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Just in time for Christmas, a Belgium family welcomes a new daughter and sister from the homeland of her adopted mother.

The Sereno family in the Town of Belgium couldn't have a more wonderful Christmas gift.

Five-year-old Gabriela, who was born in Honduras, came to live with them on Dec. 7 and is experiencing her first American Christmas.

Her parents Dania and Bob and brothers Bobby, 10, Joshua, 9, and Jacob, 7, are literally bubbling over with joy. The couple started the international adoption process three years ago.

"Now that she's here, nothing else matters, but when you're going through it, it's such an emotional roller-coaster," Dania said.

"She's everything we wanted and more."

Dania was with her daughter in Honduras from Oct. 30 to Dec. 7, waiting to finalize the adoption and obtain Gabriela's passport and visa.

She had hoped to be home for Thanksgiving, but instead they arrived in the United States on the same day that she arrived from Honduras 33 years earlier to be with her adoptive family.

Her parents adopted six children, and five were international adoptions.

The couple has wanted to adopt a child from Honduras for a long time.

"It's something we always talked about, even before we were married," Bob said. "Dania was adopted. If her parents hadn't adopted her, I would never have met her. My kids are half Honduran. It was just completing the circle.

"Besides, I always wanted a little girl."

The couple started the adoption process 12 years ago, but Dania became pregnant with Bobby and two more sons were born.

As the boys got older, Dania said, she longed for a girl.

The boys were involved in the adoption decision from the start. In December 2009, the couple talked to them about adopting a girl and everyone voted.

The vote was 4-1. Joshua cast the lone no vote, but got on board when he was outvoted.

“When we discussed how expensive it would be so we had to save money, he was the first one to go to his room and get his piggy bank,” Dania said.

“He said he voted no because I was already crabby and stressed and he thought four would be too much for me. He’s my real one.”

When they chose an adoption agency and their application was approved, the couple expected they would get a child soon, especially since Dania is Honduran and speaks Spanish.

But it was a long wait. On May 29, they got the phone call saying Gabriela had been chosen for them, and they had two weeks to decide if they wanted her.

They called back a few hours later and said they wanted her. The agency was surprised they didn’t want medical and psychological evaluations first.

“It’s a leap of faith,” Dania said. “Bob and I discussed it for a couple of hours, then called back. When we hung up, we looked at each other and said, ‘What did we do?’

“If you believe God is giving you the answer, then you go with that.

“We’ve had people say, ‘You’re so good to do this.’ We’re no more good than if we were having a baby (by birth). We wanted a daughter and we didn’t get one biologically.

“A birth child grows in your belly. An adopted child grows in your heart.”

In July, Bob and Dania went to Honduras for 10 days to meet Gabriela and her foster family. They were surprised at her reaction.

“She jumped on our laps and called us Mami and Papi,” Dania said.

Bob added, “The foster family prepared her so well and told her we had been working for a long time to adopt her.”

Leaving Gabriela behind was difficult. The next time they saw her was Oct. 30. Bob and Bobby also went to Honduras, but could only stay one week.

Bobby ran to his sister and gave her a big hug.

“She was smaller than I thought she would be,” he said.

The family expected to have its newest member last year.

“Since Thanksgiving (2011) we have been setting a place for her and praying that she is getting enough to eat,” Dania said.

The boys have been attending Port Catholic School since St. Mary’s School in Lake Church closed four years ago, something the Serenos fought against happening.

Now, they said, it’s a blessing.

At Port Catholic, they met a Honduran family that has been involved in the adoption process from the beginning. The parents will be Gabriela’s godparents when she’s baptized.

“How many Honduran families are there in Ozaukee County?” Dania asked. “There are so many blessings in this. I don’t call them coincidences.”

During both visits to Honduras, the Serenos stayed with their friend’s parents, who drove them wherever they needed to go and picked up paperwork for them.

“It was such a godsend to have family to stay with,” Dania said. “Financially, it was wonderful, and also emotionally. I can’t imagine being in a hotel that long.”

While she was in Honduras, Port Catholic parents provided meals for her family and transported the boys to school and activities. Their next door neighbor, Ginny Bittner, stayed with the boys until Bob got home. Dania’s parents also came for a week.

Last week, Gabriela started 4-year-old kindergarten at Ozaukee Elementary School in Fredonia, which has an English as a second language program.

Gabriela is an outgoing girl who runs up to people, eager to meet them and be hugged and kissed.

She is learning English, knows her numbers and can sing the alphabet song, but she also speaks Spanish with her mother.

“I want her to keep her language,” Dania said.

Bobby is taking Spanish in school and practices with his sister.

The boys adore their sister.

“All three of them baby her,” Dania said. “I don’t because I need her to acclimate and be independent.”

Dania looks at her daughter and remembers what it was like when she came to the United States.

“I won the lottery 33 years ago, and now she’s won the lottery,” Dania said.

“It was hard to leave the other kids behind. She will have so many opportunities that they won’t have.”

Image Information: Gabriela Sereno, 5, was surrounded by her new family (from left) Joshua, 9, Bobby, 10, mother Dania, Jacob, 7, and father Bob. Photo by Sam Arendt