

# CREATE A NEW BEGINNING BY ADOPTING IN CHINA

By Mark Andrews

When the Calton family goes out, people have to do a double take. Not only do they have four children - unheard of in China -, but their two girls are Chinese. Their juxtaposed life of being an American family living in an expat compound in China with two Chinese children is nothing new to the family's father, Tim. He first came to grips with the Chinese language while a missionary in the Chinatown of Sydney, Australia!

And it was the Chinese language that was the start of his family's road to adopting Anna Leigh and Sharly. Suzanne, now Tim's wife, was also a member of the same church and had been a missionary in Taiwan. These common interests led to her meeting Tim.

"I always knew I would have adoption in my future" says Suzanne, and with Tim "it was only natural to choose Chinese adoption." Shortly after their first son, Hunter, was born they found themselves volunteering at Chinese Children Adoption International (CCAI). Their own path to adoption turned out to be a much longer one, with a number of false starts.

Things really started happening after the family moved to Shanghai in January 2008 for Tim's work. Suzanne runs her own company, Skoose Design, selling clothing and accessories for children. While waiting for adoption, she started making hair bows for her future daughters and ended up selling them as a new line. Her best customers in Shanghai were part of the Baobei Foundation, an expat charity which provides life-saving surgery

to Chinese orphans born with gastro-intestinal or neurological birth defects. Naturally, the Caltons got involved, and after their two girls had received their surgery, they offered them a foster home. Then through CCAI, they started the process of adoption.

"We didn't want to live the average expat lifestyle. It's a false reality. We wanted to give back to the people, and there aren't many ways to do that," says Suzanne. Both girls turned out to be from the same orphanage and suffered from the same form of spina bifida which involves a tethered cord.

"I feel the connection to my girls like I feel the connection to my boys," explains Suzanne. This is a connection that appears to be shared by the whole family. Hunter, a quiet

eight year-old, buddies up with Anna Leigh, the elder and more boisterous of the girls, while extroverted six year old Tanner takes care of quiet Sharly on outings. "The boys adore their little sisters. Their personalities really complement one another," adds Suzanne.

"Last fall we went to Disneyland. The two girls got so much attention. The roles were reversed. Here the boys get all the attention," laughs Tim. He goes on to explain that Chinese people don't really understand why someone would adopt children, due to all of the costs involved with bringing up a child, "but, overall, they admire it."

## How to adopt

According to an official at the Adoption Department of the Shanghai Bureau of Civil

Affairs, "even if a foreigner lives in Shanghai, they should start the process from their home country."

People from the USA, Canada, U.K., France, Spain, Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, and Italy are eligible to adopt, but only some of these countries allow nationals residing in China to do so. The process must be conducted through a government department or adoption agency in the home country - there are 135 such bodies recognized by the China Center for Children's Welfare and Adoption in Beijing (CCCWA), formerly known as the CCAA. The general requirements are for a married couple (in some cases a single female might be able to adopt) where both partners are aged between 30 and 55, and the family can





have up to four children under 18 living at home. Each partner needs to be able bodied, fit and with no serious illnesses. In addition, the family needs to have an annual income equal to a minimum of \$10,000 per family member, including the adopted child.

The required documentation includes an application letter, birth and marriage certificates, proof of income, physical examination certificates, criminal record checks, home study reports, and copies of passports. These generally need to be notarized.

#### What to expect

"Most likely there will be problems adjusting, but they are almost always overcome," says Hillary Karsten, the Application Department Manager of CCAI. Support offered varies

according to the agency, but CCAI offers home study and post-adoption support in areas such as attachment, grief & loss in adoption, talking to the child about adoption, Chinese culture, being a multi-cultural family, and assisting in the child's development.

"The emotions a woman goes through with adoption are very similar to pregnancy," says Suzanne Calton. A good agency will provide relevant support for the specific stages of the process. CCAI has helped over 30 expat families in China and has a social worker in Shanghai. Talking about age-specific issues of the adoptee is an important part of the process, as is talking to other families who have been through adoption.

"Families should try 'to walk in the child's shoes' to feel what it is like for the child to

be in a family that looks very different than them," advises Karsten. In China though there is the advantage that some families can speak Chinese and that the child is still in China. The child will, however, see most families as very different to their own.

Karsten says that, for the process to succeed, "families need to have good and open communication among themselves and need to understand that there may be problems with sleeping and eating; they need to understand trauma."

#### Directory

CCCWA [http://www.china-ccaa.org/frames/index\\_unlogin\\_en.jsp](http://www.china-ccaa.org/frames/index_unlogin_en.jsp)

CCAI <http://www.chinesechildren.org/>