



[Home](#)

[Adoption Ministry](#)

[Waiting Angels](#)

[Child Relief Ministry](#)

[About Us](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Helpful Links](#)

First I would like to say that despite the unethical and illegal treatment we received by the Deputy Minister while in Liberia, we met many more wonderful Liberian people and government officials. Liberia is a wonderful country filled with mainly good, hard working, dedicated individuals. The politicians we worked with including the Honorable Representative Dr. Murray and the Liberian Speaker of the House were extremely compassionate to our plight while in Liberia and worked diligently for the law in the cases to be heard loud and clear. The whole experience was very surreal for me as I never dreamed that I would be making arguments to the man that sits in the same seat in Liberia as Nancy Pelosi sits here in the U.S.

Second, the Liberia law exonerated us of all implications of illegal behavior. You have to understand that there are two avenues in which adoptions can be processed in Liberia. The first is through an accredited adoption agency. The second is through private adoptions. Addy's Hope operates under the second provision. Accredited adoption agencies are licensed and monitored by the Deputy Minister. Private adoptions are not monitored or accredited by the Deputy Minister. So, you can imagine how much the Deputy Minister likes private adoptions. The only role the Deputy Minister plays in private adoptions is the issuance of case histories.

We were all called into the Speaker of the House's office on Wednesday. Those present included the Addy's Hope staff, the Deputy Minister, and representatives from WACSN and Angels Haven. I want to stop here and mention our extreme gratitude to Maria, the director of WACSN. Maria advocated on our behalf through this entire scenario. She is a huge champion for adoption in Liberia. I applaud her in our work in Liberian adoption and consider her a close ally in continued work in Liberia.

The Speaker reviewed all of our documents (court decrees,



relinquishments, case histories, etc . . .) one by one. He called the judge that granted each court decree and verified that they were legit court decrees. The judge indicated that they were.

The Speaker then turned on the Deputy Minister and questioned him regarding his involvement in our cases. He specifically asked him 3 times what legal involvement his office had in detaining us at this point. The Deputy Minister made excuses and said he could not answer. On the fourth time, the Speaker ordered him to answer the question. The Deputy Minister hung his head low and said that "no, his office did not have any legal basis in which to detain us".

The Speaker then told the Deputy Minister that he did not wish to force his hand on the issue, but he would rather the Deputy Minister reconsider his actions and withdraw his letters that were detaining us. Later that day, the Deputy Minister sent a letter to the U.S. Embassy and the Ministry of Defense (this is the ministry that would have detained us at the airport should we have tried to leave). The letter said that our children should be allowed to leave the country. I read the letter sent to the U.S. Embassy. It did not have a great deal of detail, just releasing us to leave the country.

I along with Pastor Wesley, Maria from WACSN, and Representative Murray then went to the Embassy to pick up our Visas. While we were there, we were able to have a meeting about our situation with Tom in the Consulars office and the Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy (I don't remember her whole name, but I think her first name was Brooks). After our meeting, Tom issued us our visas. I mention all of these details because the Deputy Minister has published an article in the Liberian Newspaper saying that we sneaked the kids out of the country. Rest assured that visas were issued by the U.S. Embassy, we were processed through immigration at the Monrovia airport by the Liberian government, and we each went through Immigration Customs at the Chicago Airport by the U.S. Government. As you know, if we were sneaking kids out, none of these steps would be possible.

We are glad to be home now, but please know the fight is not over. We as an agency are taking legal action against the Deputy Minister. I have authorized Pastor Wesley to hire an attorney to bring suit against the Deputy Minister for his actions. Please know that when I say bring suit against him, you can not think of this with 'American eyes'. We simply want to bring him to court so that a legal proceeding can be documented concerning the Deputy Minister's illegal actions.

As I am sure that this posting will circulate to other boards, and at many levels I hope it does, please know that this man, the Deputy Minister, is no friend of adoption. His motives are less than pure. Through out our many dialogues with this man, it became very clear that he is against adoption and very much in alignment with UNICEF which we all know is bad news for the international adoption community. In fact many of the people that work in his office are employed by UNICEF.

Some of the immediate concerns we have with the Deputy Minister as new guidelines for adoption are being developed by his office include the following: requiring adoptive families to live/cohabit with biological families for a time period of 3 weeks so that Americans can understand their culture; requiring a 3 week stay with the elimination of ALL escorting; requiring a monitored pre-adoptive visit by the adoptive parents--the way this was described was that adoptive families would have to make an additional trip to meet the child before the adoption decree could be issued. The visit would be monitored to insure that there is a fit between parent/child.

As I read the article that the Deputy Minister had published in Liberia, I think the most disturbing aspect is that he indicated he just wanted to verify that the biological parents were on board with the adoptions. He earlier in the week told us this as well. We asked then if he would meet with the biological parents. He agreed. We then sent for all of the biological parents from all over the country. Some of these people drove over 8 hours, some driving all night to make the appointment. When we got to the appointment, the Deputy Minister dismissed them and escorted them out of his office saying he would not meet with them after making a few brief comments. The biological parents were devastated, many crying, as all they wanted was a better life for their children. Many of the biological parents were still in Monrovia when we received our clearance--they were ecstatic to know we were given our clearance. It was such a humbling thing to see the trust these parents put in us to find loving forever homes for their children. Please understand that the biological families love their children dearly. Pastor Wesley and his staff does a wonderful job of counseling these parents about what adoption is. A document that you don't see is a pre-relinquishment form that Pastor Wesley completes with each biological family. In it, we go over every option with the families before they can relinquish their children. After all, the best thing for any child is to be raised first by their loving biological parents. If

that is not possible for whatever reason, adoption is a beautiful next option. Another thing you should know is that I met with each biological parent individually. I asked them each two questions. The first was "were you payed or coerced into relinquishing your child?" The second was "do you want your child back, because if you do, we will grant them back to your custody?" Each parent answered both questions no.

I hope this helps shed light on the experiences we had in Liberia. We were blessed with incredible families traveling with us. Again, I cannot thank Maria with WACSN enough for her advocacy on our behalf. I also credit Angels Haven for sending a representative as well.

As we continue to sort out these details, I'm sure we will have much more to share. Until then, know we are so thankful to be home and to the very faithful God that we serve.

John Petree  
President  
Addy's Hope Adoption Ministry

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