

THE ADOPTION OPTION

The cost of private adoption varies tremendously, depending on the complexity of the case, the location of the child and a host of other factors. Fees for a lawyer's services are normally charged on an hourly basis; added to this may be disbursements to a social worker, a psychologist, foster parents, etc. It is wise to discuss billing practices with your lawyer at the outset so that there are no painful surprises.

INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

Many foreign service personnel have adopted a child while on posting abroad. The availability of children and the ease and manner in which an adoption can be carried out at various posts is a subject too vast to be dealt with in this article. The following comments relate only to international adoption initiated in Canada.

Procedure

The first step in any adoption is to contact a social worker, indicate your interest in international adoption, and request that a home study be done. Some prospective adoptive parents have identified a country from which they wish to adopt and may even have useful contacts to help expedite the process at the other end. Others may have no preconceived ideas as to the origin of their child. Regardless of the situation, the next step should be to contact the Adoption Desk of Health and Welfare Canada.

The Adoption Desk was established in 1975 to provide coordinative and consultative services to the provinces and territories in the areas of interprovincial and international adoptions. When a country wishes to place children in Canadian homes, the



From left to right, Michael, Mehari, Valita and Natalie Ohlsen. Mehari is from Ethiopia, the others from Guyana.

Adoption Desk works with the child welfare authorities in that country to develop appropriate policies and procedures. In this way, the Desk is able to establish on-going international adoption programs.

Such on-going programs are presently in place with Korea, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Brazil and El Salvador. A program with St. Vincent is being explored and will hopefully develop in the months to come.

It is important to note that assistance from the Adoption Desk is not restricted to persons wishing to adopt from the countries mentioned above. Applicants wishing to adopt from any other country may be registered with the Adoption Desk by the child welfare authority in their province. The Desk works with both the province and the foreign agency to make the necessary arrangements for the adoption and to help ensure that all the requirements of both countries are met.

The manner in which the adoption proceeds varies considerably with the country involved. In some cases, the country insists that a local lawyer be involved; other countries will deal with none other than our Adoption Desk on a country-to-country basis. Under some arrangements, the adoption (and subsequently the change in citizenship) takes place in Canada. In other cases, the adoption is completed in the country of origin (e.g. Haiti). (It is sometimes recommended that the adoption be legalized in Canada as well, as the word "adoption" does not have the same connotation of finality in some cultures, and birth parents may retain some rights of access under their laws.)

Requirements of applicants also vary according to the country. Most countries with which Canada has ongoing programs prefer married couples; two countries will accept single applicants. Some countries have age restrictions. The availability of children also varies: as one would expect, the more flexible the adoptive parents are in their criteria as to sex, age and health, the more quickly the application will be processed. The waiting period can be anywhere from two months to two years for those countries with which we have ongoing programs.

Cost

Costs also vary widely. A home study in Ontario is approximately \$350; the services of the Adoption Desk are free of charge. Countries of origin charge a nominal processing fee, if the adoption is done under one of our programs; in other cases, lawyers' fees may be involved. The major costs involved are usually the travel expenses of the adoptive parent(s), or escort, and the child.

The total cost of a straightforward adoption from the Philippines, done through the Health and Welfare Adoption Desk, was approximately \$3 000. This included the home study, Philippine placement fees, air tickets for one parent and child, and the services of a lawyer to finalize the adoption. Accommodation in Manila was very kindly provided by friends, so the cost of a one- to two-week stay in the country of origin would have to be added to this amount. (Please note that this figure does NOT include the shopping spree in Hong Kong en route!)



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