

Latrobe Bulletin

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AAFLC founder Mark Miller featured in TV movie

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For The Bulletin

Latrobe native Mark Miller was living in Texas when he saw a flyer about children taken by non-custodial parents and he wondered what "lost child" organizations do to recover them.

He learned that they are only resources that distribute information and take calls on a hotline.

After courts issue warrants in those parental kidnappings, there was little that law enforcement could or did do. And hiring a private investigator is too expensive for most parents.

"Somebody needed to do something," he said, "and my heart was compelled to do it."

In 1987, Miller founded the nonprofit American Association For Lost Children (AAFLC), and since then, he has recovered more than 160 children who were snatched by non-custodial parents.

One of the cases was made into a movie, "Taken From Me: The Tiffany Rubin Story," that will be broadcast at 9 p.m. Jan. 31 on Lifetime Television.

Late Friday, Miller learned that the movie will be followed by an 11 p.m. broadcast of a documentary on the real people involved in the case.

The story focuses on Tiffany Rubin, a public school teacher in Queens, N.Y., whose ex-husband took their 6-year-old son, Kobe Lee, for a visit, then disappeared with him. Rubin did not know where he was nor how to get him back until someone directed her to Miller, who had returned to his hometown and restarted AAFLC in 2005.



MARK MILLER

Miller learned that the boy was enrolled in a school near Seoul and arranged to go to South Korea with Rubin.

On March 26, 2008, they executed a high-stakes plan to get him out of the classroom, and fled to the U.S. Embassy until they could return to the United States.

Taraji Henson, who was an Oscar nominee for her role in "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button," plays Rubin. Miller is played by Terry O'Quinn, who was John Locke in the tv series "Lost."

Miller has not seen the movie nor the script.

"A writer met me in the office a year ago and we talked about the events and what happened," he said.

"They started writing it and I talked with the writer a few more

times and it kept going on for months. They are writing it from Tiffany's point of view because it is her story."

That story is not the only one that drew national attention. Miller's successful recoveries have been covered by *Reader's Digest*, *Life Magazine*, "Inside Edition," CNN's "Larry King Live," "Hard Copy," "A Current Affair" and numerous radio, television and talk shows, and local and national newspapers and magazines.

He has been written about in two books, *Unsung Heroes* by Janet Carroll Richardson, and *Thousands of Tears* by Maria Nicholas.

But he shrugs off the attention and usually doesn't read the articles until weeks after they are published. He doesn't always see broadcast coverage, either. What's most important to him is getting the children back home.

"It's always a custody issue," he said about the cases he works on. "The missing children are taken by parents not out of love. They are taken out of spite. The other parent wants to get even. When you hear the stories of the rescued children, you know that they have suffered."

Many times, they are kept out of school, their names are changed and they are brainwashed into believing that the custodial parent didn't want them, or is a bad person. Some of the cases involve grandparents, too.

"The children end up all messed up," Miller said. "They are behind in school, they are on the run or hiding, and in some

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cases they are physically abused or even sexually abused. That is so appalling, and it drives me to rescue more missing children."

Miller has no formal training as a private detective. The son of Russell and Irene Miller of Latrobe, he graduated from St. Vincent College in Unity Township in 1981 with a bachelor's degree in business management. He moved to Texas a year later and worked in the business world.

He learned how to track people on his own and has never charged any of the parents. Donations and fund-raisers (including holding car washes and selling 55,000 boxes of M&Ms) enabled him to recover children from all over the United States, Germany, Lebanon, Mexico and Korea.

Some of the recoveries are more easily pulled off, others play out like James Bond movies, and each story is heartbreaking in its own way. Sometimes children have been away for so long that they don't remember the parents who are looking for them.

In one case, the non-custodial father beat the mother so badly that when police responded, they drew chalk lines around her to mark the crime scene, thinking that she was dead. Miller was glad to play a part in that recovery and arrest.

"You hear of so many distraught situations," he said. "The parents need someone to bring

them hope and to go out and do something, and that happens to be me."

AAFLC is a Christian organization, Miller said, but his work knows no boundaries. He calls it a ministry, and he does what he does with a Christian heart of charity. He prays with the parents and prays for the children.

Miller expects the movie and documentary to bring more interest, and that, he knows, will bring more requests to find missing children. So he will be relying on volunteers and donations now more than ever.

He and Patricia Moore, AAFLC's financial director, and Shauna Vance, who helps with administration, are the only paid staff.

In the past, Bob Gale, now 85, was one AAFLC's most active volunteers and supporters, and still provides input and feedback on cases. Don Love, a private investigator from Florida, has donated his time in a number of cases, and a couple of the mothers whose own children were recovered go out on cases with Miller. Moore works on the road with him, too.

Volunteers can help in a number of ways, including consulting, doing research or actually going out on cases. There also is a need for fund-raising. For information: www.aafc.org or 724-537-6970. The office is located on Fred Rogers Drive in Unity Township.