

CHILDLINK

A publication of Dillon International, Inc.

Making a Better Life for Families and Children Around the World Since 1972

Summer 2007

My Life-Changing Journey

By Lisa Anderson Mehta



I was adopted at five-months-old and for most of my life I have been thinking about my birth mother.

Did I have her eyes, her long arms, her prominent cheekbones, her broad shoulders? I love my parents very much but I always wondered whom I looked like. I longed for that sense of belonging.

In 2004, I contacted Dillon International for the basic information about my birth family. I received a letter explaining the circumstances of my birth, my birth parents' ages and names and where they lived when I was born. I read the letter and put it away because that was all the information I was ready for at the time. (I had really hoped for a photo, though.) The letter also stated that my birth mother did not leave her identification number so the chances of finding her were slim.

In January 2006, my husband, Hemang, and I began to discuss starting a family. We decided that it would be great to travel to South Korea to see my birth country. This prompted me to try to contact my birth mother.

I contacted Duk Kyung at Dillon with my request. She was very careful not to give me any false hopes, cautioning me we had very little information to work with. For two months, I thought of the many possible outcomes but tried not to get too hopeful. Then one day, Duk Kyung left me a voicemail message regarding the status of my birth family search; her tone of voice was unrevealing. I took a few hours to call her back because I

was expecting her to tell me that the search was inconclusive. All of my life, I believed the idea of finding my birth mom was a possibility. Now, fearing this possibility would be shattered, I definitely could wait a couple of hours to hear that news. I called her back while I was driving, and to my tremendous surprise, Duk Kyung said they had located, and talked to, my birth mother!

I remember this day so clearly. I was driving, crying and smiling all at the same time. Duk Kyung said my birth mom was in shock and was ambivalent about meeting me. The only person who ever knew she had been pregnant was her mother, who had passed away, and a distant relative. She suggested I write my birth mom a letter and send her photos. I wrote a very compelling letter and gathered the cutest pictures I could find. She was convinced.

I met my birth mother on July 4, 2006. When I walked into the room, she got up, hugged me and started to sob. She cried so hard that I was actually comforting her. I was surprised by her emotion-filled reaction. It was difficult to absorb the fact that I was hugging my BIRTH MOM! We sat down and she immediately started telling me about the circumstances leading up to my adoption. I was very relieved and pleasantly surprised at her openness because I didn't have to ask any questions. The whole time she was stroking and squeezing my hand. I, on the other hand, was looking at her thinking, "I don't look like this Korean woman." I had spent all of my life trying NOT to look Korean and didn't realize that when I saw her for the first time that I would actually feel more American.

I was very relieved to see that we did have similar features. We have the same cheekbones, eyes, broad shoulders, nose and hands. One of my biggest fears was that I would look more like my birth father than my birth mother and since I do not know where he is, I wouldn't find that sense of belonging.

After an hour or so, our husbands came into the room. My birth mother gave Hemang a big hug. Her husband, Hemyung, hugged me as well. He was extremely supportive and accepting of Hemang and me. He told me that my birth mother cared for his mother for twenty years and is a very hard worker and wonderful wife. This was his way of paying her back for her kindness and dedication. I thought that was so touching. Hemyung then proceeded to talk to us like our father, telling us to be good to each other, work hard and support each other.

Afterwards, he asked if I would accept him as my Korean father. That blew me away. For the previous couple of days, we had heard stories about how important bloodline is in the Korean culture. I thought he was going to sit there passively, yet politely, while my birth mother and I "caught up."

The biggest surprise I received was when they gave me their beautiful 24-karat gold wedding necklace with a pendant and

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Congratulations

To the following families on their



India – Zane Wesley Harris (TN)



Korea – Min Hee Gotham-Johnson (MO)



China – Layla Cheng Xi Loll (VA)

A Daughter from China

Tony and Cinda DeCicco
Tom and Tammi Gregg
Marc and Tia Houghton
Clayton and Connie Johnson
Kevin and Tammy Loll
Tim and Jodie Lund
Frank and Hayley Lundien
Philip and Jill Massirer
Adam and Kim McGinness
Philip and Cynthia Porter
Keith and Judy Ross
Claire Slater



India – Jaya Ranae Debsila Cooper (PA)



Korea – Jordan Jee Hoon Kim (CA)



A Son from China

Marty and Barb Bosch
Fred and Barbara Higgs
Phil and Jennifer Wylie

A Daughter from Guatemala

Tim and Martha Ford

A Son from Guatemala

Tim and Martha Ford
Jim and Kasie Brinson



Korea – Taggart Chase Veteto (AR)



Guatemala – Zeke Brinson (IN)

Vietnam – Maile Noel Thuy Carlson (TX)



Vietnam – Ralph Lucas Khang Kennedy (OK)



India – Jay Arthanari (AZ)



China – Isabella Grace Bosch (KS)



Vietnam – Sera Elizabeth Rust (SD)

IONS
recent arrivals!

A Daughter from India

Peter and Melissa Cooper
Gautam and Mou Ganguly
Nathan and Stephanie Hopkins
Krishna and Missy Konijeti
Luke Kramer and Ellen Korenblat
BK and Sheri Kumar
Shane and Grace McMahan
Ed and Resha Oliphant
Patrick and Amanda Phillips
James and Lynda Stanley
Jason and Kristi Werre

A Son from India

Lenin and Anila Arthanari
Pushpinder and Sheri Beasley
Ken and Kandi Harris
Ed and Resha Oliphant

A Daughter from Korea

Chad and Letizia Duncan
David Johnson and Heather Gotham
Kelly and Waynette McKay
Charlie and Tricia Morgan
Brian and Heather Nothnagel

A Son from Korea

Bob and Youl Soo Kim
Sean and Kimberly Peck
Bill and Karla Rodgers
Steven Roth and Thai-Lan Tran
Paul and Carrie Taylor
Jeremy and Kristin Veteto

A Daughter from Vietnam

Don and Kim-Lan Carlson
Tim and Rachel Rust

A Son from Vietnam

Mike and Carla Kennedy
Jason and Heather Willis

Heritage Camp: A Family Celebration

By Karin Price

Dillon's heritage camps are all about celebrating our wonderfully diverse families and the divine plan God has for each life. Our camps offer encouragement to adopted children by allowing them to foster an appreciation for their birth heritage while experiencing a sense of belonging with fellow adoptees and positive mentoring from older adoptee counselors.

Everyone can benefit from these celebrations—parents, adoptees, siblings, extended family, the ethnic community and adoption community—because this is fun with a purpose!

Through games, language, music, art, food and crafts, campers between the ages of four (*by May 1, 2007*) and 12 years will be immersed in their birthland's culture. Family Night will allow campers and their families to enjoy time together through swimming, canoeing and watching a movie under the stars. Volunteers are the driving force behind the success of our camps – volunteer parents, adoptees, Dillon staff and the local ethnic community. Parents and teenagers who would like to participate in making this year's camps a success as camp volunteers or teen counselors are encouraged to contact Elaine@dillonadopt.com.

Adults in every stage of the adoption journey will also benefit from this year's summer parent education workshops held during camps. All workshops are \$10 each.

Check this issue's Bulletin Board for dates and times.

- **Post-Adoption 101**— *talking to your child about adoption and race*
- **Keeping in Touch Luncheons**— *cook a simple traditional meal together*
- **A Different Kind of Adoption Blessing**— *raising a child with special needs*
- **Post Adoption: The Answers Are Here**— *a panel shares tools every adoptive parent needs*
- **Culture Classes to Learn About Your Child's Heritage**
- **My Story**— *learn from an East Indian adult adoptee's story*
- **Lifbook: A Tool for Positive Development**
- **Korea: Then and Now**— *Karin Price's compelling story about living in Korea during the 1960's with her missionary parents before later becoming a social worker for Dillon in the 1980's.*
- **Dillon International Adoptions During the 70's, 80's, and early 90's - what You May Not Know**

Contact Esther@dillonadopt.com to request a workshop brochure or download one at www.dillonadopt.com by clicking on "parenting seminars" under the Education Center's drop-down menu. Check out this issue's Bulletin Board for dates and times.

So Come Join Us This Summer!

Sure, you can cook, color, and dance almost anywhere this summer, but heritage camp has a unique way of blending all of these activities into educational experiences that will impact both you and your child for a lifetime.





Slaymaker Family (Korea), OK



Alex Marshall Woo Burton (Korea), AR



Jae Hong Kim with his new daughter, Ella (Korea), TX



Bailey Family (China), TN



Best friends Jared Coffey (MO) and Kira Peck (OK) both from Korea



Kraehemann siblings – Stephanie, Alissa, Ben, Matthew, and Nathan (Korea), TX



Katia Magalnick (Haiti), NH



Maya and Aleigha Schnable (Korea), MO



Maya Kumar (India), MN



Rocco Willis (Vietnam), SC



Baylee Fowler (Korea), TX



Jedna Magalnick (Haiti), NH



Hannah Marie Nix (China), MO



Kristin Reis (OK) with her decorated "Mr. Banana" from this year's Guatemala Heritage Weekend



Gentry siblings (Korea), OH

Memorable Moments



Rami



F. Marion Mann, IV (Korea), AL



Jade and Chae Ward (Korea), TX



Stow Neilson (Ukraine), TX



Jules and Keegan Craddock (Korea) with big sis Lindsay, TX



Wald Family (Korea), TX

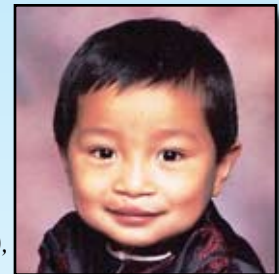


Korean adoptee Kari Lyn (Karsjens) Loeser with her husband John on their wedding day, CA

“Go after a life of love as if your life depended upon it -- because it does.”
 --I Corinthians 14:1



Holt Family (Korea), TX



Simon Walrod (China), KS



Free Family (Korea), OK



Lauren Bauman with her younger brother Parker (Guatemala), OK



Noah and Zoe Titony (China), OK

First Birthday Celebrations



Birthdays are a special celebration of life worldwide. In the United States, joyous songs and gooey birthday cake celebrate the fun of turning one year old. The Chinese wish their one-year-olds a long and prosperous life with gifts of money and a lunch of noodles. Indian children mark their birthdays with new clothes and chocolates. In Vietnam, the Tet celebration of the New Year is also a nationwide birthday celebration. Birthdays present a fun opportunity for adoptive families to share some of the traditions of their child's birth country. Here's how one Dillon adoptive family honored their son's Korean heritage with a Tol party:

Our son's Korean heritage is extremely important to us, and we wanted to honor it with a traditional celebration for his first birthday, called *Tol*. A baby's first birthday is an important celebration because it marks the first milestone in the cycle of life. An equally important birthday will be his 60th when he completes a full cycle of the Korean calendar. Also, since we did not have a birth event to celebrate, we felt that this ceremony was a wonderful way to have friends and family welcome our son into our lives.

The traditional celebration of *Tol* always has four major components: 1) giving thanks through prayer and toasts; 2) wearing traditional birthday clothes called *Tol-bok*; 3) preparing a table for *Tol-jabee*, a special event to foretell the child's future; and 4) sharing food and hospitality with guests and neighbors. Although *Tol* could be celebrated at home, we decided to rent the banquet hall at a local Korean restaurant. We did this because we wanted our families and friends to eat delicious Korean food (which we don't know how to cook yet) and the restaurant staff had experience setting the table and preparing the menu. Special foods for *Tol* include over 12 different kinds of rice cakes (*ddeok*), although we only had a few. Our favorite was *mujigae-ddeok* (rainbow colored steamed rice cake). We also enjoyed *miyeok-guk*, a traditional seaweed soup that is served at all birthdays and is supposed to give health. Many exotic fruits are also included in the ceremony, but since these are hard to find, the restaurant provided tasteful plastic stacks of fruit that were displayed in front of the *Tol* table.

One of the best parts of *Tol* was the colorful *hanbok* (called *tol-bok*). These dress clothes make the event quite spectacular. Outfits differ based on the child's gender, but both boys and girls wear a long belt that wraps around the body twice (*tol-ddi*) for longevity and a tol-pouch (*jumuni*) for luck. The outfit also includes a striped jacket (*jogori*), and traditional hat, socks, and shoes.

The *Tol-jabee* event was the highlight of the party. Our son sat at the *Tol* table so the guests could face him. We sat behind him, and behind us was a traditional screen (a formal picture of parents, child, and table is important). The table was arranged with a number of items, and the child's future is predicted according to what he or she touches. The child's father guides the child around the table. The first and second items the child grabs are most important. Traditional items include: a bow and arrow (the child will become a soldier), a needle and thread (long life), a jujube fruit (fertility), a book, pencil, or related items (scholar), rice or rice cake (wealth), a ruler, needle, and scissors (good with his/her hands), and a knife (cook/chef). We also included a few non-traditional items, and our son chose a musical recorder and a baseball. We look forward to having a musical short-stop in the family. It was wonderful to share this important event with our family and friends, and we will continue to honor our son's heritage with other Korean traditions. We learned much about the *Tol* event from www.lifeinkorea.com/culture/tol/tol.cfm

By David Johnson and Heather Gotham, proud parents of Han-Byeol Gotham-Johnson and new parents of Min-Hee Gotham-Johnson



continued from cover

beautiful 24-karat gold wedding necklace with a pendant and bracelet. They said that after a couple of years of marriage they were going through some difficult financial times so they had to sell it. A few years later, they were more financially stable and were able to buy it again so it had a lot of meaning. I



was so honored and felt almost unworthy of this family heirloom. They have two sons, whom I did not meet, so I was their only daughter. I was speechless by the unconditional love I felt from both my birth mom and her husband.

After about two hours of translating, gift giving and crying, we went out for an errand and dinner. It was fun because it felt like a “family” outing. Hemyung and Hemang had their arms around each other and my birth mom and I did as well. We couldn’t communicate with each other with words but just walking down the street arm in arm conveyed more feelings than words could ever explain. On the way to dinner, I kept sneaking peaks of our reflection in the windows and mirrors to remind myself that we looked alike.

Throughout dinner, my birth mom kept feeding me food. Every time I looked away from my plate, she would put some food on my spoon. It was a little awkward but I indulged her.

We said goodbye to them and gave them a hug and a big thank you. We even made plans to meet again after our trip to Busan. From what I could tell, they were caring people. I did not realize how much relief it would give my birth mom to see that I was healthy and happy. She told me how guilty she had felt and that she thought of me every day but couldn’t talk to anyone about it. She had only told her husband about me two months before we actually met. I am so glad that he has forgiven my birth mother and accepted me as his “daughter.”

After all those years of thinking about her and wondering what she looked like, the reality of meeting my birth mother is still sinking in months later. I think it was the right time in my life for me to meet my birth mom.



This was more than just a vacation to Korea, my birthplace, it was a quest to fill in the blanks, and search for my identity.



Did you know... your work day can add precious minutes to this little one's life?



If your employer offers a workplace giving campaign, then you have real power right at your fingertips to effect lasting change in a homeless child's life. You can give a child time to receive life-saving medicines or surgery...time to heal...time to learn...time to laugh...time to play...time to grow up.

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It's that simple.

And what a gratifying way to put new spring in your step as you head out the door for work!



Spotlight on Success: Todd Jere Harper

By Susan Serrano

Todd Jere “T.J.” Harper’s passion for music led him on a journey to discovering his Korean heritage.

The 33-year-old conductor and classically trained tenor recently traveled with a University of Southern California musical group on a concert tour to Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea.

In 1976, T.J. was adopted from Korea, at age two, by Jere and JoAnn Harper of Redondo Beach, Calif. He grew up with a sister and three brothers who were also adopted.

While on the musical tour of Korea, T.J. had the opportunity to explore his birth country with his Korean born wife, Connie Kim, and meet members of his wife’s extended family. He also visited Eastern Social Welfare Society and met his biological uncle and grandfather. He learned he had a biological aunt who lives in North Carolina, whom he now contacts regularly.

“I had been to Korea once before, about six years earlier, with a group of adoptees, but then, I just felt like a tourist. This time, it was much more significant. It was a very life changing two weeks for me,” T.J. recalled. “Discovering my heritage is still an ongoing process for me. It’s a very personal journey all adoptees have to go through.”

T.J. is currently a doctoral candidate for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Choral Music at the University of Southern California. He also works with the First United Methodist Church choir in Burbank, Calif., and the Melodia Sinica Community Choir in Northridge. “My love and passion for life . . . music . . . also happens to be my profession,” he said.

His wife is also a singer and musician. The couple met while performing in the California State University Choir in Northridge, where he received a master’s degree in choral conducting. “When we’re not singing and performing, we love to eat. My wife is a great cook. We also like to go hiking and camping,” T.J. added.

After he completes his doctorate, T.J. said he hopes to find a position with a university. “I love to teach.”

Editor’s Note: “Spotlight on Success” regularly features the achievements of Dillon’s adult adoptees.



Adoption Birth Searches

By Duk Kyung Um

A birth search is a personal, individual, and emotional process. It may take time for an adoptee, who is considering a search, to make the decision to contact the adoption agency to initiate the process. Ongoing emotional support is needed by the adoptee throughout the search process, and even after the birth family is located.

When adoptees meet their birth family, they usually want to hear directly from their birth parents why they made an adoption plan and what circumstances they faced at placement. When an adoptee was placed in overseas adoption and returns to his/her birth country, the language barriers and cultural differences are always a frustration to the communication efforts of both the adoptee and the birth parent. Because of communication and culture difficulties, the adoptee and the birth family may not feel an immediate connection with each other. It is recommended that adoptees get to know their birth family through an exchange of letters and pictures before meeting in person.

There are several reasons why an adoption search might not result in a reunion or contact with the birth family. These include:

- A lack of identifying information needed to locate the birth family
- Even though birth parents are located, they may not be ready to meet the adoptee.
- The adoptee may not be ready to make contact with their birth family once they are found, even though the adoptee initiated the search.

Adoptees’ questions can’t all be answered through a birth search; however, it will help them get more pieces of their life history or at least gain more understanding of their adoption. It is recommended that adoptees, who consider a birth search, talk to other adoptees who went through similar searches.

Dillon International offers adoption search services as part of its lifetime commitment to the children placed with adoptive families. To learn more, please visit our website at, www.dillonadopt.com/search.htm.

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