



OUR CHINA STORIES

我们的中国故事

McKisson, Colleen

Adoptee

Washington State

Adoption place: Kunming, Yunnan Province

Adoption date: October 2005

Age at adoption: 9 months

Hi, my name is Colleen. I'm 11 years old. My older sister, Campbell, is 14 years old, she was also adopted from China.

I was taken to the orphanage in Kunming, Yunnan Province when I was about 10 days old. The people from the orphanage didn't know where I was for those first days. I was adopted by my parents in Washington State because my parents thought Campbell shouldn't be alone, and my mom's friend convinced her to get me.

My parents, sister, and grandma brought me home when I was about 9 months old. When I was adopted my best friend Maddie was also adopted. We go to the same school and hang out with each other a lot. I don't really want to go back to China, or feel like I need to go back. I know if I change my mind later my mom will help me make it happen. Sometimes it isn't very fun being the little sister, but mostly Campbell and I laugh and hang out and like to do stuff together with our mom.

I play on a select soccer team with Seattle United. Some friends on that team and I have played together since Kindergarten. I love being goofy with them, we know each other so well, and all the families are fun. I can play the ukulele a little and am learning the saxophone, I just got my own bongo drums, and am playing the cymbals in drill team this summer. I really like bike riding and skateboarding but I want a longboard now and my mom says to save up or put it on my list for Santa. Ugh.

My mom says I watch too much TV and need to "read more regularly or (my) natural brilliance will be dulled by lack of stimulation." It's hard to find things to read that I enjoy, but when I do, I can't get enough of it. My mom says "graphic novels are not the only game in town."

When I was little my Grandma called me Dennis the Menace. My Aunt Kim says I'm a pistol. I'm pretty sure it's a compliment. I guess I can be a real character. At school I have received awards for friendship and kindness. I will be a Safety Patrol Captain in the 6th grade this fall.

I really love visiting with my aunts and uncles and cousins, we have a lot of fun together. Also, I'm a real dog person. We have two now. Penelope is an Australian Cattle Dog, and Sunny is a Pomeranian/Chihuahua mix. Penelope's sister, Sydney, lives with my dad so I don't see her much anymore. I really, really love my aunt and uncle's big dog, Apollo. He lets me lie down on him. I've had gerbils, guinea pigs and fish but after awhile I got bored with them. My mom says we have done enough experimenting in the pet department.

I love art and work with angles and three- dimensional art like origami I taught myself from youtube. I am really good at math in school and think I will get a degree in architecture when I go to college. I want to attend the University of Washington in Seattle.

I just started babysitting for our neighbor and found out she is an architect! Campbell and I take turns being a Mother's Helper while the mom gets dinner going and kids baths and ready for bed. I like earning my own money and the kids are cute.

I guess what I want people to know is that I am just like every other kid I know. I am not any different just because of where I was born or because I am adopted. I have a lot of friends who have different skin and hair colors, some have two parents and some don't. Some don't speak English. We all have fun together. I have my mom and sister at home and lots of other people who care about me. I know my family loves me and I love them too.

McKisson, Corinne **Adoptive mother**

Hi, my name is Corinne. I am a 54- year -old single mom to Campbell, 14, and Colleen, 11, both adopted as babies in China.

We live in a sweet, family-oriented neighborhood in Shoreline, Washington. Campbell has been dancing with the Melody Institute, performing classical style Chinese dance for eight years, Colleen has been playing soccer for six years, the last two on a select team with several of her original team members. They are both members of the Seattle Chinese Community Girls Drill Team. They have both been on local swim teams and school sponsored running teams. Campbell played violin for a few years and is now self- learning guitar. Colleen plays ukulele and saxophone. There's a lot of artwork and music in our household, and love for the outdoors.

Campbell is more introspective and solitary. Colleen is more gregarious. They love each other fiercely but I'm not sure they would tell you that if you asked. I have the insider's knowledge here (wink wink). I couldn't be more proud of the young women they are becoming. Their growing self-reliance and interdependence is wonderful to behold. When my husband and I brought Campbell home from China in April 2003, I was almost 41 and had been married for 18 years. I had been looking forward to being a mom almost my entire life and, like many adoptive parents, had not traveled a direct or uncomplicated path to parenthood. Since those days, when telling someone our story, I joke that if I had only known my daughters were waiting for me in China I would have

gone to get them a lot sooner! Obviously, knowing if I'd gone a month or a week or a day sooner it would've been someone else instead of them, I wouldn't change a single wonderful confusing moment of my wait. It was as perfect as it was meant to be. Being a mom has been the most amazing gift of my life. When Campbell was about 18 months old we began to consider returning to China for another child. We had become close friends with another family with a daughter the same age, that had already started the process of going back. The more Campbell grew, the more I realized that she needed and deserved a sister. That one was not enough for us, there was room in our hearts for more.

We returned to China in October 2005 to adopt our daughter Colleen. My stepmother, Gramma Cathy, decided she would join us for this trip, certain that we would need some help since we were bringing 3-year-old Campbell along. What a hoot! She was right and it has become a meaningful part of our family story. She helped a lot with the baby those first days while mom gave big sister some much-needed undivided attention during all of the transition. In no time, big sister was doting on her new baby and enjoying getting to know her. It was perfect and we were complete.

Well, life goes on and I don't think parenting our children was different from anyone else's experience parenting two young children. We were both working, loving our kids, being purposeful to engage with our local Chinese community and with other activities our children showed interest in, dealing with the usual every day middle-class struggles, enjoying the love and support shared with friends and family.

At this point in life you think I'd have gotten comfortable with the theme of life "things don't always turn out the way you've planned (and that's OK)." When our girls were age 6 and 9 my husband moved out on his own. It hasn't quite gone the way he had planned, unfortunately, and, at this point, there's very little relationship between the two girls and their dad. Five years later I can hardly write this paragraph without crying, not because of the pain and loss, that's long healed, but because of the intensity of love and support and community we've experienced. My amazing parents, brother and sisters, brother and sister-in-law on both sides of our family, other extended family members, friends from all corners, dance teacher, soccer coach, school teachers, coworkers, old Facebook friends... It is a seemingly endless list and it takes my breath away anytime I stop to think about it.

So, life IS grand. I am the mother of these two amazing beings, and I get to continue to watch from front row and center as their beautiful lives unfold. We don't really ever know what's in store for us tomorrow. I've been telling people for many years: "Something is always going to go wrong, don't be surprised when it does, just know that it's going to be ok. Wait for it."



Colleen McKisson