

Grandparents claim bragging rights for adopted children from overseas

October 30, 2009

HARRISONVILLE, Mo.—Wade and Nellie Paris of Harrisonville, Mo., know the blessings of adopting children of a different culture. Now they are grandparents to international adoptees.

In 1971, they adopted 7-month-old Susan from Korea. Then in 1975, they adopted another Korean girl, 5-year-old Sally. They also have two natural sons.

When son Scott and daughter-in-law Lori learned they couldn't have children of their own, they turned to adoption—a son from the Philippines and two Korean daughters.

Being adoptive grandparents has been a joy for the Parises, who saw their own parents as role models. “Our parents didn't have any fears about our adopting international children. We were older when our children were born. They (their parents) were happy we weren't having any more of our own,” Nellie Paris said, chuckling.

Although not all agencies require it, the adoption agency their daughter and son-in-law used required a statement from Larry and Carole Zahnd of Kansas City, Mo., during the process. “They require grandparents to state how they felt about it and if we could accept the child as an equal to a natural-born child,” Carole Zahnd explained.

Elizabeth and Tim Bergfeld adopted two Russian children through a South Carolina agency. “They discussed the option with us, and we were all for

them doing it," Zahnd said. And although geography separates the families, the Zahnds try to see them four times each year.

Both sets of grandparents believe they treat their natural and their adopted grandchildren equally and encourage other grandparents to do so as well. They encourage grandparents to avoid using adoption to explain away behavioral issues and to just treat them as children.

"As a practicing lawyer, I handle a lot of adoptions. ... You treat them as natural born. ... Try not to say, 'They're adopted,' as an excuse for their behavior," Zahnd said.

"Just love your children and grandchildren," Carole Zahnd added. "Don't make any distinction: just nurture them and love them."

The Parises agree. "We would encourage couples who are considering adoption and their parents," Nellie Paris said. "What you find out is children are children. Treat them as any other and make no distinction. They have all been a real joy to us."