

## Finding Beauty

This first of a three-part series follows several local people on their journeys to parenthood as they adopt discarded children from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

By JEN KOCHER  
Photos By ADAM HERRERA



As she takes a stroll through the Douglas Park Cemetery with a teddy bear intended for her new daughter, Stephanie Hill remembers the hard times and looks forward to her new life as a mother.

**A** bone-thin toddler with enormous honey eyes smiles shyly at the camera. Someone has dressed her in a pink, frilly smock with ballet slippers appliquéd on the collar. A white bow juts out of a hive of black curls. She looks like any other ordinary kid frozen in a milestone moment, maybe a birthday party, except her shoes give her away. Her high-top sneakers are too worn, too large and look like they belong on a child four times her age. Or an orphan. At first glance, she appears to be waving to the camera. Upon closer scrutiny, however, it's clear that she actually has her third finger raised in the air.

"Is she flipping us off?" Stephanie Hill asked her mother Cindy Porter, who didn't miss a beat.

"This girl definitely belongs in our family," Cindy replied.

In that instant, an invisible umbilical cord crossed continents. Stephanie had finally found her daughter, Bella Zoe.

"I just knew," Stephanie said.

"It was in her eyes. She looked like she was just waiting for the day that she could get up out of that blue plastic chair and do something mischievous."

Now, armed with a purse full of protein bars and single-serve packets of tuna fish, Stephanie and her mother, Cindy Porter, will board a plane in two months and fly 30 hours to the Democratic Republic of Congo, where they will finally meet their daughter and granddaughter face-to-face.

"Last winter, Stephanie took me dog sledding in Jackson Hole," Cindy said. "I thought that was about as wild as it was going to get,

but now, Africa!"

The journey to this point has been wild, too. In fact, it's fair to say that in recent years Stephanie has been through hell.

Three miscarriages.

The birth of a stillborn baby, Hope.

A hysterectomy.

And finally, the untimely, sudden death of her husband Justin in a car accident just one week shy of her 30th birthday. In the end, she buried Justin with Hope's ashes tucked into his shirt pocket.

None of this stops her, however. She refuses to feel sorry for herself and doesn't want anyone else to feel sorry for her either.

"I don't want my life to be viewed a sob story," Stephanie said. "It's not. I've had lots of challenges, yes, but I'm not afraid of them."

Instead, she counts her blessings: a community of great people, close friends, and a mother who would go the distance – and has – for her. Now, Bella.

Please see **BELLA**, page A-2

**It was in her eyes. She looked like she was just waiting for the day that she could get up out of that blue plastic chair and do something mischievous.**

Stephanie Hill,  
when she first saw a photograph of Bella Zoe

## New gas islands to flow at Safeway

By ADAM HERRERA  
Reporter

Douglas will soon have another place to "fill 'er up," following the unanimous approval of the Safeway gas islands by the Douglas City Council April 22.

Preceding the vote, councilman Leroy Kingery posed a very interesting question for Interim Community Development Director Marty Matsen, wondering if Safeway planned to go through with construction this time around, since the council had previously approved this very same project on Nov. 12, 2009.

"I sure hope so," Matsen chuckled in response. "We've spent a lot of time working with them and we are reviewing their building plans as we speak, so I think they indicated they are ready to pull a permit as soon as it is approved, so we'll hope for that."

The initial 2009 plan called for two phases of construction, one set of three double-sided pumps and a small service kiosk for phase one, followed by a second series of pumps and an extension of the awning to cover them in phase two. But due to the size of the existing parking lot, phase two wasn't possible, so Safeway revised its plan this year to only feature phase one.

Safeway will also re-stripe the entire parking lot to increase the size of their parking spaces and meet city code restrictions. The new version of the lot will contain 160 spaces at 10 feet by 20 feet. Safeway must re-stripe the lot and meet code to obtain their certificate for occupancy to turn the pumps on.

The main Richards Street sign may also see a change, which would add gas pricing to the existing sign, but that decision has not been made at this time.

The kiosk that will accompany the pumps will be manned by one attendant so as to be able to shut off the pumps if necessary, and will sell convenience items like snacks and drinks. It will also feature his and hers single-stall restrooms.

"Mayor, it looks like a good plan, and I look forward to it," councilman Dave Angiolillo said. "Safeway, they give a good discount for gas, and in the past I have had to take the discount and use it in Casper if I wanted to get gas, so it would be nice to have it in town, to be able to buy gas and take advantage of that. I also like the idea of having somebody outside, close to the tank. I feel that in this town, we have a fair amount of gas drive-offs and this might help control some of that also."

## Wasatch requests permit extension

By DAVE ROBATCEK  
Reporter

Citing delays from numerous legal challenges, Wasatch Wind Intermountain, LLC is applying to the state Industrial Siting Council for an extension of the permit deadline for its proposed Pioneer Wind Parks south of Glenrock.

Specifically, the company is asking for a 10-month extension of the July 18, 2013, deadline to meet Special Condition #19 requiring the company to provide evidence of sufficient financial resources to construct, maintain, operate, decommission and reclaim the facility.

Edison Mission Energy, the company that Wasatch Wind originally put forward to the ISC as the source of financing for its project, filed for bankruptcy protection last December.

In a letter to Industrial Siting Division Administrator Luke Esch dated May 3, Wasatch Wind President Christine Mikell, in asking for a revised deadline of May 18, 2014, said, "Wasatch Wind will demonstrate that good cause exists for the amend-

Please see

**WASATCH WIND,**  
page A-11

### WEATHER

High	69	66	70	66	77
Low	43	40	40	39	48
	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.

### Target Your Market!

Call Today to be part of our

### Hunting Guide

Douglas Budget • 307.358.2965



7 93573 77458 3

# Bella

from the front page

Stephanie and Cindy will spend about a week in the capital city of Kinshasa. They will be met at the airport by their five-foot-two, hired body guard, who will ferry them around during their stay. Given the severe poverty and high unemployment rate, women traveling with cartons of food and supplies for orphanages are prime targets for thieves. Anything is sellable, including baby formula, aspirin, vitamins, diapers, wipes and second-hand clothing. Hardly surprising when you consider that a can of formula costs \$8 while the average annual income in the DRC is around \$210.

This country ravaged by civil wars has left millions of children displaced. UNICEF estimates more than four million children are orphaned in the country and one in seven dies before reaching their fifth birthday.

Others, like Bella, are lucky enough to land in an orphanage, where the conditions are rudimentary at best. Children sleep seven or eight to a bed and drink rice water for sustenance. No running water, no flushable toilets. The children play on dirt or mold- and mildew-infested concrete floors, where they sometimes sleep. Nonetheless, there is progress. A wall has recently been erected around Bella's orphanage, thanks to donations from Stephanie and others like her. Now, the children are less likely to be stolen.

Both Stephanie and Cindy shrug off these Third-World conditions. Not even the oppressive heat or the threat of bugs laying eggs under their skin deters them. Instead, they are anxious to pick up Bella and drop off their much-needed supplies at the orphanage. From there, they will stay at a Catholic Church where lizards are so thick that it looks like the walls are moving. The church, with small individual sleeping rooms, has temporarily been repurposed to house parents during the final days of the adoption process. Stephanie will spend the first few days bonding with Bella, at which point she'll hand her over to Cindy while she returns to the orphanage to do work. She will read books to the children, scrub the floors, tend to the sick and help build or do whatever needs to be done. Already, she feels committed to the orphanage and to saving other children.

Bella, whose name in Italian means beauty, was found abandoned in some bushes and given to the orphanage. Because she exhibits severely delayed skills — at one year, she still cannot walk, talk or crawl — she is considered "damaged." She was initially adopted by an American family, but they decided to go a different route when they learned of her disabilities.

Recently, however, Stephanie has been told that Bella has begun to smile and now laughs, albeit noiselessly. The voice will come, Stephanie believes, as will her other motor skills, once she has attention and somebody to help her. But if they don't, then she and Cindy will handle that, too.

"If it turns out that Bella is deaf, we will try hearing aids or learn sign language," Cindy said. "If she can't walk, then we'll find some other way to help her get around. The important thing is bringing her home."

## THE MAN ON THE ELEPHANT

On her blog, Stephanie writes, "Do I still want my husband to be at my side tonight? Absolutely. Would I rather have had my four pregnancies be healthy? Of course. However, that is not how it happened. Instead of wishing things were different, I need to face what has happened. I would drive myself crazy if I thought of all the what-ifs in life . . ."

Finally, at age 32, she's about to become a mother, an obstacle not easily overcome. She and Justin had talked about adopting a baby and had even begun to start the paperwork shortly before he died. Then, as a widow, and, after having a hysterectomy, she continued the adoption process on her own, going to both the Wyoming Children's and Catholic Charities.

Neither agency, however, would work with her. Wyoming Children's Network explained that single people were typically not considered eligible unless the birth mother specifically requests a single parent. The Catholic agency said they might have worked with her had she had a stronger relationship with her pastor, which for personal reasons had since waned in the months following her husband's death. In the end, both agencies suggested she get remarried and try again two years later.

This did not sit well with Stephanie, who could not understand why she was suddenly ineligible just because she was now single. After all, she was not single by choice, and by all other counts, she met, if not exceeded, the standards for adoption. Not only was she financially solvent, but she also was surrounded by a supportive circle of family and friends. Why, then, was it so important that she be married?

"They were not very nice to me," Stephanie said. "But I was not going to give up. When I mentioned adopting independently from a foreign country, they were very much against that, too."

So, temporarily without options, Stephanie decided to adopt a dog and become a foster parent. It worked for awhile, but then the urge to be a mother again returned, at which point she reached out to Amy Tate, then an acquaintance she knew through Justin, who had recently adopted a baby from the Congo. Tate put her in touch with Sarah Whitbrod of Douglas, who runs a nonprofit adoption service, Wrens Song, and who has helped many people, including Tate, adopt children from the DRC.

In fact, Sarah thought she might have a baby for her. On her last visit to Africa, she had seen Bella sitting alone, covered in flies. She was drawn to her



**Stephanie and Cindy do not delude themselves into thinking adoption will be easy. Even as they sit on swings in Douglas, with an empty seat waiting for Bella, they know that, together, they will provide a wonderful, loving home for a child who has only known civil war, starvation and loneliness.**

wise eyes, and immediately thought of Stephanie, who, like Bella, is very much a survivor.

At first, Stephanie was skeptical about adopting an African baby. It seemed like too large of a leap. She was confused. Around this same time, her friends convinced her to attend a religious-based women's conference where the focus was on adopting children from war-torn African countries. They saw it as a sign. Still, she wasn't convinced.

There's a story that Cindy has told her repeatedly throughout her life: A person is standing in the middle of the road while a man on a white elephant charges at her, screaming for her to get out of the way. Instead, she stands her ground, trusting God to save her. He doesn't. When she gets to heaven, God asks her why she didn't move out of the elephant's way. She replied, "I was waiting for you to tell me what to do."

"I did." God said. "I was the man on the elephant!"

In other words, it's important to pay attention to the small things rather than waiting for one obvious sign. For the first time in her life, the moral of the story made sense, and Stephanie saw the signs beginning to add up.

She told Sarah she was ready to see the photograph of Bella.

"It was like magic," Stephanie said. "When Sarah and Amy saw her, she said, 'That's Stephanie's child.' And when she showed me the photo, I just knew."

With the conviction to adopt Bella now firmly in place, Stephanie went to work. She needed to come up with \$20,000 in fees to cover the legal and other expenses of adoption. Mountains of paperwork and tedious immigration policies. And though legally she could adopt as a single parent, she knew she'd feel more confident if she had a partner. Enter Cindy.

"Let's do it," Cindy told her. "I'll be the pseudo-daddy."

In the interim, Stephanie, who works full time as a pharmacy technician at Safeway, took on a second job bartending at the LaBonte Bar, earning money that goes exclusively to her adoption fund. Her patrons have been more than generous. One man comes in every shift to give her a \$20 bill. This man, like so many others in Douglas, is indicative of the community's strong support and generosity in helping one of its own. To date, Stephanie is just over her \$20,000 mark.

Like all the other obstacles that Stephanie has overcome in her life, she has also used this one to her advantage. She has returned to school full time and is pursuing an online program at Kansas State University, where she plans to earn a degree in social work, so she can help other single parents adopt children.

"It's very hard to adopt when you are single," she said. "There aren't that many people out there who are willing to work with you. This is my way of paying back the people who have helped me."

## COMING HOME

Bella's room is ready and waiting for her. A teddy bear rests on the nightstand. Night lights full of stars emit a low-yellow glow, lazily peaceful against the cushy, white pillows. Stuffed owls in varying sizes and colors line her dresser like sentinels, while brightly feathered birds gaze down dreamily from paintings hanging on lavender walls.

Since first seeing Bella's picture, Stephanie, for whatever reason, has been dreaming about owls and birds. This makes sense to Cindy, who likens Bella to an owl. Wise and patient. Waiting quietly until she is finally picked up by her mother and grandmother.

For the first time in her life, Bella will sleep in her own bed, complete with a pile of handmade quilts and blankets given to her by friends. The room as a whole emanates the ideality of childhood; it's a room that's been carefully prepared by two women already devoted to her.

If all goes as planned, within the next two months, Bella will be here, joining Stephanie's family of adopted dogs. Each of the dogs has earned its name for a reason. First, there's Healer, the first to enter her life. He's been there through all the failed pregnancies and the death of her husband, letting her cry, never leaving her side.

Then, there's Joker, full of tricks and life. A source of constant laughter and a reminder of better times.

Protector, the final of the three, lets strangers know when they are not welcome. He was sent by Justin, Stephanie believes, to look after her.

And finally, there's Bella, the Beauty, who has come at last.

**DOUBLED LIQUORS**  
Weekly Specials

- KEystone LIGHT  
30 PACK.....\$18.00
- WINE TASTING  
MAY 16<sup>TH</sup> - 4-6 P.M.

Hours: Mon.-Fri. 8 a.m. - 10 p.m.  
Sat. 8 a.m. - 10 p.m. Sun 10 a.m. - ?

323 Center Street • Douglas, WY • 358-9989

**Valentine Speedway**  
**OPEN HOUSE and CAR SHOW**  
Children's Fun Booths  
**Saturday May 11**  
10 a.m. to 2 p.m.  
(Practice from 2 - 5 p.m.)

**GLENROCK DOUGLAS**

**DIG DINOS?**

Visit the Paleon Museum in Glenrock to see a 30-foot long allosaurus, a triceratops, and explore paleo history. Open Mon. - Sat. 11:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

**SHRINE CIRCUS**

**DOUGLAS SHRINE CLUB DOUGLAS**  
**FRI 10 | 4:30 PM**  
**MAY 10 | 7:30 PM**  
**WYOMING STATE FAIRGROUNDS INDOOR ARENA**

PROCEEDS BENEFIT DOUGLAS SHRINE CLUB.  
PAYMENTS ARE NOT DEDUCTIBLE AS CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTIONS

TICKETS AVAILABLE AT THEJORDANWORLD.CIRCUS.COM

Find a Friend  
**EXPERIENCE AN EXPERT**

**ANGELA BROWN**  
Health Insurance backed by years of experience.

307-234-2649  
800-851-2227 • bcbswy.com  
231 East Midwest Ave. • Casper

**BlueCross BlueShield of Wyoming**  
An independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association

**LIL POKES RODEO**  
May 25 • 8 a.m. • South Rec. Complex • Glenrock

Saddle your stick horse and head to Glenrock for a fun-filled day! Youngsters love this stick horse rodeo featuring barrel racing, a boot scramble, pig wrestling and "wild bull riding!" Enter up by May 13 and receive a free t-shirt. Entry forms are available on the website listed below.

**WYOMING PIONEER MUSEUM**

Located on the Wyoming State Fairgrounds in Douglas, the Wyoming Pioneer Museum is a must see for western history enthusiasts. The museum is part of Wyoming State Parks, Historic Sites and Trails. Admission is FREE. Open Mon.-Fri. 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Sat. 1 p.m.-5 p.m.

**CONVERSE COUNTY TOURISM.COM**