

We might have preferred for them to sound crazy."

But possible inconsistencies arose.

Overall, Ahmed denied any desire for a green card. He asserted that he had come strictly as a tourist, with no plan to settle. Yet he confided that he was working as a "systems manager" for a Manhattan firm — unlawful without a green card. He was unable to produce a tourist visa, mentioning that it needed "paperwork."

For a marriage of convenience, he argued, he could have culled a prostitute from "42nd St." In another context, discussing sex, Mrs. Rigas had characterized Miss Winter as "clean," a point in her favor.

In the absence of her husband and Mrs. Rigas, Miss Winter brought up the subject of "citizenship," a theme in her conversation as insistent as a broken record. From an envelope she took a bundle of Immigration and Naturalization Service forms, still blank. The hitch, she explained, was her birth certificate.

To petition in her husband's behalf for permanent residency, the prelude to citizenship, Miss Winter must submit her own birth certificate to immigration officials. Brooklyn Developmental Center authorities confirmed that she had inquired about it. They had steered her to City Hospital, on Welfare Island.

The city clerk who married them in Brooklyn confirmed that he had not requested Miss Winter's birth certificate for the ceremony.

The immigration process does not stop at paperwork. The couple is interviewed, their histories and authenticity checked, according to authorities. But John Drastal, deputy New York district director, viewed the case of Mr. and Mrs. Ahmed, briefly described, as extraordinary. "That's a toughie," Drastal mused. "Try to prove fraudulent intent with this one."

A private immigration attorney retained by Ahmed has taken a more skeptical position. Reached in her Park Pl., Manhattan, office, Minerva Salzman said she was severing her client.

"I am going to give (Ahmed) the proper legal advice, for his own benefit, Miss Salzman said. "I have a very strong suspicion that money has been exchanged here. Technically, the marriage is legal, but practically, based on 50 years of experience, I don't think the marriage will hold."

Told of Miss Salzman's opinion, Ahmed said he no longer needed a lawyer.

In an official review of the marriage, Brooklyn Developmental Center authorities, for their part, adopted a policy of non-intervention.

Although aware of Miss Winter's intentions before the knot was tied, they did not confer with the couple until 10 days later, on Feb. 11. Acting within 72 hours of her discharge request, as per New York state law, state officials could have asked a state Supreme Court judge to declare Miss Winter incompetent, thereby committing her involuntarily to institutional care. Annulment of the marriage would have been the next step.

A committee of seven recommended annulment. Brooklyn Developmental Center director Schurtz overrode them, discharging Miss Winter.

"It seemed to me one in a hundred that this was an honest marriage, but retaining her against her will seemed a violation of her civil rights," Schurtz explained.

"For once, I think the state acted appropriately, and that's an attitude I rarely take," said Miss Winter's state-appointed lawyer, Ron Karben. "The only viable issue I see in the whole case is whether or not a pattern of such marriages develops.

"It is better, from my perspective, to offer her services if and when she needs them, and to document that offering. At least this way there will be no animosity. (Miss Winter) definitely would have run away," Karben said.

Certain wringing of hands and shaking of fists had accompanied the supervisors' conference. They faced a delicate philosophical issue: Should the state tamper with the right to pursuit of happiness and self-determination of an individual in its charge?

As Karben later framed the question, "Are we playing Big Brother here?"

The Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities has not alerted immigration officials of its suspicions regarding Miss Winter's marriage, authorities said. In the view of an American Civil Liberties Union lawyer and advocate of Willowbrook residents, that would be the suitable course for the state in its position of surrogate parent.

Time will tell whether Miss Winter married in her best interest, said Mrs. Rigas, the suspected broker. Mrs. Rigas related that she has taken five husbands. Originally, in her 20s, she married a U.S. Marine stationed in Naples. She since has wed a string of aliens in this country. Now 47, she married her current husband, an Egyptian alien, last fall.

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