

Crossing seas to create new families

By Janice Brunson
staff writer

Totting quietly in a small basement office on Adams Road in Birmingham, a handful of dedicated professionals are busy creating families, placing children from Korea, India and Vietnam with Americans intent on adoption.

For years, older couples, single persons or those who already have natural children — people unwilling or unable to wait for a U.S.-born Caucasian baby — have relied on foreign youngsters to fulfill parental aspirations.

But for many, 1990 may well prove disappointing as the number of foreign children available for adoption dwindles, according to Elizabeth Goring of Americans for International Aid and Adoption (AIAA) in Birmingham.

"Right now, our numbers are decreasing for many reasons, both social and political," said Goring who, like many AIAA employees, has adopted a child from abroad. Daughter Amanda, 14, is from Korea.

Previously, the majority of children processed by AIAA have come from Korea and India. But changing attitudes about adoption and more abortions mean substantially fewer children are now available from either country.

American parents who once waited three to four months for a child after processing by AIAA, now face waits of eight to 10 months, accord-

ing to Goring, who said some U.S. agencies have even temporarily stopped accepting applications.

AIAA continues to accept applications and is hopeful new contacts with government social service agencies in Honduras and Chile will result in a steady source of children in need of new parents.

ONE OF GORING'S more memorable moments in "escorting" or accompanying children from old homes to new families in the United States occurred during landing in Minneapolis on a flight from Korea to Detroit with a set of 3-year-old twin girls and a boy, 4, who insisted on unfastening his seatbelt. During descent, Goring struggled to keep the boy's seatbelt buckled when, suddenly, the twin seated farthest from her vomited.

"At that moment, there was nothing I could do. I didn't have enough hands," she said.

Such journeys are grueling affairs. Including plane changes and layovers, the trip from the Social Welfare Society in Seoul to the United States is some 20 hours and from the Mission of Hope in Calcutta, about 40 hours.

In addition to exhaustion, children are exhilarated yet terrified, unaccustomed to airline food and nervous about joining new parents in a strange new land. They are unable to express themselves in English.

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Susan Rabbers sees her new daughter for the first time, as Americans for International Aid and Adoption's Donna Turi (right) carries her out of customs.

14-month wait ends with Ashley

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Even before she arrived home, Ashley Amber Kim Rabbers, a 14-pound bundle of blue-eyed wonder, caused quite a stir in Bridgman, a small rural community in southeastern Michigan.

Her actual arrival last Friday at Detroit Metro Airport, aboard Northwest Flight 12 from Seoul, Korea, was greeted with whoops and tears of joy by adoptive parents Susan and Daniel Rabbers, who have been waiting 14 months for their new daughter.

Susan paced up and down as she waited for the flight to arrive, then the seemingly interminable time it took to go through customs. "Look, she's in labor," her father-in-law joked.

A macho-looking ex-Marine, he too was tearful when Ashley finally was placed in her new parents' arms.

"This is extra special for all of us," said Daniel Rabbers, a manager for a Meijer supermarket.

Ashley, whose new parents opted to retain her Korean name Kim, was born nearly six months ago, delivered of a mother from Pusan who had become pregnant after a brief romantic liaison with a member of

the Korean military.

Ashley is full-blooded Korean. Her adoption by the Rabbers is called a cross-cultural, cross-racial adoption.

At home, Ashley joins new brother, Justin, 7, Susan's son from a former marriage. Susan and Daniel have been married four years.

THE COUPLE FIRST decided to consider adoption when, after several years of trying, Susan failed to become pregnant.

"We wanted our own child and a brother or sister for Justin," Rabbers said.

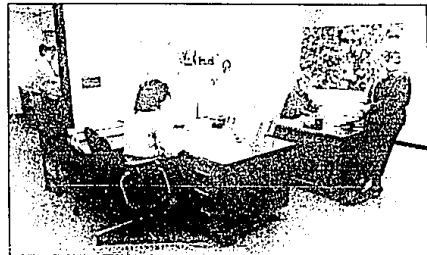
Close friends, who three years ago adopted a Korean daughter, suggested the couple contact Americans for International Aid and Adoption in Birmingham.

All applicants must submit to physical exams and supply personal biographies and reference letters. Once the home study of at least three visits is completed and applicants are otherwise approved, the

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Daniel Rabbers holds Ashley for the first time.



DAN DEAH/staff photographer

Americans for International Aid and Adoption office is on the corner of Adams and Webster roads in Birmingham. Phone number is 645-2211.

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