

enough. I am thankful to have such a person in my life, and the fact that she is my mother is more valuable than I could ever express.

“TELL ME ABOUT WHEN YOU MET ME.”

Elizabeth Johnston

Elementary Education
Elston High School, Michigan City, Indiana

On May 23, 1996, Mom and I were rushing to get checked into the Xiamen Hotel, and we could hardly wait for our bags to get to the room. In less than a half an hour, we would be at the Xiamen Children's Welfare Institute of China. Mom and I had already waited eight months to meet you and we only had about thirty minutes to go. Once we got our bags, we tore apart the suitcases looking for all the things that we needed to bring to the orphanage: diaper bag, clothing, and supplies for the orphanage. All eight of your Chinese sisters' families, our interpreter Tina, and our lawyer Keith scrambled to get on the bus.

The bus was very similar to the one that we rode in Beijing just a few days earlier. It was old, smelled like moth balls, and it looked like it was made in the late sixties, but that didn't matter to me. My dream was coming true; I was going to meet my sister. Once we arrived at the orphanage we were told that we could only film our babies. All of the parents brought cameras, but only Keith and I brought video cameras. Mine was the only one that decided to work, so I became the photographer for the day.

Once inside we were led by one of the nannies down a short hallway. All the curtains to the rooms were shut so we could not see the rooms that we passed by. At the end of the hallway was the meeting room. The room was in a circular shape and the ceiling was painted blue with white clouds. Everyone found a place to sit down on the big couches that were covered with mauve velvet material and waited. I sat there calmly, but inside my heart was pounding. I was excited, scared, and nervous all at once. Keith and Tina spoke to the nannies and to the director of the orphanage. All of the nannies were beautiful and kind. After a few business issues were taken care of, the nannies left the room. It seemed like days, but in only minutes the first baby arrived. It was you.

I knew that it was you, because you were even more beautiful than your baby picture that was given to us a few months ago. Your shiny black hair stood straight up, your cheeks were chubby, your face round, and your little lips were perfect just like a little bow. The nanny placed you into Mom's arms and you just looked into her eyes and cooed. I think that you were very happy to meet us too. I was video taping you, and then I filmed the other families with your Chinese sisters. They were all pretty, but none of them as pretty as you.

Finally, Mom took the camera from me and let me hold you. You were so small. I cradled you in my arms and told you that I was your big sister who loved you. As I was holding you, I turned around the room and saw all the happy families. I began to cry. This was a moment that I would never forget. You were now a part of my life for the very first time. I looked up at the blue-cloud covered ceiling and thought, I must be in heaven.

I think that we were only in the orphanage about one hour. It was pitch black outside and raining very lightly when we left. You were already asleep; I think that our first meeting wore you out. When we arrived at the hotel, Mom laid you on one of the beds and I played with you while Mom got your things ready for your bath. I showed you the teddy bear that I bought you for your first Christmas. Mom and I both noticed that you had a cold and a little bit of diaper rash. I expected you to have a lot more clothes on. Chinese mothers like to dress their babies in many layers of clothes, even if it's in the middle of June in China. But you only had a diaper, an oversized pink tee-shirt, and over that a small sleeper. We counted all you toes and fingers. Of course, you were perfect. Eventually, Mom found all of the bath supplies in the suitcase and we gave you a bath. You were so small that we bathed you in the sink. It wasn't very long after your bath that you were asleep again. Mom and I were too excited to sleep. We both just stood above your crib and watched you suck you left index finger while you slept.

The next day we got up early and asked Rosie, Mike, and Haley to go to breakfast with us. Haley, who was fourteen months old, was the oldest girl adopted on the trip. When she first met her mom and dad she cried, but the next day she was feeling much better. In fact, she didn't want Rosie or Mike to stop holding her. After breakfast the whole group went shopping in the streets of China. Mom put you in one of those baby harnesses that holds you in front of her. I became the pack horse for the trip. I carried both cameras and your heavy diaper bag.

As we walked through the streets, many people stared at us. Of course, I was used to this by now. Before we met you we went to Beijing

and many people stopped to look at us. The Chinese people were staring at us for a different reason now. We were Americans and we were holding Chinese babies. The people in your town were so kind. They were so happy that we adopted you. The women, especially the older ones, would stop to look at you and tell you that you were a lucky baby. I disagree; Mom and I are the lucky ones.

The women would sometimes talk to us in Chinese even though we couldn't understand them. I figured out that many of them wanted to know if you were a boy or a girl. I didn't know how to say girl, so I said "*Mei mei*." This means "little sister." Tina said that the women thought that you were such a pretty girl. One of the women took Mom to the side of the group and said, "She is the prettiest baby." Sometimes it was too overwhelming, because so many people would crowd around us and want to touch you and the other babies. Often the women would scold us because they thought that you weren't covered enough. They thought that you needed to be completely covered with a blanket in ninety degree weather.

Later that day, we went to a very nice restaurant. When we walked in we were greeted by five women wearing red-sequined dresses. There were about ten large tanks of fish, shrimp, and other sea food that you could pick for dinner. I love the way that the food is ordered and eaten in China. When you order a dish, it is for the whole table to share. It is nice, because you get to try many different things. Can you believe it? I even tried cow tongue. I don't think that you would like it, though; it tasted like liver to me. I really liked the duck that they served there, too. The only thing that I didn't try was the shrimp. I love shrimp, but I couldn't bear to eat a boiled shrimp that was complete with head, eyes, and everything.

A few days later we went sight seeing to a small island next to Xiamen. We all crowded on a boat for a short five minute boat ride to the island. It was the Chinese holiday called "Children's Day." This was exciting, because we were able to see many children that day. The girls in China are always dressed so pretty. They often wear bright colored dresses like red or pink with ruffles and lace on the trim. It was fun to look at the little girls and guess which one you would resemble one day.

The island, although rather small, was beautiful. It was decorated with so many different types of plants and flowers, many that I had never seen before. The island had several different shops. At one of the shops we bought you a real tea set and an ankle bracelet. I saw many babies wearing an ankle bracelet with the same charm on it. Tina later told us that this was a good luck charm. Of course, you are a lucky baby, so we

had to buy you the charm. Already you were spoiled. Another shop along the street was selling live turtles and even eels.

Tina led us to an aquarium that was inside a small, white brick building. The group was desperate to get out of the hot sun, so we decided to go in. It turned out that there were only about fifteen fish tanks in a small room. I looked at the first row of fish and turned around the corner. A group of junior high age girls was on a field trip for children's day. I couldn't believe it. I became the spectacle for the day. Soon about thirty girls crowded around me and were trying to speak to me in broken English. The girls asked me if I would take a picture with them. I took about twenty pictures with these girls. They didn't stop at a group picture; individual girls wanted their picture with me. I enjoyed it though. I even found you and Mom and introduced you to the girls. They wanted to take more pictures, but I told them that I had to go. Having thirty girls surround you in ninety degree weather is not that comfortable. Needless to say, I never did get to see those fish.

Well, the rest of the week was just as exciting. We even got to eat at Pizza Hut and McDonald's. I know that we all wanted a break from eating Chinese food. It's getting late, I'll tell you more about the first week that we were together tomorrow night. Good night, KateLin, sweet dreams.

BILINGUAL = OPPORTUNITY

Julie Scheetz

Exploratory

Nearly twenty years ago when I entered my Freshman year at Chesterton High School, I was asked to select a foreign language to study, which was a requirement. It was an easy decision for me to choose German since my grandparents, Alwine and Gustav, had immigrated here in the late 1920s from Germany. I was very excited to be able to learn more about their homeland and wanted to make them proud when I could speak their native language. While I was growing up they had always shared their memories of their life in Germany with me. They created a vivid picture in my mind as they described to me the small villages with their cobble-stone streets nestled in the foothills of the surrounding Harz