

Missionary mom returns home with unexpected 'gift'

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c. 2012 Religion News Service (RNS) When Becky Morlock was asked to adopt a son from India, she said a prayer. Then she hired a lawyer.

More than four years and a long legal battle later, the one-time missionary has returned to the U.S. as a mom with her son Kyle, who was given to her as a newborn. He was just two days old when his birth mother surrendered him as she was discharged from a hospital in the foothills of the Himalayas.

That was the only time Kyle's two mothers met, and their meeting likely saved his life. It also tested adoption laws in two countries half a world apart.

International adoptions have become more difficult and less frequent with tightening laws aimed to curb child trafficking and adoption fraud. In the last eight years, numbers have dropped from a high of 22,991 in 2004 to 9,319 last year, according the U.S. State Department.

Most adoptions are arranged through licensed agencies. Morlock's situation was different: Kyle was a gift, given to her directly by his biological mother. His adoption did not involve India's Central Adoption Resource Authority, or CARA.

The case, which went all the way to India's Supreme Court, kept Morlock in a country she had never planned to visit for so long. Indian officials told her she needed to adopt Kyle in the U.S., while U.S. officials told her she needed to adopt him in India before she could return.

From Delhi, with the help of her Pennsylvania-based lawyer Anser Ahmad, Morlock was able to adopt Kyle via video-conference before a U.S. court.

"U.S. immigration does not really know how to handle cases that are not cookie cutter," said Morlock, 33. "Sometimes, it's been really, really discouraging because

it's like one thing after another. We have had so many obstacles."

But, looking back now, Morlock said, "I know this was God's plan."

Morlock arrived in India in late 2007 from Millersburg, Pa., as a missionary under the sponsorship of an evangelical, nondenominational church in New Jersey. She wanted to work with poor and disadvantaged children, including those who are orphans or had been abandoned.

Four and a half years later, it was "very overwhelming" to be back in the states, Morlock said. "And it's pretty interesting going through all of this culture shock and jet lag with a 4-year-old," she added. "But we are so glad to be home."

Her parents, Wayne and Cindy Morlock, are relieved.

"It was a little stressful at times to think of our daughter in such difficult circumstances," Cindy Morlock said. But, "We were really trusting that she would follow God's lead."

The ordeal began about a month after Morlock arrived in India. It was her third mission trip to the country, and she had just turned 29. Unmarried and living in the remote area of Pedong, near Bhutan's western border, she had raised enough money to support herself for about eight months.

Morlock was there five weeks when she got the call -- on Jan. 14, 2008 -- that a boy had been born the day before to an unmarried Indian woman. The mother, who was Nepali by ethnicity and about the same age as Morlock, had concealed her pregnancy and could not return home with the newborn.

A Christian nurse in the Kalimpong hospital heard about Morlock through another Christian, and wanted to know: Would the missionary take the baby?

Morlock had one night to decide. She called her parents and her pastor, who was "instantly supportive." Her parents suggested she pray.

"Immediately, I just had peace about it, and I said, yes, of course," Morlock said.

In the hospital the next day, she found a malnourished woman trying to spoon feed warmed cow's milk to a naked and unbathed newborn. Wrapped in dirty rags, the baby weighed three and a half pounds.

"The instant I saw him my heart just opened up and I loved him immediately," said Morlock, who spoke with Kyle's birth mother through a translator. "I just assured her I would love him as my own."

Then they prayed together.

"She felt really horrible about the thought of abandoning him," Morlock said. "But she needed relief from her situation."

Kyle was two days old when Morlock became a single mother in a foreign country. She immediately contacted lawyers to help with the adoption.

"Every one of them was like, 'You can't do this. This is not possible. There's no way,'" said Morlock, who found a lawyer in the hills to draw up an affidavit of surrender, sending an emissary to get the birth mother's signature to make Morlock the baby's legal caretaker.

Unable to get further legal help in such a rural area, she left Pedong and moved to New Delhi so she would be closer to the courts. Still, it took months to find a lawyer to take the case.

While Morlock worked through the adoption process, which she said cost close to \$20,000, she and Kyle celebrated "Gotcha Day" each year on Jan. 15, the anniversary of the date their lives intertwined.

Legally unable to work in India, she was dependent on her New Jersey church, New Covenant Community Church. The congregation continues to support and raise money for her.

"Becky thought she was going to India to minister to street kids and mothers and just be a missionary," said Jon DeNick, pastor at New Covenant Community Church. "But when you look at the big picture, she was sent over there to save a life with Kyle directly."

Morlock returned to Pennsylvania in March and visited her New Jersey church in April. She's back home in Millersburg, planning to write a book about her experience.

"She's starting a brand new life," DeNick said, adding it was "mind-blowing" to finally meet Kyle in person. "We had seen him in pictures, and here he was, running around with the other children. It is an amazing story."