



Celebrating Something Special

DR. ALYSON AND WAYNE DENSON LOOK FORWARD TO
THE ADOPTION OF TWO CHILDREN FROM RUSSIA

by Tina Baiter

As Christmas season, children in three different countries have something special to celebrate, all because of the love and comfort of one Texarkana family. While the children of one country may never meet the children of the other two countries, the imprint they left on the hearts of the Texarkana pediatrician who volunteered to care for them during a time of need, reaches from the children of Haiti to children from Russia and Texas.

When an earthquake tore apart the country on January 12, local pediatrician Alyson Denson felt a need to volunteer her services to help the orphaned children left behind as casualties of the earthquake's devastation. "I put my tent up in the orphanage and worked as a pediatrician providing care of kids who had been hurt in the earthquake," Alyson said. "A lot of kids had been made orphaned by the quake, and there was one particular child that I just really fell in love with. She had a sweet spirit and was very much thankful that she was saved."

After the earthquake, Krystal, the 15-year-old, was living as a nanny in her aunt's house. Her mother and father had died several years earlier, and she was raised in the Haitian culture, Krystal was allowed to live with her aunt's family as a servant taking care of other orphaned children. During the earthquake,

Krystal realized the youngest toddler under her supervision was still in the house, so she ran back inside to grab him.

"On her way out, a wall fell on top of her, and she lost one of her legs," Wayne Denson explained. "When the family came to grips that their live-in nanny was now a one-legged dependent, they threw her out on the street. That's how she ended up going from critical care with a pediatrician to an orphanage."

Alyson spent a little more than three weeks in Haiti getting to know Krystal and several other children at the orphanage, and when she returned to Texarkana, she and Wayne had a lot of serious talks about adopting Krystal. "We went through the things that you have to do as a parent. Are the finances there? Is the time there? Are the kids that we have stable enough that we can do this?" Alyson recalled.

In March, Alyson was in Little Rock, Arkansas, picking up her son from a trip to Washington, D.C., when she stopped by the Dillon International, Inc. office to inquire about international adoptions from Haiti. While at the office, she learned Haiti had stopped all adoptions to the United States, and it was very unlikely they would resume before Krystal turned 16.

"We realized Krystal was not going to be an option because after kids turn 16, you cannot adopt

them into the United States anymore," Alyson said. "So with the realization that for her, adoption was not going to be an option, we had already gone through the steps to determine our family was not eligible (to adopt). We had done a lot of since then. So, to decide we weren't going to adopt just because she was disobedient."

The Densons, who have two boys of their own, Chase, 13, and Brett, 10, felt they had been blessed to adopt another boy. The following month, the Densons visited the Dillon International in Dallas, Texas, where they turned in an application seeking to adopt an older child. They hoped that within 9 months to a year they would be matched with a child they could open their hearts to. "It quickly was kind of thrown at us that instead of open to older children, then Russia was a large need. First of all, there are a lot of orphans. Second, when they turn 17, they are basically thrown out into society without any government support. Because of that, they have a huge rate and huge amounts of kids who go into prostitution because that's the only way to make it," Alyson explained, as tears came to her eyes.

Two months after turning in their application, the Densons received a surprise call from the Dillon International Office informing them about a child called Buckner International's Angels from



Volunteering in Haiti after the earthquake, Alyson with 15-year-old Krystal, pictured in Haiti this year, following wound care for her amputation.

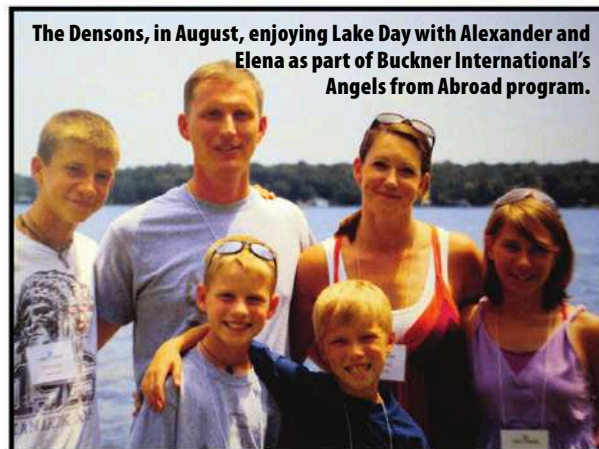
Program is designed to provide older children from Russian orphanages the chance to learn American culture, share their Russian culture, experience living in a family for two weeks. They typically bring over 10-20 orphans, usually chosen by their orphanage director, to come on a two-week vacation in America," Alyson said. "It was like, 'Would you participate? This would be a good experience for your family to see other children in your home would be good for you.'"

The Densons agreed to participate in the program, saying they would like to host a boy between the ages of 5-10. Even if it was not for adoptive purposes, participating in the culture exchange program would be beneficial for their children. "They contacted Buckner International (part of Buckner International) called in late July, only two weeks before the kids came, and said, 'Have a seat. It's a little different than what we discussed. We have an 8-year-old little boy and his 12-year-old sister,'" Alyson said. "I think I just kind of giggled." Alyson and Wayne discussed the situation that they were in and prayed about it. They decided to trust that God had brought them down this path for a reason. "All of my reluctance was at the end of the road," Wayne explained. "I had gotten to the point where it really was just a huge leap of faith. When we got to this point, we were just swimming in blind faith."

The Densons' Russian siblings, Elena and Alexander, came to Texas in August. They spent two weeks with the family, participating in a lot of activities, and getting to know the kids in the neighborhood. While the children attended things like the zoo and a circus in Dallas, the highlight of the trip was more low key. "The big things they did was just hanging out with, but making cookies and crafts, and doing things most people around here would take for granted every normal summer day activities with the kids. They were really jazzed about," Alyson said.



Trying to beat the Texas heat, Alexander (top left) and Elena (bottom right) experience their first flavored ice drinks with Chase and Brett.



The Densons, in August, enjoying Lake Day with Alexander and Elena as part of Buckner International's Angels from Abroad program.

The two weeks quickly flew by, and by the end of their stay with the Densons, Wayne and Alyson shared the exciting news with Elena and Alexander that they were going to start the paperwork process to adopt them. Both of the kids were excited. "The original time line back in July was to line everything up where we would have the kids home before Christmas," Wayne said. "We made a lot of insane sprints to Austin to get paperwork done on time. But at the end of the day, in Russia, the rate of international adoptions had gotten so far beyond the rate of domestic adoptions, they closed international adoptions to allow the rate to catch up for this year."

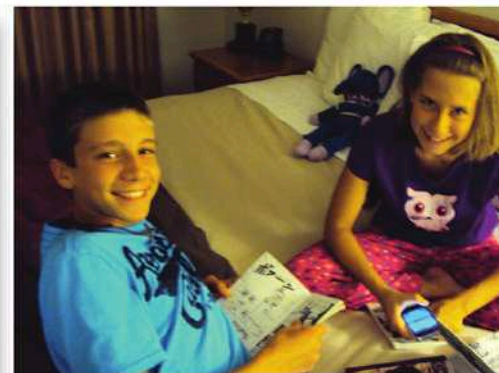
The Densons are anticipating an official court date in Russia to legally adopt the children to fall sometime next February. At that time, they will spend about three weeks in Russia, and at the end of the process, Elena and Alexander will return with them as the newest additions to the Denson family.

Until then, the Densons are doing their best to keep in touch with the children, but communication is only allowed one way. They have not heard from the children since they returned to Russia in August. "Alyson has been fantastic in sending a weekly letter," Wayne explained. "We send correspondence through our contacts at the agency to the contact in St. Petersburg, and they're printing it, translating it, and taking it to the kids."

Chase and Brett have grown from this process too, and they are eagerly awaiting the arrival of their brother and sister back to Texas. "They have shown a nobility and grace that I really hadn't prepared them for," Wayne said. "We have had very candid conversations about what the difficulties are going to be. I have never been more proud of them than



Alyson with Chase, Elena, Brett and Alexander after Vacation Bible School at Lake Pointe Church in Rockwall.



Chase and Elena learning to use the phone translator application the first day the Densons met Alexander.

the way they have handled this. From a parent's perspective, we're stretching our boys in a way they wouldn't have been just by coasting on the 'cush' lifestyle we have provided for them. It is really turning them into gentlemen."

"Our hope would be that their world perspective is different," Alyson said. "Their level of compassion is greater, and their unconditional love is advanced because of this experience."

So this Christmas, Chase and Brett are excited about the gift waiting for them in Russia. It may arrive a few months later than normal, but the sibling bond has already started to form. Alyson and Alexander have the gift of a new home to be unwrapped soon.

For Krystal in Haiti, this Christmas she is excited about having a leg thanks to a pediatrician in Texas who took the time away from her family to help others in a country devastated by an earthquake. Although legalities kept the Densons from bringing Krystal into their home, they know she is safe.

"I have given several talks about my experience in Haiti, and one Sunday morning I turned on the *Today Show*, and she was on the news," Alyson said. "They were doing their 6-month spot on the show. All of the people there, they were doing a good deed for the person fitting kids for prosthetics. Krystal was there. I got to see her with a new leg, happy and in the orphanage, walking around, happy. I really do believe that was God allowing it. It's okay." 🇺🇸

For additional information about hosting kids as part of the Buckner International Angels from Abroad program, visit www.Buckner.org.