

# One Man's Mission to Find Missing Children



Mark Miller is the founder of the [American Association For Lost Children](#). He helps parents locate and save their abducted children at no cost. When Tiffany Rubin's ex fled the country with her son Kobe in 2008, she turned to Mark. His investigative work, along with the help of a few others, resulted in Kobe's safe return to the U.S. If you're wondering how an ordinary citizen becomes a hero to families in need, read on.

Don't miss ["Taken From Me: The Tiffany Rubin Story."](#) the movie based on the real-life rescue of Kobe.

## How did you get involved in Tiffany Rubin's case?

Her sister-in law emailed me and I called her back, then a day or two later spoke to Tiffany. She thought Kobe might be in South Korea, but he could have been anywhere. I told her that I'd be glad to try to help her. We talked more about why she thought he could be in South Korea and I told her I'd never been there, but at that point I just wanted to find out where he was and then eventually figure out a way to get him out. I love talking to parents, comforting them and encouraging them, and not to give false hope, but to let them know I'll do the best I can to help.

## When a parent calls for help how do you begin the difficult process of determining where the kids are located?

Well, it's a long a process. When someone calls me, I make sure that the parent searching for the child has custody. Then I ask if the child is registered with law enforcement on NCIC, which is National Crime Information Center, so that they are listed in the system as a missing child. There usually needs to be a felony charge against the abductor. In some cases it starts out as interference with child custody or third degree kidnapping; if they cross state lines it could be an FBI warrant or international warrant. If a parent calls and the child is not registered or there is no warrant, I will help them with the right steps to take. Sometimes a parent doesn't even have custody yet, so I will encourage them to file for emergency custody. If it's an international case there is paperwork that needs to be certified from the Secretary of State.

I spend quite a bit of time on the phone with the parent because they are usually distraught and have exhausted their means. I will encourage them and pray with them on the phone. We start from the beginning about what happened, what's been done with the case, family members' information so I can look them up on the computer. Then we begin investigative work.

## It sounds incredibly complicated. How do you know how to navigate the legal system and the boundaries of law enforcement here and internationally?

It's by the grace of God. Years ago, I didn't know much about it, but in my heart I wanted to help parents. When I found out that other groups [for lost children] were just resource centers, I wanted to make a difference and actually help the parents. I've become educated by learning from others and there is an attorney on our board; I've known him for almost 20 years and he gives me legal advice. I've also worked with a private investigator from Texas who is 80 years-old now and he taught me a lot. I've just continued to learn and grow by experience.

## Have you ever found yourself in a dangerous situation while trying to rescue a child?

Yes, I have. I've been to Mexico several times and there were a couple times when we were not successful. I was jailed for about 16 hours. We didn't even get the child.

Even in this country, it's obviously safer, but you still have abductors that are not happy. In one case, the abductor

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happened to be involved in drugs, which I didn't know at the time. We did surveillance and told the police where he was, and the police arrested him and put him in jail. We rescued the child, but somehow the abductor got out of jail and called me and said he wanted to beat me up. I told him, "Look, I didn't put the warrant out for your arrest. I am just following the law." Same thing happened with a case in Germany, when the abductor called the mother and left a message that he was going to come to the U.S. and kill me.

## **So you work in partnership with law enforcement in the U.S. by doing the investigative work on your own, but calling them to make the arrest?**

We'll do all the hands-on investigative work and locate where the child is. We have volunteers that help with that. Once we've found them, we will notify the authorities and they will verify the felony charge. Sometimes we'll go with them to the house or stay a block behind or back at the station. They're thankful that a criminal was found and that a child was reunited with their rightful parent. We lay it out for them and tell them where to find the child that's missing.

In another country it's a little different because sometimes we don't have that cooperation from law enforcement.

## **In the case of Tiffany Rubin, you first had to confirm that Kobe was in South Korea. What was the next step in executing the rescue?**

We received a message from an anonymous contact that said Kobe was at a specific school and was being bullied, that he was not eating well and didn't know the language, was being picked on because of his race, and a number of other things. We wanted to make sure that the anonymous tipster was not setting us up, so we verified that. I asked a gentleman named Baz to help me on the case and we all flew to South Korea. It was a matter of meeting with the anonymous man and we went by the school to see if Kobe was at the school and to devise a plan to get him. We found out what classroom he was in, and we knew that Tiffany could go into the school and maybe just say hi to him in the hallway and slowly we would get off the school grounds and get a taxi and then we had a plan to get our stuff and go to the embassy and then get out of the country.

## **How long did you spend surveying the school and waiting for the right moment to take action?**

We arrived in the evening and got together around ten. Then we met in the morning around six and we spent the majority of the day at the school until around noon or one o'clock. Then we went back to the school and made a [practice] run to the embassy to see how long it would take to get from the school to the embassy. I had the embassy address translated. We planned to take the taxi from the school to a few blocks away from the hotel so they wouldn't know exactly where we were going, so I got a business card from a business near the hotel to tell the taxi driver where to take us. The next morning we went to the school early to watch Kobe go into the school to make sure he was there that day.

## **You had only about a day and a half of preparation in South Korea before the rescue?**

Exactly.

## **When you're in that scenario in a foreign country, and a lot is at stake and you're about to implement a plan, what are you feeling? Nerves? Adrenaline? Calm?**

The adrenaline is flowing. It's excitement and a little nervousness and anticipating the excitement of a parent finally getting to see their child. There is joy, but a lot of that is restrained because we're not back on American soil yet, so we're cautious. It's all those feelings.

## **How many rescues have you carried out since you started your organization?**

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Approximately 130 missing children have been rescued. Out of the country is more difficult; twice Germany was successful and Lebanon, three or four times in Mexico was successful and of course South Korea. It's difficult because there is customs, immigration, getting over the border.

## **How can the viewers watching the movie and reading about your work help in the effort to rescue abducted children?**

Somebody might be able to help in investigations. People can get involved in networking; maybe they have fundraising skills or sales. We have some volunteers, but we're trying to grow so we can go on more cases and train teams to go.

We operate strictly on donations, so that's another way to help. And we work with an energy company in Texas, Georgia and Pennsylvania, where if individuals switch their electricity through our charity, they save money and the energy company gives us a little money each time the customer pays their bill. It helps us and helps the person save money.

## **How many people are currently on your staff?**

They are three of us that are paid staff, but we have a number of volunteers. There have been some families that we've helped and then they help us with new cases.

## **Is there a lesson you hope people will learn from the Tiffany's story and the work you do with missing children?**

I want the public to realize that when a child is taken by one parent, they are not taken out of love. They are taken out of spite and the child suffers. We're dealing with child abuse in many forms, this is a form where they are brainwashed.

A lot of times people want to get involved and they may think they don't have the talent, but every little bit helps and anybody can call us and volunteer in any way. Our organization gets results finding missing children and we want to continue this endeavor and we need people's help. We're looking for ideas to help us grow.

*To donate, volunteer and learn more about the AAFLC, visit [www.aafc.org](http://www.aafc.org).*

<http://www.mylifetime.com/movies/taken-from-me-tiffany-rubin/article/mark-miller-aafc-interview>

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