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Family gets son back with Latrobe agency's help

By Chris Foreman
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A Latrobe missing-persons agency helped a New York woman reunite this week with her 7-year-old son, whose noncustodial father allegedly kidnapped him in August and moved to South Korea.

In this undated family photo supplied by the Rubin family, Kobe Lee, left, joins his mother, Tiffany Rubin.

Mark Miller of Latrobe, founder of the American Association for Lost Children, took the 15-hour flight from New York on Easter Sunday with the mother, Tiffany Rubin, after getting information from an anonymous source that Kobe Cason Lee was with his father, Jeffrey Lee, in a town near Seoul.

By Wednesday evening, Rubin and her son landed at John F. Kennedy International Airport after the tip led Miller and Rubin to the school Kobe was attending.

"I just wish I could have seen (Jeffrey Lee's) face when he went to pick up Kobe at school and he was gone," said Christopher Rubin, Kobe's stepfather.

The FBI in New York obtained a federal arrest warrant for Lee in September after he failed to return the boy to his mother in Queens after a court-authorized two-week summer visit.

Lee, also known as Jeffrey Salko and Kang Shik Lee, was facing a potential prison term because he allegedly had been delinquent on child-support payments, the Rubins said.

Despite the warrant, law enforcement agencies can be limited financially in efforts to recover an abducted child taken to a foreign country, Miller said.

Under the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, the United States has a treaty relationship with more than 50 countries to return abducted children, but South Korea has not signed on as a party.

According to an April 2007 report, the State Department assisted in the return of 260 children abducted to or wrongfully retained in other countries between October 2005 and September 2006.

Rubin's sister-in-law learned last fall about the American Association for Lost Children's record of returning more than 120 missing children since 1987 after other organizations said they couldn't participate in a rescue mission.

"It was such a relief, because the message you get from the other agencies is, 'We're restricted in what we can do,'" Tiffany Rubin said. "It was such a relief to hear someone say, 'What can I do to help you get your child back?'"

Although Miller and Rubin were aided on the trip by Bazzel Baz, a former Marine and CIA agent from California, the reunion wasn't as dangerous as some of Miller's trips to Mexico, Germany and Lebanon.

Miller and a colleague once were imprisoned for 16 hours in Mexico for suspicion of kidnapping the abducted child they were trying to rescue.

Rubin, a fifth-grade special education teacher, said she approached Kobe's classroom Tuesday and called the boy's name. After Kobe came running outside, the boy's teacher recognized Rubin as his mother and let them talk outside while she returned to the classroom.

Kobe told his mother he was ready to go home, and they walked away.

"You just can't take a chance to ask, 'Can we take the boy?'" Miller said. "You just have an opportunity and you take it."

The U.S. Embassy in Seoul assisted Kobe by issuing a passport to allow him to return to America. The Rubins and Miller claim Lee forged an application to secure a passport for Kobe's flight to South Korea.

"At least we know we have some making up to do with Kobe," Christopher Rubin said. "He missed his birthday (in October). He missed Christmas. He'll have a lot of parties to look forward to."

Matthew Bertron, a spokesman for the FBI in New York, declined to comment specifically about Lee's criminal case, but said the agency generally does not stop pursuing a fugitive simply because he has fled to a foreign country.

In cases like Lee's, the agency works with Interpol and law enforcement officials in the foreign country to attempt to obtain a provisional arrest warrant there, he said.

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