

The Coffee Family Story

My story begins with the devastating diagnosis of infertility and ends with two miraculous events...an adoption and the birth of a biological child.

I married my college sweetheart, Brad. We got married soon after I graduated from college in 1990. Brad and I spent our twenties completing graduate school and starting our careers. We began trying to have children in our early thirties. After several years without success, we sought treatment from a reproductive endocrinologist.

In an attempt to make a long and painful story short, I received the diagnosis of diminished ovarian reserve from a reproductive endocrinology intern. The manner in which I was given this information was highly unprofessional. It was over the phone while I was alone and driving to work. The intern said that if I really wanted children, I would need to consider adoption and/or the use of donor eggs. Prior to this phone call, the last conversation I had with my reproductive endocrinologist was that I should be able to get pregnant. Needless to say, my immediate reaction was that of shock. I cried hysterically while driving myself home after that phone call. Brad left work and met me at home. He and I cried all day. It was a day I will never forget.

Soon after receiving this devastating news, Brad and I went to another fertility clinic to get a second opinion. Unfortunately, failed in-vitro fertilization confirmed the diagnosis of diminished ovarian reserve. I only produced two unhealthy eggs after receiving the maximum amount of hormones needed to increase ovulation. One reproductive endocrinologist sat at his desk and said to me, "Not all fertility problems are black and white, but yours are. You need to consider alternative ways to having children." This all happened in the spring of 2004.

After months of trying to come to terms with the loss of having a biological child, Brad and I met with a counselor in December of 2004 to discuss the option of using donor eggs. Brad was fairly receptive to the use of donor eggs. I wasn't. I tried to envision having embryos created by Brad and an unknown woman implanted in me. I tried to envision myself carrying a baby created by Brad and an unknown woman. I couldn't get passed the fact that the baby would always be Brad's and some unknown woman. A dear friend of mine offered to donate her eggs, but she was too old. So, the use of donor eggs was out.

I continued to grieve the loss of a biological child. Brad did, too. I was terribly depressed, but never sought professional counseling for it. Instead, I looked to my friends for strength. I also looked to Brad, but found that my close friends provided the most comfort and support. What I got from Brad was his unconditional love. The guilt I had of not being able to give him a biological child was overwhelming. I performed my daily routines and I'm sure most people didn't realize I was hurting. I was sad, though, and felt empty.

I'm a pediatric speech-language pathologist. One of my former clients, Ruth, was adopted from China at age 11 months. I started working with her in July, 2004 when she was 13 months old. I quickly fell in love with Ruthie. I also quickly became friends with her mother, Sharon. Sharon watched as a bond developed between Ruthie and me over the course of

several months. She eventually told me (yes, "told" me) that Brad and I needed to make the decision to adopt...and that we needed to adopt a little girl from China. As hard as it was for me to hear Sharon sometimes (after all, she also had two biological children so how could she possibly understand the pain I was feeling), I really did listen to her. Other friends also encouraged us to adopt. After much consideration Brad and I eventually looked into adoption; although, we were both hesitant about adopting.

In the summer of 2004, I joined a national infertility group called RESOLVE. I learned of an adoption workshop in February, 2005 which was sponsored by this group. Thankfully, Brad and I attended this one day workshop. At this workshop, we went to a session on Chinese adoptions. The presenter for this session was a representative from Chinese Children Adoption International, CCAI. Her presentation was well organized. She, herself, had adopted from China and spoke positively of her experience. We also attended sessions on Russian adoptions and American adoptions, neither of which appealed to us for various reasons. Brad and I left the workshop leaning toward adopting from China. After weighing the pros and cons of all of our adoption options, we finally made the life altering decision to adopt from China and to use CCAI as our agency.

We sent in our application in March, 2005. The paper chase began in May, 2005. Our dossier was logged in at the China Center of Adoption Affairs, CCAA, on September 12, 2005. Brad and I anticipated receiving a referral for an infant in the spring of 2006. Soon after our log-in-date, the referrals started to slow down. The wait for our daughter became increasingly longer. Brad and I began to feel as if we were NEVER going to be parents. I needed to find others who were in our situation. I needed a support group for waiting parents.

One of the places I found that support was through a group founded by Dan and Susan Chapman. They hosted get-togethers for Chinese adoptive parents the first Friday of each month. I learned of the Chapman's through CCAI. We went to our first gathering in January of 2006. Although the commute was really far for us, it was well worth the hour and a half drive during rush hour traffic on Friday afternoons. Through this First Fridays group, Brad and I met many wonderful people who were willing to listen to and cry with us as the wait for our daughter grew longer and longer. We all started out as strangers with one common bond... the love for our Chinese children. It didn't matter that some of us didn't yet have these children. It was good to know that Brad and I weren't alone during this wait.

I continued to seek support and comfort from friends and family during the expanding wait. I also started experiencing severe hip pain during this time. In the spring of 2006 (when Brad and I initially thought we would be getting our daughter from China), I had surgery for endometriosis in an attempt to alleviate the pain. During the surgery, my doctor discovered that my left ovary was engulfed by endometriosis. After the surgery, my doctor said that I had a chance of getting pregnant since he had cleared my left ovary of the endometriosis. He also said that research has shown that women who get pregnant after having surgery for endometriosis usually do so within six months post surgery. My response to him was that I didn't have the surgery in an attempt to get pregnant. It was only to relieve my hip pain and that at least seven reproductive endocrinologists had said that conception with my own eggs would be a "miracle." Well, the endometriosis wasn't the cause of my hip pain (that's another

story in itself), but it was apparently the cause of my infertility. I got pregnant in October of 2006...exactly six months after my surgery!!!!

I found out I was pregnant on November 2, 2006. At that time, Brad and I thought we might get our referral from China in December, 2006. As excited as we were about the pregnancy, we were equally excited about the adoption...but, my pregnancy was considered a high risk one because of my age and two large uterine fibroids. Brad and I didn't know what to do. I was terrified of losing our biological baby through a miscarriage. I was also terrified of losing our Chinese baby by informing the folks at CCAI and CCAA about the pregnancy. Brad and I desperately wanted both children. We chose only to tell our family and close friends about the pregnancy until our adoption was completed. Brad and I never intended to be deceptive, but desperate times called for desperate measures.

On January 4, 2007, we got our referral from China. We were referred a 19 month old little girl named Fu Li Wan. We were expecting a baby, not a toddler. CCAI referred to this as a "mistake" and said we could wait until the next batch of referrals so we could get an infant. I didn't have time to wait for the next batch of referrals. I had medical clearance from my obstetrician to travel to and return from China prior to my 28th week of pregnancy (of course, CCAI wasn't aware of this since I still hadn't told them I was pregnant). If we waited until the next batch of referrals, I couldn't travel to China.

Brad and I read the developmental and medical history on Fu Li Wan. We sat in our living room trying to decide if we were mentally and physically prepared to have a newborn and a two year old. Brad and I had already prepared ourselves for adopting a baby. We knew there would be more significant bonding and attachment issues with an older child. Brad wanted to make the decision to accept or decline the referral solely on Fu Li Wan's medical and developmental information. He didn't want to be influenced by her picture. I refused to make the decision without seeing her face. I needed to see Fu Li Wan's face. We eventually opened the email with her referral picture. There were two additional snapshots of her for a total of three photographs. Brad looked at me and with tears in his eyes said, "You know what we have to do." Our decision was made. Brad and I immediately fell in love with Fu Li Wan. She was the most beautiful child we had ever seen. Fu Li Wan looked as healthy in the photographs as she read on paper. Our wait was over. This was our daughter and as we would soon learn, the most perfect child for us. The referral was never a "mistake."

Brad, my mother, and I traveled to China at the end February. Our Fu Li Wan (Allison Marie) was placed in my arms on February 26, 2007. We arrived home in the United States on March 11, 2007 at which time Allison became a U.S. Citizen. Shannon Elizabeth, our other daughter, was born on July 2, 2007.

Brad and I have created a beautiful family. I've chosen not to share some of the struggles we've had with adopting an older child. I would be lying if I said it wasn't tough at times. It was especially hard during the first month after Allison's adoption and during the first couple of months after Shannon's birth. Despite the challenges, Brad and I are incredibly happy and finally have what we've wanted for so long!!!! He and I feel a love toward our girls that we've never felt. It's the most precious love imaginable.

During our journey to creating a family, my faith in God has been tested. I'm not one who has ever believed in fate. And, I've certainly never been able to accept that God has a plan and that I should surrender to this plan. Religion, for me, is very personal. I don't share my feelings about God and religion too often; however, I do feel it is now necessary to say that I could be wrong about fate and God's plan. I often hear people say that everything happens according to God's timing. If that really is true, then I thank Him with all of my heart for His perfect timing. Without the fertility issues, the expanded delays in China, and my hip problems, Allison may have never been referred to us and Shannon may have never been born. These girls are true blessings and nothing less than miracles.