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Editorial

I have written several times over the last almost four years, about the best of good Human qualities which seem to bounce out of nowhere from an unobtrusive, ordinary man or woman from 'out of the crowd' who, up to then, had been unknown outside their circle of family and friends. Sometimes our Heroes react to a sudden situation, but many times they act heroically over an extended period of time, be it days, weeks, months, or even years!

We have, in my view, one such Heroine right here in my home-city, New Plymouth. Her name is Alana Cleland, a name which has probably only recently become familiar to most of our members outside of Taranaki. I myself had not heard of her until two years ago. So I would like to tell you the gist of her life-story over the last nine years.

Alana is a paediatric nurse who, about nine years ago, did what so many of us Kiwis did before her, she took off for Europe on her big 'OE'! Soon after arriving there, she answered an appeal by the UNO for paediatric nurses to do volunteer nursing in orphanages in eastern European countries where conditions in these institutions were particularly bad at that time, primarily in Romania. In this country Alana found herself

in 1999, working in an orphanage where one of her many charges was a ten-month-old boy named Iani. This little chap soon took a huge 'shine' to this young nurse, and it seem, she to him also. It seems Iani's parents had brought him to the orphanage and abandoned him there when he was only a few weeks old, because they already had a large family and could not keep any more because of enormous poverty.

In 2001, Alana, still working in Romania, became Iani's legal foster-parent. Then in 2003 Alana returned to her home-town with the now four-year-old Iani and a new lifestyle begins for this little boy. Everything went well for Iani and his 'Mum', Alana, the only woman he ever knew as his Mum. Then, in late 2004, Alana applied to the Romanian authorities for a full legal adoption of Iani. And this is when things went all awry for her.

The 'new-age' Romanian authorities ruled that adoptions of Romanian children could only be granted to Romanian citizens or residents, and worse, they demanded that Iani be returned to Romania!

On advice from our own Department of Foreign Affairs and other 'legal beagles', Alana decided to comply and in March 2005, returned to Romania with Iani to a very

uncertain future, but determined to fight for a full, legal adoption from within. But her problems seemed almost insurmountable! Because Iani's biological mother was still alive, the authorities first had to obtain her signature assigning his guardianship over to the state child-welfare department, before the Adoption Court would even consider a hearing on Iani's status! After initially agreeing to this, she then refused to do so a few days later when government officials arrived at her door with the necessary papers. These officials then told Alana they would apply to the Family Court to grant custody of Iani to the Government anyway, as he had effectively been abandoned as a baby, but it could take a year before they got a hearing!!!

One can well imagine Alana's sinking feeling of despair by this time, but she had several strong supporters in her corner, one a Romanian lady whom Alana had befriended during her volunteer nursing there and had kept in touch with and who now acted as Alana's interpreter. The other was a Lawyer who, after hearing Alana's full story, went into Romania's Courts to battle for her and Iani with his best legal arguments and cajoling to fast-track their hearings. It seemed to work, at least a little bit. Things kept moving through the Romanian Courts system, albeit still at a snail's pace, until finally, some twenty months after their return, the Romanian Adoption Court delivered its verdict. Alana's application had been granted, she was now Iani's mother under Romanian Law!!! One can imagine the tremendous relief they both felt at this news! But this long saga had put an awful financial drain on Alana and her family back home in New Zealand. So, while she was wrestling with Bureaucrats on the other side of the world, her friends back home organised a public appeal for her and within a few weeks had raised over \$20,000.00 to help her!

Within days of receiving the adoption papers, Alana was on a plane to London with 'her little boy!' She had friends there and she needed to apply through our High Commission for Iani's New Zealand citizenship as he was still a Romanian citizen only. There she received another setback. All the court papers regarding Iani's adoption had to be translated into English at a cost of several thousand dollars, Alana's last reserves, earmarked for their air-tickets home to New Zealand. One of Alana's friends back home had a bright idea and phoned the CEO of the TSB Bank. The response was immediate! Yes, the Bank would pay for the flights home from London just as soon as they were ready!!!

Finally, on March 7th 2007, our two intrepid Wanderers touched down on Home soil again, two years after leaving, into a much unknown future. Some of Alana's first words: "We're finally home! No more to go wrong! It's over! But I need a job now, I'm broke!!!"

What a courageous young woman, I say. She could teach many biological mothers a thing or two about true Mother-love!!! Do you agree?

Cheerio from Paul



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