

Moving Heaven & Earth: A Personal Journey into International Adoption

Barbara U. Birdsey

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United States couples looking to a foreign land to adopt a child are likely to harbor some reservations after reading this book, which as the subtitle states, is one individual's personal account of international adoption. As a social worker for many years, as an adoptive parent of a baby girl from El Salvador in 1984, and as co-founder of an adoption agency dedicated to bringing U.S. parents and children in Central America, Mexico, and the Philippines together to form a new family, Birdsey thrusts readers into the frightening world of U.S. bureaucracy, foreign unrest and foreign systems of government, not to mention lawyers, adoption agencies and individuals whose actions the author asserts are driven more by money and personal gain than by the placement of needy children with couples longing to adopt.

The book opens with vigorous, no-nonsense narration before settling mostly into exposition by the author. At times, the book falls prey to melodrama, which is understandable given the subject matter. Chapter one is memorable. Birdsey and ex-priest and agency co-founder James S. McTaggart visit the children's ward of a hospital in San Mateo, Guatemala, where they discover twenty gaunt infants, some with open sores, casts, and swollen bellies, tiny survivors of a village destroyed by rebels. Readers learn of the chief doctor's distaste for Americans, her suspicions of American adoption agencies, and her awareness of rumors that children are "imported to the United States to be used as donors for organ transplants and then discarded like empty boxes." Without the doctor's approval for release of any infant for adoption, Birdsey and McTaggart return home emptyhanded, the author torn by the knowledge that the babies will not survive.

The book describes the seemingly endless paperwork Birdsey and her husband David faced in adopting their daughter Tamsin (they are the biological parents of two children); the author's nightmarish stay in El Salvador to take custody of several children for awaiting parents; her agreement to start an adoption agency with McTaggart; the red flags that signaled a couple's unsuitability for foreign adoption; the couple she trusted who caused turmoil for parents awaiting a Filipino child; and the case of a Ohio adoption agency that was ordered to cease business and pay on \$20,000 "for the restitution to victims."

This no-holds barred look at Birdsey's experiences in foreign adoptions can leave one exhausted, especially because of the lengthy text devoted to the Ohio case. In the preface, Birdsey states that to protect herself and others, "certain people and places in the book have been disguised with fictitious names and personal information."

This is a worthwhile book for people who want to know the advantages and disadvantages of foreign adoption.

DOROTHY GOEPEL (September / October 2000)

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