



HIGH FIVE:

A SUBURBAN ADOPTION SAGA

A FILM BY **JULIA IVANOVA**
(Best Canadian Feature winner at Hot Docs 2011 for
Family Portrait in Black and White)

**Screening Dates – Hot Doc 2013
Special Presentation**

Tue, Apr 30 9:15 PM Isabel Bader Theatre
Wed, May 1 4:00 PM Isabel Bader Theatre
Sat, May 4 4:00 PM The Regent

Running times: 95 minutes.

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SYNOPSIS

Short:

Cathy and Martin Ward from a cookie-cutter North American suburb travel to Ukraine to adopt five siblings, the youngest six and the oldest 17. The children are separated when only the adoption of the two middle sisters goes through. When a year later the kids are re-united, Yuliya, the oldest girl, who had years of assuming the role of protective mother in the orphanage, can not find her place in a new family. She favors Martin over Cathy and grieves the loss of the bond with siblings. The camera stays with the family for another three years capturing the complicated reality of international adoption mixed with the dramatic intensity of teenage years and the growing pains of a family of two becoming a family of seven.

Long:

It is a story of international adoption unlike any other. We first meet Cathy and Martin Ward, a childless couple of a cookie-cutter North American suburb at the moment they are about to make a momentous decision: whether to adopt 5 biological brothers and sisters – ages 6 through 17 – from an orphanage in Ukraine. The generous, well-meaning Wards determine to adopt them all; the emotional appeal of keeping the siblings together trumps a full consideration of the economic and psychological costs. The Wards' decision has huge financial implications. With Cathy being unable to work after a car accident, Martin, a nurse, takes on overtime at the Vancouver Children's hospital. The adoptions will cost tens of thousands of dollars; the exact amount is never clear.

Cathy and Martin travel to the remote village of Gorodnya in rural Ukraine to try and adopt all five children. At first, the Wards are only able to adopt the two middle sisters, Alyona and Snezhana. The siblings are devastated. Cathy and Martin refuse to leave the other children in the orphanage for long, and they bring Sasha, Yuliya and Sergey to Canada for a summer-stay. It is the time of turmoil, sibling rivalry and the realization of the psychological complexities of older children adoption. The younger girls, who have had a year to assimilate, start to reject Yuliya, who was once their mother figure, in favor of Cathy.

When the family went camping, Martin is struck down by a virulent cellulites infection, which threatens to turn into a flesh-eating disease. While visiting Martin at the hospital, the oldest girl, Yuliya, a 17-year-old, clearly demonstrates what parent she likes more – and it is not the prospective adoptive mother Cathy. Yuliya's tenderness to Martin and the indifference to Cathy are strikingly obvious. Cathy states that Yuliya's affection to Martin doesn't bother her but even the younger girls don't believe Cathy. This problem has never been dealt with and in the years to come the relationship between Cathy and Yuliya deteriorate. But who could foresee the future? Yuliya, who had years of assuming the role of protective mother in the orphanage, can't accept Cathy taking on this role in a new family and grieves the loss of the bond with her younger siblings.

At the end of the summer Yuliya, Sergey and Sasha return to the orphanage. A year

later everything is set for the Wards to finalize the adoption of the remaining three siblings. And rather than being the end of the film's story, this adoption is the beginning of a new chapter. While Sergey finds new friends and new interests, Yuliya is lonely and moody. The middle sisters and the youngest brother effortlessly adjust to the new parents and suburban lifestyle, gladly forgetting their past. Yuliya is terribly missing her youngest sister Tania, who had been adopted in Ukraine. She doesn't accept Cathy's parenting style that emphasizes the importance of being 'nice' no matter what. For Yuliya it is important to be open in expressing your feelings and to stand up for yourself.

A year later money issues force Martin, a nurse, to accept a contract in the Arctic that takes him away from the family for four weeks at a time. When Martin leaves, Yuliya and Cathy seem not to be able to live under one roof and Yuliya abruptly moves out in the middle of a school year. Her siblings demonstrate total indifference to Yuliya's well-being. Only Martin is trying to convince Yuliya to come back home. But what can he do if he is working up North?

What happened to the wonderful loving brothers and sisters who were so close back in the Ukrainian orphanage? The middle sister Snezhana is looking forward to take over Yuliya's room, the oldest brother Sergey provokes Yuliya's anger outburst, and only two little ones maintain the traces of emotional warmth to their sister who needs extra help and extra support: being adopted at the age of 18, Yuliya had got minimal education and major traumas back in Ukraine.

While Yuliya struggles, the older brother Sergey succeeds in a new family and a new country. Despite being extremely short, due to his charm and amazing athleticism, he wins over a tall blond beauty he met at the Gymnastic Gym. He works in construction, saves money and makes his adoptive parents proud. The close bond Yuliya and Sergey used to share disappears.

Finally, Martin manages to convince Yuliya to move back home. The conflicts have taken their emotional toll on everyone but the joy of Yuliya graduating from the High School brings the family together. In the summer, the parents help Yuliya and Sergey to go back to Ukraine for a month where Yuliya finally sees her younger sister Tania again. When she returns to Canada, she quietly moves out. Despite Martin's efforts Yuliya doesn't see a place for herself in the family. She feels that she will always be an orphan.

It's been six years since Martin and Cathy started this unprecedented adoption journey. For now, Martin sees the failure with Yuliya as a painful exception in their experience of parenthood, which will not be repeated by any other of their children. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that all the loving children who are so close with their parents at the age of twelve, will not move forward six years later without looking back. Being a parent, Martin follows the same fragile trajectory as many of us.

PRODUCTION BIOGRAPHIES

Julia Ivanova – Director / Writer / Camera / Editor

Julia Ivanova, a Canadian documentary film director and editor, grew up in Moscow and was trained at the Russian Film Institute (VGIK). After immigrating to Canada, Julia together with her brother Boris Ivanov self-produced their first documentary "From Russia, For Love" which has been televised in 26 countries. In the decade that followed Julia felt a deep commitment to making films that break individual and societal perceptions. She directed a number of intimate films on the topics of minorities, orphanhood and search for love. These films have been shown on PBS, Discovery, and various TV channels in Canada, Asia and Europe. Other titles include "Fatherhood Dreams" (2007) - a film about gay fathers and their children; "10 Days=Wife: Love Translated" (2011) - a journey into the world of Dating Tours to Eastern Europe; and "Family Portrait in Black and White" (2011) a story of black Ukrainian orphans and their foster mother, which premiered at Sundance Film Festival and won many international awards, including Best Canadian Feature Documentary Award at Hot Docs Film Festival.

PRODUCER - Boris Ivanov – Interfilm Productions Inc.

Boris Ivanov's producing credits include the documentaries *Family Portrait in Black and White*, *Love Translated*, *True Love or Marriage Fraud? The Price of Heartache*, *Fatherhood Dreams*, *From Russia, For Love* and *Moscow Freestyle*. Other credits include his work as director/producer for CBS/History Channel's *Beyond Top Secret*, Investigation Discovery's series *Deranged* (2008), three episodes of WeTV's *Secret Lives of Women* (2008/2008), a special on *Jaycee Duggard: Kidnapped for 18 years* for TLC (2009) and two specials for TLC *Natalie Holloway: Lost in Paradise* and *TV Murders* (2010).

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS - Piksuk Media Inc. was founded in 2005 when **Joelie Sanguya, Charlotte DeWolff** and **Ole Gjerstad** brought together their passion for Arctic storytelling and their commitment to developing the video and new media industry in Canada's north.

Joelie, an Inuit elder from Clyde River, Baffin Island, has a deep understanding of Inuit culture and history. Charlotte has worked for many years in Nunavut as a manager/producer for Inuit Communications Systems Ltd.'s commercial video and television facility and Executive Director of Nunavut's film, tv and new media industry association. She has produced for varied commercial projects and television series including ICSL's *Piqusingit* and *Elders Series*. Ole is a Montreal-based veteran documentary-maker with a record of award-winning films. Their first production, "***The Mystery of Arqioq***", was broadcast on APTN in early 2008. Their current projects include "***Niaqqirijjuq: The Great Distemper***", with NFB, APTN and SRC.

FOR IMAGES:

CAPTIONS:

HighFivePress1.jpg: Wards Family. Surrey, BC, 2009. photographer: Geno DellaMattia.

<http://www.interfilm.ca/HighFivePress1.jpg>

HighFivePress2.jpg: Wards Family. Surrey, BC, 2010. photographer: Geno DellaMattia.

<http://www.interfilm.ca/HighFivePress2.jpg>

HighFivePress3.jpg: Yuliya. Surrey, BC, 2011. photographer: Geno DellaMattia.

<http://www.interfilm.ca/HighFivePress3.jpg>

HighFivePress4.jpg: All the children. Surrey, BC, 2009. photographer: Geno DellaMattia.

<http://www.interfilm.ca/HighFivePress4.jpg>

HighFivePress5.jpg: Yuliya. Surrey, BC, 2011. photographer: Geno DellaMattia.

<http://www.interfilm.ca/HighFivePress5.jpg>

Julia Ivanova, Director

<http://www.interfilm.ca/JuliaIvanovaDirector.jpg>

POSTER

<http://www.interfilm.ca/HFPosterLetterHD.jpg>

CREATION OF ONLINE ADOPTION RESOURCE ASSOCIATED WITH HIGH FIVE: A SUBURBAN ADOPTION SAGA

With the support of Canada Media Fund and Knowledge Network, the producers of the film will be launching during HOTDOCS 2013 an online adoption resource

WWW.KNOWADOPTION.com

It will be an interactive social networking website where anyone who has had experience with adoption can upload videos of their own opinions, dos and don'ts, advices or warnings. Social workers can share their observations and possibly help families going through tough times or to learn how to avoid those. Families waiting to adopt can ask questions and hear answers from other families that have gone through the process. Social networking abilities and geo-locating can bring adoptive families together to support one another. The resource will also give individuals an ability to host their own adoption blogs if they are in the process of adoption. We will also encourage families to host orphans from outside North America for the summers or Christmas, just like the family in HIGH FIVE. Website will also include a Video-On-Demand channel that will make available documentaries and films on adoption for the website members.

As the producers of a number of films related to adoption including Fatherhood Dreams, From Russia For Love, Family Portrait in Black and White and now High Five: A Suburban Adoption Saga we learned one very important lesson while making these films: adoption is a complicated process so having support and being aware of the complexities facing the children and the family as a whole is paramount in making the adoption process a success. We hope WWW.KNOWADOPTION.COM will assist in learning the ropes for the new adoptive families.

PRESS COVERAGE

VARIETY: <http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117948563/>

Posted: Sun., Oct. 14, 2012, 5:05pm PT

High Five: A Suburban Adoption Saga

(Documentary -- Canada)

A Family of Five Production in association with British Columbia's Knowledge Network with the support of the Shaw Media-Hot Docs completion fund, CMF FMC, the Canadian Film and Video Production Tax Credit, the Province of British Columbia: Film Incentive B.C., developed by Piksuk Media, Interfilm Prods. with the support of Nunavut Film. Produced by Boris Ivanov. Executive producers, Murray Battle, Charlotte Dewolff, Joeline Sanguya, Ole Gjerstad. Directed, written by Julia Ivanova. With: Cathy Ward, Martin Ward, Yulia Ward, Sergey Ward, Snezana Ward, Alyona Ward, Sascha Ward. (English, Russian dialogue)

When a childless Canadian couple takes on five Ukrainian siblings, ages 6 to 19, the difficult process of adoption is only part of the story in "High Five: A Suburban Adoption Saga," a years-in-the-making docu from Russian-born, Vancouver-based helmer Julia Ivanova. With two of the younger siblings arriving well in advance of the others, Ivanova shows that the real drama lies in how family dynamics develop and change when all sibs are together again, living amid the values of a different culture. Already set for Canadian broadcast, this absorbing and compassionate pic should be embraced by other fests and broadcasters.

Initially, Martin and Cathy Ward of Surrey, B.C., want to adopt one infant, but after playing summer host to then 4-year-old Alyona, they learn she has additional siblings at the orphanage. When Alyona returns the following summer with her slightly older sister Snezana, they all bond well. The generous, well-meaning Wards then bring the rest of the family -- younger brother Sascha and teenagers Yulia and Sergey -- for a vacation, and determine to adopt them all; the emotional appeal of uniting the siblings trumps a full consideration of the economic and psychological costs.

Undeterred by the fact that the kids' traumatic upbringing has marked Yulia and Sergey in obvious ways, as well as in ways they may not fully understand, the Wards press forward with the lengthy procedure. Complications ensue.

Helmer Ivanova ("Family Portrait in Black and White," "Love Translated"), who worked for eight years as a foreign adoption specialist, makes use of her professional insights and first language to pick up on issues that Martin and Cathy are slower to see. Alone with the kids when they are talking in Russian, she sometimes steps out of her observational role to question them frankly about what they are doing and feeling. As the younger girls, who have had longer to assimilate, start to reject Yulia, who was once their mother figure, in favor of Cathy, we follow a small tragedy.

The Yulia/Cathy dynamic further deteriorates when money issues force Martin, a nurse, to accept a contract in the Arctic that takes him away from the family for six weeks at a

time. Although Cathy professes not to feel jealous over the bond Martin and Yulia developed, viewers may wonder if seeing the teenage blonde constantly cuddle up to Martin when he is at home while rejecting Cathy's authority plays a subconscious role in the family's troubles. Moreover, Yulia's refusal to accept Cathy's appeal to "be nice," because Yulia has grown up in a culture where it is important to be loud and stand up for yourself, should prove revelatory for North Americans considering adopting older, foreign children.

Although the final scenes, showing the now-adult Sergey and Yulia's return visit to the Ukraine for what Martin calls closure, feel a tad rushed, the well-crafted, nicely scored pic remains compelling throughout. Jumps in time are smoothed by Martin's voiceover narration.

Camera (color, DV), Ivanova; editor, Ivanova; music, Boris Sichon. Reviewed at Vancouver Film Festival (Canadian Images), Oct. 6, 2012. Running time: 96 MIN.

Contact the Variety newsroom at news@variety.com

CREDITS

OPENING CREDITS:

Family of Five Productions in association with

BRITISH COLUMBIA'S
Knowledge Network:

Present

HIGH FIVE:

A Suburban Adoption Saga

END CREDITS:

Director / Writer / Editor

JULIA IVANOVA

Executive Producer, Knowledge

MURRAY BATTLE

Executive Producers

CHARLOTTE DEWOLFF

JOELIE SANGUYA

OLE GJERSTAD

Producer / Production Manager

BORIS IVANOV

Director of Photography

JULIA IVANOVA

Additional Cinematography

RENE SMITH

KIRK TOUGAS

GREG MASUDA

Composer

BORIS SICHON

Additional Music

“The Orphan Variations”, “Sonata for Piano, Cello and Horn”
written and performed by Sebastian Hugeneck

“Alia Flynn”

“Ships are Sailing / Morrison’s Jig”

“Wiggly Tooth Hoedown”

Written and Performed by Calvin Cairns
Courtesy of Urban Accordion Music (SOCAN)

“Many Dreams From Here”

Written and Performed by Paul O’Brien
Courtesy of fivefeathermusic (SOCAN)

Online Editor and Colour Correction

MIKE JACKSON

Post-production Audio

JAMIE MAHAFFEY

J. MARTIN TAYLOR

Post Production Supervisor

Production Coordinator

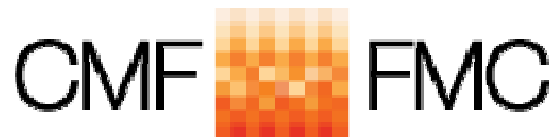
BORIS IVANOV

Legal

LORI MASSINI

Produced in association with

BRITISH COLUMBIA'S
Knowledge Network:



Produced with the assistance of the Shaw Media-Hot Docs
Completion Fund



The Canadian Film and Video Production Tax Credit



The Province of British Columbia:

Film Incentive B.C.

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PIKSUK MEDIA INC.
INTERFILM PRODUCTIONS INC.

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NUNAVUT FILM

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