

Agency guides aspiring parents in procedures of adoption

By LIZ SAYLOR
Staff Writer

Nena Bolenbaugh and her husband were the first N.C. couple to adopt a Korean child through Bethany, the first N.C. adoption agency licensed to arrange foreign adoptions.

"On June 30, 1984, Keri came into the Chicago airport," Bolenbaugh said. "An escort brought her to Charlotte. We found out the day after Mother's Day last year that we had a 6-week-old baby girl."

"We believe that the God we believe in created Keri just for us. We got a really perfect baby."

The adoption process was not easy. The Bolenbaughs, residents of Butler, adopted 11-month-old Keri Michelle through Bethany. They spent about 2½ years dealing with immigration papers, FBI reports, inquiries into their financial status and interviews. They compiled a report describing their views on parenting, foreign children and home life.

The home study was approved in North Carolina, then sent to Korea, going through an agency that controlled orphanages in Korea. Most of the children in these orphanages, including Keri, were born out of wedlock.

To help families like the Bolenbaughs, Judy Geysers started a support group for adoptive parents, called Ours for United Response, two years ago.

"A lot of people were interested in adopting but didn't know how to go about it," Geysers said. "They'd call me for information because we had adopted so many children. Local adoption's just about impossible, so we looked into the international adoption option."

Geysers and her husband have 13 children, seven of whom are adopted. They adopted some Korean and bi-racial children to extend their family because she loves raising children, she said. "This is what I want to do in life."

The group holds meetings with discussions and speakers on topics of interest to the adoptive families and those interested in adopting. About 40 families from across North Carolina are in the group, which also holds social meetings during which the adopted children can meet others like themselves.

"The people are just great, which is what makes a good group," Geysers said. "There were a lot of adoptions that may have been at least a result of our group."

The Geysers and the support group helped the Bolenbaughs.

"I was constantly frustrated," Bolenbaugh said. "It takes a long time to go through the adoption process. We felt it would never happen. We wanted a child so bad for so long. . . I'd call Judy a lot. The OURS support group helped, also."

Many people are waiting to adopt healthy infants, said Mary Smith, public information specialist at the Children's Home Society of North Carolina Inc., a private adoption agency of the United Way. "For healthy, white infants we had between 2,000 and 3,000 people who called last year to adopt."

According to Jane Maske, a social worker at Orange County Social Services, there are few adoptable children for two reasons: "One, it is much more acceptable today to be a single parent, so women are choosing to keep their babies. Another reason is the huge number of abortions."

"Adoption has not had a good image," she said. "One reason may be that it's not easy to carry a child to term and then release the child for adoption. Often, abortion may look simpler."

"But it is never an 'unwanted' child," Maske said. "It is the role of 'parent' by the biological parent that was not wanted. The role of parent simply came at the wrong time in the parent's life. It's a very complex and emotional issue."

Maske handles about 50-60 adoptions a year. She is in charge of placing children in foster homes and does adoptive home studies.

When a mother is going to give a child away for adoption, Maske said, "We get the mother to get good prenatal care. Then the child is placed directly into a foster home."

"In a recent court case, *Stanley vs. Illinois*, it was decided that not only the birth mother, but also the birth father must be part of the adoption process," Maske said. "If he won't take custody of the child, he must fill out and sign a form stating so."

Smith said CHS brought only young infants and toddlers into homes, sometimes working with social services. Last year they placed about 150 babies in homes and followed through during the temporary custody of the foster children, she said.

"We ask one parent to quit his or her job for the first year," Smith said. "They must be N.C. residents. The minimum age is 23. Maximum (age is) 35 for the mother and 39 for the father. . . These are guidelines, not hard-and-fast rules."

The final order of adoption is issued after one year, Smith said. The child is then placed under the parents' custody.

"Foster parents are paid some expenses," Smith said. "The agencies — public or private — make certain decisions, such as with medical problems. The adoptive parents pay all bills and leave property to the child upon their deaths, just like natural parents."

For older children released for adoption, Maske said, the protective service social workers try to have the child stay with the natural parents. If this is unsuccessful, the court determines the child must go to a foster home.

At Christmastime in Orange County, CHS had 48 or 49 children in foster

homes, said Maske, who added that the number varied depending on the time of year.

Those children not in a foster home stay in homes such as the Janus House Residence, Maske said. While there, they attend regular public schools, she said.

"Presently, one child has been freed for adoption in Chapel Hill, an older, black little boy, waiting for a home," Maske said. "If you saw a list of waiting

children (such as the one put out by area social services, PALS), most are black little boys. By 'waiting,' we mean they could move into an adoptive home if we could find one. But most people just want healthy infants, (newborn) to 5 years old."

"A number of children will probably grow up in foster homes and never be adopted," Maske said. "With the special-needs older kids, foster parents often become attached to them and then adopt them. By 'special needs,' we mean

anything that makes a child harder than an infant to be adopted — such factors as medical conditions, race."

After unadopted children turn 18, they are on their own unless they are still in school, she said.

"We are very actively recruiting homes for children with special needs, working closely with social services," Smith said. "We try to put out enough publicity to let people know how to adopt."

Adopted student reunited with her family after 14 years; TV ad brings them together

By LIZ SAYLOR
Staff Writer

"Adoptive parents are very sensitive," said Laura, a 19-year-old freshman whose real name is being kept confidential. "I've always thought of them as my real parents, though in the back of my mind I've known they weren't. She really is my mom, and my dad's 'Dad.'"

Laura's natural parents divorced when she was very young. Her mother died when Laura was 4 years old, leaving her in the care of a boyfriend. He put Laura up for adoption, despite her pleas. "Can I stay, please, and play with the little girl next door?" She, her two sisters and two brothers thus were separated.

Laura remembers staying in another foster home before she came to her present family's home under foster care. Adopted when she was 5, Laura said: "I felt out of place and scared. I was so little. They were so big."

After 14 years with her adoptive family, Laura said, "I don't talk to them about adoption." She has one brother,

also adopted.

In July 1984, Laura's life changed dramatically. Her two biological sisters and one brother (the other was killed in an accident) found her. They had gone to a social service agency, Laura said, but said they had been treated rudely and were told Laura had to be the one to initiate a reunion. Nevertheless, they made a television appeal, only knowing their sister's first name and her approximate age.

Laura was on vacation with her father. When she returned, her mother told her about her real family's television appeal.

"I felt an invasion of privacy," Laura said. But her adopted mother asked her, "Do you want to see them?" Laura agreed, surprised at her adoptive parents' support.

Her mother invited Laura's sisters and brother to their house. Laura said she was still amazed at the openness and friendliness her mother showed to her siblings. When they came to the door, Laura said, her mother welcomed them saying, "I'm glad this happened."

When Laura asked if everything was all right, her mother said, "It's not going to hurt me."

"Deep down she might be scared I'll go off to live with them someday, I think," Laura said. She said her father didn't mind the reunion.

One of Laura's sisters apologized for the potentially embarrassing and threat-

ening announcement they had made, but said it was their "last measure" in a long, desperate search.

"After they came, it really opened me up," Laura said. She's considering putting her story in *Reader's Digest*. "Now I have two families and lots of brothers and sisters. It gets confusing sometimes. But not everyone's that lucky. It's all so smooth for us."

"They told me that nearly every single day they thought of me," Laura said. "It's not every day a reunion with your real family happens. We were all at ease. In just a few hours, that bond was re-established after a 14-year separation."

Laura's sister told her that once, when they were still together, Laura had called her "Mommy."

"She took care of me," Laura said. "Even after 14 years I can still feel the bond with her. Everything from my early childhood was a blurred image, like looking through a crystal ball."

Laura said the reunion had not really affected her relationship with her adoptive family. "I want to do everything I can, especially with my mother, to make our relationship even better," she said. "That's kind of been bugging me."

"You don't want to hurt your adoptive parents," Laura advised adoptees who want to find their biological families. "Either talk to them about your decision to find your real family, or don't let them know. Then later, when you start living away from home, do it."

Laura said she would adopt children if she could. "Then I could relate to them. I'd know what they'd be going through. That could make us a lot closer."

For any person debating between abortion or giving their baby up for adoption, Laura said: "There's always a couple that wants a child. And if you wished, you could always go back to find them."



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Holy Week at the Chapel of the Cross
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WEDNESDAY in HOLY WEEK—April 3
10:00 am The Holy Eucharist: Rite One
10:00 pm The Service of Tenebrae

MAUNDY THURSDAY—April 4
5:15 pm The Holy Eucharist: Rite Two
8:00 pm The Holy Eucharist: Rite Two

GOOD FRIDAY—April 5
12:00 Noon to 3:00 pm—The Three Hours
(The faithful may come and go as obligations require.)

EASTER EVE—Saturday, April 6
10:00 pm—The Great Vigil of Easter, Lighting of the New Fire, Baptisms, First Eucharist of Easter

EASTER DAY—Sunday, April 7
7:30 am, 9:00 am, and 11:00 am—The Holy Eucharist: Rite One
4:45 pm Evensong
5:15 pm The Holy Eucharist: Rite Two

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Cross Listed Courses			
SOCI 24 (WMST 24)	Sex & Gender in Society	12:30-1:45	Staff
PHIL 46 (WMST 46)	Philosophical Issues in Feminism	2:00-4:30 W	Staff
HIST 66 (WMST 66)	Women in Europe I	9:30-10:45	Bennett
MHCH 103 (WMST 103)	Reproductive Physiology	1:00-2:50 M	Hulka
ENGL 50 (WMST 150)	Topics in Gender & Literature: Southern Women Writers	11:00-12:15	Davis
Departmental Listings			
AMST 60	Women in Victorian America	11:00-12:15	Kasson
POLI 95	Women and Politics	11:00-12:15	Conover
Allied Courses With Partial Focus On Women And/Or Gender			
SOCI 30	Family & Society	TBA	
RELI 84	Psychology & Religion	TBA	
SOWO 311	Nature & Etiology of Institutionalized Discrimination (concerns the discrimination of racial groups and women)	TBA	Staff