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## Newsletter

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## News From Americans Adopting Orphans

### **Chinese Adoption Officials Visit the United States**

A six member delegation of Chinese adoption officials toured the US in early May. One of the purposes of their journey was to report on the status of adoption in China. This was accomplished through speeches given by Guo Si Jin, the Director-General of the China Center of Adoption Affairs, to audiences of adoption agency representatives, on both the East Coast and the West Coast. Highlights of Director Guo's speech appears on pages 3 and 4 of this newsletter.

While in the United States, the delegation also wanted to meet individually with government officials and adoption agencies. With their limited stay, it would have been difficult for them to see every agency. **Americans Adopting Orphans** is proud to be among the few agencies personally visited by the delegates. Much to our delight, we had three separate occasions to speak with them which were all positive and productive.

### **Airport Greeting In Seattle**

“Huan ying! Huan ying!” (Welcome! Welcome!) **Americans Adopting Orphans** families happily cheered as they waved Chinese flags and held up a banner. This was the enthusiastic greeting given to Chinese adoption officials arriving at SeaTac airport on Thursday, May 14th at 10 PM. It was a pleasant surprise for the weary travelers who paused to return smiles and shake hands with a small gathering of **Americans Adopting Orphans** families. It was a stirring moment for those whose lives have been so deeply enriched by Chinese adoption. The delegation departed to the heartfelt applause of appreciation. As they made their way down the concourse to retrieve their luggage, one of the officials turned to video tape as a small contingent of toddlers meandered down the hall following them.

### **Our Meeting with the CCAA**

On Friday, May 15th, between their visits with Washington State government officials, **Americans Adopting Orphans** had the opportunity to meet with Chinese adoption delegates at our Education Center. There were three representatives of the China Center of Adoption Affairs, the esteemed Guo Si Jin, Director-General, Liu Xiao Lei, Director of Administration Department, and Liu Kang Sheng, Director of Review Department II (the department which makes assignments of children to families). Also present were Jiang Long Chuan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Jiang Xiao Liang, Ministry of Justice; and Zhou Yan, Ministry of Civil Affairs. We were excited to finally be face to face with the folks responsible for bringing so many children and families together.

## Highlights from Director General Guo's Speech in Oregon

Within two hours of our meeting with the Chinese adoption delegation at our Education Center, we were packed and heading south on I-5 for Director Guo's West Coast speech which was scheduled for the next afternoon. The Eugene Hilton (in southern Oregon) is 7 hours away from Seattle when you have three adults and three kids under the age of six in a minivan, and make all the potty stops and snack breaks attendant with such a trip. But it was worth the time, to hear Guo Si Jin speak to a group of about forty people representing sixteen adoption agencies.

Although Director Guo read from a prepared speech using an interpreter, we heard the inflection and emotion in his voice first hand. He made it extremely clear that he takes adoption and the welfare of children very seriously. He spoke at length about how the CCAA is structured, general CCAA procedures, documentation from families, and comments about how US agencies are doing.

- *CCAA Structure*

The CCAA was created in June of 1996 and is part of the Ministry of Civil Affairs with support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Justice. The CCAA has a Director-General, two Deputy Directors, five department supervisors, and twenty-six staff members. The Administration Department receives the paperwork, the Liaison and Services Department works with agencies, and Document Review Departments I and II reviews applications from prospective adoptive parents and assigns children, respectively. The CCAA has a relationship with twelve countries for the purpose of adoption, with the US doing the largest number of Chinese adoptions. Currently there are about one hundred US adoption agencies working with China.

- *CCAA Procedures*

With the increase in the number of adoptive families over the past few years, Director Guo stated that one of the primary goals of the CCAA has been to organize and make professional work standards for Chinese adoptions. This has been accomplished in several ways. First by upgrading work procedures to process dossiers according to a month by month sequence. Automating and computerizing the process has helped eliminate much of the manual work and duplication of effort which has sometimes occurred in the past. There are also plans to computerize each province to increase efficiency and reduce disorder and errors. Further strong efforts are being made to abide by established Chinese regulations in making assignments of children to adoptive families, particularly with "special needs" assignments. Director Guo said that *policy* has remained unchanged but *enforcement* has been standardized.

Much effort has been put into reducing the wait time for families and children. Director Guo pointed out that while the CCAA has not slowed down, the number of applications has increased. Wait times have grown slightly longer because the number of available children has not increased. Time has been taken to find the most appropriate referrals for specific families. Each child assignment is required to pass through eight different staff members and have three signatures before being approved.

- *Documentation*

Director Guo expressed strong concern that only complete and accurate information about families be sent to the CCAA. He feels that it is imperative for agencies to instruct pre-adoptive parents to provide correct information about the adoptive their age, marital status, number of children, financial status, and criminal record so that the family complies with Chinese adoption regulations. Some agencies and parents have not been truthful in presenting this information to the CCAA.

Director Guo also said that some adoption agencies apparently are not truthfully telling parents about "special needs" restrictions or may not be presenting the all the medical information or photos of children to parents for acceptance. The result has been that some parents travel to China unprepared to adopt the child assigned to them. The CCAA now requires parents' signatures on child acceptance forms, as a check mark indicating acceptance could be made by someone other than the parents.

- *US Adoption Agencies*

Cooperation between the CCAA and US agencies has been excellent according to Director Guo. He said all agencies and families are given equal consideration. There are no favorites. He was disappointed that some agencies make claims that are not true. For instance, some claim that they have special representatives

within the CCAA itself, some state they run their own welfare institutes in China, some claim they can get “healthy” babies in 2 to 3 months. He warned parents that if they read these things on the Internet, not to consider them reliable. He also advised agencies not to mislead parents.

Agencies using commercialism to promote their adoption programs came under fire. Director Guo was particularly displeased with agencies that solicit clients through strong advertising campaigns and he feels this behavior does not demonstrate “a serious attitude” toward adoption. He went on to say that he is uncomfortable with methods used by some agencies to raise funds for orphans especially those that build “donations” into their fees. He feels donations should be voluntary, given to benefit the children not to influence adoption processing, and without competition between agencies. Though donations sent directly to the CCAA are rejected, Director Guo did mention that donations for orphans are accepted by the China Charity Federation. See the article on page 6 of this newsletter for further details.

### **Mothers Day in China and Beyond!**

For 14 **Americans Adopting Orphans** moms, Mothers Day 1998 was one that will never be forgotten. Families from WA, MT, WI, CT, and NY spent the day arriving in their babies’ home town. With nervous anticipation they began readying themselves to meet their daughters the next day. Lisa Vance relates, “When our interpreter said my child’s Chinese name and pointed to the baby in Dr. Chen’s arms, I let out a scream! I was *so* excited.” About mid-trip, we received a fax from the group, “Tah-Dah! All is going well. We all have Babies. Everybody is thrilled. The kids are Wonderful.”

Seven of the families returned to Seattle on the same flight. Debye Chapman was met at the Immigration/Customs Gate by her husband and son (who had remained at home). “What a trip!” she exclaimed through tears of joy as she introduced her new daughter to her family. Later she explained, “It was emotionally exhausting and wonderful at the same time! I am so happy. From about the third day of the trip on, I have felt like crying. Every day with my daughter is fabulous! And I would do it all over again.” Congratulations new families! May all your Mothers Days to come be as happy.

### **Summer Class Schedule is Here!**

Push aside those dogdays of summer and come to an **Americans Adopting Orphans** class or two. There’s a new Grandparents class and Toddler Adoption class that are sure to be standouts. Planning Your Adoption Trip and Infant Care and Medical Considerations are offered in this schedule by popular demand. We note that they will not be offered again until October or November, so if you think your referral might come before then, now’s the time to sign up. The fall/winter schedule will be out in September with our normal offering of 16 - 20 classes.

## **News From the Net**

### **How It’s Going with INS Fingerprinting**

Since the new INS fingerprinting policy went into effect on March 28th, families processed under the new rules report that it adds about 6 weeks, or more, in some areas, to the process of obtaining INS approval. About a month after a prospective adoptive family sends in their I-600A application, they receive a notice by mail that they can come down to their local INS office to be fingerprinted. Parents are given an “appointment window” of one week to present themselves at INS. The appointment window is 1 to 2 weeks after the appointment notice is received. Applicants may come only during their appointment window. Drop-ins are not allowed.

In the past, fingerprint services authorized by the INS could be used. Unfortunately, many sets of fingerprints were being rejected by the FBI as being unreadable, necessitating the time consuming and frustrating repeat fingerprinting of applicants. Now, all fingerprinting must be done at INS offices, often using electronic fingerprint scanners to insure greater accuracy. Many independent fingerprinting services across the nation that had been certified by the INS for three-year terms as Designated Fingerprint Services have joined a class-action suit against the INS, hoping that their original three year commitment will be honored. However, Application Support Centers (ASCs) will soon be open around the country to perform fingerprinting. The Seattle Times reports that an ASC will open in Renton, WA in July. In addition to the INS office on Airport

Way in Seattle, there is a temporary fingerprinting site at the Federal Building downtown and mobile units are being used in Bellingham, Richland, Spokane, and Yakima.

This new procedure even affects families currently approved to adopt a foreign-born child. Remember, the 171-H is valid for only 18 months and families should begin reapplying for a new 171-H *EARLY*--when their current 171-H is 6 months from expiring. In the worst case scenario, it can take as long as 90 days for INS to notify families of their fingerprint appointment time, 2 weeks until your appointment time rolls around, 45 - 90 days for the FBI to clear fingerprints, and 2 - 4 weeks for INS to issue the 171-H after the fingerprint clearances and home study report are in their files. Families risk *months* of delay in adopting if their 171-H lapses.

**Americans Adopting Orphans** families receive a pack of materials for INS reapplication 6 months before their current 171-H expires. Avoid headaches and disappointing delays in your adoption processing, reapply in a timely manner.

### Scam Alert

Take caution when sight seeing and shopping in Guang Zhou. Scam artists frequent hotels, restaurants, and shops around the airport and US Consulate waiting for unsuspecting adoptive families. You aren't hard to spot with all that luggage and a baby strapped to your back! Families have been approached by Chinese people posing as students, businessmen, or someone who "just wants to practice their English." After gaining your trust, they offer to escort you to places of local interest and act as interpreter or "negotiator" with shop keepers for buying souvenirs, meals, taxis, etc. Unbeknownst to you, a "trusted guide" may over-inflate prices of purchases and pocket the surplus. Families have been left stranded on the back streets of Guang Zhou far from their hotel without money after their "guide" simply walked away with their last few dollars "to go find a taxi." Protect your family by using common sense and simple precautions:

- If you want to explore, and your adoption agency does not provide a local guide, ask your travel agent or the concierge at your hotel to recommend and arrange for someone to help you. Guides provided by your adoption agency are paid by the agency for their expertise and proven good service to families. Thus they are not as desperately motivated as independent tour guides to seek tips and price gouge as their major source of compensation for their time.
- Always keep the name and address of your hotel with you in both English and Chinese. You can show it to people on the street, taxi drivers, etc. to make your return to your hotel if you get lost.
- Never disclose how much money you have with you. Con artists will push you hard until they think they have all the money they can get out of you, then will suddenly disappear when your money is gone even if you are relying on them to continue helping you.
- Make shopping expeditions in groups when you can. It's more difficult to fool a whole group than a couple of individuals. Always tell someone in your group where you are going and when you expect to return particularly if you venture out alone.
- Take your English-Chinese/Chinese-English dictionary with you so that you can communicate without an interpreter. By pointing at the Chinese characters and words in English you can make yourself understood.
- Always carry your passport on your person--never let it out of your sight. (A recent Seattle Times story tells of a traveler who left his passport in a jacket pocket then placed it in an overhead storage bin on his international flight. When he arrived at his destination, his jacket was there but his passport was not.)

## News From the East

### Consulate Closed to Adoption During Clinton Visit

According to Keith Ketterer, US Consulate Officer in Guang Zhou, there will be no adoption visa related appointments from June 25th to July 13th if President Clinton continues with his plans to visit China during that time. Mr. Ketterer told us that some of our families were given the last available Consular appointments for June. July could prove to be a tight month for scheduling Consular appointments which may push travel plans for some families into August.

### Processing Times

Families whose dossiers were sent to China in September and October 1997 are currently waiting to receive assignments. We anticipate that assignments will arrive in about a month, although we expect assignments for families who are eligible for children without medical conditions to arrive first and families eligible for children with medical conditions to follow a few weeks later. **Americans Adopting Orphans'** August 1997 families received their non-medical needs assignments in early May and our July/August 1997 medical needs families received their assignments in late May.

"*Permissions to adopt*" have been coming about 1 month after the CCAA has received families' referral acceptances. However, we would not be surprised if the recent trip to the US by Chinese adoption officials slows travel permissions a little for the next few groups.

### Ages of Children

The children have been ranging in age from four to eight months at the time of assignment for families adopting children with medical conditions. Six to twelve months is the typical age range for children without medical conditions. This has remained fairly consistent over the past several months.

### Expedited Processing Now Available for Children over 3 Years Old

It appears that families *truly* interested in adopting older children may be able to significantly reduce their processing time and bring their children home much sooner than they might have otherwise thanks to the dedication of the CCAA in finding families for waiting children. In his speech in Eugene, Director Guo reported that it is possible to receive faster processing for families requesting children over the age of three years or for children with more serious medical conditions. This is handled on a case by case basis and should be coordinated by your agency. **Americans Adopting Orphans** does have a few client families whose applications are receiving expedited service from the CCAA.

### How to Donate to an Official Chinese Charity

Director Guo stated that since the CCAA only accepts official adoption fees, donations for orphanages are handled by a different organization (listed below). We are **not** asking or suggesting that families make donations. We are simply making the information available to you. If you choose to donate, we do encourage you to consider the advice of Director Guo to base any donation on the following principles:

1) the donation must be completely voluntary, 2) there should be no link between adoption and donation, 3) donations or amounts of donation are not assigned to adoptive families, 4) if you cannot afford to donate, do not try, 5) fund raising should not be a competition

Contributions in the form of *money orders* may be sent to: CHINA CHARITY FEDERATION, No. 9 South Street West Huangchenggen, Beijing 100032.

Contributions may also be sent by *wire transfer* in US Dollars to: Bank of China New York Office--International Department, Account No. 5003-6007198-000-001, Beijing Office, the Industrial & Commercial Bank of China for the beneficiary: China Charity Federation BJ111-017.

## Parents' Zone

### Putting Development into Perspective

by Jill Dalbacka

As a new parent, you will watch with wonder as your child achieves or is preparing to hurdle developmental milestones. You will also compare your child to other children: cousins, children of friends and co-workers are all fair game in the “developmental derby.” You will worry through every step of your child’s maturation, it’s part of the charge of parenting.

It’s not easy to **not** worry about your child’s development. As the parent of two daughters Jesse (birth child, 16 years old) and Lani (adopted from China, almost 3 years old) I’ve done my share of worrying. My anxiety is tempered by twenty years of experience as a Pediatric Occupational Therapist. I can share with you a few things that I have learned along the way to keep concerns about my children in perspective.

There are many factors that go into the developing of a whole child. To name a few: Genetics. Nutrition. Culture Influences. Social Materials. Some of these factors you as parents can influence, others you cannot. You often have very little information about some of these factors with a child who has been raised in an institutional setting, yet all have a profound affect on the young child. When a good portion of a child’s life has already been spent on a less than optimal path, parents are left to fit the pieces together and work toward maximizing the child’s potential how and where possible. This is not done without frustration and worry.

As internationally adopted children have frequently been abandoned anonymously, the **genetic information** you get is negligible. You wouldn’t be able to change anything even if you had this information. Some children are genetically predetermined to walk earlier (or later), talk earlier (or later), and to have a more pushy personality, or be more “laid back.” Each of these genetic “sets” comes with its own joys, and challenges. Enjoy your child for who she is. Recognize that while you can shape the behavior that develops on top of this genetic “predisposition”, it does not excuse your child for making poor choices in life. Is it nature or is it nurture? Who knows. Either way, your responsibility as your child’s parent is to help her to develop into the best person she can be.

It is a fairly safe bet that the **nutrition** your child received in the orphanage or while in foster care was the best that it could be under the circumstances. However, it was probably was not high enough in calories nor contained the right combination of nutrients to sustain developmental skills that would be at par with children raised outside of an orphanage. Our daughter, Lani, had severely low muscle tone when we received her at nearly 8 months of age. She could hold her head up when in a sitting position, but had difficulty in raising it off of a bed surface when being lifted from lying on her back. She couldn’t take weight in her legs when held in a standing position. She needed full support to sit up. She also lacked energy and appeared to be a docile, “laid back” little girl. We couldn’t have been more wrong!

Once Lani got onto formula with higher calories, and began getting more water in her diet, her body used the “new-found surplus” in nutrition to fuel her development. And did she blossom! We now refer to her as our “little golden monkey” with her climbing and antics. I love to watch her play after her bath, when she isn’t wearing any clothes, just so I can watch her well-muscled body move. Nutrition is a factor you can influence. so stay away from the sweets and go for higher nutrition.

**Cultural influences** are also important in the development of a child. In many cultures, children are swaddled and/or carried on their parent’s back sometimes until they’re 2 - 3 years old. In some cultures (Asian included) the back of the head being flattened is considered attractive so babies spend a lot of time on their backs in order to develop this feature. This impacts motor and perceptual development to an extent, also.

A child’s relationship with gravity influences how muscle tone (the “readiness” a muscle has when at rest) and strength develop, which will determine whether the “milestones” we watch for (sitting alone, standing, walking, etc.) come at “appropriate” times. If a child has had experiences with gravity that are primarily on their backs, their back muscles will initially develop faster than the tummy muscles, and their legs may rest in a more “frog-legged” position. This will make it difficult for the child to crawl, because she needs the muscles that counter these positions to be strong in order to hold her body up in a hands-and-knees position. Once you

begin to move your child and give her more experiences in developing her relationship with gravity, she will develop these skills. They may be delayed by our standards, but by the time she enters preschool or kindergarten, she will probably not stand out from other children her age.

**Social influences** also carry with them developmental implications. With younger children, you will again see the implications in motor skills as well as in social and interactional skills the child brings with her. My niece, adopted from an orphanage in Brazil at the tender age of 8 months, had already learned not to depend on the adults around her for comfort and support. When she would hear another baby cry, she would look frantically around for the child and try to leave the arms of her mother to get to the baby to comfort it. In Brazilian orphanages, the babies are left to cry in their cribs, but are placed in close enough proximity to the other cribs so that they can reach through the bars to pat each other on the back when distressed.

My niece also came with some severe feeding difficulties, not due to any medical or developmental problem, but due to the fact that in Brazil children are struck for putting things into their mouths (little hands included). This makes some sense when you consider that parasites are passed by putting things into your mouth, but can be developmentally devastating when you desensitize the mouth for new food and language experiences. There is a culture and a community within an orphanage, whether for good or bad, that influences our children prior to their joining our families. We can't change what that culture and society are, but we can teach our children coping strategies once they join our families.

"Grocery store grandmas" are wont to believe that your child is a "poor little thing." Before reading this information, you may have been tempted to agree with them. Armed with a new way to view your child's capabilities and her potential, in light of the genetic, nutritional, cultural, and social influences that have made her who she is today, perhaps you can begin to see more clearly where and how much to worry. Once you are home, she will likely develop very quickly in an environment where you and she can relax and play.

Since I work with children who have developmental challenges, parents in our Families with Children from China group occasionally ask me to "take a look" at their babies when they return. I do "take a look" at their baby, and usually see a wonderful human being full of magic and surprises to come. I point out the great things the child is doing, and what to expect next in the developmental quest. Although I strive to be friendly and professional, I don't give any developmental advice outside of working hard, playing hard, and enjoying these moments together. And, unless the child has an identified special or medical need, I recommend that they not pursue any developmental testing for 4 - 6 months after they arrive home. Why? Let me explain.

In my opinion, it is not fair to expect a child new to the US to perform on a developmental test that has been standardized in our culture, with children who have been raised by our developmental and nutritional standards. Why would you want to do a fine motor/play test on a child who has not had exposure to toys? Or do a (English-based) language test on a child who has only been exposed to Mandarin? Give your child some time to catch up. After a few weeks or months at home together, if you are still concerned, talk to your physician. Explain what the child was doing developmentally when you received her, how you have been playing (working) with her, and how far she has come. If she isn't catching up, be persistent with your doctor in getting a referral to a therapist who is familiar with developmental issues. If nothing else, you can lay your worries to rest knowing that you're headed in the right direction.

Remember, life is a journey you are taking together. And what a journey it is. Or, in the words of Theodore Geissel (aka Dr. Seuss), "Oh, the places you will go!"

Jill Dalbacka and her husband Tom live in Minnesota with daughters Jesse (16) and Lani (almost 3). They are preparing for another China adoption as repeat clients of Americans Adopting Orphans.

## **Birds, Bees, and Beginnings**

by Cindy Ptasnik

Does thinking about discussing menstruation, brassieres, and pubic hair with your child make you nervous? Many parents find sexual topics difficult to talk about with their kids. Perhaps in response to experiencing the almost painful avoidance of sex education growing up in my own family, or maybe because of my nursing background, I had always planned to be forthcoming with information for my future children. I never expected that discussions with my children about “where babies come from” would be particularly daunting. After becoming a parent through adoption, I realized that it's a little more complicated than simply the birds and the bees. Adoption is emotional, political, and can be very threatening to small children with concepts such as relinquishment or abandonment.

Don't plan on waiting until your child's preteen years to begin this part of your child's education. Beginning with their adoption story and building as they grow older, teach your child about the biology, human relationships, and world events that brought you together as a family. It's our job as adoptive parents to provide our children with developmentally appropriate answers to their questions, to give them a sense of perspective, and protect their tender self-esteem regarding their beginnings.

Even before they are old enough to fully understand what you are telling them, model positive adoption language in your early “conversations” with your baby. Cracking open the photo album of your adoption trip and telling the “story” of how you became mommy and daddy is a good way to start. Not only does it introduce your child to words that will become a familiar part of their history, it gives you a chance to practice your tale and grow more comfortable with each telling. Keep it simple and expand with more complex concepts and details as your child gets older. By the time your child launches into those tough questions, you'll be better prepared to provide the answers your child seeks, to give them as accurate and as positive an account as you can of where they came from and who they are--with honesty, and with love.

The first questions come earlier than you might expect. At the ripe age of four years, Kate made her first attempts to understand the answers to life's more difficult questions. Are you prepared to answer your child when they ask “Where did I come from?” I wasn't sure I was. My main goal was to lay the foundation for more conversations in the future and to give my daughter the information she needed at that moment. It's not as easy as you might think when the questions come tumbling out of your child. And they will. Just like they did for my daughter. Read on and consider how you think you would have answered.

Bedtime was proceeding as usual with Kate picking out her clothes for the next morning. Balancing on a box of her brother's Huggies in front of her closet, and holding out a multi-colored sleeve, she asked "Mom, where'd we get this shirt?"

"Well, I think Aunt Beth gave it to you."

"Did she make the shirt for me?"

"No, she probably bought it at a store." Nodding, she hopped off her perch with shirt in hand, and moved onto her dresser to find socks and pants.

"Mommy, who made our house?" She queried as she hauled up a pair of sweatpants out of a drawer and plopped them down on the floor beside her bed.

"Well, some men built our house with bricks and wood before either Daddy or I was born." Kneeling alongside her bed, and giving her bunk an inviting pat, I motioned for her to come sit and read a story with me. But Kate was not ready to change gears, "*Mommy who made me?*"

Thus I began 20 very candid minutes of discussion about birds and bees, and adoption, with my Chinese born daughter. I'm sure it was prompted by what she had seen on TV just a few nights earlier. We had been flipping through the channels and happened upon a childbirth documentary. My husband and I exchanged glances and shrugged indicating no objections. With a kid on each of our laps, we watched as a tiny little person made their

way into the world before our eyes. Fortunately it turned out to be a rather gentle birth without too much spillage of bodily fluids or vocalizations from the mother to be distracting or scary. Kate was spell-bound and questions flowed from her. She focused on mechanical issues, to which as a former labor and delivery nurse, I was able to provide simple yet satisfying explanations.

In dealing with the question at hand, "Who made me," I knew what she was asking. This was beyond the "where did I come from" question to which we had always simply answered "China." That's all she had *really* been asking back then, all she was ready to hear. This time though, it was different. Over that summer, she had watched as the tummy of a family friend grew large with a future playmate. She had managed to grasp that only some women have babies in their tummies. This time, she wanted to know about herself, how she herself came to be. So I started with the obvious to see where it would take us.

"You asked who made you? Well, you grew in a woman's tummy."

"*Your* tummy?" We had touched on this topic only one other time, almost a year before and she had become a little tearful and uneasy when she learned that she had not been in my tummy, but in a "different lady's tummy." At that earlier time she had said in a small quivering voice, "But I *wanted* to be in *your* tummy."

This, I have come to understand, is one of the first grief reactions a child can have about being adopted--that they did not have that "special closeness" with the one person, "mommy", with whom they have bonded so deeply. Now she was ready to approach it again. "No. Not in my tummy. You grew in another woman's tummy and you came out her pookie (our family's term for the female genitalia) like the baby in the movie."

"Did I cry like the baby did in the movie?"

"I don't know. Maybe you did. I wasn't there to see you when you were born." I resisted the temptation to add "but I *wanted* to be there. I wish I had been there." This was about my daughter's need to know something about her past. I knew I could not cloud it with my own emotional needs.

"Why did I cry?" her concern for herself was growing. She has, at various times, cried when she has seen photos or videos of herself as a baby. Having little memory of the early times when she was an infant, yet seeing herself with her daddy or me or other people, sometimes makes her feel a little disconcerted.

"Well most babies cry when they are born because they are used to being all snug and warm inside a woman's tummy where it is quiet and dark. After a baby comes out of a woman's pookie, the baby gets cold. And it is brighter and louder than she is used to and it makes her unhappy. But the doctor and nurses and the woman hurry and give the baby a blankie and give her lots of snuggles and she gets warm and happy."

"Did I cry?" I waited for her tears this time.

"Mommy wasn't there when you were born so I don't know for sure. But the people that *were* there when you were born gave you a blankie and snuggles too." Abandoned in China at two weeks of age, it is just as much of an unknown to me as it is to my daughter, but I want to believe that someone gave her the care and affection she needed during her first hours and days of life. I cannot allow myself to imagine any less.

"Why weren't you there? Where *were* you?" a little irritated with a slight note of worry. Answering silently to myself, "I would've given anything to save you those first four months in an orphanage and have you in my arms." Blinking back my own tears remembering those eighteen months of tormented waiting, I tried to sound matter of fact, "I don't know exactly where I was but I was probably here at our house. And later when I heard that you were born, I went to China to get you."

"Why weren't you there? Who were the people?" I could feel her trying to make sense of herself in time and space, without the edge of fear that she had had in the past.

"Remember how we talked about how you didn't grow in my tummy or come out of my pookie? Well, the lady whose tummy you did grow in and whose pookie you came out of was there to take care of you for a while." I

could feel myself naturally wanting to call "the lady" "your mother," but consciously made the effort to avoid introducing that concept for the time being. I admit my first motivation for doing this was a selfish one, not wanting to compete with my child's "other mother" but at the same time wanting to keep the discussion simple and focused on her needs at the time.

"For a while? Where is she? What is her name?"

"No one knows her name, but she was in China because that's where you were born." Thinking to myself that her birth mother must have the same questions in her mind about the tiny baby girl she left on the steps of a police station four years before. I bear no ill will toward my daughter's birth mother. In fact, I think of her quite frequently. It's hard not to want to share the many milestones that your child accomplishes with someone who contributed so much to that young life, someone invisibly linked to your heart. It's also hard knowing that neither you nor your child may ever know exactly who that person is.

"Why can't the baby stay with the lady?"

"Sometimes a baby will grow in the tummy of a woman who isn't ready to take care of a baby. Sometimes, when a baby is born, the baby can't stay with the woman who grew the baby inside her. Maybe she doesn't have enough room in her house or enough food for a baby. And the baby is taken to an orphanage (a familiar term from watching the videos of our trips to China to adopt her and her brother) where other people take care of the baby until a Mommy and Daddy can come to take her home with them."

Then back to less threatening and much more interesting territory, the actual birth. "Why did the baby cry? Did the lady in the movie cry?" referring to the documentary scene during which the mother was pushing accompanied by relatively mild mannered grunting, panting, and a few yelps.

"Well, sometimes people cry when they're sad. But people also cry when they're cold, like the baby in the movie. Sometimes people cry when they hurt. Having a baby come out of your pookie can be owie. But I'll bet she was a little happy too because her baby was being born. People can cry when they're happy too."

Nods. Obviously enjoying the discourse but getting a little sleepy.

"You know, I'm glad you have all these questions. I like to talk about all kinds of things with you! How about if tomorrow we read some books together about where babies come from? (knowing that I had purchased an arsenal of books including "Mr. Rogers Talks about Adoption," "Where Did I Come From," "Did the Sun Shine Before You Were Born" , and "When You Were Born in China" just for this occasion).

"OK! Can we watch the movie again too?"

"We can try to find a movie that shows a baby being born. Would you like that?"

"Yeah!" reaching out and patting me on the shoulder as if to say "Nice talk, Mom!" We then exchanged one of the most blissful hugs you can imagine. Our bedtime ritual came to its usual close with a chorus of "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." I came out of the her bedroom to find my husband Dave grinning and pointing to the baby monitor. He had heard everything. "She really tried to pin you down on things," he chuckled.

"Being in the hot seat wasn't that bad." I sunk into the sofa smiling to myself, but it's never too early to begin preparing for adolescence!

Needed: Mothers with adopted children currently under age 5 yrs for UW study on how mothers develop relationships with their adopted children. Call JoAnne Solchany. RN, PhC at (206) 685-8115.

## Community Calendar

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- Waiting Parents Group**----- 1st Tuesday of each month, 7 - 9 PM  
Location ----- Children's Home Society of Washington (CHS)  
3300 NE 65th St. Seattle
- Fee \$5/person  
Facilitators ----- Dana Blue, MSW & Jan Wilder, adoptive parent
- Baby Expo '98 \***----- Saturday, June 27th -- 9 AM to 5 PM  
Location ----- Meydenbauer Center, Bellevue, WA  
Admission Price ----- \$7 over 12, under 12 free--we have a few **free** guest passes  
What you'll see----- Toys, baby clothes, baby products & services, safety equipment
- SeaTac International Festival**----- June 26th, 27th, & 28th, 12 Noon to 7 PM  
Location ----- Angle Lake Park, SeaTac  
Fun things to do ----- Celebrate diversity, live entertainment, ethnic foods, children's area,  
arts & crafts, parade Saturday at 10:30 AM  
More information ----- (206) 439-9273
- Chinese Culture & Arts Festival \*** ---- July 3rd, 4th, & 5th, 12 Noon - 6 PM daily  
Where ----- Seattle Center  
Something for everyone!----- Music, dance, art, demonstrations, visiting Chinese artists
- 23rd Annual Chinatown Summer Festival \***  
Date ----- July 11th, 11 AM to 8 PM/July 12th, 11 AM to 6 PM  
**It's BIG** ----- Seattle's largest Pan Asian event of the year  
Join the fun!----- Performers, arts & crafts, children's activities, food, & more
- 3rd Annual Attachment Disorder Conference**  
Date ----- September 18th - 19th, 1998  
Location ----- Portland, OR  
Presented by ----- Providence General Medical Center & Attachment Center Northwest  
Fee \$120 per day or \$205 for both days  
For more information----- Call 425-889-8524

\* Come visit us at the **Americans Adopting Orphans** information booth at these events!

**Americans Adopting Orphans** is a medium size adoption agency that specializes in adoption from Asia. We provide choice and freedom in adoption, through our unique program that lets adoptive parents design their own adoption. At our Education Center, you may attend adoption and language classes, as well as free informational and support group meetings. If you would like more information and a schedule of meetings and classes, please ask for our free introduction and application packet.

Mailing address:  
**Americans Adopting Orphans**  
12345 Lake City Way NE  
Suite 2001  
Seattle, WA 98125

Tel: 1-206-524-5437  
Fax: 1-206-527-2001  
E-mail: [aao@orphans.com](mailto:aao@orphans.com)  
Web Page: <http://www.orphans.com>  
Hours: 1 - 10 PM M - F, 1 - 5 pm Sat

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