

Home / News / Local News

## Saving Ian -- Couple dreams of adopting special needs boy, but needs financial help

- Story
- Discussion

Saving Ian -- Couple dreams of adopting special needs boy, but needs financial help

LINDSAY FIORI [lindsay.fiori@journaltimes.com](mailto:lindsay.fiori@journaltimes.com) JournalTimes.com | Posted: Monday, April 18, 2011 6:24 am | (21) Comments

Font Size:

Default font size

Larger font size

•

•

Recommend

24 people recommend this.



Buy this photo

Gretchen Stewart: "Ari is talking to me while I am playing with Vasya (ian). We had to call him Vasya because that is the only name he knows. We will change his name when he gets home." Photographed at the orphanage in St. Petersburg. Photo courtesy of Gretchen Stewart

### How to help Ian

Donations to Gretchen Stewart's efforts to bring Ian home can be made through Reece's Rainbow, a U.S.-based nonprofit that helps with the international adoption of children with Down syndrome. Donations may be made online by visiting [reecesrainbow.org/sponsorstewart](http://reecesrainbow.org/sponsorstewart). Donations can also be made by sending a check made payable to Reece's Rainbow, with "for IAN/STEWART" in the memo line, to Reece's Rainbow, P.O. Box 4024, Gaithersburg MD 20885.

Donations are tax-deductible.

## Why Ian needs help before he gets older

Because of the age of 5-year-old Russian orphan Ian plus his Down syndrome, he's at risk of soon moving from a regular orphanage to an orphanage or institution for disabled people where he could spend the rest of his life without being eligible for adoption, said Kira Bogouslavski, president and CEO of iOrphan.org, a nonprofit that raises money for Russian orphans.

Russian culture maintains a deep-rooted shame of disabilities and parents are encouraged to give up children with disabilities at birth, Bogouslavski said. That's what happened to Ian.

"People keeping kids with Down syndrome would be the exception rather than rule," he said. "There's no information on how to raise those kids. Most of the time people are institutionalized. They're not seen on the streets (like in the U.S.)."

Instead they're placed in orphanages and institutions where conditions can be "horrible" by Western standards, Bogouslavski said, mentioning mildewed walls, beds and mattresses he'd "be afraid to touch" and a lack of funding for food, clothing and sometimes even electricity.

## Related Links

- Related: Donate to Ian through Reece's Rainbow
- Related: Stewart's blog about visiting Ian (with photos and videos)
- Related: Hope for Ian informational website
- Related: National Association for Down Syndrome
- Related: iOrphan website

Seated on a couch in the office of a faraway Russian orphanage, former Racine resident Gretchen Stewart silently willed the little boy in the room to look her way.

Stewart had been staring at pictures of the boy for almost a year and seeing him in person for the first time she needed his attention.

She pressed the foot of a small teddy bear she held in her lap, making it belt out the ABC song. It worked and the 5-year-old boy's deep brown eyes turned toward her.

"He immediately came over to me and he took the bear," Stewart said. "He danced to the ABCs and it was just so cute."

For Stewart, watching the dance and finally meeting the boy, who she calls Ian, was an affirmation she's doing the right thing. Stewart and her fiancé are trying to adopt Ian, who has Down syndrome, but the process has been complicated and slowed by mountains of paperwork and outrageous adoption costs. Because of the boy's age and the attitude toward disabilities in Russian culture, he's on the verge of being transferred from an orphanage to an adult mental institution, where he could spend his entire life in poor conditions without the prospect of adoption.

As if that didn't make the boy's situation precarious enough, Stewart just found out he has a heart condition and will need a surgery considered risky if performed in Russia.

The heart condition has made bringing Ian home an even greater race against time for Stewart and her family.

### **Finding Ian**

Stewart, 39, was surfing the Internet one night about a year ago, paging through parenting blogs because her 4-year-old son, Ari, has autism. On the blogs, Stewart stumbled across a website about special needs orphans in eastern Europe and how they are often treated badly and end up in adult mental institutions. Then she saw Ian's picture.

"That was the moment our lives changed," said Stewart, who attended Park High School and Gateway Technical College and still has family in the area. "We weren't looking at adoption at all. My son has had a rough time. He was sick for two years of his life. He requires 100 percent attention ... But I got to the point where I couldn't sleep at night seeing Ian's picture, knowing he was heading for an adult mental institution where he would die a slow death. I brought it to my fiancé and I said, 'We have to do something. We can afford another kid. We already do all the therapy and stuff. We know what to do. Let's save this baby.' "

Stewart's fiancé, Craig Morgan, a 40-year-old IT consultant, was hesitant at first because of the adoption price tag. But because of his upbringing and Christian faith, which both encourage helping others, he quickly came on board.

"Craig and I get the ultimate satisfaction and joy in life from being the change. I don't think we would be happy knowing children are suffering," Stewart said, adding they felt their backgrounds, particularly hers, would make them the perfect parents for Ian.

Aside from already having a special needs child, Stewart is a special education program specialist for the Georgia Department of Education. She works with six of the largest school districts in Georgia to improve achievement for disabled students and prior to that she taught both special and regular education.

Stewart and Morgan have also studied up on Down syndrome and after finally meeting Ian in person for the first time this month, they're confident they can raise and love him.

### **Meeting Ian**

During their week-long visit in Russia, Stewart, Morgan and Ari spent time with Ian each day. He and Ari played together and though Ian is not used to being touched or hugged, he eventually let Stewart and Morgan pick him up and hold him.

"He slowly warmed up," Stewart said. "I sang to him in Russian and he let me rock him."

Stewart and her family left Russia wanting Ian more than ever before. They also left knowing timing was critical.

"We heard that now he is showing signs that he will need a heart surgery ... In your heart you have like windows that open and close to control the blood flow. His windows aren't opening and closing right, causing circulation problems," Stewart said.

The condition is not immediately life-threatening so they declined doing the surgery in Russia as their

adoption agency advised.

"(They know of) several children in the last few months where they had surgery in their home country and have died," Stewart said. "They don't have what we have here. We're just praying now we can raise this money and get him home as quickly as possible ... We know now we have to pull out all the stops."

### **Bringing Ian home**

That means finding more money so they can complete the adoption process.

"It's almost \$40,000 when it's all said and done," Stewart said, explaining there are costs for a home study, paperwork, psychological and medical tests, traveling to Russia three required times and much more. The family still needs \$18,000. "We have put in some of our own (money) but with Ari's needs, mostly donations are funding this. On a daily basis we have enough for these kids and ourselves but not this big sum."

Stewart and Morgan are searching their house for things to sell and they may even part with classic cars left to Morgan by his father. It still won't be enough though, so the family is searching for donations with the help of friends like Racine resident Amie Miller, who has held fundraisers for Ian's adoption costs.

"They're not asking for handouts; They're asking help to save a child's life," said Miller, a 32-year-old Kenosha Unified teacher. "(Stewart) has just always served the community and has done so many things to help others. Just in the education field alone she's done pretty amazing work. I'm inspired by it ... People like this who have lived their lives helping others, they deserve help."

Miller said that's especially true given Stewart and Morgan are willing to adopt a special needs child, growing their family to two boys with disabilities. Most parents would pale at the idea of having a special needs child, she said, and certainly wouldn't choose it.

"To do that willingly," Miller said, "is such an amazing thing."

Copyright 2011 JournalTimes.com. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Posted in Local on *Monday, April 18, 2011 6:24 am* Updated: 1:14 pm. | Tags: Gretchen Stewart, Adoption, Downs Syndrome, Russia,

Share This Story

Print Email ShareThis

### **Other Stories**

- Restored 1920s commercial plane coming to Batten
- Living history - Pearl Harbor survivors share their stories
- County Executive McReynolds' 40 years of public service -- From teacher to sheriff to county executive
- Residents look to drive less as prices rise
- Snow in the forecast for Monday morning

- Christian faithful mark Palm Sunday
- A dream worth singing about

## Sponsored Links

### [Secret Trading Strategy](#)

See how I turned \$1000 into \$1M in 13 months trading penny stocks.  
[www.PennyStockProphet.com](http://www.PennyStockProphet.com)

### [2011 Stock Forecast](#)

Our Experts' Top 5 Investment Picks For This Year!  
[www.taipanpublishinggroup.com](http://www.taipanpublishinggroup.com)

### [1000% Stock Gains](#)

Believe It or Not, It Happens All the Time. Signup & See for Yourself.  
[www.StockStars.net](http://www.StockStars.net)

Ads by Yahoo!

Replay 

Available on Windows, Mac & Mobile



Now chat with your Facebook and Google Talk friends on AIM

[Download AIM Now](#)