



## Dad's adoption anguish

By Karyn Maughan

Jose Williams refused to agree to his baby daughter's adoption - and "walked into hell".

Now he has been forced to watch his first child spend the first five months of her life in a state-subsidised "place of safety", while the Pretoria Children's Court decides who will take care of her.

As the October 1 date of his daughter's "child in need of care" hearing looms, Williams, 26, is praying that she will come home to him, his mother Heloise Renate Sequeira and his two sisters.

But he also faces the prospect of her being placed in foster care.

"I have spent the last five months praying and crying," he told The Star, "All I want is to bring my baby home to her family, where she belongs."

Williams has spent thousands of rands on lawyers' fees, drug tests and a social worker's assessment of his suitability as a parent. His family have prepared and decorated a bedroom for the baby, which is filled with clothes that are now much too small for her.

Williams has hired a lawyer to force the adoption agency to let him visit his little girl.

He claims he has been allowed to visit her only six times, but the agency denies this.

Williams says he learnt that his baby's mother wanted to have her adopted only when she contacted him to ask if he would attend "counselling" to reconcile their tumultuous 11-month relationship.

"When I arrived at the 'counselling' venue and saw the name 'Abba Adoptions', my heart fellâ€ but I was absolutely clear that I was not going to allow my child to be adopted," he said.

Under the new Children's Act, an unmarried father can acquire full parental responsibilities and rights if he consents to be identified as the child's father or has contributed to the child's upbringing or maintenance. All of these conditions apply to Williams.

Despite the fact that Williams had refused to agree to his daughter's adoption, Abba removed the baby to a place of safety after her birth.

Abba manager Katinka Pieterse claims this was at the behest of the Children's Court.

Williams and his mother learnt of his daughter's birth by SMS. They immediately drove to the Pretoria Children's Court, where Sequeira says she discovered the April 16 court roll and found a reference to her granddaughter's hearing as an inter-country adoption.

Armed with a March 6 affidavit from his baby's mother, in which she seemingly relinquished all her rights to her child to him, a desperately worried Williams arrived

at the Children's Court on April 16.

But, he claims, his reception was less than friendly.

"No one wanted to read anything I had brought with me.

"I asked the magistrate handling the case what I could do and what my options were, and she told me to get a lawyer if I needed legal advice."

The magistrate in question, child commissioner Sarie Snyman, on Tuesday declined to comment on any aspect related to Williams' claims or his battle for custody. She however stressed that the case was "never an adoption".

"I cannot discuss this with youâ€ it's in the law," she said.

Pieterse on Tuesday stressed that the Children's Court would "make a decision about what is in the best interests of his daughter".

"This is not an ideal worldâ€ This man must understand that there is a legal system in place and he must accept that there is a legal route to be followed."

The baby's mother could not be reached for comment.

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