The Adoption Underworld

Who wants to buy a baby? Certainly not most people who try to adopt internationally. And yet too often that’s how their dollars and euros are being used.

The idea that the developing world has millions of healthy infants and toddlers in need of new homes is a myth. In poor countries as rich ones, healthy babies are rarely abandoned or relinquished—except in China, with its one-child policy. The vast majority of children who need adoption are older, sick, disabled or being used.

In-country facilitators, including orphanage workers, nurses, police officers, village officials and even family members are selling children, hiding the children and paying off adoption officials for clean identity papers.

Corrupt officials can name in enormous fees from in-country facilitators for each set of documents.

U.S. adoption agencies pay in-country facilitators to take infants from their parents, often not in the children’s papers.

Parents pay adoption agencies $8,000 to $40,000, or 10 times the local per capita income, for each referral.

Parents pay adoption agencies $8,000-$40,000 for in-country facilitators to search for infants and toddlers. They pay $10,000-$12,000 for in-country facilitators to search for infants and toddlers.

The orphans manufacturing chain

The Money

The orphan manufacturing chain is not limited to infants and toddlers. In 1999, Songkea was 9 or 10 years old. She lived with her British-born, Irish aid worker in Siem Reap, Cambodia. The mother had seven natural-born children, but the adoption facilitator, Galindo, believed there was an eighth. Six years later she was adopted by a family in Holland.

Meanwhile, Judith Mosley, who was living in France with her husband and children and waiting word about a pending adoption, got a call from Lynn Devis at Friends International Adoption, which Devis ran with her sister, Lauren Gaddis. Devis told Mosley to go to Phnom Penh and meet Galindo, the adoption facilitator. There, Mosley was told, she would have to go to Saipan with her husband and children and await word about a pending adoption. Mosley says Galindo’s promises—instantly going with the girl to see the Saipan orphanage where she had lived—made her want to go.

Once out of the orphanage, the girl gave the test driver directions to her family’s house. There Mosley learned that Songkea had a family, although she believed that they had knowingly given up her for adoption.

Out of Cambodia

Just before Mosley and Songkea, now to be named Camryn, boarded the plane back to Saipan, Galindo handed Mosley the adoption paperwork. It said that Songkea had been living in the orphanage for four years and had chosen to give up her baby for adoption. She continued to believe, however, that Camryn’s family had chosen to give her up and that Galindo had simply muscled the documentation. In December 2005, following a tip from a former executive at Friends International Adoption and the human rights group and the Phoenix Peak Post that exposed buying and abduction through Galindo’s adoption operations, as well as others, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service halted adoptions from Cambodia and began its own criminal investigation.

Of course, not every internationally adopted child has the same story. The adoption process continues today. In 2004, Galindo pleaded guilty to federal charges of conspiracy to commit visa fraud and money laundering from her role in arranging the adoptions of Cambodian children such as Songkea. She was sentenced to 10 months in prison and also ordered to forfeit more than $1.4 million in proceeds of the conspiracy. She was held in a halfway house in Florida, supervised by U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. Her parole was revoked in 2007.