American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

Flight attendant Karen Stinson flies full circle

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Miami-based flight attendant Karen Stinson doesn't remember her first trans-Pacific flight. She also can't tell you much about her birth parents or the country where she was born. But over the years, she's pieced it all together thanks in large part to a baby book kept by the only person Karen ever remembers calling "mom."

Karen's story is a different kind of Mother's Day story, one that begins in an orphanage in South Korea. She was given up for adoption in 1959 shortly after she was born — one of thousands of mixed-race babies abandoned by their mothers in the years following the Korean War.

> "It's a difficult history and a background that I could choose to hide from. But I don't, because this is a story I'm proud to tell, especially during Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month."
> — Karen Stinson, flight attendant, Miami

Half a world away, in San Saba County, Texas, Jonnie Stinson and her husband, who had unsuccessfully been trying to adopt for many years, finally caught the break they had hoped for. The very day Karen was born, they had sent a letter asking for permission to adopt a child from South Korea. Their request was approved, and, 4 1/2 months later, it proved to be Karen's ticket to a new life.

Actually, it was two tickets. The first was on Northwest Orient Airlines from Seoul to Chicago, where, in the hustle and bustle of O'Hare International Airport, Karen somehow became separated from the person who brought her to the U.S., and missed her connection. But in a twist that could only be described as fate, an American Airlines agent stepped in and helped get Karen and a volunteer onto an American flight to her final destination — Dallas Love Field — and into the waiting arms of her new family.

Of course, Karen was far too young to recall her journey in this much detail; she has her adoptive mom to thank for meticulously documenting it all in that baby book, which she still holds close to her heart. The book includes newspaper clippings telling her story and an unused diaper — in an American-branded pouch — that she was given during her flight.

As if American wasn't already so much a part of her life, the new family would soon move to Euless, Texas, where Karen grew up not far from where construction began on the Dallas Fort Worth International Airport in 1969.

"I remember the groundbreaking and news that American would be the prominent airline there," she said. "As I learned more about my story and grew into a teenager, my destiny became clear: I wanted to be an American Airlines flight attendant one day."

That dream became reality in 1998. "I feel like I won the lottery," Karen said.

To this day, Karen doesn't know who her birth parents are. And she still gets emotional talking about her adoptive mother, who never saw her graduate and get her wings at American. Jonnie Stinson passed away six days before Karen started training. "But it's because of her I can say this with pride: I'm a Korean-American gal with a booming Texas accent who is proud to call the largest airline in the world a part of my family," she said.

Karen has now spent two decades in the sky, and she has made it her mission to give back, never forgetting where she came from.

"I make it a point to visit orphanages in different countries, sharing my other passions — yoga and meditation — with kids who remind me very much of myself," she said. "I'm hopeful that they will find as abundant and blessed a life as I have."

Karen as an infant

The diaper given to Karen on her American flight to Dallas

An article about Karen's adoption in the San Saba (Texas) Star