



OUR CHINA STORIES

我们的中国故事

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Adoptee

Adoption place: Yangxi County Social Welfare Institute, Guangdong Province

Adoption date: June 2004

Age at adoption: 10 months old

I am adopted from China, and I have always had a dream to go there and visit the orphanage I spent the first 10 months of my life at.

I am 13 years old and I have never had a time in my life where my parents sat me down and told me I was adopted, because they never kept it a secret from me. Instead, we discussed it openly from the time I was young. One of my friends never knew that she was adopted from China, and unlike me, found out the day her parents told her when she was 10.

My parents have always told me stories of my orphanage, what it was like to go to China and get me, and what the first moments were like when they saw me. When my parents went to China to adopt me, they took a video of my orphanage. Every year I watch that video to learn about my home place. I love learning about where I am from, and seeing visuals of the place I was born. I think I like looking at pictures of where I am from because I don't want to forget the part of me that I left behind.

When I was 8 years old we moved from California to Utah for one year, and it was not until then that I noticed that I looked very different from everybody else. Everyone at my new school had white skin, and it seemed like no one had ever seen anybody that looked like me before. On my first day of school, I saw three girls who stood out because they had dark skin like me, while everyone else's white skin blended into the background. We became friends and hung out together. Other girls at my school started pointing out that some of my facial features were different from theirs. I felt like I didn't belong at my new school except with my three friends that looked like me. I became more aware of my race, and that I looked different than the other white Americans. This felt particularly true when one of my classmates pointed out that my features were different than hers. She told me that my eyes looked thinner than hers, and that my skin was a like a dark tan. It was the first time I acknowledged I was Chinese.

When I was in fourth grade, I had this sudden a strong feeling that I should go to China and see where I was from. At my school, there was a room full of computers so I used them to make a PowerPoint to show my parents what I wanted to see, and what I

wanted to do in China. Later that evening, I went out to dinner with my parents and I showed them the PowerPoint. One of the things I expressed to them was that I wanted to go back to my orphanage, and try to find my birth parents. They looked at each other like they had something that they wanted to tell me, and I didn't know if they were thinking that this was a good, or bad idea. They told me that they had no idea who my birth parents were, and that they didn't leave any kind of sign or note telling me who they were.

I was disappointed that we couldn't find them, but I still wanted to go back to my orphanage and I asked them if we could at least visit it. They said yes, but they also asked me if I was ready to go back and see where I was from. I thought about the video my parents took of my orphanage from when they went there. I have been watching that video my whole life, and I had memorized the image of my orphanage and was hoping it would look exactly the same as I remembered it. If I found out it was different or changed a lot, I would be heart broken. These feelings I was having helped me realize I was not ready to go yet. So I waited for another year, but I was still nervous about the feelings I would have if I was to go to China.

The year after that, when I was 11, I decided that if I couldn't go to China, that the least I could do is donate money to the orphanage. For a few years I raised money in small ways by having lemonade stands and selling bracelets. In two years I had made over \$1,000, and I wanted to raise more so my mom and I found a fundraising site where you could share your story and reasoning for wanting to raise money, and where people could give online contributions. From that site alone, I raised \$2,000.

Finally, in 7th grade I felt ready to go back to China, and now I even had money to donate! It took a whole year to plan our trip back to my birth place. We had to book our hotels, communicate with the orphanage, figure out what parts of the country we wanted to visit, and plan our transportation to other places in China. But out of all the planning, the most important part of the trip to consider was our visit to the orphanage. We tried our best to send a letter to the orphanage telling them our plan, but we didn't know someone who was fluent in Chinese. We actually had to use Google translate in Chinese to help us communicate with them.

Our journey back to China took place in the summer of 2016. We made a couple of stops before we got to the orphanage in Guangzhou. My orphanage was three hours outside the city so we got a driver to take us there. He was also our translator for the trip. When we started getting to the rural part, I noticed there were more farms, less cars, and big apartment buildings. When we got to the orphanage, there was a huge sign in the front that said, Welcome all our children. I looked at the building and noticed that the building was a different color that I remember, and that the courtyard in the front had changed from what I saw in the picture my parents took when they went there. The courtyard no longer had plants and vines along the wall. They didn't have flowers blooming everywhere like they used to. Instead they put in a concrete parking lot even though they didn't have many cars in it.

The ladies who worked at my orphanage came out and greeted us and led us to a large room with a round wooden table in the middle and black chairs surrounding it. My parents told me that is where they sat when they first came to my orphanage. I looked over to the right and spotted pictures hung up on the wall. I looked and studied each one until my eyes landed on a picture with me as a baby. I started to see more and more pictures of me and some of the other pictures had my friends in them. I saw pictures of me going to Hawaii and going to Chinese New Year with my friends. In all, there were twelve photos of me on their wall. I was so amazed by the photos and how many families sent in photos of the kids they adopted.

After I looked at the photos, I sat down at the table with all of the other ladies that worked there. We showed them pictures of my parents and when they came to China the first time. The women at the orphanage still had the contacts of the ladies that worked there when I was living there. We contacted them and they told us that one of the ladies that knew me would meet us for lunch. I also got to ask them questions and that is when I found out that the oldest kids that were still there, were kids around my age. I also found out that not many kids that were adopted come back to the orphanage. After the questions, we went to the second floor to a room with lots of cribs and babies laying all over the floor. All of the babies were trying to eat or throw their toys. There were probably about fifteen babies in that room. The babies looked about five to twelve months old. I guessed I was in that room when I was living at the orphanage.

We stayed at the orphanage for a while until we all piled into a van and drove to a big restaurant. The people that worked there welcomed us and brought us upstairs to a private room. The room had a large table in the back and a couch with a TV in the front. We all took our seats around the table and started to talk more about my life in America. A few minutes later, some people brought in tea. Next they brought in various plates of food. I didn't really get what they were doing because we didn't even order food. I guess they just knew in advance. After we ate the food, I decided it was a good time to tell them what I raised for the orphanage. My family didn't tell them in advanced so we decided that once we got to China, it would be a huge surprise.

When I was starting to raise money, I sold tiny bracelets at parties for \$5. I did that for a while until I had about \$100. My friend and I always loved to have lemonade stands, and I thought that lemonade stands would be a good way to raise money. I did that for a while until I decided to give up my birthday presents for money to give to my orphanage. What started out as a tiny donation turned into a whole project. After I told them about the money I raised, their faces lit up with excitement. Our first stop was an electronic store. The store had no doors or windows and looked like a big concrete box. The ladies went to the counter telling the workers what they wanted to buy. My donation bought refrigerators, one stove, a water purifier, and air conditioning for the whole building, as well as a bunch of necessities for babies.

After the ladies finished shopping at the electronic store, we all got in the van again and headed to a baby shop. The shop had baby food, baby clothes, baby toys, and other things. I looked at the clothes and showed them to the ladies. We bought 10 dresses,

and also found shoes that matched. We bought several crates of both baby formula and shampoo. We also bought lots of tiny clothes that could be used as blankets for the babies.

After we shopped a little more, we got into the van and drove to the place I was left as an infant. I had always looked at the pictures that my parents took while they were in China, but it was not until we were about to go there that they told me exactly where I was found. I was left by a big rock and was wrapped in a blue blanket. I was found and brought to a police station when they took a picture and put it in the newspaper saying that if anyone wants to claim me that they could come pick me up. The picture of me was in the newspaper for six months. While my picture was in the newspaper, the officers brought me to the orphanage and I stayed there for 10 months. I looked at the park in front of me. Sadly, I could only see a construction fence around the park. I could only see the tip of the rock popping out. The ladies motioned to a truck next to us and told me to go on top so I could get a better look. I hopped onto the truck and I saw the full rock and a patch of garden in the middle. I took a couple of pictures and hopped down from the truck. We all said our goodbyes even though I didn't want to. My family got into the car and left my home for the second time. I watched the whole time and saw the ladies that raised me for my first few months get smaller and smaller until they faded.

When my parents came to China to bring me home to America, I probably didn't know I was getting a new family. Going back to China was an experience I will never forget. This time when I left, I felt sad. I felt like this orphanage was my other home, a place that I call mine because I lived there, and it was the place I was born. I didn't want to leave for the second time. I don't even know when I am going back. It might be a few years, or it might be a decade, but I will never forget my experience of going back to the place I was born for the very first time.

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Sophie Mei in China