

It's official: Maengs stay

■ Moncton family granted three-year temporary stay while their permanent residency permits are processed

BY ERIC LEWIS
TIMES & TRANSCRIPT STAFF

A lot can happen in one week.

The Maeng family of Moncton had just been rocked by the news that Citizenship and Immigration Canada wanted them deported back to South Korea by the end of this month when their story first appeared on the front page of last Saturday's Times & Transcript.

Federal immigration officials had decided that the health-care costs of treating the Maengs' youngest son, Sung-joo, 15, who has been diagnosed with autism and epilepsy, was a burden on the health system in New Brunswick. The family had moved to Canada in 2003 in the hope of improving their son's condition.

The Maengs' story quickly became national news this week and ignited a firestorm of community support that led to quick political action at both the provincial and federal levels.

Today, the family — who own the 'The Main Stop Oriental Market' on West Main Street — can relax, knowing that their temporary resident status has been restored and that they have been granted a temporary stay of three years while their permanent residency application is being processed.

The family — father Tai Shik (Eric), mother Hee-Eun Jang (Jo) and sons Jung-joo (John) and Sung-joo — got the news late yesterday from the same Citizenship and Immigration Canada official who informed them less than two weeks ago that they would have to leave the country.

The Maengs and their lawyer Nicole Druckman picked up the family's permits yesterday evening, which led to a brief celebration on Main Street in Moncton that saw some Metro residents stop what they were doing to cheer and clap for the family.

"I thought my wedding day and the birth of my children was special, but this is right up there," said Druckman, who had essentially shut her law practice down this week to tackle the Maengs' case.

On Thursday rookie Moncton Riverview-Dieppe MP



Tae-Shik Maeng, left, and son Jung-joo Maeng celebrate on Main Street yesterday after getting their new temporary residency papers.

PHOTO BY ROB WALSH/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Maeng family receives permission to stay in Canada

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Robert Goguen said the federal government was prepared to re-establish the Maengs' temporary resident status, which relieved some of the stress the family was under. But as Druckman put it at the time, she wouldn't be completely satisfied until the papers were in the family's hands.

Yesterday afternoon, while still waiting for final word on their status, the Maengs and lawyers Druckman, Jack Haller and Janet Thompson-Price held a press conference in Druckman's office, reiterating how amazed they've been at the show of community support over the last week.

Referring to Canada Day on July 1, which the family was expected to miss following a return to South Korea, John Maeng, 19, said, "We're still Korean, but through community support and what we've been going through, I would consider myself Canadian."

"It's going to be the most memorable Canada Day, I would say, in my entire life."

John said his family's ordeal sends a message to other immigrants that they shouldn't give up despite how disheartening it is to be told you must leave the country. In fact, after the enormous community support and quick political action, John says he expects his family's story to change immigration rules in Canada.

And in a sign that the Maengs' story truly has gone global, shortly after yesterday's press conference, mother Jo was asked to speak to a Korean reporter calling from Los Angeles.

This was after John had already cracked everyone up when he explained that his grandmother saw her family on television news in Korea this week, following a story about a war overseas.

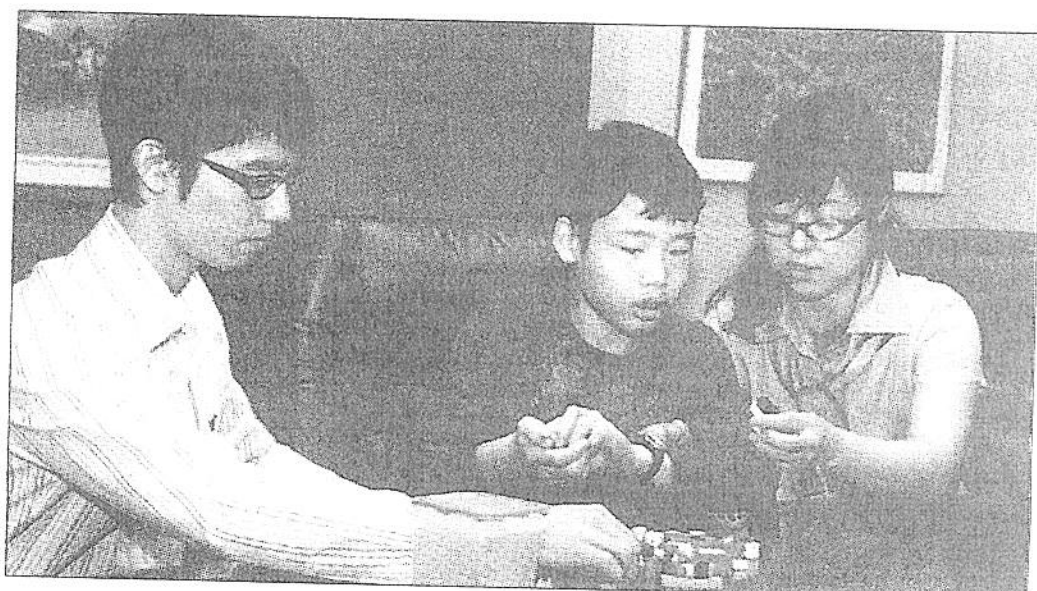
"And then suddenly, our story comes up in the subtitles, it says in Korean, 'Let me stay in Moncton,' and I guess it showed me talking," John explained.

His grandmother assumed the war images were from Moncton and that there was a war taking place here.

"My grandmother thought, 'oh no, there must be a war going on in Moncton, and they must be crazy to want to stay in Moncton,'" John said, eliciting laughs from everyone in the room.

Moncton West MLA and Minister of Social Development Sue Stultz wasn't able to attend yesterday's news conference, but she was given credit for the province writing a letter of support for the Maengs.

The letter from the Province of New Brunswick, issued Wednesday, made it clear the provincial government was prepared to cover any costs incurred over the course of Sung-Joo's life to the extent it would cover the costs of a Canadian citizen. This was required by immigration officials if they were to restore the family's



RON WARD/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Jung-Joo Maeng, Sung-Joo Maeng and mom Hee-Eun Jang play with building blocks yesterday at the family's lawyers' office.

temporary status in the country. Now, as the family seeks permanent status, Goguen said Sung-Joo's medical status won't be considered in the process.

Druckman, who admitted it had been a tiring, difficult week, thanked Stultz, Goguen and other political figures who supported the family, including Moncton East Liberal MLA Chris Collins, Moncton North Conservative MLA Marie-Claude Blais and former MLA Mike Murphy.

Asked why re-establishing the Maengs' temporary Canadian status was the "right" thing to do, Druckman said, "They have not been a burden on our system. They have contributed to our society. This is what New Brunswick needs, this is what New Brunswick wants."

Collins said yesterday he was proud of Metro Moncton and New Brunswick for supporting the Maengs.

"It sends a message to people within Canada as well as outside of Canada that Canada is open to, and welcoming immigrants to this area," he said.

Needless to say, tomorrow's rally in support of the Maengs, set for 1 p.m. in front of Moncton City Hall on Main Street, is now a celebration for the Maengs and for the entire community. It was originally set to be a rally designed to force political action in support of the family, but with that out of the way, the community can instead focus on celebrating.

A Facebook page for the event shows more than 2,000 people have committed to attending. Maple Leaf Foods' local plant is donating 2,400 hamburgers, 2,400 hot dogs and all the buns needed. Maritime Fire-place has pitched in too, donating three industrial barbecues.

"We're just asking for donations in exchange for food and pop," rally co-organizer Scott Agnew said yesterday, adding,

"we won't turn people away."

Organized by Agnew and Mary Sullivan, it's expected to be a massive celebration, and if the show of spirit felt yesterday morning in Harrison Trimble High School's auditorium is any indication, it will be something to see.

Trimble held its ceremonial final assembly of the school year, but it took on a bit of a twist this time as the student body welcomed back John Maeng, who graduated from the school last year and is now pursuing a bachelor of science degree at Dalhousie University.

Brandishing signs that read "We love the Maengs," "We support the Maeng family" and "Once a Trojan, always a Trojan," Trimble's Trojans let out a deafening roar when John took the stage.

The roar continued for a minute or two, so John had time to soak it all in before his former classmates let him speak.

"I can't express how happy I am," he said when the crowd finally quieted.

The Trimble grad was welcomed to the stage by teacher and student council liaison Dale MacLean, who said, "In the past week, he has gone through more than most of us will go through in our lifetime, and he's only 19."

MacLean said the Maeng family's plight went "from travesty to celebration."

Students jumped and stomped their feet in celebration, prompting John to later tell the Times & Transcript, "When I was in school, I didn't feel the floor shake as much because I was always jumping too."

Asked to explain why the school showed so much support for the Maengs, student council president Julie Wasson spoke for her peers: "There's this saying, 'once a Trojan, always a Trojan.' We know that there's times we have to come together, and this is one of them."