

The Smiths

Our Journey

My husband, Eric, and I have been married for 7 years. I have 2 children from a previous marriage--a son (16yrs) and a daughter (12yrs). Eric has been in our lives for 9 years and is a great step-father who treats both children as if they are his own. We both knew from the beginning of our marriage that we would never have a biological child together, but always hoped that someday we would be able to adopt. The idea of adopting seemed so very far away, a dream that may never come true.

But, in early 2006 our journey begins to unfold... we would see people with kids from China and were both drawn to these families, not sure why, but we both noticed them and little did we know this was the beginning of our journey to our daughter in China. April 13, 2006 we mailed our application to Hope for Children to adopt a baby girl!

The last week of April we received our dossier packet and began our first home study meeting. We both were so excited. We have officially begun the paperwork! When we first looked at all the paperwork requirements it was a bit dizzying. I wasn't sure where to start. But we dove in and things quickly came together and everything we needed became organized in our minds, hearts, and surprisingly all this information ended up on paper and then into a binder. Our dossier! We both read *The Lost Daughter's of China* and tried to learn as much as possible about Chinese culture via internet and books.

Our 2 children were excited about having a new little sister. We've always talked to them about wanting to have another child to join our family. Our son is 16 and is very consumed with school and his social life. Our daughter seems permanently attached to the phone when not playing soccer or hanging out with girlfriends in the neighborhood. Watching them now and seeing how they have grown and changed over the years is enlightening, exciting, and fun. Bottles and diapers to Barney; Thomas the Tank Engine to Pokemon; Playstation games--and now...cell phones (the occasional big cell bill), Hollister; Abercrombie, formal dances, and braces. We are so proud of them both and have truly enjoyed passing through all the seasons of their lives so far, but are excited about sharing these seasons together with another little one.

Paperwork was finished, everything had been filed, but even with those things complete a few people still questioned whether we've realized that we would be giving up our "time alone" and the ability to come and go more freely. After all, now we have plenty of "free time" as our kids have gotten older, more self-sufficient, and don't think it's as cool to hang out with the 'rents. Oh...occasionally we can round them up; get everyone to agree on a movie--as long as it includes extra butter movie theater popcorn. We insist on eating dinner together as a family at least half of the week. We talk about and go over homework, grades, friends, current events etc...we catch and try to hold onto those brief moments in the kitchen when they are raiding the fridge or feeling a little talkative. Now, I have plenty to do when the kids don't have time for us--there's no such thing in our house as an empty laundry basket and I am currently working on getting my BS in Nursing.

But, Eric and I have always revolved our lives around the children...we feel that we're still very young (37 & 33) and know we have a great family full of love to share with another child. I miss having a little one around...Eric would love to see the baby phase...we have so much love and family to share...and we know our hearts belong to a little girl somewhere in China. We're happy to say that it will still be a long time coming that we will have soccer chairs in the back of our SUV. So, to answer the questions, "won't you feel cheated giving up your free time?" No, because our hearts "together" have so much to give.

So we wait, and in early September 2006, 5 months after we started the paperwork, I received a call from our representative at HOPE saying that a new special needs list had been received and would be posted at some point that night on the web if we were interested. I called Eric at work that afternoon and asked him to come home early to look at this list with me. When Eric came home we opened the first file on the list. We both just sat there in silence and gazed at the picture in front of us. We both knew this was our daughter! Lily's big beautiful eyes captivated us from that point on. We signed a letter of intent to adopt and faxed it immediately so that HOPE would have it waiting for them on their fax machine first thing in the morning.

The next morning we received Lily's (Han Xue) medical paperwork via fax. I scanned the paperwork and emailed my friend Xia and then called her on the phone. Xia read the paperwork to me over the phone—I had tears in my eyes listening to her words as she described our daughter as it was written in Chinese. Within minutes, I called HOPE and said that without a doubt we wished to pursue the adoption of Han Xue.

The next day HOPE informed us that there was another family interested in adopting Han Xue and that we would need to write a family biography to be submitted to the board at HOPE for a final decision of who would be Han Xue's forever family. As soon as I hung up the phone I sat at the computer wrote our biography. I have never been much of a writer, but there was no loss for words...they flowed from me as I typed and poured my heart out explaining why we deserved to be Lily's family and how much we knew she was meant to be our daughter. This decision took 2 long, agonizing weeks. Finally, on September 26th, 2006 we were told that we were chosen to be Lily's forever family.



Lily's referral pictures



Now we continue to wait but there were things we could do. A friend of mine had adopted from China earlier that summer and told me that I should look online and join Lily's orphanage Yahoo group. I did and as soon as my membership was approved I made my first post announcing who we were and that we were adopting a beautiful little girl from Siping SWI, Jilin Province, China. Within minutes I received an email from Christine, a member of the group, stating that she was on a mission trip with a group of people earlier that summer to Siping SWI. She hadn't adopted from Siping SWI—she adopted her daughter (her name is Lily also!!!) from Fuzhou a few years ago. She asked me to email Lily's referral picture to her and she would go through her photos from the trip to see if she had any of Lily. Amazed and thrilled I sent Lily's pictures to her! She told me that she had hundreds of pictures and would love to send them to me so I could see what the orphanage looked like, etc...within minutes I had a flood of pictures on my email. As I received the pictures and I got to about number 6 or 7 and STOPPED----FROZEN.....I called Eric over to the laptop...we were staring at this little girl in the

picture sitting on a mat with an American woman playing one on one with her. I said, "That's Lily!!!!" I immediately emailed Christine attaching this picture, and I told her I thought that the picture she sent was of Lily—she wrote back to me that she was thinking the same thing! We also realized at this point that Lily's cleft lip had already been repaired.



At this point we were emailing each other back and forth for the next couple of hours. Christine knew a wealth of information about Lily, the orphanage, etc... we felt very blessed to be able to connect with Christine and be comforted to know that our daughter is in an orphanage where the children are well taken care of. Most families don't have the privilege of knowing any information this detailed after they get their referral. We thought it was the hardest time because we now had a picture and as you look into the eyes of your child you hope and pray that someone will pick her up and comfort her—take care of her until you can get your arms around her. Some families have no idea what the conditions are like in the orphanage, and we felt very blessed to have this contact and information. Also, I told Christine I was going for my BSN—Nursing. She asked me what kind of nursing interested me...I said, "I love Cardiology"...she then said, "I'm a Cardiac RN. Then she told me that her daughter that they adopted from Fuzhou was also named Lily. Christine told us that she has 2 teenage children—and, Eric & I do also. I then asked her if she was my twin!!! Christine and I talked via email and on the phone for hours. Our red thread had reached Christine in California and on to China. This is the first time I felt a "bigger hand" guiding this journey.

We couldn't believe we were seeing all of these photos of Lily. From the time we saw those pictures to the day we traveled became a double edged sword. It was so sweet to see that Lily was fed, she looked healthy and warm and from what we could see the nannies were holding her. But knowing and seeing all this made it so much harder to "wait" for the paperwork process to play itself out. As we waited I wrote this letter to our daughter:

When I look at Lily's serious face I see her heritage. I see the many men and women that preceded her. I see the beauty in their souls...I imagine their sacrifice....I feel the self-discipline. This is Lillian Han Xue Smith...we will be granted the

First Friday China Adoption Journey-Red Thread Connections

privilege to be her parents very soon...I can only dream that we will live up to her expectations.sleep tight sweet princess...we love you...mommy loves you....we're on our way to bring you home .

Eric and I felt so fortunate to have all this information about Lily, but, believe it or not our "wait story" gets even better...

Each first Friday of the month we have been attending a support group for families adopting from China, it called First Fridays. The Chapman's hosted this gathering in their home for people in the process of adopting, who already have adopted, or those who are thinking of adopting from China. Dan & Susan open their home to everyone--they have touched our lives and opened up a whole new world of adoption families for us. I almost didn't go that month because I was exhausted from working at Piedmont Hospital for two days and had a Political Science exam Saturday morning at 8 a.m. Eric was in Philadelphia that weekend for a wedding he had asked to be in. But, I just felt like I really wanted to go anyway and we always have a great time. I asked Bev, Eric's mom, to come with me. She was excited to meet other families who were adopting and to see all of the children. I'm SO glad she was there to share this evening with me. We took most of the pictures we had just received of Lily in the orphanage to "show" the group. When we got to the Chapman's, we were standing in the foyer and Sue came over to say hello and to see our pictures. She was leafing through the photo album and STOPPED....



She pointed to the woman in this picture holding Lily and says, "She's right over there...that's Cassandra, yes...that's her." Then she points to a lady who is standing across the room talking to a few other guests at the party. Cassandra, was standing right there in front of me and I was standing there holding a picture that I had received from Christine of Cassandra holding our daughter!!! Sue walked over to show her the picture as she looks at it with this amazed look on her face. She says, "that's Snow!" (Lily's Chinese name, Xue, means "snow") Amazingly, she and her husband Dale had been on the same mission trip with Christine. Cassandra came over to me and I just began to cry, it was amazing, I was shaking. The moment was incredible – magical! I gave Cassandra the biggest hug!! She told me that

Christine had told her that she had talked to the people that were adopting Snow. Christine, Cassandra, and Dale had all participated in an orphan ministry for America World Adoptions and were on the same mission trip to Siping orphanage in July. Christine is in California, Cassandra and Dale live in Georgia are now currently adopting from China. This was an amazing night, one we will never forget, and believe we witnessed "the Lord" at work that night!

We finally traveled to get our daughter in early May. During this 9 month "wait" I never realized how little control we really have. I tend to be a very controlling person, or so I thought I was. I felt confident in myself and also somewhat self-centered, why shouldn't we be? These feelings weren't bad, but when you'd watch a little girl hoard food in her mouth so she couldn't even chew or swallow it really hit us that "this human being really understands fear and survival". I learned that there is no place to be self-centered after seeing something like that. Through one little girl we learned that a culture so foreign to us would be something we would freely love and embrace. We have changed, our outlook on life is different, we witnessed God's hand in so many ways during this process, it was stunning. We are confident that our "normal" everyday lives would not have ever brought our hearts and lives to the place we are now.

We are so grateful to Christine, Cassandra and Dale...our new found friends...our angels. Thank you so much...thank you for being so caring, and for being there in China to comfort our daughter and all of the other children in Siping SWI. We also thank our Lord, GOD for giving us a "huge" gift, one that has changed us forever.

This is our Red Thread story, our journey, and it continues even after we've been home.

Christine sent me a link to a blog of an American teaching English at Jilin Normal University in Siping City, Jilin Province, China. I couldn't believe it when I saw many, many more photos of our precious Lily on her website. The American English teacher, Sarah, visits Lily's orphanage just about every weekend to hold the babies, play with the children, and take them candy, cookies, etc. They also hold fund raisers to finance surgeries for the children. I have sent a few emails to Sarah and have learned from her that her parents sent the money to have Lily's cleft lip repair. She was happy that she and another teacher were able to actually go with Lily and a couple of other babies to Changchun, the capital of Jilin Province, for the surgeries.

This is a picture of surgery day.

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Lily is in Sarah's arms on the left.

How is this entire story possible? A God bigger than we have ever known; the perfect designer. We wouldn't have ever dreamed our lives or hearts could change so much in such a short time. Our kids are different, they've changed. In one year, our faith, our attitudes, our appreciation for others, has all been altered; we are glad our family will never be the same. A child, halfway around the world, helped to reshape a new family, a stronger family, and for this we will be forever grateful. God really does know what He is doing!