

ILYA AND THE BEFRIENDING PROJECT



I first met Ilya when he was 9 months old. It was Christmas and I was visiting the abandoned baby unit at Borovliani hospital. He was a new arrival and how long he had been separated from his mother, we didn't know.

His huge dark brown eyes were full of sadness. This was a child that would break everybody's heart!

Sure enough, over the year that Ilya spent at Borovliani, he became everybody's special little boy – even the mothers who were in with their own children 'adopted' him whilst they were there, but no-one wanted to take him home.



When Ilya's papers were completed he was moved to Barissov Baby House. He was deeply traumatised by this. He had gone from the relative security of the familiar surroundings of the hospital to a strange new world, sharing his life with 100 other babies.

It took Ilya some time to 'toughen up' to this new life and it was very distressing to witness his trauma. Initially tears would constantly flow. This wasn't the happy, cheeky little boy that we knew.

On our first visit it was only the comforting words from Luda that would pacify him.



Gradually Ilya did learn to survive, but not always in the nicest of ways. At meal times he would 'thump' one of the other children before stealing their piece of apple or bread. It was the law of the jungle, survival of the fittest! Make sure you got as much food into your mouth as you possibly could!



Barissov is not a bad Baby House, it just has to work under the confines of its limitations. Director, Svetlana Anatolyevna is wonderful and cares very much about the children in her care.

At the age of 3, Ilya was moved to Zhordina Orphanage. This seemed to be a much easier transition as Director, Tatyana Yurevna works closely with the Baby House and ensures that the children are as prepared as they can be. Although I surmise that in Ilya's case, it was more a case of

having learned to hide his emotions (a fact that was proven to me some time later, but is too distressing for me to relate).

Through Luda's network of friends we met Tanya and Zhenya. They had been considering adopting or fostering a child for some time. Both of their girls are grown up and Tanya, having grown up in an orphanage herself, knew the importance of helping a child. Luda suggested they start by befriending and told them that she had just the child in mind.



We drove Tanya and Zhenya to Zhordina in the April to meet Ilya. It was 'love at first sight'. The interaction between them all was instant and a friendship developed there and then.



A very different little boy!!

They started the paperwork and one month later took Ilya to their home for the first time. Since then he stays with them every weekend and every holiday. They have worked so hard with this little boy, building his trust and confidence – no longer the fear that they will not come back the next Friday to fetch him, no longer the fear of showing affection.
