

The Perry's

Mommy, teacher says every time you hear a bell, an angel gets his wings --"It's a Wonderful Life."

The bells are ringing all the time. It is a lifelong process to tune our ears to hear them and to stop and appreciate their music. We heard the bells ringing both literally and figuratively in a museum in Wuhan China. This museum is famous for the Chime Bells, which is the largest bronze musical instrument ever discovered.

It was no coincidence that we were at the Wuhan museum in China on this day in the summer of 2006. For in that museum on that day were new forever families. These new parents had just adopted their children. We had even joked before we left for our vacation to China that we would not mind if we could bring home a couple of children. This was one of our dreams for our lives that had been unfulfilled.

Don't get us wrong our lives together have been fulfilling, but we had missed out on our dream of being parents. We had weathered storms in our marriage including Kim's retirement on disability. To understand our journey, we have to go back in time. We had been pregnant for a brief time and had to grapple with the hard decision of whether to continue the pregnancy. The pregnancy would be a high risk pregnancy because of a history with phlebitis and embolism. Kim would have to be on blood thinner and bed rest.

We consulted with our doctor's and made the difficult decision not to continue. My father's mother had died in childbirth and both of us knew we couldn't risk Kim's life in our quest for a family. It was a short time after this procedure that we were traveling to a wedding on a lonely country road when a deer jumped in front of the car. We were fine except for some bruises. However, if Kim had been on blood thinner she would have lost the child and could have died from internal bleeding before I could have reached a hospital. A sign that the tough decision had been the correct one and a sense of peace was restored to both of us in grieving.

Each year we watched the sands run out the hourglass that represented our dream of being parents of a child. We finally came to a certain peace that we had become too old and would not qualify to adopt. We knew we could provide a loving family to a child as we had formed a very non-traditional family with the adoption of our son who was an adult and a former student. We instantly had a family with him and his wife and two wonderful grandchildren. We later added a daughter who is also a former student and is our daughter in every way except the legal paperwork. These were wondrous events, but still they are still different than raising a son or daughter from the beginning of life to adulthood. Our other children we met as teenagers.

We had just left the bell concert in the museum where they play an exact replica of the ancient bells discovered buried in Wuhan. With these bells still ringing in our memory, we went out in the museum to see the bells and artifacts uncovered in the tomb. We journeyed off in separate areas of the museum and we each found a new parent to talk with.

We did not mention these individual conversations for the rest of our trip. We did make comments about how there was a glow in these new families. We continued with the rest of our vacation experiencing the beauty of China. We left the Yangtze Cruise Ship and

stopped in Nanjing. We walked on the ancient city walls and looked over the park in the heart of the city. Little did we know that from these walls we could see the place where our child had been left near the park across from the train station.

We flew home from Shanghai and in the in flight magazine were ads for adoption agencies. I made a mental note of the names and determined to check this out when I got home. I still did not speak to Kim about this as I did not want to raise her hopes without having more facts. With facts in hand, I asked Kim if she was ready to be a Mom and of course she said yes. This was a dream that we had thought had passed us by. God works in mysterious ways and the older I get the more I think there are signs all around us. Most of the time we just don't see them or take the time to look back and recognize that the signs were there all the time.

The next week was a blur. I would be returning to teaching in a week and so we had two information meetings to attend and then begin the application process. It was during this week, I heard another bell. I was in the Wal-Mart and there was a lady with her daughter. I said to myself, if she gets off the phone I will talk to her. I had a 45 minute conversation with her and it reinforced our decision to adopt from China.

We spent the last couple of days before the new school year started for me chasing papers to get our application in and approved. It was at the end of this week that I heard another bell in my mind and it was about a meeting for adoptive parents and prospective parents that was held on the first Friday of the month. First Fridays is a support group where a community of friends has been formed with this common bond -- Chinese Adoption.

We attended the meeting that night having learned that our agency had approved our application earlier this day. First Fridays was at the home of the Chapman's. We especially felt a connection when we saw the photo from Iona Scotland hanging in their home. It was at this meeting that we made an important connection and friendship with another family. They would help guide us through the paperwork process. They had not been at a meeting for several months and in fact did not get to attend another meeting for several more. We soaked up her advice and called when we had questions. Her best advice was to get a copier for the process and a FedEx account for the shipping.

I guess Santa was busy the day before as our US approval came the day after Christmas. The dossier was completed at the start of 2007 and we settled in for a waiting period that we thought would be 18 months. During the wait we would be able to pay the favor forward to others who were in the paper chase phase.

We have gladly helped others in completing paperwork and by giving advice to our friends from the First Friday Community. As it turned out, one of these people was the sister of the lady I met in Wal-Mart. Kim and I were able to help her get her paperwork completed and through all of the authentication process. Certainly another bell ringing event as it was not a mere coincidence.

Instead of 18 months, we got a referral in 18 days. I will never forget the day at the end of January when the bell on the phone rang and I did not answer it. It had been a long day and this was the first restroom break all day. I knew that I could call back in few minutes. Wrong. The phones lines at the agency in Colorado were down that afternoon for incoming calls.

I was sure that it was more information that was needed, but I desperately tried to call. In the meantime, the bell on Kim's phone rang with a call from the agency. We have a file for you to look at or so the conversation went. Kim was struck dumb in the middle of the store. Other customers asked if she was OK and she said these were happy tears. There now was a picture to go with the dream. She called me and I downloaded the info while I tried to teach my college class. What a hoot. I finally told them they would have to wait a few minutes and she was able to see the info while I continued to teach and wait for a break between classes.

The bells started ringing as we made calls for advice and doctors to consult with his medical information. It soon became apparent to both of us that the doctors would have to convince us not to accept the referral and of course they did not find a reason not to bring him home. We went to our First Fridays meeting with our referral and a huge grin as we talked about "the boy" for we had a girl's name picked out for!

Names in China have deep meaning and carry the best wishes of the parents for the child. We pursued the name of our son in the same manner. We looked to keep his Chinese names and include them with two good Irish names. After some consultations and reading, we decided his name would be Sheridan Colum-YouBai. Sheridan means seeker in Irish. Sheridan's middle name is Colum for the Irish Saint Columba who helped spread Christianity to the island of Iona in Scotland and later into England. YouBai was added with a hyphen so as not to be lost. YouBai means free like a white cloud dancing in the sky which goes well with Colum (dove of the church).

We had our homestudy updated and sent in our letter of intent. We received a quick Pre-Approval and then the wait began. Little did we know that we would still need to buckle our seatbelts as the roller coast ride was not yet done. I will not forget the Wednesday when the bell rang with a call from the agency that our file had been pulled in the review room for more information. We hung on the knife edge of disaster. They wanted to know the specific medication that Kim took for her bi-polar condition.

We had learned early to call it a condition. The Chinese do not have the same understanding of this condition or mental illness as we do in the west. They often classify the mentally ill with drug addicts. My heart fell with this news, but our agency was not about to abandon us. The bell in my phone was ringing and it was me calling in advice, favors and help. I spoke to her first doctor who is now in New York. With his help and the agency's help we worked out a plan and hammered out the wording for the physician letter that was needed.

The letter even went to the main office where another specialist and one of the founders reviewed it. Next it was up to us to get the doctor to agree sign the letter and not to tinker with the wording. This went well and then we waited and waited and waited. Our son's birthday passed without any news. His birthday party on this side of the ocean was bittersweet. Our 25th wedding anniversary came as well with no news. One chapter of our lives had come to a close and the next chapter was still on hold.

We learned many things during this "pause" moment. Surprisingly, one of the strongest emotions was guilt, we had pursued this adoption, connected to this child and now was it going to be "no"? Could all this be "our" fault? It wasn't "his" fault. What would happen to our Sheridan if China said "no"? The flood of emotion was almost unbearable, how were we going to get to the end of this dark road?

We were so thankful to have the families in the First Friday community to share this journey with and for their support. These were very dark days. We had absolutely no control over the process and no news was good news, but hard to swallow. We prayed and waited and finally when we decided one morning that God had not brought us this far to leave us and we made a decision that day to seek another country if China said “no”. Later that afternoon the bell rang and we had been given a second pre-approval.

Time had stopped during “the wait” from that second terrible call until that wonderful bell sounded again and then time leapt into hyper-drive. Our letter of acceptance came shortly after and coincided with a business trip to Colorado I got to sign the document in the main office. I personally had a chance to thank those folks who had worked so hard to get Sheridan to us.

Travel plans began to fall into place and we were soon off again to China. We met with our guide from a year ago in Beijing and enjoyed an evening with him. We then walked again on the Great Wall one year, one month and one day after our first trip to China. We left Beijing and arrived in Nanjing and met another angel who would guide us in the next crucial days. We both shed a tear when we saw the crib in our room in Nanjing.

On that magical day of August 6th (one year and 2 days after our application was approved), we were united with our son. It was a surreal experience and peaceful for 5 minutes. He grieved hard while kicking, screaming and crying for the next 2 hours. After a restful night, he woke the next day like he had always been with us. A few days later we visited the orphanage and we knew he was ours when Mama got her first kiss and he led her to the elevator as he was ready to leave this part of his life behind. By the time we left China, he comprehended our English and had bonded to both of us.

Our story has its own red thread, but we have found this thread is not unique to just us. Each adoption has a thread and a story. As you start “your journey” become aware of the angel's bells and God's signs. Look for these in those you meet on the journey. Seek support along the way and accept help from those who offer it. Pave the way for those who will come after you. In a very short time we have learned to see many of the missing pieces of adoption through Sheridan's eyes. An unintended consequence of our journey is the need to slow down in order to take time to enjoy life's small blessings. Kim has especially learned that she **is** stronger than she had ever imagined. Coming home and having the support of playgroups and others who really “get” what she is experiencing as an adoptive mom has been crucial.

We met many angels in the process of adopting our son. We have learned that “control” is an illusion and the only things we can control are our faith in God and our attitude. Prayers are answered. One prayer that I had even before I left for vacation to China was to find friends and a community. The answer to all of my prayers was one word “Adoption”. The result was the next chapter of our “Wonderful Life”.

We also have learned to be still and know that God is working in our lives and to look for the signs that most call coincidences and to appreciate the sound of heaven's bells ringing. When I hear the bells they sound like those ancient bells in Wuhan, China.

So when someone asks you for whom the bell tolls, it tolls joyfully for Sheridan.