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Dwight, Ill., Couple Adopt Russian Child

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Dwight

Dwight, Ill., Couple Adopt Russian Child; Challenges of International Adoption Recounted in *IWU Magazine*

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--Hannah Marika Wilkinson, a 4-year-old from Siberia, has a new home in Dwight, Ill., and a cat named Shadow thanks to the persistence of her adoptive parents Barbara and Bradley Wilkinson.

Eighteen months ago, the Wilkinsons met the youngster, nicknamed Masha, at a Russian orphanage, her home since she was 6 months old.

The difficulties and joys of international adoption experienced by the Wilkinsons are reported in the winter edition of *Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine* in an article by Dave O'Neill, a public relations major who will graduate next May. A copy of "Masha Makes Three--International Adoption Enlarges the Family of Barbara Wilkinson '75" is attached to this news release.

"We spent a year with one agency, and we didn't get anywhere," said Barbara Wilkinson, a third grade teacher and a 1975 IWU graduate. "Then we got another agency (Adoption Resources, Inc., of Silver Spring, Md.) and they had a child for us in six weeks. The real problem is that there are so many countries and agencies, you have to narrow it down."

"I know people who have horror stories in dealing with Russia," said Bradley Wilkinson, an Illinois state employee who administers driving tests. "For whatever reason, markets in some countries open and close without warning. That's one of the drawbacks of international adoption."

The Wilkinsons became interested in adoption after five years of being foster parents. They chose international adoption because "domestic adoption takes a long time," Barbara Wilkinson said, "and because with domestic birth moms, you run the risk of the mother deciding she wants to keep the child."

Masha was adopted in March, 1993.

Language was a problem when the Wilkinsons initially met Masha. They knew about 25 words in Russian, and relied on body language to

(more)

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communicate with the youngster. "Language was one of the biggest barriers," Bradley Wilkinson said. "But Masha was young enough that she didn't know much Russian either."

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 1,800 students in a College of Liberal Arts, College of Fine Arts, and a four-year professional School of Nursing. The Carnegie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching promoted Illinois Wesleyan to a "Baccalaureate I" institution in 1994, a classification that places it among 164 highly selective National Liberal Arts Colleges in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, another respected college guide, rated IWU "highly competitive (+)" in its latest edition.