

### *Chapman Family Story*

Our story begins in 2000 when Susan and I were trying to have a baby. We had been married a few years and had decided that we wanted to have a family. Then an unexpected problem came up, we could not get pregnant. Susan's OB/GYN Dr. Terry Kelley said in his opinion with our ages, we should go to the infertility clinic, we decided not to and decided to buy a beach house instead. We named it Iona Beach House! This self-centered superficial act of filling our lives with something other than a child was soon turned into folly as the first night in the beach house our daughter Grace was conceived. God had a plan!

After Grace was born we went back to see Dr. Kelley. We were now in our 40's and if we wanted to have another child he thought we should go to the infertility clinic, we decided not to. Susan brought up the idea of adopting from China, a thought that God had laid on her heart, a thought that I never had even considered and frankly was not open to at all. Hey, we have Grace and don't need another child especially by adoption and definitely not from China. Dr. Kelley just smiled at the idea of adoption as he turned a photo around on his desk so that we could see a picture of his daughter Grace, a beautiful Chinese girl his family had adopted. He wrote us a new prescription, his wife April's phone number. That began a series of events that forever changed our lives.

I was still not impressed with idea of adopting and told Susan, I quote "there is no way we are going to adopt, it is never going to happen, God may have told you, but I am not hearing anything, case closed." But, for some reason the Kelley's invited us to their home for a Christmas party for families with kids from China (April and Susan). They asked me to bring my guitar and sing Christmas songs. We went and I brought my guitar. I figured "great, this will be a chance to put this adoption idea to bed once and for all." I started to play, sitting on their stairs in the foyer, not overly excited and entirely unimpressed with all of these little Asian girls running around the house in their Christmas dresses. I thought to myself, "there is my beautiful daughter Grace, she loves Winnie the Pooh, I will sing "House on Pooh Corner" not some silly Christmas song (so defiant). I began singing, and from every corner of the house girls came running, they love Pooh too!! Oh my, every time I sang the word "Pooh", they would scream like I was the Beatles, loud! So, there I am with 15 beautiful little Chinese girls screaming with smiles on their faces at the top of their voices just two feet from my face. It was in that moment that I was forever changed. God showed up not with a whisper but with a sledgehammer. It was like God was screaming at me through these girls, "ADOPT FROM CHINA!" When we got home I could not contain myself any longer and shared with Susan what had happened to me that night. In that moment, I was able to give up what I thought I wanted and told Susan that whatever God wants to do with me and "us" let His will be done. This was our moment of obedience.

That was a Saturday night, on Monday I had to go to Bed, Bath, and Beyond to pick up something for a client (this never happens...me at BB&B). So while I was in there I look around and notice the entire place had about 30 people, all of them were Chinese and it was like they didn't know each other either. It was weird. It was as if a bus of Chinese people pulled up to shop. I just started laughing so hard, I'm sure people thought I was crazy. God gave us confirmation like this over and over, it almost became humorous.

We were so excited to tell everyone our news. We had a strong confirmation in our spirit that God had truly led us to this decision. Most people were somewhat excited, the ones that had already adopted "got it" and were very excited, Susan's parents were supportive, and then there was my mom and dad.

We were at dinner in December to celebrate my dad's birthday and had just made the decision to adopt that week. Susan and I had not even talked about how we were going to tell them our awesome news. So, right in the middle of dinner, I told them that we had an announcement, "Susan and I have decided to adopt a little girl from China." The silence was deafening and long. I will never forget the first words my mom spoke after about a five-minute pause... "this chicken is good," she said. I was devastated. My dad just sat staring with a blank look on his face. They were clearly not happy. My dad called me the next day to point out that our daughter Grace was going to lose half of her inheritance if we adopted (note: my folks are not wealthy, so this really perplexed me). Then he went on with more "helpful" advice on adoption. If we really wanted to do something "good" why not just give some money to charity or adopt a highway! ADOPT A HIGHWAY... I hung up. I didn't see the point in continuing this insane conversation. So, began the year and a half of silence from them.

During "the wait" we learned so much about people, faith, and patience. We were surprised at the range of questions and comments from family and friends. Some totally understood our leap of faith and supported our decision 100%. Then again, some people who we thought would totally support us, looked at us in silence and gave us the cold shoulder. Then there were the bold defiant ones who said, "why do you have to bring more foreigners into our country." Ah, the evil one weaving into our story. For us, it was the subtle comments and actions that we noticed the most, these comments were very hard to process because we were already so far out of our "comfort zone." Was it racism, was it criticism, was it disapproval... it was all of that and in this, there were times we were really hurt, but in the end it made us stronger because we had to totally rely on God and prayer. The strange part about this "leap of faith decision" is that you soon begin to realize that you have no control over who your daughter will be, when you will get her or what she will look like. We discovered what it is really like to submit to God's will and to lean on him for comfort and strength. Wow, God is all we needed!

It was finally our turn to get our daughter's referral. Then out of the blue SARS hit China and China closed all travel and all adoptions until further notice. We were devastated. Not only did we have all of this anxiety of being the next group to get referrals, but now we were not even sure when China would open adoptions again. After an agonizing four months we finally got our referral. Yong, Ning Jing, all 11 months and 9 lbs of her... she was little, real little. We had asked our good friend and spiritual prayer warrior Carole Ford to pray for our daughter in China during the wait. Carole's prayer for a year and a half was that "Mimi catch the eye of a caregiver and be given a little something extra." Our prayer was answered on the day when Yong, Ning Jing became Faith MaeNing Chapman (we call her Mimi). Out of the 12 families who received their daughters on that Sunday only one of them, MiMi, could sit up, stand up, and walk... this petite Asian princess could even feed herself... prayer answered.

I had great anxiety waiting in Atlanta as Susan traveled by herself to China to get Mimi. With the fear that SARS could become a national epidemic, there was a suggestion that a ten day quarantine be in effect for anyone returning from China. So, we had to make the difficult decision that only one of us would go to China and the other would stay home with our 2-1/2 year old daughter, Grace. Little did I know the blessing I would receive in spending two weeks with Grace, something that I had not anticipated. On the contrary, our chance to bond, just dad and daughter, was extraordinary and I would not have traded that time for anything. So, while Grace and I were waiting and Susan and Mimi were traveling, I had some trepidation about how I was going to feel, really feel, deep inside about a new daughter that I did not know. Could I possibly love this girl like I do our Grace? But, all of my fears were put to rest in a split second as Susan stepped off the plane in San Francisco and handed me our new daughter. This was the single most powerful moment next to the birth of our daughter Grace that I have ever had! It was like God had parted my Red Sea and handed me a gift. It was powerful. It was God! I knew for sure that there was no difference in the depth of love I could have for both of my girls. That was also a prayer answered and confirmed.

Waiting on God to work in my mom and dad's heart was another lesson that God unveiled to Susan and me. After we came home and settled in, my parents made the mandatory visit to "see" the child. My dad's somewhat accepting, yet callous, manner did not daunt our precious miracle. After a few visits they slowly began to warm up to Mimi, but never fully embraced her.

My dad died of colon cancer a few years ago, he was 71. Soon after his cancer surgery and during his recovery period, he called me. He called to tell me that he was sorry about the way he had acted during the last two years while we were waiting to adopt. He said, "he knew he was wrong and asked for forgiveness for his behavior and attitude towards Susan and me." He said, "it was like the devil had taken his mind." I forgave him on the spot, and then he asked if I would ask Susan to forgive him too. I told him, "that one he would have to do himself and that he had hurt her deeply and anything that needed to be said needed to come from him." He understood. The following weekend we visited my folks and this tired frail man asked Susan to forgive him. It was the first time that I have ever seen Susan speechless. As tears rolled down her face, she embraced him and forgave it all. My Mom was silent. As we left that day my dad was too tired to really stand up so he sat by the breakfast table near the back door and said good bye to us. My dad is what we call a "side hugger", you get the almost touching two fingers pat in the back. He side hugged me, he side hugged Susan, he side hugged Grace, and as he was sitting bending forward to side hug Mimi, oh no, not Mimi. In the true spirit of love, only MiMi could show, she looked up and grabbed his face and pulled him down closer to give him a kiss on the lips and said "I love you granddad." Christ revealed Himself in that moment for us and my dad. I will never forget it, it was a moment chiseled in my memory. I cried all the way home. Dad died 4 months later.

To answer the question, "what did we learn" would take a novel to answer. Yet, it is best summed up with "Be Obedient to His Will." The best advice we received was that "everyone has an adoption story, learn to laugh and look for God's confirmation moments." The worst advice we received was to adopt a highway. The unintended consequence was that we grew as a

couple, as children of God, as parents, and we were strengthened by the adversity we overcame.

People ask us all the time why we open our home the First Friday of every month to China families. The answer is easy. We only had one family, the Kelley's, who were amazing. But, we never had a consistent group or a community to help us process all of the "stuff." In our hearts, we do not want anyone to quit during the wait because it is too hard, we believe "that every child is worth the wait."

We are in "the wait" again for our beautiful daughter Hope and know God will bless us all with the most precious gift ever, family!