How I met Guo Liping, my youngest daughter

**Seven years ago** my family and I encountered a little girl 3 weeks from her 4th birthday. She lived in Harbin, China and she was an orphan. **At 5 days old**, she was left in the waiting room of the Harbin Medical School. Undoubtedly she needed medical attention and her biological mother did the very best she could for her. Liping was born with a **cleft palate and lip**. Most probably her mother was poor and most definitely there were no legal means for putting a child into the adoption system in China. **The orphanage named her Guo Liping**. Guo was her last name, a name shared by all 350 children living at that orphanage, The Harbin City Social Children’s Welfare Institute.

How my family came to be adopting this tiny 32 lb girl is a strange story. Maybe not like any you have ever heard before. At least not one told by **a modern person with a modern fact based education**. You will soon see why I say that and I ask you to just not judge it. For now, receive it for the possibilities the story may offer you now or in the future. The other point I would like to mention is that this is a story **about my relationship with God and how he communicated his concern for one voiceless little girl in China**. I am a Christian woman and this story is told from that perspective. That hadn’t always been the case. I had been agnostic all of my adult life.

 I promise I will launch into this story soon enough, but Molly thought I should explain a little bit about **why I had been agnostic and why that agnosticism changed**. I think the main reason is that **I grew up**. I didn’t know how to think about spiritual things as a teen. **Children’s stories weren’t good enough and I didn’t have anyone to talk to about more abstract ideas**. In short, I didn’t know how to believe. Finally, after taking the freshman philosophy core at Stanford, **I concluded: God is not real, he is a feel good myth.** I have to say, I wasn’t particularly happy about this conclusion. And so life went on. I went to school, got a job, started a business, married, started a family….the usual stuff. But, somewhere in there **I always had a desire for more something**. It simply felt like something was missing. Eventually I said a prayer. “Lord, if you are there, show me how to get to you because I don’t know how to do it.” About 5 years later, at the age of 39, that prayer was answered and that is an altogether different story.

So back to the adoption story, **about 6 months after deciding I truly believed in God, this set of events unfolded.** And believe me living this story felt crazier at the time than it will even sound telling it to you now.

**In 2005, while visiting Japan with my husband for a wedding**, I had a distinctive dream. **It was a simple dream, but very vivid. (KISS principle)** In fact, it was so resonant it changed my thinking regarding my family as I knew it. We were a happy family of 4 with two healthy children. It had felt complete. It had felt like enough. The dream opened another possibility—the dream was simply me looking at a positive pregnancy test. In the past this experience had been a cause for joy with my husband. **Upon waking that night of April 10th, 2005—a date to remember**—the idea of having another child pressed upon me as something that we should consider, it was something that I thought I really wanted and that with my age at 40, needed to consider right away.

 Shortly after that, I realized that **I could actually be pregnant already**. I was filled with joy. It turned out that I was not, in fact, pregnant. At that point, I was disappointed, but thought about the fact that I generally felt so sick during pregnancy that **I wouldn’t miss it at all**. But, did **we really need to produce biological children to expand my family?** As a new Christian I had been studying about God by reading the Bible. It seemed clear that God used many means to create families. **Adoption came to mind**. Before marriage, I had the odd experience of running into the idea of adoption over a condensed period of time with many people sort of popping up into my life.

Do you ever have that happen where everywhere you go, people are talking about a certain thing to the point it seems like a message to you? Like it is some kind of **divine appointment**? In fact, I had spoken to **my husband** about the idea of adoption before we married. Now I renewed the topic with him. My argument was that **we are so blessed in this world**, why not share it with someone who is not? After all on our deathbeds do we want to say, **“We provided for our own, or do we want to say we extended our reach into the world and made a bit of it better?”** To my utter shock, he agreed. That was when I knew God was probably in this thing. **My husband likes things regular**. He comes from a large, regular family and everyone is a good citizen and a good student. There isn’t too much adventure seeking there, actually, there is **no adventure seeking there**. Except that each of them chose kind of wild card spouses to marry.

So I began to pray, how to begin. Where should we adopt from, Russia or China? One night I was in the bathtub praying about this adoption. And a most startling thing happened. In my minds eye, I saw a young girl running up to the bathtub, by her expression, I was clearly her mother. She was Chinese and there were the words “Her name is Hope.” My immediate thought wasn’t anything other than that I thought the name had too much message and sounded way to pious. But, I got out of the bath and found my husband. **“Ah, Jack, I think I know now that we are supposed to adopt from China. I think we are supposed to call her Hope.” He said, “Okay”. That’s so typical of him.**

So we began a process to adopt from the actual category called “healthy baby infant”, from China. At the time it would supposedly take a year and we would have a 1-1 ½ year old child at the end of it. Well, things changed in China, but they never did say what. The adoption community of waiting parents went berserk as one year waits turned into two year waits, then two years turned into three years. We had an assigned group number and it looked grim like maybe **6 years or more for the adoption**.

In addition to the slow down, there were **numerous other obstacles** that popped up. We got to the point where we really wondered if we were on the right path. **What about you?** How do you know when to keep going to the end and when to stop because it just isn’t happening? I think at these times it is helpful to ask what are you doing it for? Is it out of faith or calling? Or is it out of your own agenda, your own sense of accomplishment?

This is where the thing with **the minds eye** **image** I told you about really came into action. I saw her. I was sure she was out there for us. I could not think for a second about not persevering. And I had learned that overly pious name, Hope, was yet another gift. In my Bible study, I learned that **Biblical hope is not simple optimism,** it is waiting expectantly for God to act. We persisted and I made another call to find out about “**waiting children**”. These are older children, some with medical issues and immediately available for adoption.

**Later that afternoon, I received an urgent call from her**. She said, “There has been a release of a dossier for a 3 ½ year old on the internet. They will need to know if you accept the dossier by 10 PM tonight.” **I was thunderstruck!** She emailed the file to me. All this waiting and now while staring at two photos and a medical report, I had to ask is this the one? Can I love her? Am I her mother? Who is she really? I have this report full of check boxes, but how do they add up to a living, breathing person.

 **Then I saw something, the date of her birth**. It confirmed everything. This was the one we were waiting for. I ran to grab an old itinerary from a trip to Japan in 2005. I could find the date of the dream because it happened in a really unique hotel, it was the only traditional Japanese hotel we had stayed in. Remember how I said, April 10th was a date to remember? Do you remember the dream’s content? It was a positive pregnancy test. When compared to her birthdate of Dec. 18, 2005, she was exactly full term, 37 weeks, Sunday to Sunday. God most certainly gave me the gift of certainty in the plan he had for us. Well I told you this was a strange story! For me it was clear and the result was excellent.

Liping today is a vivacious little girl who is simply a joy to be around. In fact, she got the “Ray of Sunshine” award last year in the fourth grade. However, it took time for her to become knitted into our family and there were difficult times as well. Certainty that she belonged with us was a tremendous gift to me as I learned to mother her.

So **why is this story relevant** to you today? You truly will have to come to that conclusion for yourselves in the end. However, I hope you see **some general principles** that could apply. **God cares about his children**. He cares about you and he cares about the voiceless. He invites our participation into joyous, albeit sometimes difficult plans in repairing the tears of creation—the places of terrible need. Another way to look at it is put this way by **Elie Wiesel, a Jewish writer and Holocaust survivor**, he talks about **being a song within a song, that we are a song within a song**. We are all called to participate in the larger overture, and when we sing the song we have been given, the opportunity to participate that is unique to our person, I feel certain that is where we come to know joy. So I leave you to ponder, what is your song? And how will you open your ears to it? How will you help knit together the tears in creation?