

Jocelyn & David

In 2015, I received the news that I had been awarded a \$12,000 grant by Helpusadopt.org. I was hoping to adopt a 6 year old boy with cerebral palsy from an orphanage in Poland, and the grant helped me make that a reality. I brought my son home in November, 2015.

It is hard to describe the last eleven months in a short testimonial. Some changes are easy to recognize: my son now wears a brace and can run and climb and jump without falling all the time as he did in Poland. He is not fluent in English, but can make himself understood and learns new vocabulary all the time. He has grown two sizes. He attends school.

Those are the obvious changes, but they do not come close to summing up our journey together. I was unprepared for how very limited my son's experiences had been, and for how much that I expected a child his age to know that he did not. He did not know about death, for example. When we found dead earthworms after a rain, he cried and was furious that I could not save them. He loved dinosaurs, but did not know they were all gone. I thought I would thrill him by taking him to the Museum of Natural History, only to have a shocked little boy as he found skeletons instead of live dinos! He did not know about pregnancies, or the typical way most children come into families. My first attempts to explain the subject to him led to his pointing to a pregnant woman on the bus and loudly exclaiming "she ate the baby! " why she eat the baby?" It was as though he had been living apart from the world in so many ways. The ordinary ways that children acquire information—through interactions with attentive parents, a broad community, neighbors, friends, extended family members—had been denied to him.

Luckily, my son is a confident little boy who believes in grabbing life with both hands. He has done things that he never even imagined in Poland. He has ridden a bike; gone boogie boarding; surfed; jumped waves in the ocean; steered a boat; taken horseback riding lessons; ridden a camel at the Bronx Zoo; attended a medieval fair and watched a joust; attended baseball games; been in so many bouncy houses that he now regularly expects them at parties; break-danced his way up Fifth Avenue in the Pulaski Day Parade; taken trips to Maryland and Florida; learned to swim (only about six feet, but it's a start!). He is a dog owner! (Cats, too, but the dogs come first in his heart).



I think many prospective adoptive parents are concerned about adopting "older" children, feeling that they will have missed out on so many milestones. But we've had so many firsts - placing my son's hand on our cat's side, and watching the expression on his face as he felt and listened to him purr; watching the transcendent joy on his face when our dog covered him in kisses; seeing fireworks; taking him to the ocean for his very first time, and watching him as he experienced waves (first afraid and holding tightly to my hand, then sitting on the sand and letting them wash over his legs). Then there are the holiday firsts: Christmas morning when, after being told he was a good boy for six years, Santa finally, finally came! Coloring eggs at Easter, trying apple pie on the Fourth of July, and the scary excitement of decorating for his first Halloween.

There have been losses, too, of course, but I believe they have been offset by what he has gained. He misses some of the boys from his orphanage tremendously. I enrolled him in a Saturday Polish school the week he came home, and while he loves it, and is learning about the holidays, history, and culture of Poland, he has lost most of his ability to speak Polish. His class just marched in the Pulaski Day Parade. Dressed in red and white, shouting "Polska" as he walked, my son was a proud Polish boy. As our bus headed home, though, he spontaneously broke into the theme song for our neighborhood, the Ramones' "Rockaway Beach." My boy knows where his home lies!