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Former NY foster child gets back \$400k in insurance money reported swindled by foster parents

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TAMPA, Fla. — A former New York foster child swindled out of more than \$400,000 in insurance money by his foster parents recovered the money Tuesday, posing for photos alongside an oversized check from Florida authorities as if he had won the lottery.

For Markus Min Ho Kim, now 25 and working as a stage hand in New York City, some of the money may help further his education, possibly in music. The restitution comes more than a decade after authorities say his father killed his mother, landing Kim as a teenager in the New York state foster care system.

On Tuesday Kim came to Florida to collect a check from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the full amount of \$409,662.94, a rare case of a victim of major fraud receiving full restitution.

Although he describes his years with his foster parents as "vacant" and said he never regarded them as family, he agreed to be adopted by them after he turned 18 and accepted their assistance managing the money instead of New York's child welfare officials.

"They actually convinced me they would be better able to help me than the agency," Kim said Tuesday. "I was distraught, to say the least, and I needed their advice. It was probably one of my biggest mistakes. I wanted to trust them more than anything."

Authorities said the large payment from his mother's life insurance policy was taken from Kim years ago by the foster parents in New York, adding they later moved to central Florida and used the money to buy up properties. Several agencies worked for two years to recover it from the couple, now serving time in prison for the fraud.

"If I had to put it into words, I would say it's a new lease on life," said the lean, articulate Kim, who emigrated with his parents from South Korea when he was about 5 years old. "I plan to use it to be best person I can be and live my life to the fullest potential."

Kim ended up in foster care as a young teen. According to news accounts, his father fatally stabbed his mother at their Queens home as he watched.

He wouldn't talk about his family Tuesday, but had plenty to say about Radhames Antonio Oropeza and wife Asia, foster parents who took him in several months after his mother's death. He suspects the Oropezas knew that he would have access to the insurance money when he turned 18.

Authorities say they Oropezas cleaned out his insurance money and eventually moved to rural Polk County, Fla., east of Tampa, investing the money and buying a number of properties without his permission. Kim sought the help of Fort Lauderdale attorney and foster child advocate Howard Talenfeld, who alerted the U.S. Attorney's Office.

The FBI and Florida Department of Law Enforcement also got involved.

Last year, Radhames Oropeza, 54, was convicted by a federal jury of conspiracy to commit wire fraud. His wife pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit wire fraud and wire fraud. Both are serving three-year prison sentences and are scheduled for release in December 2013.

Authorities said the couple turned over some cash assets, with the rest coming from the sale of the seized properties.

As far as the investigating authorities were concerned, it was as good as winning the lottery for Kim.

"This does not happen. We do not see recoveries such as this for people who are victims of fraud," said David Waller, special agent supervisor at the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

"It really is something that is very gratifying for us," said Robert O'Neill, the U.S. attorney for Florida's middle district.

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