

Queens mom finds her abducted 7-year-old son in South Korea

BY EDGAR SANDOVAL LEO STANDORA

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A Queens mom whose 7-year-old son was abducted by her ex-husband last summer returned home with the boy Wednesday night after snatching him from a South Korean school in an act of derring-do that would make James Bond proud.

"I'm so happy," said Tiffany Rubin, 30, her arm around son Kobe as they arrived at Kennedy Airport Wednesday night. "I thought I would never see him again. So this is all so amazing."

On hand to greet them was a welcoming party of family and friends, waving, jumping up and down, clutching balloons and cheering Kobe's name.

One youngster drew laughter when he shouted, "What took you so long, man?" only to have Kobe shrug, grin and answer, "I don't know, but I feel good."

The saga of Kobe and his mom began last August when his father spirited him off to South Korea after a visit at the dad's Brooklyn home.

Jeffrey Sako, a native of South Korea, had been battling Rubin over child custody since their divorce more than two years ago.

At first, Rubin, who teaches at Public School 166 in Queens, was at a loss for what to do.

"I didn't even know where in South Korea they were," she said.

Hiring a private investigator, who might charge up to \$100,000 for the job, wasn't possible on a teacher's salary. A federal fugitive warrant was issued for Sako, but authorities could do little else.

Rubin's sister-in-law Samantha Cason, 30, came to the rescue, hooking her up with the American Association for Lost Children, a nonprofit group that finds missing kids.

The association located Kobe in the town of Gamsil near Seoul, and sent Rubin and investigator Mark Miller there two months ago.

"We did a little surveillance," said the modest Miller, finding out where Kobe went to school and charting his schedule.

Tuesday morning they walked into the school and went to Kobe's classroom. Rubin told the teacher she wanted to talk with Kobe.

"She was a little reluctant to believe I was his mother, but Kobe recognized me and that changed her mind," Rubin said.

She said she took Kobe into the hallway, "acting as cool as I could," put a wig on him to disguise his short hair and walked out of the building.

Miller stayed behind for a while to run interference if needed. It wasn't, and mother and child made a clean getaway, stopping only to hug and kiss on the sidewalk.

"The whole time," said Rubin, "my heart was thumping like a drum."

Rubin, Kobe and Miller picked up their luggage at their hotel and then sought sanctuary at the U.S. Embassy until they could fly home.

What's in store now?

"We're going to relax a little as a family and live a normal life - as normal as possible - and I'm going to keep a close eye on my son."

Miller smiled, nodded and said, "She worked with us every step of the way without ever faltering. She is one courageous woman."