

ADOPTION AS A CALLING

Already parents of two wonderful boys, my wife, Kelly, and I sensed adoption as a calling—it meant one less child living without a home or a family, good stewardship of what we have been given, and one way of growing our family more deeply and broadly. We also saw ourselves adopting a child from Asia. And our adoption agency made the impossible seem possible.



Still, we simply could not have completed the process without our family and church communities, whom we included each step of the way. They were incredibly supportive. We held yard sales where people would offer us \$200 for a small piece of junk. One buyer said, "I was told to give you this much no matter what I came home with." We sold pieces of a puzzle we created and raised over \$8000. People were praying, asking, giving—all to help make this happen. Including them was one of the best decisions we made and one of the greatest parts of what we've experienced.

We were matched with little Vivienne in January 2013 but had to wait until Thanksgiving to get her. We knew we were adopting a special-needs child, and though early on we didn't know everything about her, we suspect we received more medical paperwork and foster care reports than most. Vivi was born with spina bifida and at one point developed pneumonia and hydrocephalus. Hearing stories about her surgeries, illnesses, and early struggles changed my life. And knowing that we had been given such a gift in receiving her has changed the way I view so many others around me now. It makes the little insanities and chaos of our daily family circus pale in comparison.

There were so many memorable parts of our trip China to adopt Vivi—shopping at Wal-Mart with nothing labeled in English, and with very few products we even recognized. Extremely friendly people who also stared at us all the time. Worshipping in a Christian church that only allowed expatriates because it is still illegal for the Chinese to be Christians. The list goes on. The best day was our "Gotcha Day," when we received our little girl. Absolutely unforgettable!

We were one of 10 families who received children in China on "gotcha day." Most of us had been together for the majority of the two-week trip, and getting to know these amazing people was one of my favorite parts of our time there. Because of our common bond, seeing each family receive their child was almost as special as experiencing it ourselves. We have remained connected mostly through facebook and blogs of families in our group, as well as those who are still waiting to get their children. It really is a journey.

Since our return with Vivi, the greatest challenge for me has been trying to re-enter our lives. There have been so many people—friends, family, our churches—who have made this new life together as smooth as possible. But it has still been hard at times—mostly, just the shift from two to three children, and otherwise simply doing everything we can to make Vivi feel welcome and normal. Our agency has been great about helping us with our expectations and adjustments, and I cannot imagine doing this without them or our communities of faith, which have surrounded us with care all along the way.

Vivi has already overcome so much that dealing with the likes of us should be a cinch! Her loud demands of "Croni, please!" ("Macaroni, please") and so many other catch phrases keep us all entertained, and her smiles and giggles keep us going day to day. Seeing our boys care for, play with, and entertain her has given her a welcome into our home in ways that Kelly and I truly never could.

We are offering this little child of God to the community of believers, who have all played a major part in her life already.

- The Rev. Tim Black '04, Associate Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Brandon, Fla.

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