



Children's Bridge

INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION CONSULTANTS



making families happen

*May your choices reflect your
hopes not your fears.* Nelson Mandela

My husband and I have been together our whole adult life. As far as I can remember, we always talked about adoption and caring for vulnerable children. After having biological children, it felt like the next coherent thing to do would be adopting. To us, adoption should never be seen as a second option, it's a legitimate and wonderful way to grow a family and provide loving parents to an orphan. This is what led us to adopt a girl with special needs. The process to bring her home and to care for her was challenging and many times draining but it was also very rewarding. She is a wonderful child and an amazing addition to our family. When we were in her home country, we met another couple that were adopting a child affected by HIV. They were really open to disclose and discuss it. To be honest, our first reaction was fear and many questions followed... What about their other children? Is it safe? How long will he live? Does he take like 30 pills a day? What about side effects? Our knowledge of it was way out-dated and we needed to be educated on the subject. Through our discussions and some reading, we learn that people with HIV can live a long and happy life. The medication is not what it used to be and it's actually hard to catch so there is no worry for friends and family members to get infected through day-to-day activities. **CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE**

Hi, I'm Mickael, I'm 10 and I come from India. When I was there, my parents died of AIDS. My brother and I were sent to an orphanage. I was six years old, I was sad and scared. I knew that children who stay at the orphanage end up in the streets and they steal things. When I arrived at the orphanage, I was sick, they told me I had the same disease as my parents, I was concern my brother and I would die too. They gave me meds but they didn't tell me I was going to be fine. When I was 8, I was told a couple would come from Canada to adopt us. They had sent a letter and a picture. I read the letter over and over again. I was really excited, I had no idea what Canada looked like but I wanted parents. I was not scared, I was happy. Our new parents love us, they take good care of me and my

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Everyday life!

After our adopted daughter, M. was home for about two years, we decided to extend our family again. Not that this was our life plan, but seeing the difference it made for her helped open our hearts to welcoming more children. We knew HIV positive children don't often find a permanent home and we felt that this would be doable for us. We proceeded to adopt siblings who are HIV positive, they had lost their parents to AIDS. To be honest, I wasn't that worried about HIV as much as the trauma they have been through, and how it would affect their attachment style and their behaviour. Now, our children have been home for more than a year. The attachment process went really well. They are very well behaved, polite, get along with their siblings, doing well in school, making friends and they are extremely cute (I wish I could post a pic!). Our children take two pills in the morning and two at night with their meals. It's just part of our routine and we don't find it difficult at all. They don't complain about it and honestly have no side effects from them. We remind them how important this is for them to stay healthy and that means taking their meds everyday. We told them that they have a disease but it's sort of sleeping in them so it doesn't make them sick but if we want to keep it sleeping, they have to take the meds. At first, I was worried it would be very complicated to carry and give meds everyday but we kept the same lifestyle, in fact, we are a family that's always on the move, we travel, visit friends and family, go camping, etc. Meds have never been an issue. They are regular children in every way, they take music lessons, play hockey, ski, do swimming lessons, play with friends and go to school. The main difference is that they take meds!

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brother. I also made new friends and new siblings. Now, I go to school and I learn many things. I want to become a robotic genius or a police officer. I also ski and play hockey just like my brothers.

In India, they told me about my disease but I didn't know much about it. My parents explained to me that with my meds I will be just fine and I will live a long long time. My parents are healthy and they are young, my mom jokes that we will end up being in the same nursing home and be old together! It's funny! I take my meds everyday, I also tell my little brother to take it, I don't want him to be sick like my parents in India. My meds keep my little soldiers strong so it's in my blood but I'm not really sick. I don't mind having HIV. I don't tell my friends, some people could get scared and not want to play with me anymore. When I'm older, maybe I will tell my friends.

I am happy here in Canada. I have a good family! I write this because I hope more children like me have a family. Thank you for reading my story.

Disclosure and stigma

When we chose to adopt them, professional advice on disclosure had not been given to us. My hubby and I felt like ending stigma starts with education and being a voice for HIV positive people. We also felt like we would have never done it if the couple we met didn't choose to disclose to us, and to take the time to educate us about HIV adoption. So, we did share the information with our close friends and family members. Unfortunately, not everyone warmed up to the idea, even after they received scientific information to help alleviate their concerns. A family member chose to not let his children in the presence of our children. This was quite a lesson. We now choose to talk to each other before we decide to disclose. Not only do we want to avoid that kind of situation, but we also want to respect our children's story. Now, I always advise prospective adoptive parents to keep their children's story confidential, it belongs to the child and he should be the one choosing who he wants to share this with. Not only for a medical status but also for their abandonment, biological family information, past abuse, etc. Feel free to let professionals (unless it's relevant to their treatment), strangers, friends and even relatives know that this is very personal and when the child feels ready, he can decide who he shares his information with. People tend to be very curious with adoption but you and your child have the right to privacy.

What is hard for us too, is hearing people discussing the disease either in person and in the media, and the information they are sharing is not always accurate and up to date. It's still seen as a death sentence and something that can be transmitted easily. There is still pervasive stigma around it, and the judgmental comments we hear from people is often very hurtful. It is a concern for us that our children will hear these comments growing up and feel ashamed. Our hope is that every HIV positive person (regardless of how they got infected) get medical treatment but is also treated with the compassion and respect they deserve.

Appointments

As for the medical piece of it - we have follow-up appointments every three months. They can last for about three hours. At first we had many appointments, as the children needed medication changes and many other tests that were not related to HIV, but from coming from a neglectful environment. Our team was very welcoming. They have a multidisciplinary team in charge of our case. I had MANY questions the first few

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months, I didn't always feel competent to care for them appropriately and just wanted to make sure I do the right thing. The nurse was very kind and was always available by email to give me directions. One thing for sure, you are not alone with this, the team is quite available for you. In my case, I'd say that in a way it was sort of overwhelming to add such a big team to our family as we had many professionals already involved. Among things to consider, and it goes for any special needs adoption, when you choose to welcome such a child, you also welcome many professionals in your life. They are strangers, that you have not chosen, they may not think the way you do and many of them unfortunately, are not educated to appropriately help adoptive families. That said, we had many very helpful and supportive people to help us along the way and we couldn't make it without them. But just remember that you will have to be open to let other adults have an impact in your child's life and you'll need to be flexible to adjust to whatever will come along as your child enters the teen years. Feel free to find the right professionals and supports for your unique family and remember that you are in charge, you love your child most and you know better than anyone what's best for him/her.

HOPE

I often read articles on the advancement of HIV cure and treatment. To be honest with you, I'm not someone who « over thinks » about cure... I have other children who live with much more complicated disability for which there will never be any healing. Cure or not, our HIV positive children have the same life expectancy as any healthy individuals, they can achieve their dreams whatever they will be; find a spouse, have a career, travel and even have non-infected children. Our children have a wonderful life ahead of them and we are truly blessed to be part of it.

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your **hopes**
not your fears.
Nelson Mandela*

Burlington's Savannah Rankin featured in April in Autumn

This article is from The Burlington Post - Dec 23, 2016
By Dennis Smith Special to Burlington Post

<http://www.insidehalton.com/whatson-story/7034942-burlington-s-savannah-rankin-featured-in-april-in-autumn/>

Burlington's Savannah Rankin has brought 'star power' to the film April in Autumn.

The 11-year-old actress recreated Vincent van Gogh's work The Starry Night in the feature-length movie.



"She painted part of it, then finished it later after we stopped rolling," said Warren Sulatycky, the film's writer/director.

Savannah plays Phoebe, a young girl whose parents are separated, in the comedy-drama filmed in the Toronto area.

Sulatycky portrays Phoebe's father, who is teaching her how to make art.

"When she visits me, we paint together, although she'd prefer to play basketball," he said.

Savannah recreated van Gogh's work after seeing an online image of it.

'She's really quite remarkable'

A shot of her finished painting is displayed later in the film and Sulatycky plans to give it to Savannah.

"She's really quite remarkable," said the filmmaker. "She just has a real natural quality about her." Sulatycky noted Savannah is playing a younger character who is about seven or eight."

"She has a young quality to her, although she's pretty mature," he said about the actress.

Her mother said Savannah fared well during three days of filming last week.

"She was given directions by Walter and off she went," said Kaye Williams-Rankin. "She had such a blast and the people on the set are incredible."

Williams-Rankin said Savannah was called just 24 hours after auditioning for the role.

"It all happened very quickly," she said.

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Savannah's talent agent and manager noted she was chosen from top regional talents for this principal actor role.

"She's a very talented and very hard-working young actress," said Francesca Nicassio.

She said Savannah regularly attends professional auditions.

"She's very passionate," said Nicassio. "When she prepares for upcoming auditions, she sends me her practice tapes."

Savannah is also a competitive dancer who studies musical theatre and acting at Canadian Dance Company in Burlington.

"Dancing is very heavy, there are lots of hours of core training," said Nicassio. "They drive Savannah to workshops all over the United States and Canada. She's a very intense little lady."

She believes Savannah will do well in professional theatre.

"She has the voice of an angel," said Nicassio. "You're just mesmerized."

The agent, whose son Myles Erlick was in Billy Elliot, the Musical, previously ran Stars Academy in Burlington.

She met Savannah about four years ago when the girl joined the local talent school.

"I knew immediately there was something special there," said Nicassio. "I spotted her talent right away. It really popped out."

Savannah, who's a Grade 6 student at Frontenac P.S., also volunteers to sing for Carpenter Hospice residents.

"She really does it for the love of it," said Nicassio.

Savannah has previously performed in Aladdin, Into the Woods, Les Miserables and the Walk Off The Earth Christmas television special.

Nicassio said Savannah has enjoyed doing the long hours required to make the movie.

"It's an independent Canadian film with a rising star director and a really strong cast," said Nicassio.

Sulatycky's career includes a Gemini nomination for producing TV specials featuring Keith Urban, Blue Rodeo and others.

He's aiming to enter the film in Cannes, Toronto and other international festivals, then obtain distribution for it.

Sulatycky hopes to raise \$35,000 to fund production of April in Autumn.

For more details about the film's fundraising campaign visit: <http://bit.ly/2i6d70Y>

In Ottawa we are very lucky to have wonderful volunteers from the Korean Community who created and run the Association for Families of Korean Adoptees.



Bomi Lee, Yun Sook Lee, and Min Sook Park

The Association is led by Min Sook Park, along with Yun Sook Lee and her daughter, Bomi Lee, who are supported in their efforts by volunteers from adoptive families.

I cannot express how grateful we are to them for their dedication to young adoptees and their families over the last 15 years. Through events such as monthly culture classes, the annual Christmas party, children's day picnics, and combined events with the Korean Community Association of Ottawa, they connect our children to their birth heritage, connect families with each other, and form a bridge to the greater Korean community. It is a priceless gift to our families. The Korean government recognized their dedication with an award in 2013 for outstanding contributions to Korean social and cultural activities abroad.

The culture classes take place on Saturday mornings in an informal atmosphere, and are typically centered around a Korean cultural theme. The program for this year began with a special class focussing on Korean food culture that took place at the newly established Korean culture centre in downtown Ottawa. The following month, we learned how to draw maewha blossoms from a calligraphy artist, and how to make cold buckwheat noodle salad. The most recent culture class celebrated the Lunar New Year, bringing in the



Drawing maewha blossoms

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year of the Rooster. We had multiple crafts to choose from, including colouring pages depicting children in their Hanbok (traditional Korean formal wear), assembling a paper rooster, and a very special Hanbok craft. Children bowed to their elders, traditionally done at New Year, and at the end of the class we all enjoyed a delicious lunch including tteokguk (rice cake soup), which tradition dictates that you eat at the New Year to become one year older.

The annual Christmas party in December was generously sponsored by the Korean embassy. The party gave us a chance to catch up with the many families in or near Ottawa that have families like our own, some of whom we only get to see once a year. The program included a lively and impressive Taekwondo demonstration (always a big hit with the children!), Kayageum (traditional Korean instrument) and Samulnori (Korean percussion team) performances, as well as several musical



Completed Hanbok craft



Tteokguk

performances by our very talented children.

After a group Zumba dance, and a very well received visit from Santa himself, we enjoyed a potluck lunch, which as always was very plentiful and delicious.

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The Association welcomes all people with a connection to adoptees with Korean heritage. For more information, please contact The Children's Bridge.

*Article by **Lora Ramunno**, Volunteer Co-coordinator, Association for Families of Korean Adoptees (Ottawa)*



Min Sook Park performs with the Samulnori team



Welcome



Children's Bridge

SOUTH KOREA

Welcome home to Jeremy Daon, son of Stephen and Noreen of Renfrew, Ontario

Welcome home to Chelsea Jeong, daughter of Peter and Melanie of St. Marys, Ontario

THAILAND

Arrived February 18, 2017 from the Songkhla Home For Children in Thailand:

Jirapat Silpraneet, born September 21, 2014, son to Harvey and Lori of Toronto, Ontario

Arrived February 25, 2017 from Chiangmai, Thailand:

Aran, born August 30, 2012, son to Watcharin and Yiwa of Calgary, Alberta.