

Child of Chernobyl

BY DEBORAH QUAILLE
THE COMPASS

She likes to listen to music, especially the Back Street Boys, while flipping through glossy magazines about her favourite group. She watches TV, loves the movie *Titanic*, and has a particular flair for gym, maths, and German.

She sounds like a typical 13-year-old, but Lena Samusava (an Anglicized and phonetic spelling of her Russian name) is in Eramosa just for the summer, as she has been for the past three years.

Lena (pronounced Lana) takes her holidays with Rob and Carolyn Farrell of Rockwood, leaving her mother, father and older brother at home in Chausy, a small town in Byelo-Russ. As the crow flies, it's just a couple of hundred miles from Chernobyl, the scene of a nuclear tragedy that has polluted the landscape and made access to healthy living impossible.

Impossible, that is, until a few years ago when The Canadian Relief Fund for Chernobyl Victims in Byelo-Russ was formed, and the children's program is one aspect of that.

Lena and many other children are provided with transportation to and accommodation in homes all over the world, where they can eat fresh fruits, vegetables and meats, drink clean water and breathe a lot of fresh air.

"There is no government funding for the program; the cost is born entirely by the families participating. Most get donations from friends, family or neighbours, or small service clubs," Rob states. "The idea was initiated by the UN in '91 or '92, and has spread to 22 countries all over the world. There are over 600 visiting kids in Canada now."

Rob Farrell is group leader in the area for the children of Chernobyl. He checks over application forms, calls references, does background checks, and a CPIC check through the OPP to ensure that a host family is strictly up to the job of caring for a Russian child. Throughout the winter, he holds meetings every couple of months, and reports to the regional coordinator, who in turn works with the national office in Ottawa.

The children come to Canada for six weeks; a few are allowed 10, and orphans stay with hosts for 12 weeks. An interpreter is assigned to each group, who also acts as legal guardian for the summer. Interpreters change every year, and this summer Lena came over with Tanya Dementchouk, a widow with a 10-year-old daughter who's in PEI with the program. Tanya is a teacher with the linguistic university in Minsk, and is using the summer to travel and take care of the children in the outlying Guelph 'division.'

There are 12 families ranging from Fonthill, Dundas, Milton, Campbellville, Guelph, Rockwood and Elora, caring for 13 children (one family has a brother and sister together). Special organized trips are planned, such as the Metro Toronto Zoo, and usually the outings are offered free of charge by the facility.

"Just a couple of weeks ago Wonderland gave us free tickets," Carolyn says. "The host families get together every couple of weeks to get the kids interacting. They meet in

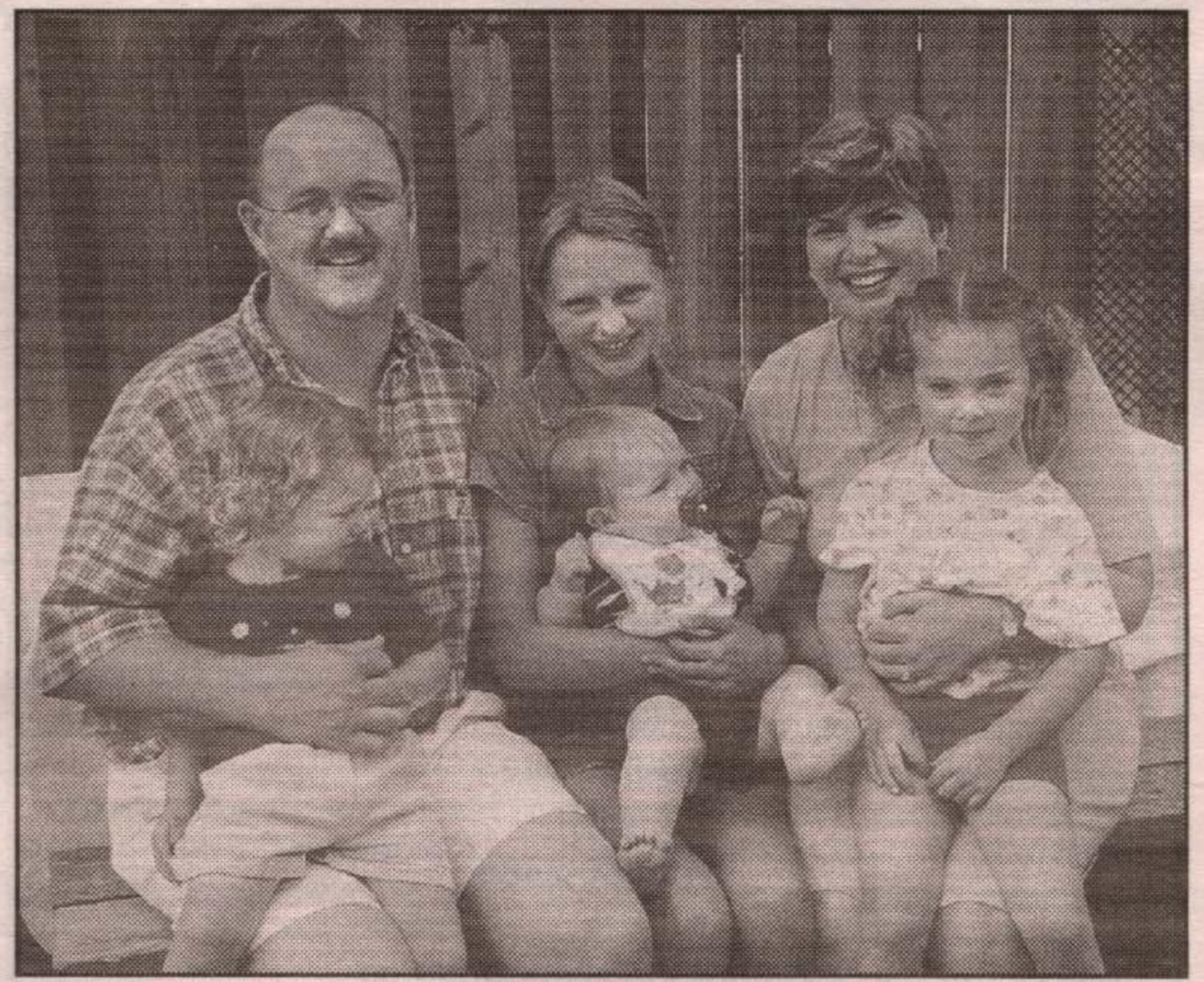


PHOTO BY DEBORAH QUAILLE

A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY - Rob and Carolyn Farrell of Eramosa use each summer to provide a nurturing place for Russian teen Lena Samusava so that she may eat fresh, nutritious foods, drink clean water and have a rural atmosphere in which to play. Pictured from left to right (back) are Rob, Lena and Carolyn, and the Farrell children Mariah, Jack and Paige.

Canada, but they don't necessarily know each other."

"The children don't come over with much," Rob adds, "but they find gifts for the hosts whether they can afford them or not."

"This year it was crystal and vodka," Carolyn adds with a smile.

"[Canadians] have so much in comparison," Rob continues. "Russian children aren't choosy about anything we feed them. In fact, it's hard for them to make decisions when they're offered more than one item - like whether they

want apple or orange juice in the morning. At home, they take what they can get."

"Lena tries everything we offer her," Carolyn injects. "Even cauliflower, and that's not something she would be used to at home."

So for a little while through a typical Canadian summer, a few "lucky" Russian children can absorb a healthier environment and bloom where they're temporarily transplanted.

"The six weeks really go fast. It's hard to say goodbye - but we look forward to the next year," Carolyn concludes.

Romping rednecks at Whiterock

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farm was deluged with calls about it. As well, artist Wendy West from Acton will be hand-painting eggs, and visitors can admire the ostrich egg jewelry boxes.

Guided hay wagon tours to see the rednecks, the largest birds in the ostrich family, include a free feather. Simmonds will have a picnic area with barbecued ostrich hotdogs and burgers, corn on the cob cooked in an old fashioned kettle, ice cream cones, drinks and popcorn available for purchase. There is no admission fee and parking is free, but there is a nominal \$2 charge for the wagon tour, with children under two years of age free.

Frozen vacuum-packed, preservative-free ostrich steaks, roasts, Italian sausage, hotdogs, burgers and breakfast sausage are available from the gift shop so visitors might want to bring a cooler to keep meat purchases fresh on the drive home.

Free recipes and advice on cooking ostrich meat will be provided by their gourmet experts. White Rock offers ostrich raised in a natural, free range environment with no added antibiotics or hormones.

"Ostrich should be pink when cooked, and not overcooked or it will toughen, due to the low fat content," Deborah Simmonds states.

She attributes the strong sales of ostrich in Ontario due to an awareness by the consumer for healthy red meat.

"We enjoy the meat and that's one reason we got into this form of alternative farming," she says. "The birds grow to 250 pounds in one year; there is no wasted meat and no grease when cooking!"

To visit White Rock Ostrich Farm, from Guelph take Highway 7 West to Wellington Road 44 (beside Rockwood

Conservation Area) and turn right (south). Turn left on 25th Sideroad and follow to 4th Line. Turn left and proceed to 13085 4th Line.

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