



From Abandonment to a Beautiful Life

I run an advertising and public relations company and count several of Georgia's leading companies as clients. While my work life is busy, I enjoy a respite of personal reflection when I write a quarterly check to Holt International, the adoption agency that helped place me with adoptive parents in the United States 43 years ago.

I was abandoned at four weeks old, discarded during a sweltering Seoul summer. I was left wearing only swaddling clothes with no note and no name. I had no identity. I was not entrusted to the care of any person or institution — just abandoned.

A passerby brought me to a courthouse, and from there I was taken to a recently established American orphanage, founded by Holt International. In 1954, Harry and Bertha Holt, a couple with six children of their own, adopted eight children orphaned by the Korean War. This act required Congress to pass special legislation. Two years later, Harry Holt traveled back to South Korea to set up an orphanage and adoption program, which proved my salvation.

I recently made the pilgrimage back to the country of my birth, envisioning a personal and cultural homecoming. Instead, I was greeted with disappointment when I realized the lack of records available concerning my early life. After some searching, a dusty four-inch thick binder was brought out, and there I was — a stark, one-line entry: "Four-week-old girl brought in August 28, 1959."

The poverty in the aftermath of the Korean War meant thousands could not adequately care for their children, prompting many to give away or abandon them. Female offspring were frequently judged a burden to their families and discarded. At best, a girl would be put to work as a maid or street cleaner, until she was old enough to be sold into prostitution.

I was shocked and appalled to learn of the prospects facing abandoned girls like me who remained in Korea in the 1950s. At the same time, I instantly felt a deeper appreciation for my family, lifestyle, education, professional career and America.

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Holt International intervened and saved me from the lowest career. Even that miserable existence would only have come to pass had I survived my infancy in Seoul. Lethal diseases ran rampant after the war, and effective medicines were hard to come by. The high levels of infant mortality meant I would have been lucky to survive, even inside the walls of the orphanage.

I am very fortunate in the life that I now lead. My professional world is demanding, yet being the boss allows me to balance the needs of my family and work. I find a tremendous amount of joy supporting my children and their activities. I also place millions of dollars in advertising for several retail and healthcare clients, and I'm a publicist for Barter Consultants International and CapSure. I feel lucky to have achieved the amount of personal and professional fulfillment I enjoy, something that would not have been possible had I remained in Seoul all those decades ago. 🌱

Deedra Hughes, owner of Hughes Media, lives in Atlanta with her husband and two children. For more on the orphanage and adoption program, visit www.holtinternational.org.