and the Kruschev apartments have 2 bedrooms. Each of the apartments have a living room, a bath, and a kitchen. Entire families live in one apartment. Olga lives in a two bedroom apartment with her parents, her brother, and her husband. Olga and her husband don't expect to get an apartment on their own for a few years because they are so expensive.

The streets are lined with many shops. Most of them are very small and do not have that many items in them. There is probably a cell phone store on most of the blocks. Cell phone usage is very high here. All of the youth have them. There are also many very small grocery stores here. Some of them are only 20 x 30 and they have a very limited selection of items. I did walk through their largest store in Tver. It is a grocery store on the first level and then a department store on the next two levels. Total size of the store is probably about the size of 3 Convenient stores. They have a lot of items, just one type of each so there isn't a lot of selection. For example, if you need an iron, here is the one or two that you can select from.

Cultural diversity is extremely limited here. Everyone is white, except for a few of what they call Gypsies. The Gypsies spend most of their time in the open market. The big thing that they seem to be doing is selling cell phones. Olga said that they steal the phones and then resell them to others. They seem to have some scams going on and she said to watch them because they are pretty good pick pockets. I have not seen an African, Hispanic, Indian, or any other race since I have been here. I am guessing that Moscow will be different. I don't think that many people try to move to Tver.
From Russia with Love

Today was the first day of School for all of the schools and colleges in Russia. All of the little girls are in dresses with white bows in their hair and the boys have on dress pants, jackets, and ties. It is tradition for all of the kids to take flowers to their teachers on the first day so all of the kids were walking to school with a bunch of flowers. There are also big parties this evening to celebrate (probably the parents celebrating that the kids are back in school).

The speed of life here in Moscow is very slow. I can see it in the workers that are working on their construction projects and rebuilding some of the homes. Not much seems to happen in the day. There is a lot of standing around and having smoking breaks. Olga said that this is one of the remnants of the Communist society. When you were working for the state run businesses, you weren't pushed to work that hard. Many in their culture still have that type of work ethic. The schedules seem very slow to me. Olga also stated that people in Moscow are never on time for appointments and warned me that my 10:00 appointment with the judge could occur any time between 10:00 and 4:00 and there is nothing that we can do about speeding up the pace of things. I move way to fast for here.

There is a large movie theater here in Tver. It has 8 separate screens. All of the movies playing there are from Hollywood. All of the movies were the same ones that are out in the US right now, they are just delayed by a couple of weeks. I also walked into a video rental store and all of the movies are from the US, just translated into Russian. They love the US movies and the US music.

The walking tour was a very nice experience for me because I was guessing most of the time what things were and Olga was able to tell me and give me some of the history of the city.

Tonight I am going to walk to the Volga river to go to a restaurant that I saw during my tour today. The menu will be in Russian so I will just pick something and hope for the best. Hopefully, I won't get horse steak and cabbage or pigs intestine and potatoes, although I probably won't know the difference anyway.

All the best to my friends and family at home.

Love,

Scott
Trip 1 – Day 5

All,

Last night I spoke to another couple that is on their second trip to Russia. Their final court appearance did not go well yesterday. The judge added another document request at the last minute and now their adoption will be delayed until they can get a signed, notarized, and apostiled original of the document from the US. They were almost in tears telling me this. They just want me to know that we need to be extremely prepared. They said that their agency never mentioned this document to them. This really got me nervous about the visit with the judge this morning.

As I am now coming to expect in Russia, today did not quite start on time. I was supposed to meet with the Judge at 10:00 in the morning, but my contacts called to check and she was running late so she would be able to see me at about 11:00. Until about a month ago, the process was only a 5 minute process, however, with all of the changes that have occurred in the adoption process in Russia, they said the meeting would take at least 1/2 of an hour. As we drove to the meeting, the translator reminded me that I had to lie that we saw both Ivania and Vitia because that is what the inspector had put in her report. She also said that I should focus on the benefits to the children and that the judge will spend the most time discussing our health and our financial ability to provide for the children.

When we arrived at the judge's chambers, they were small and they were shared with another judge. The translator and I sat in the two chairs facing her desk. If I would have closed my eyes and imagined what the judge would have looked like, I would have seen her. She was in her early 50's with a very plain look. She did not smile during our greetings, she just wanted to get down to business. She started by reviewing our paperwork that we had prepared in Russia. She moved through most of it very quickly, until she came to our official petition to adopt, she paused for a few moments and said that "This will not do. We cannot do a request from one parent, your wife will need to be here." She said that she would review everything else and then discuss this. My translator told me not to worry and that we will work through it. The judge went through all 40 or so documents in our translated application packet. She made comments on each one of them such as "you will need to update your physical exams" and "is your current income above the poverty level in Ohio and is it sustainable". She has been through hundreds of these packets so she could quickly pick out any issues and was ready with many comments. I tried to interject some of my American humor during the process and even got her laughing a couple of times. I think this broke the tension a little bit. It was funny for me seeing this woman not wanting to smile or laugh and not being able to stop herself. Throughout the process, she came up with about 12 additional or updated documents that she is going to require us to bring with us during our second trip. I thought that Marylin and I provided her with every document from our lives, but she came up with more...
At the end, she came back once again to the magical question about Marylin not being there and our request for adoption being only signed by me. We told her that we had the required power of attorney document, but she stated that it was not good enough and did not cover this particular request document. She said that we had two choices. One was to not continue forward with the adoption process and the other was to have Marylin and I come to Russia 5 days earlier on our second trip to submit the document in person and provide enough time for the judge to review and approve the request. I said that we would do whatever it took. Our translator could tell that I was disappointed, but she said that there was not much that we could do, but comply. Then it popped into my head that if the judge was compassionate about children she wouldn’t want us to be away from our 3 beautiful girls more than 2 weeks. The picture of our family was on her desk, so I asked our translator to tell the judge that it would not be good for our daughters to have both parents away for an extra week and to ask again if there was any additional option that they would accept so that we could minimize our time away from the girls. She smiled at my request and then thought for a moment. Finally she said that they could translate the official document from Russian to English; email it to us; we could then sign, notarize, and apostilize the document; translate it back to Russian; and Fedex the documents back to them. This would be acceptable to them, but we would have to do it as soon as we got back. I happily agreed to the compromise and thanked her from Marylin and the girls. I now see that Russian judges are like candy, they can have a very tough shell on the outside, but be mushy on the inside. Hopefully, she will be compassionate on our next trip too!

She then asked if we had a date in mind for the court date. I stated October 14th and she said that the day would be fine and we should arrive at the court room at 10:00. She said that the adoption could still be canceled if we do not bring all of the documents; if the documents are unacceptable; or if Ivania or Vitia state in court that they do not want the adoption to occur. She said that the process was complete and that we could go now”. Her bedside manner needs a little work, but at least the first piece of the process is now complete and we can begin planning for the second trip and preparing all of the documents. Marylin and the girls will be happy that we are moving forward!

We left the court room and jumped right into a hired car for our trip to Moscow. The translator went with me to make sure that I had a safe trip to my destination. We drove from Tver to Moscow in record time. The driver was on his CB radio the entire time talking to other truck drivers about where the police were sitting. We were going 120-140 KM per hour most of the time. When we got to the outskirts of Moscow the driver tried to "sneak" past a police road stop by taking another route through a gas station. This didn't work and they pulled him over and asked for all of his paperwork. This, however, became nothing more than a short delay and we were back on the road. As we took the main road into Moscow, it was lined with large apartment buildings. The bottom floor of the buildings were filled with shops and the top floors were apartments. There were hundreds of these large apartment buildings.

When we got downtown, the main road was a parking lot with traffic. It took us about 45 minutes to go the last few miles. We arrived at the Marriott Tyverskaya (Tvverskaya is the main road from Moscow to Tver and is also the main street into Moscow. It was widened during the Soviet era to become the parade route for all of the military parades into Red
From Russia with Love

Square. Those of you who are old enough will remember the military parades that occurred back then to show their might. Now, however, we realize that many of the missiles that were shown in the parades were just empty shells because the country was almost bankrupt. I digress...

I quickly went outside to walk the 25 blocks down Tverskaya to Red Square. When I walked out onto the street I was extremely surprised. If you would ignore the language that is written and spoken and the architecture of the buildings, you could have thought that you were in any other major city in the world, Chicago, New York, LA, and I am sure London, Paris, etc. There were large stores everywhere, signs and advertising, new cars everywhere, well dressed people, lots of business people, etc. You could have been at rush hour anywhere. This is why they call Moscow a modern metropolis. Such a contrast from the city of Tver and even more of a contrast with the city where the orphanage is. So much poverty out in the surrounding country and so much wealth in the city. The contrast is much more dramatic than the poverty to wealth contrast in the US.

The shops were bustling and people were headed into the restaurants to have dinner. All of the top designer stores were there. Lots of jewelry, electronics, cosmetics, high end clothing, etc. Everyone is dressed in clothes that could easily pass in the better areas of the US cities. The city is getting set up for some type of a celebration this weekend. They are building a concert area and putting up tents and decorations.

One interesting thing about the city is that none of the buildings are more than 10-12 stories high. They seem to all be about the same height and go the complete length of each block. I asked the receptionist at the hotel desk and she said that there was a rule that no building built in Moscow could be higher than a specific tower in Red Square. She believed that this rule has been removed, but she is not positive. I thought that it was pretty wild in a city this size to not have any sky scrapers or even reasonably tall buildings.

Soon I was at Red Square. What an amazing place. Sometimes called "The Kremlin" which means "Walled City" because it was truly a large brick fort that was built to protect the city. For years it has housed the Russian government. I got to see the site of Lenin's tomb, but I was unable to answer the big question of "who is buried in Lenin's tomb" because it was closed. Maybe next time for all of those history buffs.

There are at least two churches at the square. One you will recognize when you see it with the towers that have very large gold tops - St. Basil's Cathedral. The other has just been rebuilt. It was torn down during the soviet times. FYI, most of the churches during the Soviet times were used for other purposes. Some as barns, some as storage, etc. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, many of the churches have gone back to their original purpose or have been refurbished.
From Russia with Love
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Red Square is just as the movies present it. I can imagine Kruschev sitting in the stands watching the military parades going past. The cold war is over and now it is a gigantic tourist attraction. Hopefully, it will never be used for the military purpose again!

I couldn't help myself and I had to stop at the McDonalds right outside of the entrance to Red Square to have a Big Mac, large fries, and a shake. They weren't quite as good as the American version, but I have craved a change to the standard Russian diet all week long. I looked around the McDonalds and the people and the surroundings looked just like a McDonalds in the states. All of this for just 118 rubles (just a little more than $4).

On my way back to the hotel, I walked through a tunnel that goes under the street. As I descended the stairs, I heard orchestra music. As I got closer, I could tell that it was live. When I rounded a bend I saw two string bases and 7-8 violins playing classical music for money (they had a violin case on the ground). I have heard of and seen street musicians on the streets of big cities, but never a street orchestra! They were great. My mom would have loved it. They had quite a collection of rubles in their case.

I spent a lot of time this evening walking the main streets of Moscow. It truly is a "Western style" city. Advertising everywhere. Everyone on cell phones. Expensive cars - very few Volga's and other Russian made cars. I even saw a couple of Hummers on the street along with a couple of stretch limos. However, BMW and Mercedes are the two premium car brands that you see the most.

Prices for everything is much higher here in Moscow that Tver. Luckily the hotel told me to do souvenir shopping in Tver because I would have paid double here in Moscow. I feel very comfortable and safe walking the streets of Moscow. I am sure that there are some very bad sections, but where I am staying is very safe.

This is my last message from Russia for this trip. I hope that you have enjoyed receiving my daily updates. I leave tomorrow morning for the airport and my flight back to the US. Thanks for keeping me in your thoughts and prayers. This has been a great experience for me and we are one step closer to bringing our boys home. It has been a long process so far, but we just keep reminding ourselves that it will be well worth it when we bring the boys home to America and provide them a life that they could have never dreamed of having back in the orphanage. Now that I have been here I know that it is an amazing gift that we are giving these two boys. Until I see you in America...

Scott
Trip 1 – Day 6 - Return

All,

FYI, I just landed in Atlanta and I am waiting out my 4 hour lay over here for my flight to Cleveland. I will be very glad to see Marylin and the girls and to sleep in my own bed this evening.

Thanks for keeping me in your thoughts and prayers!

Scott

Trip 2 Begins

To our friends and family,

Marylin and I are all ready for our second, and the most rewarding, trip to Russia. We leave on Saturday at 10:25 am and we return home on Saturday the 22nd at 10:30 pm with the boys in hand. We cannot wait until they are part of our family here in the US.

Please keep us in your thoughts and prayers. Marylin and I will keep you posted via email.

Love you all!

Scott and Marylin

Trip 2 – Day 1

All,

It is truly a miracle. Marylin Young is now in Russia! After lots of coaxing and a few little "drinkie poos" that were made from some small blue bottles provided by some really good friends, Marylin sat down beside me on the plane and strapped on her seat belt for dear life. She kept picturing in her mind the boys faces and how they would look when we saw them at the orphanage. This is what I think kept her in her seat the entire flight and kept her from going up and lecturing the pilots about how they should be flying around turbulence instead of through it (a small path of diversion around turbulence in the grand scheme of a 6000 mile plane ride really makes sense to Marylin). I was very proud of my wife and how she kept the faith and made it through the 11 hour plane ride to Russia. She is really a trooper and this really proves how much she loves these two boys and wants them to be a part of our family.
When we arrived at the airport, Marylin quickly noticed how quiet it really is in the Moscow airport. No one talks and you could really hear a pin drop. I think that this atmosphere is still a hold over from the Soviet era. There are also still lots of military staff working in the airport and this may have something to do with it.

We quickly met up with Olga, our interpreter, and Alexi, our driver and main contact for the adoption process in Tver, for the 2+ hour drive from Moscow to Tver. They are so nice to us and really try to make the process as smooth as possible. We learned today that Alexi also volunteers his time to the Russian Orthodox churches in the area by painting some truly amazing pictures, statues, crosses, etc. in the churches. They are as beautiful as you could possibly imagine (Sistine Chapel like artwork).

The ride went very smoothly. Marylin was similarly amazed by many of the things that I was amazed by in my first trip. The small vegetable stands along that are being worked by the old Russian women; the very small houses; the poverty; the wild driving with seemingly no rules; the wide open countryside; and how run down most of the buildings are. She also identified one thing that I didn't notice last time. On our way to Tver, we go through a village where almost all of the homes are under ground. You just see a big pile of dirt with a door sticking out of it. No windows, just a door. Probably pretty energy efficient, but talk about getting the blues from the weather in the winter when you are stuck under ground all winter! They might even get them worse than us back in Cleveland.

We arrived in the hotel and after a quick nap (Marylin did not sleep a wink on the plane), we went out to walk through Tver and to get something to eat. I took Marylin to my "Old Faithful" restaurant where you can point to what you want behind a large glass case. It is just much easier than playing the "guess the meat" game at the restaurants. Without English menus in the restaurants and no interpreter, it is almost impossible to get what you want. At my "Old Faithful" you can see what you get and it is really good food. Marylin had pigs in the blanket and I had stuffed chicken and mashed potatoes. Yum! Marylin said that the pigs in the blanket were even close to her moms, but not quite because no ones could be as good as hers (notice the points that I am trying to win back from my mother in law!).

We then walked through some of Tver and through a couple of shops. I wish that I could give you a better mental picture of the stores that they buy their food from. Most of them are only about 24 x 24 and they have such a small assortment of things. Boy, if you don't like the store brand here, you have no other choice. We are so blessed in so many ways to live in the US.

Thanks to those of you who sent toys or $$ for us to give to the kids at the orphanage. I know that they will all go to good use and that they will be very appreciative. For all of you that read my last series of notes, the orphanage shouldn't have a shortage of Barbies after I make the "Mentor Delivery". They will have about 3 dozen of them with lots of nice clothes. Parents, please thank your kids for giving them to the orphanage, there will be many smiling girls when we go there on Wednesday. We will be shopping for boy things over here.

We are working through one small issue with our adoption right now. We got a call at the hotel this evening from one of our agency contacts and they said that we were missing the license from our psychologist (just one for adoption testing and not one that Scott needs to see on a weekly basis or anything like that for those who are wondering...). The Eipperts and
From Russia with Love

the Remchecks are on the case though to get the document faxed to the right people tomorrow so we know that it is in good hands.

It is so great to have Marylin here to share everything with me this time. I am glad that I went alone the first time to get the lay of the land, but it is nice to have my wife here to enjoy this with. We do miss our three daughters though, but we know that they are in good hands and that they are doing their homework each night with a diligent attitude and a big smile (I know that Madison has been reading these messages:).

All the best to our friends and family back in the states. Please keep the prayers coming!

More tomorrow...

Scott and Marylin

Trip 2 – Day 2

All,

Good news! The missing paperwork is being forwarded as we speak to our contacts in Tver. Looks like we should have it for our court hearing on Friday! This takes a lot of worry off of our minds.

There has been a schedule change. We were supposed to see the boys for the first time on Wednesday, but today them moved it up to Tuesday! We are really looking forward to it. We had to hurry out to buy gifts for the kids at the orphanage today to make sure that we had them ready for tomorrow.

The rest of the schedule is as follows: Tuesday: see the boys at the orphanage Wednesday: go to the notary Thursday: medical exams Friday: court date Saturday: if all works out on Friday, the boys are ours. Sunday: head to Moscow with the boys Monday - Friday: Paperwork at the US embassy, etc.

In regards to the medical exams, we found out today from some of the other families, that this is 100% a money making scheme. The visits to the doctors consist of some very simple questions being asked by each doctor and then paying 500 rubles to each of them (about $20). The funny one is that you go to a specialist on drugs and alcohol and they don't even take blood. They just ask you if you abuse any substances. I know the economy is tough here, but I cannot believe that they would put this additional hurdle in place for adoptive parents. When they have you, they have you...

It has been great sharing stories with the other families that are here adopting children. There are 5 or 6 just in our hotel alone. Some of them have already gotten their children and they are waiting for the paperwork to go to Moscow. Some of the others are on their first trip. Many of the families have picked out their children from pictures in emails, etc. That would be a tough thing to do because you would want to bring them all over with you. The conversations
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have really put Marylin at ease and have better prepared both her and I for our court date on Friday.

Now that Marylin is on the ground here in Russia I think that she likes it a lot. We have had beautiful weather here (although it is clearly coat weather). The city is really run down, but it still has a great sense of beauty and style. The history here is great.

Our day started out with a great 6 hour walk around the city. Marylin was really a trooper on our walk. Not one peep of being tired or anything. She just kept right on going! We saw the Vulga river; the main park with an amusement park; many churches; lots of stores; and one of the open markets. The open market was really interesting because there were a ton of tents, but there were really only a few things that were being sold. There were booths with hats; some with shoes and boots; some with hand knit socks; some with underwear; some with purses; and some with clothes. However, even with all the booths, there was still a pretty poor selection.

At one point during the walk, Marylin was looking for a bathroom. We found a pay toilet, however, when we looked in, there was just a hole in the floor and no real toilet. Can you believe that we were wishing for the old "porta potty" from the US? They sounded pretty good at that point.

About lunch time we found a restaurant to sit down and relax in. Of course we couldn't read the menus so we looked around on other people's tables to see if there was anything that we liked. Both Marylin and I thought the meal that a girl next to us was having so we asked for two of the "chicken" dishes next to us. The waitress looked at us pretty weird and then headed into the kitchen. Little did we know they were pork dishes. She really thought we were weird when we were making our chicken wing imitations during our order. The food was great though and a nice break from our walk.

Marylin really hates the traffic here. It is clearly every pedestrian for themselves and the cars have the right of way. It is funny to see the little Russian grandmas hustling across the street to beat an oncoming truck or bus just before it hits them. Marylin did save my life today though when I was trying to cross the road and read the map at the same time she screamed and scared me to death. However, it caused me to stop walking and a big panel truck drove right in front of me. Guess I need to pay a little more attention to the traffic.

To all my fishing buddies, Marylin found me a fishing show on one of the Russian channels. The funny thing is that I had no problem following the show even though it was in Russian. It was more like a show that was done out of some southern US redneck's basement (the quality was pretty poor), but they were catching fish. Mostly natural baits, on the bottom, and letting them drift. I couldn't recognize any of the fish on the show, but I did see some Northern Pike for sale in the market today.

Marylin has commented many times on the fashion here in Tver. The women all try to really dress up when they are walking the streets. Mini skirts, high stiletto heals with pointed toes, and fancy tights are the rage here. All in black or red. That's about as far as this man can go on fashion. Maybe I should stick to the fishing above.
From Russia with Love

Well, that's all for tonight. We are looking forward to a great day tomorrow with the boys.

Love to all!

Scott

Trip 2 – Day 3

All,

Warning to all who read this message, you may want to grab a box of Kleenex before you read on...

Today was a very special day in the life of our family. Marylin and I got to take the 2 hour trip from Tver to the orphanage to see the boys. Marylin hasn't seen them in more than a year and for her, it was incredibly special. As we drove up to the orphanage, we saw Vitia's head peaking out of an open window. They said that he woke up extra early today and he had been waiting by the window all morning just waiting for us to get there.

Vitia greeted us at the van and Marylin got a big hug from him. As you can imagine, Marylin's tears started to flow right then and there. We walked in and entered the office. Svetlana (the chaperon from last year's trip) greeted Marylin with a big hug too. She and Marylin established a very unique bond last summer, which was amazing because Svetlana didn't speak a word of English.

After this, Ivania stepped into the room with his sister Katia. Ivania tried to be the tough guy, but came right over to get a hug and a kiss from Marylin. It was amazing when he spoke because the little boy voice from last summer has been replaced by a deeper "man's voice". They are both very small, but they are growing up.

We spent a few minutes looking through the scrap book that Marylin put together from last summer. The boys were proud to show everyone their new sisters and list them by name. You could tell that they had many fond memories of the time that we spent together 14 months ago.

Marylin and I took a tour of the orphanage. She was much more impacted by this than I was during my trip and said that she felt that the conditions were deplorable. She could not believe that they were living this way. She saw the children in the old clothes that the Salvation Army would have thrown away and their dirty faces (their bathing facilities are very poor). She also smelled and saw the living conditions that they were living in and just started to cry. I guess I was just expecting it to be bad on the first trip and it was. She was not expecting it to be that bad and it was much worse. We are so blessed to be living where we are and to have the gifts that we are given. I wish all of our children could live one night in the orphanage here in Russia and they would never beg for anything else again. I don't think that
From Russia with Love

Marylin or I will ever forget the smell of the orphanage or the conditions that we are getting these boys out of.

We then got in the van to go out to the boy's grandparents home. It was Alexi the driver, Golena the social worker, Olga the interpreter, Marylin, myself, Katia, Vitia, and Ivania all in a small mini van. When we got there, the grandparents came right out to greet us. The grandmother was already crying when she was hugging us all. We quickly went inside and they got ready for what we are finding is the traditional meal with guests. The grandmother had been up since early morning getting everything ready.

Marylin and I took a walk around the home and she was amazed by what she saw. So small, so simple, yet so comfortable and warm. The kids feel at home here at their grandparents. They are very nice people. The grandmother's long time neighbor and now "practically family", Nada, came over the entire time to help and to support her best friend through this difficult day.
On the way there today we stopped at a store to get a cake to bring. Marylin picked one out that had a cow decoration on it in honor of the "smart cow" that I wrote about last trip. However, we found out today that the grandparents had to sell the cow because it became too much work for them to handle at their age. Milking 3 times a day, cleaning the stalls, feedings, etc. became too much for them now that they are in their 70's. The grandfather also now has diabetes and has to take insulin. Marylin and I were saddened to hear that this took place, but we all had a good laugh about the cake decoration and the "smart cows".

As we sat there and finished dinner, the grandmother started to speak and we all looked over to see her crying, but clearly and boldly making statements directly to the boys. This is the translated text of her statements: "Vitia and Ivania, these are your new parents now. They will care for you from now on. I want you to promise me that you will be good boys for them. I want you to listen to them and do what they say. I don't want you to quarrel. You must listen to me now and do what I say". There wasn't a dry eye at the table. Can you imagine being a grandparent and giving your grandchildren to another mom and dad from 6000 miles away that you have only met twice? This my friends is blind faith. Knowing and trusting that you are doing the right thing for the boys even though there is a chance that you will never see them again. "If you love something set it free" is so easy to say, but to actually do it takes courage, faith, and an extreme level of love. These grandparents love the boys dearly, but they know that they are unable to give them a decent life. This even makes it more important that
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Marylin and I give everything that we can to our 5 kids to make sure that they all have a great life. I am sitting here crying as I write this so I had better move on.

After lunch we all went out and I took pictures of the grandparents with the boys and Katia. I also took pictures of Marylin with the grandparents. Soon we found that everyone from the village (about 20+ people from this small village) all walked over the grandparents front yard. They are all like family in this small village. All of the people in the village seem to be of similar ages as the grandparents. They probably all lived there all of their lives and are as close as family. They all knew what was happening today. Most of them had never been further than Tver in their lives and most had never seen anyone from another country. They wanted to be there to support the grandparents and to see the boys off. As we pulled out of the drive way they all stood there and waved to us. It was quite a site to see. The grandparents and the boys are really loved by this little Russian community.

From here we drove a few miles and stopped at the grave site of the boys father. The grandmother wanted them to stop one last time to pay their last respects to their father because they may never be back to this area again. I walked back to the grave site that was in the back of the cemetery alone with Katia, Ivania, and Vitiia. I stood there just wondering what he was thinking and if he was pleased with the choices that had been made in his absence. It clearly put in perspective the responsibility that I was taking on today.
From Russia with Love

This was one of the hardest days of Marylin’s and my lives. It had many ups and many downs emotionally. However, we know now more than ever that this was the right thing for us to do. We have 3 wonderful girls at home (who we miss dearly) and now we hope to bring back two brothers for them to grow up with. Our lives have been changed today probably more than Ivania’s and Vitia’s...

Until tomorrow,

Scott and Marylin

Trip 2 – Day 4

All,

Today was clearly less eventful as compared to yesterday, although this is probably good for our emotions and our nerves. Marylin still comes to tears any time we discuss the events from yesterday. It was amazing and yet heartbreaking at the same time.

Our day started with a trip to the notary office. Like typical government offices in Russia, it is very large and very quiet. It makes me feel like we are in a library at all times. We believe that the document that we created today will be our last for the court hearing on Friday. The translator today said that she doesn’t remember a family that has had as many documents as we do in our court packet. Many of the documents are multiplied because we already have 3 kids and we are adopting 2 more. They believe that we have everything in place for the court case on Friday. Please keep your fingers crossed (or if you want to wake up to pray, set your alarm clocks for 2:00 am - Ha!).

The driver then dropped us off at another one of the markets in Tver. This market was full of coats and other cold weather garments. I think that they are getting ready for the long winter to start. The sales people there were a combination of the normal Russian population and Gypsies. They were very helpful, even though none of them spoke any English. Both Marylin and I got a winter coat at the market as our souvenir from the trip. They were probably 60% off the prices that you would pay in the US for a similar coat. By the way, we are having abnormally warm weather for October so far. The temps have been in the range of 38-55 degrees and they are normally between 28 and 45 for this time of the year in Tver. We are hoping that the temps stay this way for the next week or so!

We then walked up through the town to my "old faithful" restaurant and had lunch. All of the food that we have had here has been great so far. The one interesting thing that we have seen while eating out is that it is very common to order vodka with your lunch. They will order what is probably equal to 4-6 shots of vodka along with some type of chaser (usually peach or orange juice). Some times two or more people will order an entire bottle of vodka to split at the meal. They drink the vodka as shots and then just sip on the juice. They then go back to work or school just like nothing happened. I think that I will try this when I get back to work...
From Russia with Love

Our hotel is right beside one of the local water supply pumps for the local neighborhood. About every couple of blocks there is an open pump that provides water. The local people walk from their homes to the pump and fill up buckets of water for their homes. It is amazing that many of the homes do not have running water and the only way that they get water is by carrying buckets down the street to the common pump. It is not too bad now, but can you imagine having to walk down the street to get water for your home during the dead of winter. They will see many days in a row here where the temp does not get above zero degrees. I sure wouldn't want to draw the short stick when it was time to go get water. It seems as if all of the homes have electricity though.

We ate this evening at another local restaurant. Once again, it was very tough to order, however, we had a great meal of fried pork, french fries, salad, and bread. I have a feeling that our luck will run out at some point though and I will have to write home that we ate horse stew or pig's brain or something like that. Hopefully, they will just smile and not tell us...

Sounds like if everything goes well with the judge on Friday, the boys and their sister Katia will be staying in the hotel with us from that evening through Wednesday when we leave for Moscow. During these days the agency will be preparing new birth certificates and passports for the boys. We look forward to this time together.

That's all for tonight. Off to the doctor's offices tomorrow... all the best to everyone back in the states.

Love,

Scott and Marylin

Trip 2 – Day 5

All,

Well we worried a little bit about today's medical tests. How intense would they be? Would they draw blood? Would they take Xrays? Would they do a full physical? How many doctors would we need to see? Would it take all day?

What we really should have asked is how much money would it cost for the doctors signature on the certificates? It was pretty funny to see it happen...

We went first to the Psychologist. On the way, we purchased a box of candy for the Psychologist. When we got there, we understood why we bought the candy. The Psychologist was a beautiful young Russian woman. She sat us down and asked us about 5 questions about adoption and then said that she felt comfortable with our psychological health. She signed the documents, we paid the 520 Rubles (about $20), Alexi gave her the box of candy with a big smile, and we were on our way to the next appointment.

At the second appointment we were to see the doctor regarding drug and alcohol addiction. We paid the 480 Rubles before we even saw the doctor. The doctor just told us that "I have
From Russia with Love

never heard of anyone adopting children that has had an addition to drugs or alcohol" and he signed the paperwork. We were there about 10 minutes.

At the third appointment we went to one of the state run clinics to see a "series of 6 medical specialists". The clinic was in a pretty bad state of disrepair. There was clearly nothing sterile in the clinic. For example, we walked down the hallway and saw a table with mason jars holding tongue depressors, cotton balls, swabs, etc. All without wrapping and open to the air and the dirt of the facility. The building was probably built in the early 40's or 50's. Everything there was old and dirty. Our translator even said that she would never go to a state or government run facility because they were so run down and the care was very poor. However, in Russia you need to have a very good job to afford private facilities because they are so expensive. Mr. Eippert, you would not believe the conditions of the hospital. Camp Rattletrap is cleaner and more sterile than this place was. Maybe we should move your surgery down to Camp Rattletrap? Wow!

When we got there, Alexi went around to the back of the building to find the Chief Medical Doctor for the facility. We waited in the hallway for a few minutes and then were ushered into the Chief Medical Doctor's office. We sat down and were asked one question, "have you ever had any serious diseases". We both said no. He looked over our blood tests and said through the translator that there is no reason for us to see any of the other doctors. He smiled at Alexi and handed him forms that had already been stamped with six official looking stamps and then he signed the form at the bottom. We paid the bill of about 500 Rubles and our day at the doctors was done. We spent much more time in the car driving around than we did with the doctors. Thanks goes to Alexi for "shortening the process". I hope that the Rubles go to good use.

Marylin and I spent some time today preparing for tomorrow's court appearance. Alexi said that it will be a very formal court hearing with a prosecutor for the state, the judge, a court appointed interpreter, and us. They said that the judge has already spent a lot of time looking through our documents and has prepared a long list of questions. The hearings can take anywhere between 2 and 8 hours to complete. Most of the time will be spent answering questions regarding why we want to adopt, are we prepared for the adoption, do we have the financial means for the life long costs of adoption, etc. Alexi said that we just need to be confident and calm in front of the judge. The boys will also go in front of the judge to state that they approve of being adopted. We hope that all will go fine and that the judge will make the right decision.

If everything goes well, the boys will come back to our hotel and stay with us from here on out. Tonight they are saying their goodbye's at the orphanage. It must be tough for two young boys to say goodbye to the only family and friends that they have had during the time in the orphanage. I think that they understand the opportunity that they have though and I am confident that they want to be a part of our family.

Wish us luck. Tomorrow is the big day. Hopefully, we will have a good report for all of you!

Love,

Scott and Marylin
Trip 2 – Day 6

All,

Well, it has been 14 months of ups and downs with the adoption process, but I am very pleased to announce that today it is official that Marylin, Madison, Hannah, Gabrielle, and I have adopted two sons/brothers Jack Ivan Young (Ivania) and Alex Victor Young (Vitia)! I know that our family, friends, and church welcome them into our circle with open arms! Two young boys to go along with our three beautiful girls.

The court appearance went very well. Marylin and I were a little nervous because everything was done in Russian and we had a court appointed interpreter instead of Olga. However, it was nice to see some familiar faces in the small group in the court room. Svetlana from the orphanage spoke on our behalf and so did Galena the social worker. There was a court appointed prosecutor for the case and a stenographer. The rest of our "crew" including Olga (the interpreter), Alexi (the coordinator and driver), Katia (the boy's sister), and the boys sat out in the hallway and waited.

The judge was a very large, older, and seemingly stern Russian man. He clearly had the respect of all in the court room. If I were to dream of what a Russian judge would look like, he would have fit the description perfectly. The judge went through a series of prepared legal statements to start off the case and then asked both Marylin and I if we thought that we trusted them and that the judgment would be fair. We both responded yes and then it was off to the questioning. The judge had reviewed our documents very closely and I was very impressed with the breadth and detail of the questions. I answered questions first and they were mostly related to adding children to our home; our financial situation; dealing with teen aged boys; etc. He questioned me for about 45 minutes and then turned the questioning over to Marylin. Marylin had a similar group of questions, but more focused on the home and parenting. The questions were all very fair and you could tell that he was trying to see if what we submitted was true and how we would deal with adding two new boys to our home.

After our questioning, they had Ivania and Vitia come into the room one at a time so that they could be questioned. The judge was tougher on Ivania because he was older. He asked them some very straight forward questions regarding whether they were confident of their decision; whether they knew that it was a life long decision and not just a vacation; and whether they were comfortable leaving Russia and never coming back or seeing their friends again. Even though he was tough, he seemed more "grandfatherly" than anything else. He just wanted to make sure that they had thought their decision through. The boys did very well in this overwhelming situation and we were very proud of them.

Svetlana and Galena then both spoke and said very nice things about us and recommended that the adoption be approved. Then the court appointed prosecutor spoke and also recommended approval based upon the submitted documents and the testimony. The judge then asked us to leave the chambers for him to make his decision. He called us in after less than 5 minutes and read the official decree that the adoption was approved and that the 10
day waiting period had been waived (this means that we can go home on time!). Everyone was very excited and we thanked the judge and gave hugs to everyone that supported us through this process.

We then spent the afternoon getting their new birth certificates and the official adoption documents. Then we spent the rest of the evening having dinner and enjoying ourselves in the hotel pool.

Katia is spending the next 4 days with us to have some additional time with her brothers prior to them coming to America. Katia is a wonderful young girl (18 years of age) with a great head on her shoulders. Everyone that knows her says that they are amazed that she turned out so well considering the parenting and life circumstances that she had. She truly was more of a mother to the boys than they ever had from anyone else. She is currently studying in a local culinary school to be a bakery decorator. My prediction is that we will see her in the states someday. She would be a welcomed addition to our extended family and the boys would love being able to see her again. Only time will tell.

We will go tomorrow to the town where the boys orphanage is one last time to get some paperwork signed for their passports. Then we will spend Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday in Tver waiting for the passports to be completed so that we can travel to Moscow to go to the US Embassy there.

I want to take a moment to thank our family and friends for your support and prayers throughout this process. We couldn't have pulled this off if it wasn't for your assistance. I know that this seemed crazy for Marylin, the girls, and I to want to adopt 2 boys from Russia, but it is truly a dream come true for us to be able to give back to these two boys some of the many blessings that we have received in our lives. Life without opportunity truly isn't a life at all. Now they will be able to have a life and a chance to really enjoy it.

Love to all,

Scott and Marylin

Trip 2 – Day 7

All,

With the big day over, things have slowed down for us today. Jack and I went back to Kalianzazan, the town of their orphanage to get a new passport for him. Because he is older than 12, he needs to get a separate passport for travel within Russia.

Good news from the orphanage front. Some of you got to see the bathrooms that they had there. They were just awful, only 2 toilets and sinks, and were being used by all 50 kids in the orphanage. I saw today that they have gutted the bathroom and they are putting in two new toilets and sinks along with all new tile. It should be really nice (the nicest part of the orphanage). They said that they were able to purchase this because of the money that they
From Russia with Love

got from our adoption. It made me feel good that a little bit of the money that we are spending is going back to the kids!

When we got back, we spent the afternoon touring the city with Olga the interpreter. Most of the time was spent in the "city park" where they all got to ride a horse for the first time in their lives and they got to ride some go carts. They really enjoyed it a lot. On the way back we stopped to buy Jack a new pair of pants because all of the ones that Marylin brought for him from the US were too small. He grew a lot more than we thought he would. Marylin brought 3 sizes of pants and Alex is in the largest size and Jack was too big for any of them. Just wait till we get some nutritious food into them!

We also bought a copy of the movie "Robots" in Russian. I don't think that it was a licensed copy because it was selling for only 110 Rubles (about $4), but all the movies were selling for about the same price so I had no choice. The boys and Katia all loved the movie! We also went swimming again in the hotel pool. It was really nice.

Now it is off to bed for all of us. The busy days and excitement have caught up to us.

All the best to our friends and family back home!

Love,

Scott and Marylin

Trip 2 – Day 8

All,

Today and the next few days will just be spent in Tver waiting for the passports and other documents to be completed and translated prior to going to the doctors in Moscow for the boy’s medical exam on Thursday and the US Embassy in Moscow on Friday to get the final paperwork to get on the plane on Saturday.

Marylin is very impatient about the paperwork and wants to get home to see the girls NOW! The longest she had been away from the girls in the past was one nighter’s on the Church’s women’s retreat and to see her grandmother. She is really missing them and cherishes the phone calls to them. Soon this too will pass and we will be back in the states.

Today we went to the Tver circus. We weren't too sure what to expect, but boy did they put on a show. It was by far the best circus that I have ever been to. Unlike in the US, there are no OSHA safety rules so there are no nets or any safety devices. When they are flying through the air with the greatest of ease, there is nothing but the hard ground to fall down to. The acts were great. My favorite was the trained elephants. They danced, balanced on one leg, lifted people, and my favorite, kicked large beach balls into the crowd. We sat in the front row and they were literally 5 feet from us. Marylin liked all of the dancing and the acrobatic
acts. The kids liked it all. It was their first time ever to the circus. The circus only cost about $8 per person for the best seats and it lasted more than 2 1/2 hours. What a travel bargain!

The boys are adjusting pretty well. Besides a few brother to brother conflicts, we have been doing very well. Alex has started to work with Marylin on the alphabet. He knows A-H now and is working on the others. Jack has been playing video games on my PC a lot. He seems like a typical teenage boy. This is a big adjustment for Marylin and I.

We found out two things today about Katia. First, we found out that her father actually adopted her. I think that this makes the thought of us adopting her brothers much easier. Second, we found out that she has been talking to her boyfriend, Dima, about marriage. They will probably be married in about 2-3 years. She leaves us tomorrow and will return back to the town where the orphanage is.
Well, that is all for today. We really miss everyone back home, especially for three little girls who are reading this message right now!

Love to all!

Scott and Marylin

Trip 2 – Day 9

All,

We finished the passport process for the boys today. Now they just need to register them officially, which will be completed on Wednesday. Then we will be free to move throughout the country and we will make our trek to Moscow on Thursday morning.

Today was our last day with Katia. She left mid afternoon to take a bus back to her home town. It was very sad when she said goodbye to the boys. She also hugged Marylin for a long, long time. I think that the two of them got along really well and Katia has never really
From Russia with Love

had a good mother. Katia has been living on her own, in her own apartment, since the day she turned 15. Can you imagine living on your own in this rough country when you were 15 with no one to rely on but yourself? Considering all that she has been through, she is an amazing young girl. When she was getting into the car she said "Katia love mama and papa. They are good people." It made us feel good that she was comfortable with the new parents of her brothers.

After Katia left we swam in the pool and then went to the pizza place for dinner. It was funny that we saw some of the circus performers (including two clowns) out of costume. The boys got a kick out of it.

This evening the boys and I watched "National Treasure" -- the Russian version. I saw it in the theaters so I could make out what was going on. The boys really liked it because it was an action adventure type of movie.

We also watched the fishing show on the Russian channel. It is pretty funny to see because it is just a bunch of people off of the street that are fishing from the side of the river. They are catching mostly very small fish and they have a repeated soundtrack that replays over and over again. The boys comment that they catch much larger fish than they show on TV.

Marylin has a cold, a blister on her foot, a spider bite, a cut on her leg, and she just plain wants to come home. This waiting period is very tough on her. She really wants to be on US soil and she wants to be with her three girls. She is a pretty tough cookie though so she will make it through.

Love to all in the USA!

Marylin, Scott, Alex, and Jack

Trip 2 – Day 10

All,

Today the boys met Daisey Duke! Wow, what an eye opening experience for them. Marylin decided that the three boys should have a male bonding experience so we found the movie theater and went to see the Dukes of Hazard. I had seen the movie this summer so it was a good one to see in Russian because I could follow the plot. We went to their movie theater. It was very nice and clean inside. It must have been built in the last year or so because the seats were almost brand new. They had six movies to choose from, but they only had two theaters so each of the movies played 2-3 times per day. The seats for the 3 of us only cost $9 in total (no wonder Hollywood is doing poorly financially!). The boys loved the movie. If you haven't seen it, it is very similar to the old TV show with lots of car chases, car wrecks, the police getting duped, etc. And yes, Daisey Duke is still in her scantily clad top with those short cutoff jeans. I thought Jack's eyes were going to pop out of his head! The boys really enjoyed the movie and laughed throughout. It was a great time!
From Russia with Love

We also bought a soccer ball to play with in the park. The boys really enjoy playing the game and they seem to be pretty good at it. Maybe we can get them into a winter league at Heisley so that they can interact with some other boys their age.

Tonight we went to the store to get some snacks. We picked up some chips, cookies, cereal, dried calamari, and dried fish. Yes, Jack and Alex wanted dried calamari and dried fish. The dried calamari came in a small plastic bag and tastes like beef jerky except with a fishy taste. The fish was just a dried and salted fish. Marylin could not believe it when Alex took the fish and took off the head and the skin and then just ate the meat off of it. Cultures are surely different and so are the snacks! The grandfathers would have been pleased with their love of eating fish that goes along with their love of catching them.

In my messages from my first trip, I mentioned a building that was built for the 1980 Olympics that was never used because it was deemed unsafe when it was completed. It has a very skinny base and then goes up about 30 stories much wider than the base. It looks something like a very squatty wine glass. I found out today that it is only a few blocks from our hotel. I also found out that the locals call it the wine glass and joke that the architects must have been tipping lots of wine bottles when they designed it. It must have cost 10's of millions of dollars to build (it looks really nice), but they have never been able to occupy it. The only use for the building is that it has a series of TV antennas and satellite dishes on top of it. Wow, what a waste!
From Russia with Love
We found out today why they delayed our trip to Moscow by one day. The World Financial Organization is having their annual summit in Moscow this week. We were told that the rooms on Wednesday evening were $1000 per night and they delayed us because of this, but we didn't know why they were so expensive. We saw some news about the meeting today on TV and put two and two together. We head there early Thursday morning.

We hope all is well back at home. We are counting the days until our return!

Love,

Marylin, Scott, Jack, and Alex

Trip 2 – Day 11

All,

First, thanks to all for your messages. They are especially good for Marylin who really misses home a lot!

I am really getting sick of the Russian breakfast buffet here. Every morning they have the exact same combination of the same few fruits, meats, breads, cheeses, meatballs, and blintzes out on the bar of the restaurant. Each day I eat less and less of it. It is always nice the first day and then it goes down from there. We have been here 11 days so it is pretty old right now.

Today we went to the local museum of Tver history. It was a really nice museum (by Russian standards) and had a lot of unique items from the Tver region starting about 900 BC. One interesting thing of note is that one of the first Russians in space was from Tver and they had the actual reentry capsule in the museum. It was also interesting that they had caviar as one of the staple foods when they were in space. I don't think our astronauts had any caviar on the mission.

We then went and picked up the passports for Jack and Alex. This means that we are all set to leave for Moscow tomorrow morning. We will be picked up at 8:00 am (about midnight your time) and we will be driven to a hospital in Moscow to get the boys checked out. Then we will head to the hotel there.

We said a sad goodbye to Alexi and Olga today. They were very good to us and we became quite close to them. As you know from my prior emails, Alexi really liked Pink Floyd. I asked him last week if he had all of the cd's and he said all but one. I found the one missing cd for him in a shop here in Tver and gave it to him today. He was very happy. We also gave both he and Olga money for them to take their significant others out to dinner. We will really miss them...
From Russia with Love

In discussions with Olga today she said that she chose to quit her teaching position at the university last year because the money was so poor. She was paid $20 per month in her teaching assignment ($240 per year). She said that her current translation position pays her $40 per month which puts her above the average here in Tver. Some things are cheaper here in Russia, but not many. I'm sure that it is tough living on her and her husband's salary each month.

Speaking of cheap prices, I know why everyone in Russia seems to smoke. You can get a pack of Russian cigarettes for as little as 4 Rubles (about 15 cents). Most packs are between 8 and 30 Rubles though (30 cents to a dollar). Marboro's, which seem to be very popular here, cost about 28 Rubles ($1). At these prices, along with the low cost of Vodka (anywhere from 60 rubles to 200 rubles per bottle), I can see how they have the real problem that they do on their hands. It is extremely common for people to sit down with a friend (single friend, not group of friends) at a meal and finish a 1/2 liter bottle of vodka. Then they just go back to work or home like nothing happened.

Well, that is all for tonight. Only a couple of days left!

Love,

Scott, Marylin, Jack, and Alex

Trip 2 – Day 12

New Author, Marylin Young is now in the building...

Okay, enough of this fluffy stuff...now for the important things.....

Yes, my butt is in Russia. Amazing but true. I can't believe it myself. Every time we pass a nice store, and my eyes catch something cool, my romantic husband says that our souvenirs are walking WITH us. He is cheap, but touching. Lucky me.

Has Scott told you of my ailments since we arrived? Let's see, a sinus cold, a cut on my right thigh from a sharp piece of metal, I bashed my head on a metal drying bar in the bathroom, a spider bite on my left cheek (not on my face) and a large oozy blister on my right heel. Ahhh, Russia!

We have done a ton of walking. But my love of yummy Russian food has prevented any and all weight loss efforts. We have enjoyed stuffed cabbage, stuffed dumplings, stuffed pork and stuffed blintzes. I am stuffed and ready for some U.S. food. We ate at the Moscow McDonalds tonight and I have to admit, I could feel the chocolate shake slide through my veins. Ahhhh, America!

You know the standard view we have of the Russian women? Big and hearty, well that is all wrong! There are very, very few overweight Russian women. The old Babuskas may look big just because they are 4 foot nothing, but the young Russian woman is very, very fashion
From Russia with Love

conscious. They are always wearing high heeled, very fancy boots, usually in red, white or black and very stylish clothing. Lots of fancy leather coats, furs, hats, scarves, wraps, and mini skirts. I definitely stick out in my New Balance sneakers, Levis and Oprah Winfrey sweatshirt. I feel like I am wearing a sign on my back "I'm American, kick me!"

We are enjoying the boys very much. Getting used to the world of boys is a challenge for me. I am used to girls talking all the time and fighting VERBALLY over clothes and use of the computer. Here the boys are always wrestling and playing video games. We are very thankful for Jimmy Brown's game boy he lent us as that is preventing days and days of fighting over THIS computer. (I just LOVE that Jimmy Brown!)

I want to thank each and every one of you for your love and support during these long 18 months of adoption stuff. It has been a long and emotional journey, but our friends and family have surely made it bearable. We have so many people to thank...but I am gonna give it a try.

Thank you to Lisa Tephenhart for introducing us to the boys, thanks Pat Ameling for helping our family with this whole adoption process, thanks to Ed Korsok and Sue St. Hilaire for notarizing a gajillion documents for us, thanks to Kelly and Greg Eippert for driving us to and from the airport and for their constant love and friendship, thank you to Luci and Olivia for the yummy goodbye lunch and beautiful bracelet, Thank you to Paula and Matt Stevens for the beds for the boys summer visit, thank you to Scout Parsch and Donna Modica's daughters for the Barbies for the orphanage, Thanks Carol Brown for the pep talks, Thanks Deb Frank for the pick-me-up emails. Thanks Mom and Dad Gonta and Young for loving our girls while we are away and thanks to Mareda and CHI for their help with this long process. Thanks to our MUMC family and our JWCM family for the fundraisers for the adoption, your love and prayers are such a blessing to our family. Thanks to Len Pagon and Brulant for allowing Mr. Scott this chance to touch some lives and thanks to Jackie and Micheal Moskal for the gift certificate allowing us to buy the boys lots of Pjs, socks, gutch, etc. Thank you for boxes of clothes from the Eipperts, the Grantzs, the Pucaks, The Morans, The Edwards, The Franks, The Schmidts and the Petites. We love each and every one of you and we truly appreciate all of your love, prayers and support. I am beyond home sick and I can not wait till I am in Ohio on Sat. night. I am dreading the flight, but I miss the girls so much, I have no choice, but to board that plane. Pray for me and know that I appreciate your friendship!
From Russia with Love....Marylin

Trip 2 – Day 13

HELLO ALL!

I know that most of you are asleep right now. It is about 9am here in Moscow and the boys are still in bed, so I thought I would email some things I forgot last night. So much for emailing late in the busy day. :-}
From Russia with Love

We have many friends that are BIG TIME coffee drinkers. So, my advice would be NOT to travel to Russia. Russians love their coffee, but it is ALL freeze dried! Not a single BREWED coffee to be found. The grocery stores only have Nescafe and other freeze dried coffees and even coffee shops have ONLY freeze dried coffees. It is always bitter. Amazing!

Russians are very unfriendly people on the surface. As you walk around the town, nobody smiles, nobody says hello and nobody opens a door for you. In fact, when you go through a door, usually someone will push their way in front of you. Big time culture shock for me and Scott as we are used to smiling at EVERYONE. I am sure many think we are nuts here as it does take some practice to NOT smile. So, we just keep on being us and we long for our friendly American faces!

One way we know that Russians are NICE people deep down inside, is that fresh flowers are everywhere! There are fresh flower vendors everywhere....almost on every street corner. Last night, during our stroll in downtown Moscow, many couples showed that romance is alive here. Many girls had fresh flowers in their hands thanks to their Russian spouses/dates. They are beautiful flowers, many roses, and large carnations. So Russian know how to smile on the INSIDE I guess.

Speaking of smiling on the inside....

I forgot to thank Cindy Wollant and Heisley Racquet Club for their support with the adoption. Last year, when we were only THINKING about having them visit us with the Summer Miracles program, one of our biggest concerns was the fact that you had to make sure that the kids attend some sort of a summer day camp during their stay. Well, a 6 week camp for two boys sounded like a large investment for us at the time, but that is where Cindy came in. She heard of our concerns and without a single hesitation, offered to have both boys attend their summer sport's camp free of charge! Not only did this kind gesture help us have the boys come here, their sports camp experience helped Alex and Ivania fall in love with America. So, Cindy and Natalie and all the Heisley Fitness Team....THANK YOU!

I forgot to thank our girlies for all their love and support for the past 18 months of the adoption. They have made many, many sacrifices for these boys. They have given up toys, play dates, gymnastic classes and sleep overs because Scott and I were too busy or too tired from the whole adoption process. So, we need to thank them. We are so proud of Gabby, Hannah and Madison. They are good girls and we are proud of them. We love our girls!

I know that you have all heard the ups and downs of the adoption process through our experiences. If anyone you know is interested in adoption, we would be more than happy to help them with the process. Our process was much longer than usual because the boys were older and had not been placed on the Russian database. The normal process is much smaller and less painful. The Summer Miracles program was a blessing to us as it introduced us to our boys....so check them out and Children’s Hope International on the web. We met many people here that are adopting and have adopted in the past and are here again for more children. They are so happy and so blessed. Please feel free to spread the word
From Russia with Love

about this amazing opportunity. It may not be for you, but there is someone you know that may just need that extra push to think about it. Time for a commercial break....

Love you all and so happy that we return tomorrow. As you can see, here in Moscow, we "bought" wireless internet for $30 for the next day or so. So, send us your messages if you have the time. Hugs and kisses from the Young family! Marylin

Trip 2 – Day 14 – The Successful Return

All,

We are finally back in the USA! We arrived in Atlanta at about 4:00 pm EST this afternoon (Saturday) and we have a lay over until about 8:45 pm EST. Marylin did well on the flight, but she is really glad to be on land again. Only one more quick flight and this is all over.

Jack and Alex are now officially US citizens. I'm not too sure if they fully understand what this means, but they will over the next few years. We are truly in the land of freedom and opportunity. Something that we all take for granted most of the time. Even though we can't claim to be world travelers, we saw the differences between Russia and the US and how good we have it here. We should all say a big thank you tonight for our forefathers and the great idea that they had for this new country. Enough of the serious stuff, we are just really glad to be back home.

We look forward to seeing you all over the next few weeks and introduce you to our new family members.

All the best!

Scott, Marylin, Madison, Hannah, Gabrielle, Jack, and Alex (wow that is a lot of names!)