

Dad describes Russian child adoption adventures

BY ERNEST HERNDON
RELIGION EDITOR

A couple who decided to adopt a child from Russia found up embarking on a roller-coaster of adventures that's still under way.

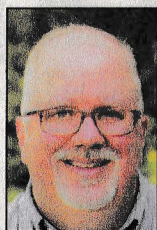
R. Thomas Rankin describes the experiences in his new book, "Finding Wallace! How we came to adopt our son from Russia and the misadventures that followed."

Rankin, an attorney in Westmont, N.Y., is the son of Tom and Alydia Rankin of Summit.

The book began as a series of newsletter articles for the Episcopal Diocese of Western New York — in part to explain the sometimes-wild antics of Wallace. Those articles kept growing and became a book.

Unable to have a child, Rankin and wife Elisabeth tried various fertility treatments before deciding to adopt. Rankin employs lots of humor in his writing as he details their often miserable experiences.

After finding an adoption agency, the Rankins decided to look to Russia, which at the time — 2004 and 2005 — was cooperative with overseas adoptive parents. The paperwork turned out to be enormous, and the option required two trips to



Rankin

Russia, both of which turned into wild adventures in Siberia where the orphanage was located.

There the Rankins met a year-old baby named Kiril, whom they would later name Wallace.

Rankin uses a Dave Barry style of humor to detail the foibles of travel and culture shock, as well as the bureaucratic absurdities involved in the overseas adoption process.

The child was under-sized by American standards but average for a baby in a Russian orphanage. His mother was suspected of having used drugs during pregnancy. Otherwise, he seemed OK, and the Rankins decided to adopt him.

Once the process was complete, which took over a year and a second trip to Russia, they gradually learned Wallace had all sorts of medical issues, notably severe ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder) and a psychological condition called Reactive Attachment Disorder.

"There are happy times and sad times like any life story," Rankin writes. "Wal-

lace's story, though, is about the challenges of life while living with mental illness."

The book describes Wallace's life through age 12, including difficulties with day-care, school, church, home and the general public.

Due in part to the neglect he sustained in the first year of life at the orphanage, Wallace is subject to violent fits of rage and other uncontrollable behavior, sometimes resulting in hospitalization.

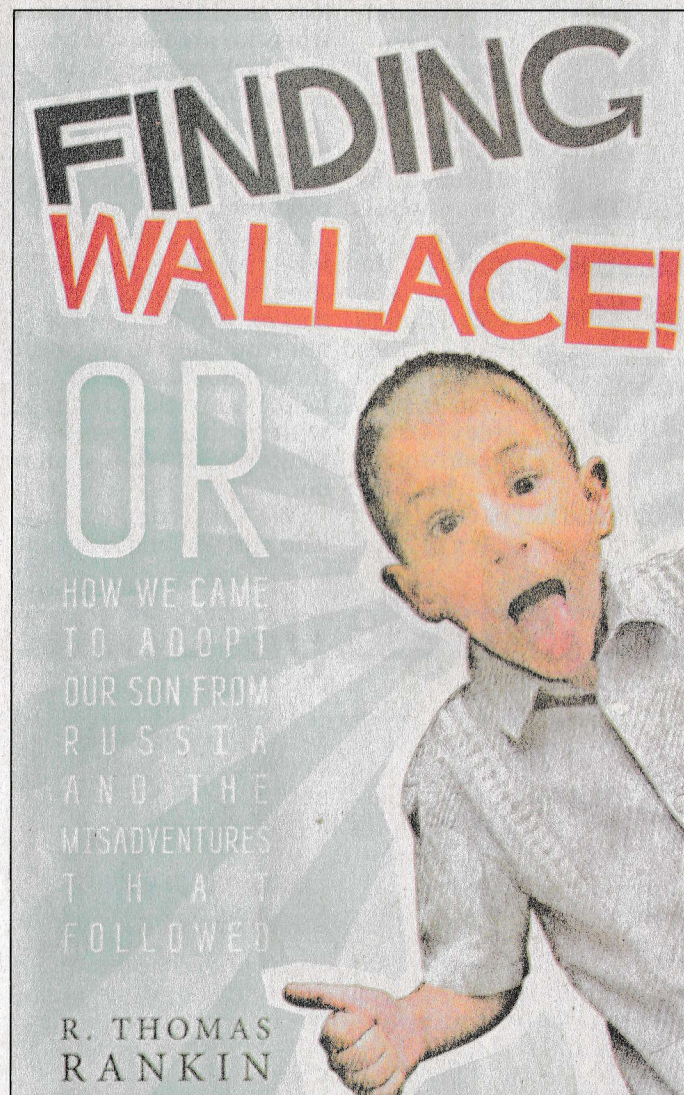
He also has an infectious energy and humor that keeps his parents in love with him throughout.

"We love Wallace and do not regret at all our decision to adopt him," Rankin writes.

"Wallace is a sweet young man with a huge heart. Wallace loves to help younger kids in school, and he can actually show great sympathy when he sees children and adults in need.

"Wallace also wants to experience everything he can in life. From tasting his shampoo every day to trying new ramps at the skateboard park to making fruit smoothies for the family, Wallace wants to see and do as much as possible."

FOR MORE information on "Finding Wallace!" see www.tomtheauthor.com.



SUBMITTED

This book on adopting a child from Russia is by Thomas Rankin, son of Tom and Alydia Rankin of Summit.

Book excerpt

One of Wallace's favorite activities is helping me when I usher. Wallace has learned how to count (with occasional accuracy) the number of people who come to church, to help pass the offering plate, and is a great greeter. On the other hand, having Wallace as a junior usher has created the need for some never-before-needed rules:

- Ushers do not butt dance in church.
- Ushers do not eat all of the cookies at coffee hour.
- Ushers do not contemplate shooting misbehaving people with paintball guns.
- Ushers do not play in the parking lot during church.
- Ushers do not fill out pew cards in the name of "Seymour Butts."

These new rules help clarify Wallace's role as a junior usher.

The Saint Luke (Episcopal Church) community is very understanding and supportive of Wallace. He has dropped the collection plate only once.

More importantly, the people of Saint Luke's want Wallace to succeed in life and can see he is trying. I often think God takes Wallace's hand as he goes through his day.