



INFORMATION BOOKLET

MISSION STATEMENT

To provide adoption services to both birth and adoptive families so they can make an informed decision regarding their options.

ABOUT ADOPTION OPTIONS

Adoption Options Manitoba is a licensed not-for-profit adoption agency. Adoption Options provides a full range of adoption services to both birthparents and prospective adoptive parents. The Act and the Regulations governing the Adoption Act regulate fees for services to prospective adoptive couples. Manitoba residents may make application for adoption. AO is licensed to provide adoption services. Adoption Options has helped create over 300 forever families.

ADOPTION OPTIONS IS LICENSED TO PROVIDE SERVICES IN THE FOLLOWING:

Division 2 PRIVATE ADOPTION

The birthmother chooses and meets the prospective adoptive family through the agency. Adoption Options also provides Direct Placement Services where a birthmother meets a prospective adoptive family before coming to the agency.

Division 3 INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION

Adoptions from countries other than Canada.

Division 4 DE FACTO ADOPTION

A person may apply for the adoption of a child who has been in their care, control and maintenance for at least two years.

Division 5 EXTENDED FAMILY ADOPTION

A birthparent may place a child with an extended family member.

Division 6 ADOPTION BY A PARENT WHO IS MARRIED TO A CHILD'S PARENT

A stepparent may adopt a child of their spouse.

PROGRAMS

Adoption Options currently offers two programs:

Division 2 - Private Adoption

Division 3 - Intercountry Adoption - China Program

The Adoption Act of Manitoba allows you to have an Application for Adoption in each Division. Only one application per Division is allowed.

You could have applications open with Adoption Options for both Divisions 2 and 3. However, when an Intercountry Adoption Dossier leaves Canada, the Division 2 application must be put on hold. When a placement occurs in any division the other application is closed.

PRIVATE ADOPTION PROGRAM & PROCEDURES

DEFINITIONS

- Open Adoption:** There is full disclosure of identities in the placement. Private adoptions are open.
- Closed Adoption:** Anonymity is maintained. Certain non-identifying information is shared.
- Contact:** Communication in writing, over the phone or in person between the birth family and adoptive family. Both “open” and “closed” adoptions may have contact after placement within guidelines that are agreeable to all parties.

All Private Adoptions are open with full disclosure of identities.

Adoption Options began facilitating open adoption placements in January 1990.

Since opening in September 1989 Adoption Options has had contact with over 1000 birthmothers. Over half of these have come in to meet at least once with an Adoption Counsellor. Over 350 birthmothers have placed children through us.

STEP 1 - INITIAL INTERVIEW & APPLICATION APPOINTMENT

At this appointment the agency’s policies and procedures will be explained and questions will be answered. You will also be able to apply at that time. This appointment is approximately two hours long.

STEP 2 - EDUCATION SEMINAR

The Education Seminar is held four times a year usually in February or March, May, September and November. This is a weekend course, Friday 6:30 pm - 8:30 p.m., Saturday 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. and Sunday 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

At the Education Seminar, applicants will receive a manual and the topics covered include:

- Step By Step Guide for Completing a Private Adoption
- Openness
- Parenting and Adoption
- Statistics

There will also be presentations from Birthparents, Adoptive Parents and a lawyer.

STEP 3 - ADOPTION FILE DEVELOPMENT

After attending the Education Seminar prospective adoptive parents have all the information and documents that are required for their adoption file.

STEP 4 - HOMESTUDY

A file submission appointment is scheduled when the applicants are ready to move to the next step of having the Homestudy completed.

The purpose of the Homestudy is to determine suitability, capability, and willingness to assume the responsibilities of a parent to a child. The Homestudy will also include medical reports, criminal record checks, child abuse registry checks, prior contact checks and letters of reference.

To complete the Homestudy there is a minimum of four interviews with an Adoption Counsellor. Each meeting is approximately two hours in length.

STEP 5 – APPROVAL

When prospective adoptive parents have met all the requirements it will be determined if they are suitable, capable and willing to assume the responsibilities of a parent to a child – that is “Approved for Placement”.

PLEASE NOTE:

- Approval does not guarantee that a placement will occur.
- Should applicants not be approved, they may request a review.
- Applicants may transfer their file from one agency to another.
- Any change in marital status would affect the application.
- Any significant changes in life circumstances could also affect an application.
- Once approved for placement applicants now become an active waiting file.
- Active waiting files can be shown to Birthparents.

BIRTHMOTHER PROGRAM

The process the birthmother goes through is lengthy. Birthmother sessions are one on one with an Adoption Counsellor and her supports (birthfather, birth-grandparents, friends, etc.)

Some of the services that birthparents receive are information regarding their options, decision making and grief counselling. Birthparents are also required to completed documents if they are considering an adoption plan.

STEP 6 – MATCHING PROCESS

With information obtained from birthparents and prospective adoptive parents, we utilize a double match system. The birthmother will look at a letter and photographs from each of the families that match. After reviewing letters and photographs, the Birthmother narrows her choice to two or three families. She is then able to read further information about those families to assist in narrowing her decision down to one family.

With the double match system Adoption Options can never guarantee that a file will be shown or that a placement will occur. Some families have waited a very short amount of time and other families have waited over six years.

STEP 9 - MATCHED

Matched is the term used when a birthmother officially chooses a family. At that time, Adoption Options contacts the family to arrange a meeting.

Match Meeting

The prospective adoptive parents will read information on birthparents prior the meeting. At the match meeting the Adoption Counsellor will introduce the prospective adoptive parents to the birthmother. After this meeting, if both parties wish to proceed, a second meeting called the Details Meeting is scheduled.

Details Meeting

This meeting with the prospective adoptive parent and the birthmother is to discuss the details surrounding the impending birth and the physical placement of the baby. As well, legal documents are signed indicating the intent to place and receive a child for adoption.

Adoption Options continues to work with both parties through the adoption process. An adoption counsellor will visit the birthmother in the hospital to support her as she revisits her decision.

STEP 10 - PLACEMENT

The Birthmother can sign her Consent for Adoption 48 hours after the birth. The Birthfather needs to be served notice of the adoption prior to the signing of the Consent. If the birthfather is involved with the placement plan he will sign a Consent for Adoption as well.

The Adoption Counsellor will be involved in the transferring of care of the child from birthparents to adoptive parents.

The birthparents have 21 days in which they can revoke consent.

STEP 11 – FINALIZATION

Adoption Options' role continues with post placement support to the birthparents and placement supervision of the adoptive family. This placement supervision continues until the adoption is finalization and an Order of Adoption is granted.

DIVISION 2 – PRIVATE ADOPTION

Fees for services as outlined in the Regulations supporting the *Adoption Act* are legal. Adoption Options is committed to quality, caring, and individualized service at the lowest cost possible.

DIVISION 2 – PRIVATE ADOPTIONS

INITIAL INTERVIEW/APPLICATION	\$ 350.00
EDUCATION SEMINAR	\$ 750.00
HOMESTUDY	\$1200.00
<i>SECOND or SUBSEQUENT HOMESTUDY</i>	<i>\$ 600.00</i>
PRE-PLACEMENT SERVICES	\$ 200.00
YEARLY UPDATE TO EXISTING HOMESTUDY	\$ 150.00
PLACEMENT SERVICES	\$ 500.00
PREPARATION OF MEDICAL/SOCIAL HISTORY	\$ 350.00
BIRTHPARENT COUNSELLING	\$1200.00
PLACEMENT SUPERVISION AND PREPARATION OF DOCUMENTS FOR GRANTING ORDER OF ADOPTION	\$ 900.00

OTHER SERVICES

Preparation of each Openness Agreement	\$ 150.00
Counselling services:	\$ 50.00/hr
Transfer Fee	\$ 50.00

DISBURSEMENTS

Mileage, Travel, Meal and Incidental Expenses

Remember the above fees are the maximum under the regulations. You only pay for the actual services provided. You may pay less but never more. You will be required to pay the legal fees of your birthmother as well as your own.

REDUCTION OF AGENCY FEES

Any family may apply for a reduction or waiver for fees charged for adoption services. The reduction or waiver requires a copy of the applicants' latest tax return brought to the Initial Interview.

Generally a family of two with no children with an income of \$20,000.00 jointly will receive the maximum deduction and be required to pay a maximum of 5% of the fees. Applicants making \$60,000.00 jointly a year would pay the full amount.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. How long is the wait?

At Adoption Options it is the birthmother who chooses the family. Adoption Options can not guarantee that you will be chosen. Some of our families are chosen within months of approval while some have waited over six years.

2. Can a birthmother change her mind and take the baby back?

A birthmother can not consent to an adoption until 48 hours after the baby is born. A birthmother has the next 21 days to revoke her consent. After the 21 days, the adoptive parents' lawyer will file court documents and set a hearing date for the granting of an Order of Adoption (about 30 – 60 days hence).

3. Do I have to have contact with the birthmother? How much?

All Private Adoptions are open which means a full disclosure of identities by all parties. The amount and type of contact varies from adoption to adoption. The least amount of contact would be sending a letter and pictures once a year around the child's birthday.

4. Can we specify the sex of the child we want?

Most birthmothers are pregnant when making a placement plan and few if any know the sex of their unborn baby. If you specify the sex of the child you would only be shown to birthmothers who match and have given birth.

5. What will we know about the Birthmother? Birthfather?

When you are chosen, the Adoption Counsellor will contact you and give you basic information. Before meeting the birthmother you will be able to read her complete medical social history and other information from her file. If the birthfather is involved, you would read the same information on him. If he is not involved then the only information regarding the birthfather would be what birthmother has supplied.

Greetings from Proud Adoptive Parents (Division 2 - Private Adoption)

We were pleased to send this message to prospective adoptive parents. We, like many of you, have struggled with infertility. For over 5 years we were on the emotional roller-coaster of tests, treatments and surgeries. Every month began with high hopes of conceiving - only to end the month in tears. It was hard to walk through Wal-Mart and see pregnant women around every corner or to leave every baby shower in tears. We had endless feelings of " why not us " as we saw little ones playing in the park.

We finally decided to take back control of our lives and explore other ways of becoming parents. Our search lead us to Adoption Options. We had feelings of nervousness, apprehension and fear. We were very ignorant about adoption and actually attended the Education Seminar with a closed mind. We quickly realized that we were not the only ones experiencing infertility – that the other couples in the class felt the same pain as us.

We were welcomed and treated with respect from the moment we came to Adoption Options – putting us at ease with the agency and all the people involved. After the Education Seminar we felt very comfortable and left with a positive outlook on the adoption process. Our closed minds had been opened and we decided to proceed, completing and submitting our file. Anytime we called or visited the office, there was always someone to talk to us, answer our questions, give us advise or give us a hug. We felt like part of a "family" - like part of a group who really understood what we were going through.

Our story does have a very happy ending. We were blessed when we were chosen by a Birthmother to become parents of our son, Kyle. He was lovingly placed in our care by a courageous young woman who wanted minimal contact but felt good about knowing who we were. We reapplied when Kyle was six months old and the wait began again. This time the ache for a baby was not a constant thought in our mind as life was very busy with our little one. Three years later brought “the call” again from AO that Birthparents were interested in meeting us. There is a saying at AO – that you quite often get the call at the busiest and worst time possible. And we did!! We were two days away from the moving truck showing up for our transfer to Winnipeg. Kyle was thrilled to become a big brother when Shayla was born and lovingly welcomed into our home.

Our children are being raised knowing they were adopted and Kyle said it best - “I came from my Mom’s and Dad's hearts”.

We have different contact arrangements with our children’s birthparents. The thought of ongoing contact scared us at first but over time it has become a positive supportive aspect to our lives.

From start to finish Adoption Options was there for us. We have had a positive experience in becoming a family through adoption. We will always be members of the organization, enjoying the Family Picnics, the social events as well as the feeling of belonging. You see, adoption is something we feel strongly about and something that will always be very close to our hearts.

With our very best wishes to each of you – May your dreams come true ~ Ian & Tammy

INTERCOUNTRY CHINA ADOPTION PROGRAM & PROCEDURES

DEFINITIONS

- DOSSIER:** It is a collection of documents that is sent to China. It includes information describing the applicants and demonstrates that they are suitable, capable and willing parents.
- CCAA:** Is the China Center of Adoption Affairs. The organization is a unit of the Ministry of Civil Affairs which has responsibility for all of the orphanages in China. It is responsible for all international adoptions and receives and processes all of the paperwork to and from adoption agencies in other countries.
- BLAS:** Bridges of Love Adoption Services is a non-profit organization that provides consulting, translating and travel reception services for those adopting from China. They are under the administration of the Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China and sponsored by the China Centre of Adoption Affairs.
- CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION CANADA (CIC)** This is the government of Canada agency which approves the child, who is adopted abroad, being allowed to enter Canada either through Citizenship or Sponsorship.
- CHILD REFERRAL:** This is the document sent to Manitoba Family Services from CCAA. This profiles the medical social history of the child to be adopted. Often pictures are included. Families at AO see the original Chinese document as well as an English translation.

CHINA PROGRAM AND PROCEDURES

Adoption Options is very pleased to have **Family Outreach International (FOI)** as the facilitator for our China Program. FOI is a federally incorporated, non-profit organization that helps Canadian families adopt children from China. FOI was established in 1995 and is licensed by the Province of Ontario. FOI brings expertise on China Adoptions and has an excellent working relationship with the China Centre of Adoption Affairs (CCAA).

China is a signatory to the *Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption*. Signing countries assume responsibility for establishing centralized authorities to monitor international adoptions and to give highest priority to ensuring that the process is conducted in the child's best interests.

There are two programs through China - the regular program and the waiting child program.

CHINA CENTRE OF ADOPTION AFFAIRS REQUIREMENTS

Age of Applicants

Married applicants must be between the ages of 30 – 50 for the regular program and 30 – 55 for the waiting child program.

Marriage Requirements

The applicants must be a couple of one male and one female, married at least two years at the time the dossier is submitted. If either applicant has had a previous marriage, the applicants must have been married at least five years at the time the dossier is submitted. If either the husband or the wife has had more than two divorces the applicants are not eligible to adopt from China.

Medical Requirements

CCAA requires that both applicants are healthy physically and mentally and do not have the following conditions:

AIDS, infectious disease within infective stage; binocular blind or binocular parallax or monocular blind and with no ocular prosthesis; binaural hearing loss or language function loss (adoption of special needs children who have identical conditions will be exempt from this limitation), dysfunction of limbs or trunk, severe facial deformation, diseases which require long-term treatment and affect life expectancy (including malignant tumors, lupus, nephrosis, epilepsy); post-surgery of major organs transplantation within the past 10 years; schizophrenia; mental illness treated with medication (including depression, bi-polar, and anxiety) stopped not more than 2 years; Body Mass Index > 40.

Finances

Either applicant holds a stable occupation. The family annual income reaches \$10,000 for each family member, including the prospective adoptee and the family net assets value should reach \$80,000 USD. The family annual income does not include social assistance, pension, employment insurance, or government subsidy.

Education

Both applicants must have received education of or above the level of senior high school, or vocational skills training of the same level.

Criminal Records

Both applicants must have a clear criminal record and have never come under any criminal sanction. They can not have a history of domestic violence, sexual abuse, abandonment or abuse of children; history of drug abuse (narcotics); history of alcohol abuse (within ten years of application).

Children in the Home

There can be no more than four children currently living in the home and the youngest child must be at least one year old at the time the dossier is submitted to China.

STEP 1 - INITIAL INTERVIEW & APPLICATION APPOINTMENT

At this appointment, the agencies policies and procedures will be explained and questions will be answered. You will also be able to apply at that time. This appointment is approximately two hours long.

STEP 2 - EDUCATION SEMINAR

The China Education Seminar will be held twice a year usually in April and October. This is a weekend course, Saturday 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. and Sunday 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

STEP 3 - ADOPTION FILE DEVELOPMENT

After attending the Education Seminar prospective adoptive parents have all the information and documents that are required for their adoption file.

STEP 4 – CHOOSING THE REGULAR OR WAITING CHILD PROGRAM

Regular Program

Children offered by China for international adoption are children that have been abandoned. Most of these children are girls who have been abandoned at birth and who, when adopted, are typically under 1 year old. There are a few boys and a very few slightly older children. The birth parents of these children are unknown so no genetic information is available.

Waiting Child Program

The Waiting Child program is the adoption of children that China identifies as having a minor or correctable medical condition, or a school age child. Children in the program are boys and girls with ages typically ranging from infant to 60 months and some are school age.

The most common affliction is congenital Cleft Lip & Palate. Other common medical conditions are Hepatitis B and congenital heart disease. Less common are orthopedic conditions such as leg length differences and club foot.

Orphanages have access to funds from the federally sponsored “Tomorrow Plan” which is devoted to providing surgeries for orphaned children. It is common for children in the Waiting Child program to have had surgery.

STEP 4 - HOMESTUDY

A file submission appointment is scheduled when the applicants are ready to move forward to the next step of having the Homestudy completed.

The purpose of the Homestudy is to determine suitability, capability, and willingness to assume the responsibilities of a parent to a child. The Homestudy will also include medical reports, criminal record checks, child abuse registry checks, prior contact checks and letters of reference.

To complete the Homestudy there is a minimum of four interviews/contacts with an Adoption Counsellor. Each interview is approximately two hours in length.

STEP 5 – APPROVAL

When prospective adoptive parents have met all the requirements it will be determined if they are suitable, capable and willing to assume the responsibilities of a parent to a child – that is “Approved for Placement”.

PLEASE NOTE:

- Approval does not guarantee that a placement will occur or that the file will be approved by the China Centre for Adoption Affairs
- Should applicants not be approved then they may request a review.
- Applicants may transfer their file from one agency to another.
- Any change in marital status would affect the application.
- Any significant changes in life circumstances could also affect an application.

DOSSIER DEVELOPMENT

During the Homestudy the dossier is also being prepared. The dossier consists of documents that are required by China, including photographs, a letter to CCAA, financial and employment verification and birth and marriage certificates.

PROVINCIAL APPROVAL

The Dossier is sent to Manitoba Family Services for the Provincial Letter of Recommendation to be granted.

DOSSIER TO CHINA

The dossier is sent to Family Outreach International where it is translated and authenticated by Department of Foreign Affairs and the Chinese Embassy in Ottawa.

The dossier is then returned to Manitoba and Manitoba Family Services will send it to the China Centre for Adoption Affairs (CCAA).

Adoption Options will be notified when the Dossier has been logged-in at CCAA.

CHILD REFERRAL

Regular Program

CCAA matches the applicants with a child and then sends a Child Referral to Adoption Options through Manitoba Family Services. Currently the wait time from the log in date to child referral is over four years. There is currently a very large backlog of applications in China that are waiting for children to become available. It is difficult to give a credible estimate as to how long the wait will be. Estimates range from four to seven years.

The Child Referral includes at least three photographs, a medical report, developmental report and a brief biography of the child.

The Letter of Seeking Confirmation from Adopters is a formal letter from CCAA that requests a decision from the applicants whether or not they accept the child proposal. This letter is returned to CCAA.

If the applicants accept the child proposal then CCAA will issue a Notice of Travelling to China for Adoption. This is an invitation for the applicants to travel to China to formally adopt the child.

Waiting Child Program

Applicants who want to adopt a child from the Waiting Child program are placed on a list maintained by FOI. The list is ordered on the date that families received provincial approval to adopt a child from China's Waiting Child program.

From time-to-time FOI receives a set of child profiles from CCAA with the authority to find families for these children. FOI will match children to families according to the parameters (age range, gender, medical condition) expressed in the family's provincial Letter of Approval. CCAA is continually reviewing and assessing the Waiting Child Program - administrative changes are common.

Time from acquiring the Letter of Approval to a child referral varies widely. The wait on the list is highly dependent on the family's stated age range, the specified gender, and the medical conditions that the family is willing to accept.

On receiving a child proposal, a family submits a formal "Letter of Intent to Adopt a Special Needs Child" to CCAA who will review the family's full dossier in the context of the Letter of Intent.

TRAVEL TO CHINA

Once the applicants accept the child proposal, travel arrangements are made by Family Outreach International (FOI). FOI provides the applicants all the necessary documents and travel information. An escort will be provided by FOI who will be traveling with the applicants to China. The applicants spend two weeks in China where they receive their child and finalize the adoption.

POST PLACEMENT REPORTS

Post placement reports are required at 6 months and 12 months after the placement. These reports are completed by an Adoption Counsellor in your home.

CHINA PROGRAM FEES

DIVISION 3 – INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTIONS

INITIAL INTERVIEW/APPLICATION	\$ 350.00
EDUCATION COMPONENT	\$ 750.00
HOMESTUDY	\$1200.00
<i>SECOND or SUBSEQUENT HOMESTUDY</i>	\$ 800.00
YEARLY UPDATE TO EXISTING HOMESTUDY	\$ 300.00
DISBURSEMENTS	\$ 250.00
REQUIREMENTS OF CHILD’S COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	
1st Instalment	\$1400.00
2nd Instalment	\$ 450.00
POST PLACEMENT REPORTS each	\$ 300.00
Transfer Fee	\$ 100.00

FAMILY OUTREACH INTERNATIONAL

Facilitation Fee	
1st Instalment	\$ 850.00
2nd Instalment	\$1600.00
Document Processing	\$ 600.00
Translation of Documents	\$ 100.00 US
CCAA Application	\$ 750.00 US
Dossier Proof Reading	\$ 200.00 US
Translation Post Placement Reports (For each Report)	\$ 30.00 US

CHINA COSTS

Adoption Registration	\$ 150.00 US
Provincial Notarization Fees	\$ 250.00 US
Orphanage Donation	\$5100.00 US
Administration Fee of Orphanage	\$ 100.00 US
Child’s Passport	\$ 50.00 US
Medical Examination for Child	\$ 100.00 US

TRAVEL COSTS

Escort Fee FOI	\$ 615.00
Air Travel	\$1500/person
Air Travel one Way for Child	\$ 150.00*
Hotel, in China Transportation, Excursions (based on 2 travellers)	\$4000.00 US
Meals, Incidentals	\$ 200.00 US

Please note that fees may change with US dollar exchange rate. Costs in China are subject to some slight variations depending on which region you adopt from.

*Families that adopt a child over two years old are required to purchase a one-way fare from China to Canada (as opposed to an infant-in-arms fare). This is likely to cost about an additional \$1000.

The family budget for an adoption of a child from the Waiting Child program is similar to the budget for the regular program. Often families spend a few days in a city other than where the main travel group will be travelling, and family should be prepared for some additional costs (perhaps \$200).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. How long will I have to wait after I apply to adopt?

The Dossier is logged in by CCAA and it may take up to 4+ years for the Child Referral. Once the applicant has received and accepted the Child Referral they can expect to travel to China within 6-8 weeks. Stay in China is approximately two weeks long.

Please note that neither Adoption Options nor FOI can be responsible for delays in China. CCAA may from time to time slow down the adoption process due to internal situations within China.

2. What is the cost of an adoption from China?

Costs are approximately \$25,000.00 CAD. Factors that may affect the cost include changes through CCAA and variable travel costs and expenses in China. As well some fees are in US dollars so depending on the exchange rate at the time.

3. Can I choose a particular child?

Applicants cannot choose a child as the match is made by CCAA and then referred to the applicant.

4. Can I adopt more than one child?

Only in the case of twins or siblings would the applicants be allowed to adopt more than one child at a time. This is extremely rare. If the applicants wish to adopt a second child from China they must wait a full year before submitting another Dossier.

5. Do we have to travel to China to receive the child?

Yes, the Chinese government requires that the applicants travel to China in order for the adoption to be granted.

6. Do you have to use an adoption agency?

Yes, CCAA requires that all dossiers be sent by a signatory with CCAA. Manitoba Family Services is a registered signatory with CCAA. All Manitoba applicants must work through a licensed or mandated agency.

Greetings from Proud Adoptive Parents (Division 3 - China Program)

Why We Chose China.

Our daughter, who was born in China, is a vibrant, vivacious and delightful 3 1/3 year old who amazes us on a daily basis. We began our journey four years ago and decided then that the China adoption program would serve us best. Our hearts leapt at the prospect.

Due to our ages, we felt that we could not delay in building our family. We had lost time trying for years to conceive and did not want to wait indefinitely through domestic adoption. Adopting domestically, though a wonderful prospect, could take five weeks, five years or not happen at all.

For us, "a child is a child is a child" - all children, no matter where they are born, are fascinating and special. We researched the China program and concluded that out of all of our options this was probably the most predictable and reliable process in comparison to other adoption routes in order to receive a healthy baby. Birthmothers in China tend to be non-smokers and non-drinkers. AIDS is less prevalent in China than in other countries so in these regards we thought the odds of receiving a healthy baby seemed greater. We also have a couple of friends who had adopted their daughters from China years prior and their experiences were excellent. Knowing as well that there would be supports in place for our family - an extensive China adoptive community and ethnic Chinese community - to help us raise our daughter also helped to influence our decision.

Fast forward and here we are today - finger-painting, building snowmen, swinging and sliding at the park, baking cookies, cuddling in the rocking chair and reading Goodnight Moon - it is in these simple moments shared with our daughter that we have been given the life that we once yearned for, and what a gift as our house now is a home. It is the opportunity to slow down and experience the magic of childhood and the wonder of life with our daughter, as any parents do. It is the opportunity to watch a human life unfold before your eyes, as if by time-lapse photography.

Instead of heading aimlessly towards retirement, filling our lives with acquisitions, trips, careers and other forms of busy nonsense we are making a priceless emotional investment that will outlive us. It is a feeling of direction and knowing that we are all on a very special path together. The Chinese heritage of our family has broadened our world in a way that nothing else might have, bringing us wonderful friends from China and in the adoptive community with whom we celebrate traditions both new and old.

Like many parents, we feel that our daughter would benefit socially and emotionally throughout life if she had a sibling, so we wish to return to China for our second daughter. Our family will feel complete. Looking down the road, one day we will be gone and knowing that our girls will have each other will hopefully be a source of comfort. We have gone down the path "less traveled by", and that has made all the difference.

Good luck on your journey ~ Paul & Darcie

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