

Foreign adoptions usually turn out well, experts say

Sunday, April 11, 2010

By MARY REEVES ~ mreeves@t-g.com

One adoption attorney is concerned that recent events will affect public opinion when it comes to international adoption. Rob Kirsh of Memphis said almost all of the time, an adoption is a win-win-win situation -- and when things happen like Torry Hansen sending a 7-year-old child back to Moscow, more people can be hurt than just the child.

"It gives adoption a bad name," he said. "I know when someone handles an adoption thoughtfully, it's wonderful -- it's a win-win-win for the birth mother, the child and the adoptive parents."

In fact, he said, there are probably many prospective parents in Moscow right now on their visitation, preparing to take home their new children, who might not be allowed to leave after spending years and thousands of dollars in the effort.

Adoption usually only gets big media attention when it goes wrong, as in this situation, or "on the Jerry Springer show," Kirsh said, leading people to believe the whole process is doomed to failure. He compared it to media coverage of a plane crash as opposed to the coverage of an airport on an ordinary day.

"If you only watched the news, you'd think a plane never landed safely," he said.

Kirsh is an expert on adoptions and although he specializes in infant adoptions, he's very familiar with the international process as well.

"There's a home study done to determine if the prospective parent is appropriate enough," he said. "There is counseling involved, which is particularly important for a number of reasons. A person who adopts must learn they would love an adopted child as much as they would love a child who was theirs naturally.

"In an international adoption, it's particularly important to discuss what it means to bring an orphan into your home. These children have been in an orphanage and they're older. There can be issues with attachment and bonding.

"But there are many, many more success stories than not."

Chuck Morris agrees. The Bedford County resident and his wife, Amy, adopted their son Morgan from Taiwan almost two years ago. The process took years, tears, travel and money, and if he had the money, he said he would do it all over again.

"We have several friends we've made on the message boards and Facebook who also adopted," said Morris. "Some of their kids are slow to develop -- and that's what they tell us can happen."

He said environmental and nutritional issues in the early development years can factor in the child's development. One couple's child may be autistic -- bu

t he's still their child, Morris stressed.

It's like having your own baby," he said. "You get what you get. You don't know what you're having, if it's going to be special -- they're all special, and special to us."

Although all of the details about the Hansen case aren't known yet, both men were concerned with what they had heard.

"With this woman, I don't know her and it is conjecture, of course, but it would seem to me that something was missed. She wasn't counseled on the bonding or given the right tools to handle it or something in her background was missed," said Kirsh. "Once an adoption is finalized, for all intents and purposes in the eyes of the law, that child is the legal child of the parents. Sending him back to Russia -- you just can't do that."

There are many alternatives and resources for parents having problems with their adopted child said Felicia Burke, a Shelbyville native now living in Murfreesboro. She should know -- she has two adopted children, both of whom are autistic. She is also in the process of adopting another child, also autistic.

And Russian.

The child's original adoptive family also had problems dealing with him, she said, but since he has joined her family, he has settled right in.

"I can understand how difficult it can be, how overwhelming," said Burke, who is a behavior analyst. "I have a tremendous amount of expertise resolving behavior issues and for someone who doesn't, I can understand how overwhelming it can be.

"However, once a child comes into our home, our perspective is, regardless of what happens, this is our child and we'll see it through."

Burke said the DCS, while not involved in international adoptions, can be used as a source of assistance once the adoption is final.

"There are many, many, many alternatives to what she did; it was such a bizarre choice," she said.

Hansen reportedly said in the letter she sent with the child that the child was mentally unstable and she had not been told of his condition. Morris said with his adoption experience, they were given access to Morgan's medical records before even meeting him.

"Based on the medical records they sent us, we could have decided not to take the child," said Morris.

Another report said she only met with him four days before bringing him home.

"It doesn't matter if it was four days or four weeks, when you change the environment, it's going to take time. He's been in an institution and probably fending for himself for years," said Morris.

Morris said there are many resources available for parents experiencing difficulties with their children, helping both them and the parents adjust.

Kirsh said there are four main types of adoption, all of which can benefit parents in one way or another.

"I suggest people who are considering adoption look at all types," he said. "If they want to save a a life, an international adoption is the way to do it. If they want to save a teenager's life, DCS, Department of Children's Services, is the best way. If they want an infant adoption, they can go through an agency or a private attorney.

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Story URL: <http://www.t-g.com/story/1625499.html>