



OUR CHINA STORIES

我们的中国故事

Scinto, Jeanette (Dan Dan)

Adoptee

Adoption place: Chenzhou Welfare Center, Chenzhou City, Hunan Province

Date of adoption: October 1992

Age at adoption: 8 months

What would have Dan Dan's life have been like? That is a question I often think about when reflecting on my adoption. Who was I before I was Jeanette Scinto? Would I still be this introverted extrovert who loves to dance, travel, and help others? Would I be jaded from what life threw at me? Would I be accepted within my community because of my cleft lip? Would I even still be alive?

When I came home to the States, my pediatrician told my parents that I was so malnourished that had I been in the orphanage any longer I probably would have died. I am now about a month away from turning 25, and there is so much life that has happened between February 29, 1992 (my birth date) and now. When I think about that and how fortunate I have been, I can't help but smile and be thankful to be Jeanette Scinto. I have had more opportunities in the last 24 years than many people get in a lifetime, and definitely more than what Dan Dan would have had.

I know a name is just a name, but I feel like it's more than just an identifier. A name signifies personality, reputation, and family ties and it often has some deep, sentimental meaning. Jeanette means God is Gracious and it is my maternal grandmother's name. She is the kindest person on this planet and I am happy to share a name with her. My parents were told that Dan Dan means "Cinnabar" or "red." However, what is the significance of those things? Did my birth parents name me Dan Dan or did the orphanage? I guess these are questions I will never know the answers to, and for the most part I am okay with that.

Ever since I was little, I wanted to know whether or not I had biological siblings. My mom would tell me the story about how I asked if I had any brothers or sisters at a very young age. Apparently I was in the car with my mom and brother, and out of the blue that question came out of my mouth. My mom said that my brother whipped around in his seat and said I am your big brother! He's been an amazing brother and is someone I have looked up to my whole life, but after I watched the documentary "Twinsters" and saw the Good Morning America segment about the Chinese twin adoptees finding one another [Sarah Heath and Celena Kopinski, who also tell their story on Our China Stories], that longing to find any biological siblings has increased. If I found a biological sibling, I would at least have one person who shared the same DNA as me. I would

imagine that we would have similar features and mannerisms and maybe even the same complex personality.

I've never really felt the want or need to find my birth parents; however, I would like to know my whole story. Why was I given up? Was it because of my cleft and the fact that my family probably could not afford a cleft repair? Was I the second child? Was it because I was a girl? Do I have my dad's eyes? Do I have my mom's hands? These are more questions that will probably never get answered, and once again I am okay with that. I have to be okay with that. Adoption has taught me acceptance.

My life has been a rollercoaster ride. There have been some really high highs and some really low lows. Every high makes me thankful and every low teaches me a lesson. Adoption is a part of who I am and has definitely shaped me into the person I have become. It has made me compassionate and empathetic, and I believe that those are two of my greatest qualities. I love helping others and I don't think it is because I feel guilty about the life I was blessed with. I love helping others because I want to and because I can. Why not help others become the best versions of themselves if you have the opportunity to do so? In the words of Kevin Spacey: If you're lucky enough to do well, it's your responsibility to send the elevator back down.

Even though I've been Jeanette Scinto for a little over 24 years now, my China story is not over; it never will be. Every day of my life is a new page and every day I get a little bit closer to who I was meant to become. I was born very far from where I was supposed to be. So, I guess I'm on my way home.

Published March 22, 2017



Jeanette Scinto