

I have always loved solving puzzles. As a child I spent hours trying to connect the intricate pieces of a puzzle that only fit together a certain way. I was determined to finish the word search or crack the riddle. Because of my curiosity and ambition, I always wanted to learn more about my life before I was adopted. Reuniting with my foster parents after ten years clarified moments of my past and solved pieces of my life's puzzle. It prompted the gratitude I possess for my past journey to America and for the profuse amount of opportunities I will have in my future.

I was born in China. I do not know much about the first few months of my life. Did I have a head full of hair when I was born? Did I have a favorite toy I played with? Was there a special song or noise that calmed me down or helped me sleep? The orphanage placed me in a foster family for one year in Yuanling, China. My foster parents cared for me wholeheartedly as their own child until my forever family adopted me when I was fourteen months old.

When I was ten years old, my parents gave me the opportunity of a lifetime to travel back to my birthplace and meet my foster parents. I jumped up and down barely containing my excitement. I realized that I would finally be able to place a concrete image to my foster parents' faces instead of the abstract visual created in my mind.

When we arrived in China, everything was so foreign to me: the traditional pagodas with red and gold accents; people drawing Chinese characters with water onto the sidewalk with long, wooden brushes; and conversations spoken in Mandarin. The small markets on the streets displayed a variety of food to the populace from fresh produce to fried silkworms to sugarcanes. Because public areas permitted smoking, the smoke hovered over the crowds of people like a dark and pungent cloud, making it hard to breathe. Even though everything around me appeared

so different, it felt comfortable. I felt a warm sense of belonging. Most everyone had black hair, oval eyes, and smaller noses. Living in a city in Minnesota where most people had light eyes and a pale complexion, I was accustomed to being in the minority, but in China, I was in the majority.

Our final destination of the trip was my hometown, Yuanling, where I met my foster parents for the first time since I was adopted. Butterflies flew around in a million directions in my stomach, and my hands contained beads of sweat. I attempted to steady them by holding the gift for my foster mother, a bouquet of pink roses with lime green wrapping and a sparkly pink bow; my absolute favorite colors growing up were pink and green. I constantly looked down making sure that my blue silk shirt had no wrinkles and that my hair was clipped back perfectly.

As my foster parents walked up to the orphanage, I made eye contact with my foster mother making my heart full and my eyes watery. Her reaction was immediate as she embraced me in a tight, welcoming, familiar hug. The world stopped when she put her arms around me. I felt like I had returned home. Her dark brown eyes twinkled when she talked with such enthusiasm. My foster father seemed more reserved and shy, yet gentle and kind. His fisherman hat discreetly covered his graying hair and his soft eyes complimented his warm smile. My foster parents fed me when I was hungry, made me laugh when I was sad, and swaddled me to sleep. They were the ones who graciously wiped the tears off my face when I was crying and changed my diaper when it was full. I would never be able to express sufficiently the gratitude I possess for everything they did for me. Reuniting with them was a missing piece to the puzzle that I had wanted to solve all of my life.

My foster parents gave me a perpetual sense of peace by giving me a window into my past. I am so grateful to have solved another piece of my puzzle, but some pieces are still missing. Reuniting with my foster parents inspires me to be hopeful for the chance to meet my birth parents in my future.