



### **Forever and always plus two weeks**

*An International adoption story*

As we approach our third Family Day (the day we celebrate the adoption of our amazing son, Ryan) I take a moment to step back and revisit our journey, to fully appreciate where we are today, and how far we have come together.

Along the way I have realized that "family" truly is a journey, not a destination, and the joy of being a family is in the journey itself, a beautiful culmination of past, present and future.

Our journey to parenthood followed the "every possible fertility treatment" route. After a while, we realized that God had a different plan for us, and we ventured excitedly into the world of adoption. After some intensive soul-searching, prompted by the lengthy homestudy process, we discovered that we were most enamoured by adopting a toddler, rather than an infant.

Our decision took us into the international adoption realm, specifically to Bulgaria, which was just starting to expand its program, and had a very similar ethnic background to that of my husband. We then endured an emotionally draining 1.5 years before we were finally matched and met our son who, ironically, had been born within a few days of when we started the whole process two years earlier!

Several months after our first visit, we returned to Bulgaria to pick up Ryan, and commenced the most challenging part of our journey. Ryan was as wild as he was charming, and did not adapt well to his new environment. Because he had lived in an orphanage for the first 2.5 years of his life without a consistent caregiver, Ryan has struggled with attachment issues which make it hard for him to show us any genuine signs of affection. If he does, he risks leaving himself vulnerable to pain; therefore, it is easier for him to push us away physically and emotionally, in order to protect himself. We have our moments of frustration and helplessness, but we are encouraged by

Ryan's strength and courage, having already endured his own journey in Bulgaria, before starting a new one with us. We will be celebrating our Family Day with a short vacation out of town; we will talk about things we like about being a family, express our love for each other, and just plain have fun together.

Ryan continues to struggle with attachment challenges, but when asked how much we love him, he still replies with "forever and always...plus two weeks!"

Written by Valerie Petroff, mom to Ryan Originally published in Canadian Family magazine, October 2007 issue

