

Journey to Easter

Picture the situation: After a year and a half on the adoption waiting list, you have just received notice that your child is ready to be collected from a Korean orphanage. Within forty-eight hours you are on a plane headed for a foreign country. In Seoul you find the culture strange and confusing. You stay in a hotel. You know no one. You are allowed less than an hour with your child before departure. Your new daughter screams the whole time, seemingly traumatised by her first contact with a white person. Her foster mother looks at you warily. Through an interpreter she expresses her doubts. You are a first-time parent. Your confidence levels are shot. What is supposed to be a dream come true is a bewildering, stressful ordeal.

This was the experience of one couple, Mary Jo and Mark, who, after years of dealing with the heartache of infertility, chose the path of overseas adoption. Seeing the family together nearly a year later you would never guess at the 'hard yards' they have covered. Baby Alex is happy, relaxed, surrounded by love. Her parents glow with contentment. Family bonds have been forged. A beautiful dream has come true. But, like every journey to Easter joy, it has been by way of the Cross with all its challenges and sacrificial moments. Mary Jo recalls the final leg of that journey:

'The founder of the orphanage, Doctor Kim, came

to see Alex before she left. Apparently he says goodbye to every child that leaves the orphanage. While he gave Alex a blessing in Korean I placed her in the arms of her foster mother. I thought it was very important to do this. This woman was obviously grieving the loss of Alex and concerned by the child's distress.

'Back in my arms, Alex continued to scream. They say that children can sense the anxiety inside you. So I turned to my husband Mark, who is an extremely calm person, and asked him to carry her. It worked. Alex settled well with him. I believe I saw a calm come over her foster mother too. I dearly wanted to hold my daughter, but I knew this moment of departure was important for everyone – child, foster mother, doctor, us. My need to hold my daughter could wait.

'The return flight to Australia was hell. Alex cried the entire way. We walked her up and down the plane during the whole flight, but nothing would console her. We were the only white people on the plane and it was obvious to everyone what was happening. We felt so out of our depth. Nothing had prepared us for this. An Asian passenger offered to hold her for a while and I was grateful for the break.'

Thankfully, the stress of the adoption process is behind them now. Mary Jo and Mark revel in Alex's progress and happiness. Says Mary Jo, 'She has made us a family and filled a great hole

in our lives.' Alex has brought other gifts too. Her parents speak of their deeper appreciation of Asian peoples and the way their child has been a bridge between cultures. Since adopting Alex, Mary Jo and Mark now sponsor Korean children with special needs. 'It's our way of giving back to the Korean people the gift they gave us,' says Mary Jo. 'When we first faced infertility I never thought much about where God was in all this. But more recently I have been thinking that perhaps this has been God's path for us. We have we been put here and endured all this so as to be there for these Korean children.'

Mary Jo and Mark are now hoping to adopt a Korean brother or sister for Alex. •

