

# They Say Things Happen for a Reason

*By Karen and Martin*

After trying to start a family on our own for several years without success, we opened our hearts and minds to adoption in late 2005. We did research, attended seminars and spoke with adoptive families and one name was mentioned over and over again – Adoptions Together. Once we met with an ATI staff member and received the initial information that we needed to begin our adoption process in Russia, we understood why.

From the moment we signed our contract to the moment we brought our son, Nicholas, home in February 2007, ATI's support and concern for us as well as the children in need of loving families was extremely evident. The monthly Waiting Parents Meetings were invaluable to us as we waited for our referral as was the open and honest lines of communication that we had established with Irene, the Eastern Europe Program Manager, and Grace, our Family Coordinator. Even during turbulent times when it seemed that adoptions in Russia were coming to a halt, our faith in ATI never wavered and in the end it paid off as we received Nicholas' referral in November 2006. After reviewing the information provided to us, we knew immediately that we wanted him to be our son. And so the gears were set in motion and we were on a plane to meet him less than a month later!

Once we arrived in Russia, we were greeted by our interpreter, Maria, and our driver, Vlad, who were both members of the ATI staff in Russia. The courtesy and hospitality that they extended to us during each of our three visits to Russia was comforting and provided a great relief to us. We were able to stay with Vlad and his wife, Natasha, on each visit when we arrived in St. Petersburg which was such a positive experience given Natasha's culinary skills! Maria accompanied us on each trip via overnight train to and from Petrozavodsk, Nicholas' hometown, as well as each visit to the Baby Home. We even had the pleasure of sharing a train cabin with both Maria and Sasha, the Karelia adoption coordinator for ATI, on our return from Petrozavodsk after our court hearing on our second trip where we toasted many, many times and rejoiced together over our successful ruling!

Our third and final trip to Russia was the most important as this was the trip in which we picked up Nicholas and traveled with him to Moscow to obtain his entry visa from the US Embassy. We were safely guided to the train and then greeted by the ATI Moscow staff to take us to our hotel. They also handled our Embassy documents as well as treated us to a tour of Red Square which definitely helped to pass the time as we awaited Nicholas' clearance. When the time came to for all of us to leave, we were filled with mixed emotions. We were thrilled to be starting our new life with Nicholas, but sad at the same time to leave these wonderful people who had welcomed us into their country with open arms and treated us as their own family.

As we approach the one-year anniversary date of Nicholas' homecoming, we reflect back on our journey to Russia with fond memories. We now know that the reason life lead us down the adoption path was not only to bring a very bright and beautiful child into our lives, but also to be touched in a special way by all of the people who played vital roles to make that happen.

