



## **An Adoption Story**

We started our adoption journey in January 2006. Initially we chose to adopt a Non Special Needs (NSN) child from China, but with the lengthening wait for NSN and the greater need of Special Needs (SN) children, we decided to switch to SN. We spent a few months researching many medical conditions, so that we were comfortable with what each would mean to us as a family, and so that we felt we could cope with the best and the worst case needs and outcomes for each of those conditions. We consulted medical web sites for detailed information, looked at many US adoption agency web sites for information on SNs in general, joined various Yahoo groups for the SNs we were considering, and we spoke with other families who already had SN children. Finally, we had a list of SNs that we were comfortable with, including certain heart conditions, cleft lip/ palate, club foot and a few other conditions. We worked with our Social Worker to write an addendum to our home study, returned to panel for reapproval and sent our updated documents to the CCAA in April 2008. We then crossed our fingers, and waited.

In July 2010 we received our referral from the CCAA through the direct match system (which is no longer offered by the CCAA for SN cases). We had been referred a 2 year old girl with a minor to moderate heart condition. We arranged for a cardiologist to review the file and explain the condition and any potential treatment in more detail. A few days later our acceptance was winging its way back to the CCAA. At last, we felt as if we were on the road to becoming parents.

In September 2010, nearly 5 years after starting out and over 6000 miles later, here we were in Nanning (the provincial capital of Guangxi in China) ready to adopt our daughter. She was handed to me – a small bundle, crying hard and extremely upset. When I held her I could feel her heart thudding hard in her chest, and I was very worried; I felt real fear for the enormity of what we were about to take on. It suddenly hit home that this was the reality of a Special Needs adoption of a child with congenital heart disease. Her medical records said she had a small hole in her heart, but now we thought that we might not know the full extent of our daughter's condition. As new parents, that first day was extremely challenging for us, and I expect it was even more difficult for our daughter albeit for different reasons.

One week later we were in Guangzhou at the medical clinic, having various tests carried out on our daughter to make sure she was fit to fly home. In the space of that week, we had seen a true transformation in our delightful little girl – she had become playful, sociable and talkative. However her heart still hammered away in her chest. When we asked for further

tests to assess our daughter's heart condition more fully, the doctor asked us why? She said that those tests could wait until we got home, because she could tell that despite our worries, we were not going to disrupt the adoption, no matter what the tests revealed. She was right. All we needed to know was that our daughter was fit to fly, and she was.

Fast forward to February 2011 and we have now been home for 5 months. Our daughter has grown since coming home –both in size and in character. She has changed our lives immeasurably and it feels as if she has always been part of our family. She is an extremely active toddler, who likes to keep her parents on their toes, and makes very clear her likes and dislikes. She loves swimming, eats far too much chocolate, and throws the occasional tantrum when things are not going according to her plans! Our specialist paediatric cardiology team have said her Chinese medical records were extremely accurate, despite our initial concerns, and it is likely that our daughter's heart condition will resolve itself over the next few years. I cannot say that all of our worries completely vanished at that point, because we still need to be cautious when our daughter catches a cold or chest infection. However to be told that we should go away and lead normal lives with only annual medical checks was the best news we could have hoped for.

To us now, Special Needs is merely a label. Our daughter is just that – first and foremost she is our little girl, and it just so happens that she has a medical condition that means she visits the hospital every so often.