

*Radicchi Family*

We have always had a heart for international children and God first planted a seed subtly in us to adopt through mission trips and personal experiences. He gave us a heart to serve, a desire to love beyond ourselves, an interest in international culture, and a heart for Asia.

Mark and I started dating during our first months at the University of Kentucky. Throughout the first five years we dated, we always included discussion about adopting a baby girl from Asia. We got married and traveled a great deal and moved around a bit with Mark's job but, kids were definitely in our future, and adoption continued to be part of our plan.

After settling in Atlanta, Mark completed a military activation which included 19 months of living apart. Soon after that we decided to start our family. We began trying biologically, and also began having serious conversations about adoption. At dinner one evening, I said, "we've always talked about adopting, are we serious?" Mark responded simply and assuredly, "of course, let's start the process." The next day, March 2006, our journey to Claire began.

We started the process by looking at agencies and almost immediately knew CCAI was our agency. We were approved and were told the wait would be about 9 months. As we began our paperchase, everything felt just right. It was as if we were finally walking into a true and clear calling on our lives. We had such a feeling of certainty; a peace and knowing that we were doing what we were meant to do. From the moment we filled out our application, Claire was truly born in our hearts. She was already a part of our family. Claire was not a distant dream, not something that will happen in the future, she became real to us, as real as a pregnancy. Our lives were going down a new path, but the path felt familiar and certain.

Our paperchase took 8 long months. Although we were diligent about the paperwork with checklists, spreadsheets, and a file system, a quick chase was not in God's plan. Our first feeling of helplessness and the realization that we were not in control began with an extended wait for our I-171. The Atlanta USCIS was experiencing an extreme slowdown, and we were stuck in the middle of it. The emotions were intense as we ran to the mailbox for three long months hoping for our US approval to adopt. Many tears were shed over the empty mailbox. But, we were finally approved and logged-in to China, October 27, 2006. Soon after our LID we learned that China was really slowing down, but we continued to hope for a year to a year and a half until we would get our referral.

As we wait, we have chosen to share the journey with fellow adoptive parents. Many of these relationships began at First Friday's. This is a group of adoptive families who we could celebrate with as they came home with their children and encouraged other families who were just starting the paperchase. We found that these relationships formed quickly as we all share a kindred heart and dream for our children in China. These families understand the language of adoption, DTC, LID, USCIS, etc. and most importantly understand the challenge of waiting. Each month we build up hope that more LID's will be matched, that the wait would speed up, but as the small number LID's are announced we continue to be tested on perseverance and faith.

As all journey's go, we have found that our journey will have many turns, and one of those roads for us was starting to try to have a biological child. God blessed us with a pregnancy and our daughter, Sophia, who was born on October 10, 2007. Many people have asked us if we are glad "the wait" is so long so that we would enjoy and take care of Sophia as an infant. The answer is "no!" We want Claire ASAP! Others ask if we are "still adopting?" They assume infertility was our reason to adopt and that we wouldn't have chosen this path to parenthood if given a choice. We happily attempt to explain we have been called to parent both of these children, one born in our hearts and one in my stomach.

The pregnancy journey has truly changed our view of adoption. As I experienced a life growing inside of me, I couldn't help to wonder how Claire's birthmother must feel. My heart pondered so many questions about this pregnant woman on the other side of the world.

Does she feel the same sense of hope for her child's future?

Does she experience the same sense of awe and wonder over the miraculous life that grows inside of her?

Does she go to the doctor and leave feeling peace, excitement and hope?

Does she already know that she will give up the child she is carrying?

Does she long for a boy so that she won't have to abandon a girl?

Does she feel the same joy I felt when the baby kicks and moves inside of her?

Throughout my pregnancy I connected to Claire's birth mom. I've realized that this woman does love her child, regardless of the circumstances behind her abandonment. I feel that it would be impossible for a mother not to feel love for the life growing in her womb. I feel that we will forever be connected to Claire's birthmother and hope that she will feel forever connected to her child.

As I gave birth and held Sophia in my arms for the first time, I wept with joy for the life that God has entrusted us with. I felt the magnitude of what it means to bring life into the world. At the same time, I wept for Claire's birthmother. The tears that fell from my cheeks connected me to a mother who will hold Claire just after her birth, in the same way we held Sophia. As her mothers, we will both love her for the rest of our lives.

God has taught us many things during this journey. He has taught us to trust in His perfect plan. Although the end of this adoption journey doesn't seem to be in sight, we trust that God has charted this path and has planned out "the gift." Psalm 118:24 God reminds us that "THIS is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." We are called to rejoice in TODAY. We can't wait to rejoice when the CCAA matches more LID's or when we receive our referral or when Claire is in our arms. God designed TODAY, and the number of unknown days between us and Claire. He is continually teaching us to rejoice in each day of the wait. He has taught us that His ways are higher than ours, we are not in control, and that is a great thing!

As we have connected to "waiting families" one of the biggest lessons we have learned so far is to share the journey with others. Celebrate with families when referrals come in, encourage those who are starting the process, this has given us a purpose. We have also learned to appreciate that the journey is part of the gift of adoption. The journey is a time to bring to-

gether community and a time to learn how you can become better parents. Find mentors, learn from those who have traveled this road before you. Be open to what God intends to teach you through the wait, and always give your worries, fears and doubts over to prayer. Start becoming the parent that God intends you to be, use "the wait" time to grow in your faith, strengthen relationships, get healthy, prepare your home, read parenting books, and most importantly trust that your child will arrive in God's most perfect timing.

For us, if "the wait" had not been so long, our faith would not have grown so deep. God is carving a place for Himself in our lives and in our hearts for Him. Our journey is becoming less about us, and more about Him. What a gift! We still don't know how long "the wait" will be but we do know for sure that someday our daughter in China will take her place in our family circle.