

Hannah Weaver: To be honest, I have Abby. That's pretty much the only friend I have. I have a lot of fair-weather friends. I've come to realize they're good for shopping and movies. If I have a problem, they won't understand me, not because they're not Chinese-adopted like Abby. They care more about themselves than they do about others. I've come to realize those people are good for little hangouts and everything. When it comes down to the serious things, they're not really good. I've talked to Abby. Abby has never experienced any of the rude, ignorant comments that I have had to go through. I wonder why. Maybe she just has better friends than I do. Just recently, I've come to realize all the rude and ignorant things people have been saying to me. I don't know why, but lately people have been saying more rude things to me.

Jena Heath: You mentioned Culture Camp. Is that the FCC Culture Camp here in Austin?

Hannah: Yes.

Jena: Have you gone to that pretty consistently?

Hannah: I was there the first year it began.

Jena: Does that give you a place to be with people who get it?

Hannah: Yes. I've always loved going to the camp. This past year for some reason camp meant a lot more to me, maybe because it was the last year I thought. I cherished everything. I really enjoyed this last year's camp. I was really touched and really moved by the camp this past year. I was really into all the discussions. I was really understanding and wanting to reach out to more people this past year and really enjoyed the therapy times with the adoption therapist for some reason. This year really meant more to me than all the past years have.

Jena: What was that like for you when you were younger? Did you like it when you were younger?

Hannah: When I was younger and a camper, I enjoyed it. It was a really great time to hang out with other people that understood where I was coming from and how I was feeling, how I was raised up and my history and past and stuff. As I transitioned to being a counselor, the camp kind of switched. Now, I was having to be the leader to other kids. It really pushed me to think and really reflect on how I feel so that I could share it to others instead of people asking me. It was a different experience, but I've enjoyed every year of it.

Jena: Having this community, having Abby, has given you some sense of belonging, even with all the other dopes out there and their dopey comments. You've come to a place where you're beginning -- or maybe not beginning, maybe it's been going on for a while -- to think about a birth parent search. Tell me about that. What was it like when you were younger as you processed this story your mother told you in the car? I was also in the car when Caroline was asking me about this, turning left sweating bullets. I don't know what it is about the car, thinking, "Don't die. Don't die. Just make this left turn," as I'm trying to explain this. There's so

many ways this is anxiety-producing. You hear this news. You're two and half years old. "You were in another lady's tummy." "Whatever, Mom. I'm tired. [snoring noise] I'm out." Later, how did that begin to gel? How did you understand it?

Hannah: I've always really wanted to find out my history and want to find my birth family. As I was watching the movie *Twinsters* and the movie *Somewhere Between*, there was something that sparked a fire that really wanted me to find my birth family. Watching *Twinsters* I was like, "I so want to find my birth family. I want to have a twin. That's what I want. I want to have a twin." [laughs]

Jena: These documentaries are very powerful. These real people are really like you, have actually found biological parents, birth parents, siblings. Does it feel like something that's possible to you that maybe before seemed impossible?

Hannah: With talking to [sp] Shun-Shun, it made it more possible to find it by her saying all these things. The news will help. My birth mom can't be prosecuted. It made it more possible. It made it more like it could become a reality instead of a fantasy. Talking to other people has made it more possible to me.

Jena: How big a concern in the past has been your worry about your birth mom and what might legally happen?

Hannah: I don't know if I ever really thought about it. I was always hoping that communism would fall so that she could step out on her own and be like, "I placed my daughter here on roughly this day. She's from here." I thought that was how I was going to find her. I always imagined her never getting in trouble. I always imagined her wanting to find me. That's what I'm hoping, that she also wants to create a relationship with me and doesn't just want to eliminate me from her life.

Jena: Have you thought much about the fact that you can't know what the circumstances might be? If let's say you did find her, you might find someone who's thrilled to be reunited. It would be very bittersweet, but happy. There's a possibility though that you might find a story you didn't expect. I wonder have you wrestled with that at all, the possibility it could be a really not happy story? There are a lot of different stories.

Hannah: If she doesn't want to create a relationship with me, it'd hurt. I'd be pained by it. I think I could live with it. I'm happy where I am. I'm happy with the life that I've been given. Either way is a happy ending to me because I love the family that I'm with. I know that my life here is a thousand times better than my life would've been in China. I'm thankful that she did what she did. There's no anger. There'll never be any anger towards her for whatever decision she makes. If she wants to find me or if she doesn't want to find me, I'm fine with that, but I do want to find her.

Jena: Whatever the story is, you want to know it?

Hannah: Yes.

Jena: Why? I know that sounds like a strange question, but why? You love your parents. They're here with you. They're obviously very supportive. Why does it matter?

Hannah: That's how I've been living for the past fourteen, fifteen years. I was like, "I want to find my birth mom but if she doesn't want to find me, that's okay. I'm okay with not knowing the first thirteen months of my life." This past year I've been like, "I do." I've been going through this identity crisis of who am I? I know who I am thirteen months up. It's important to me. It has become important to me to know what happened to me thirteen months and before. There are certain things that I don't know that I want to know for my own sake just to know who I am. There's a missing puzzle piece that I want to find. I believe that it is thirteen months prior to me being adopted. I want to know what it is. It's important to me to know my identity by finding this, is what I believe.

Jena: This is an odd question. Do you think that this would feel quite the way it does if you had not seen *Twinsters* and *Somewhere Between*?

Hannah: When did *Twinsters* come out? When did we see *Twinsters*? Was it before or after adoption camp? I feel like it was after adoption camp. Had I not seen *Twinsters* or *Somewhere Between*, I think I would be, still, the way I am now. Those movies just wanted me to have a relationship with them and want to find them in the way of wanting to find a sibling. I've always wanted to know where I came from. I've always wanted to know who my birth family was. Just recently, I've wanted to know for the sake of who am I?

Jena: It would give you a fuller sense, it sounds like, of your identity?

Hannah: Yes.

Jena: I'm going to ask your parents a couple of questions. Is that okay if we do this all together like this? It feels like we're having one conversation. How is this for you, the desire for a birth parent search?

Brenda: I'm all for it. She has really always felt very strong about China, about her connection. Some kids don't. Some adopted children, even Abby, they're just fine with their story, what they know of it. They're fine with who they are. They don't really have that overwhelming curiosity about it. Hannah always has. When I first realized this was making her unhappy as she got to be about ten or eleven or twelve, I thought, "You have really overdone it with the China pride thing." When she was little, she was a toddler, we'd see a pretty woman on the street and I would want her to be proud of China so I would always talk about China and then I would say, "Where is that pretty woman from?" She'd say, "She China." I would really build up China in her mind. I thought, "You have done this to her. You have created this overwhelming curiosity. I

don't think that now. I think that God put this in her heart. She will follow it. Whatever she finds, she'll be fine with it. That's how I feel.

Jena: How about you, Dad?

Larry: I could see early on because she would identify somebody -- she wasn't two years old, if she would see somebody that was Asian, she'd go, "She China." She would do that on her own. When the Olympics in 2008, we'd watch the Olympics and who you're cheerin' for, it was very strong whenever China would do anything. You could see that she had an immense pride and reachin' back. There was a very strong identity there. It's something that we have taken from that time, whatever she wants to do, she can do that.

Jena: Is it scary at all for either of you? Let's say Hannah found her birth parents. How does it feel, the idea of making room for another set of parents?

Brenda: I think for the young mother, that's a scary thing. For a young adoptive mother, they never want to think about the other mother coming back in their life, especially if it's a domestic adoption. Once you start lookin' at things through their eyes and seeing that she wants this and that no one's going to take my place, then you start wanting it. That's how I feel. I want it. I want it for her. I want to see it in my lifetime.

Jena: How about you?

Larry: Almost from the beginning I was hoping that the barriers would come down so she could do that. It's part of her family. It's another part. Like she said, there's a piece of the puzzle missing. What's the best way to do that? That's to reach back. Like Hannah said, and Brenda, and we've had these conversations before. The way she was taken care of to get her to here showed there was a great deal of love. She's blessed us. I hope she can reach back.

Jena: What did you know about China? Why did you decide to adopt from China? How old were you? What was the decision-making like?

Brenda: I was single. I married Larry after we got back from China. When I started the process, we were not dating or anything. It was a year and a half process. I was a single parent. It was a God thing. I was forty-eight. I had looked at adopting from China at thirty-eight. I didn't have a house. I wasn't financially stable. I put it away. China was always the country, of all the adoptive things, that I was most interested in. I think it's because it was the girls. All the girls were there because they were girls, most of them. I come from an all-male family. That was attractive to me. Then I put it away and just lived my life as a single person. Basically, the money fell on me at the same time my brother, who's a adoptive father, told me, "If you miss out on this, being a parent, you've missed out on the best part of life." He said that to me so profound. It was on Easter of that year. All of a sudden, the money came to me. Money doesn't fall on me. Look around.

Jena: Did you win the lottery?

Brenda: No. My parents decided to sell the trees off the land that they own and split that with us. That came to about \$20,000. I asked God. I prayed for several days before. I have what I call my letter from God. I'm not even very strong with God, but this is very, very important. I have to have it in writing from God that I should do this. [laughs] So we have this thing up here, what we have in the China chest, called my letter from God. It came in the form of -- I took this magazine every year. I used to date the production manager of Texas Monthly magazine. That's the only one I've ever subscribed to. There's probably three over there on the thing. I was lookin' through it. I was praying constantly. I mean, I was praying constantly for a few days. It got so bad, I would be sitting at the light and I'd go, "I bet if I turn my head right there, there'd be an Asian person there." Sure enough. That night I'd go into HEB, and that night I counted thirteen Asian people. I said, "God, the universe, is tellin' me this."

I kept praying about it. I went to Mary's hair salon downtown and got my hair cut. Then I said, "God, you know what a doubter I am. I have to have this in writing. I don't care if you send me an email and just say, 'Do it. -God'" [laughs] I had the money. It was pressing on me so hard here at forty-eight years old. Then I was lookin' through Texas Monthly. She's about to cut my hair, the girl who does it all the time. I turned the page. There was a half-page ad of a little Asian girl sitting in a crib. They don't have ads like this. It was an adoption ad. It said, "She won't have your eyes, but she will have your heart." I tore it out. I started crying and sobbing. The girl couldn't hardly cut my hair. I was like, "You don't understand what this is."

Jena: This is an email from God!

Brenda: This is. I went and put down my first \$3,300. That's how it started. I knew that God was tellin' me that. I even contacted Texas Monthly and said, "Have you ever run this ad before?" I'd never seen it. She could've been a girl from Mexico. It could've been a boy, but it wasn't. It was speaking directly to me. When God speaks to you, all you can do is cry. When you realize, God took the time to speak to me -- that's what I believed happened. So we started the process. Meanwhile then, we find a father. [laughs]

Jena: Wow. God sends an email in the form of the ad in Texas Monthly while you're in the hair salon. You start the process. God sent a previous email in the form of your brother and the trees on your parent's land. The universe is aligning here. Did you have anxiety about doing this -- or no, maybe not anxiety, I don't even know why I asked that, but I'll ask it anyway -- about doing this as a single parent?

Brenda: I did have some during that time, during that long year and a half wait, every now and then. Once you've committed and you've realized God has told me this is fine to do, that this is going to go well, I just went with that. Every now and then you'll have fears of, "What if the baby's not healthy," that kind of thing.

Jena: You start the process. Then, this guy comes along. You were engaged when you ended up going to China, but not as the adoptive parent. Really, only three months ago did you officially become Hannah's adoptive dad.

How did you, Larry, process the decision, China? Did you know anything about China?

Larry: Really, I did not. She told me that she was going. The funny thing about it, I'd been single for fifteen years. I had no overwhelming desire to be married but felt like there was a reason I'd been sent to Austin. Come down, we went through that whole process. Hannah's been in our life since then. We vacation together. I get three weeks of vacation now. Some of the stuff I have done with my older daughters. This next year in the summer we're going to the upper Midwest. We're going to start in Kansas City where I live and then go to my older daughter's in Arkansas, then down through Little Rock and over to Memphis and talk to Elvis, and then back up to St. Louis. I had never been there before so I thought I'd been fun and then go to the arch so she can see that. She did a project about the arch later on. If I can get up the nerve, I'll go through the arch with her. We'll see.

I really didn't. A lot of my friends that know I'm pretty systematic in what I do, "You really quit your job? You're moving to Austin?" We talked about this earlier today. My parents have passed away, so I had some money from their estate. I would've never made that commitment had I not had the financial backing to be able to do it. I come down here. It took eleven months to find a job. Then, it was in western Kansas. It was in Dodge City, Kansas.

Brenda: I have a new baby. I'm forty-eight. We're up in our forties. Now, Larry's unemployed and 9/11 has hit. As soon as I convinced him to quit a very stable job where he's the HR manager of this big company to come down here and set up a business -- I thought he could be an HR consultant -- then two or three months later, 9/11. Then there were no jobs to be had. We wait almost a year. Then he gets a call from the meat industry, "We know you. Are you interested in coming up here? Are you willing to work in Dodge City, Kansas?" I'm sitting here going, "Dodge City, Kansas?"

Jena: Hey, he went to China for you. You got to go to Kansas for him.

Brenda: Basically, he wanted the job. I wanted to come back home. We tried to commute for a while. That took its toll on a marriage. We grew apart. Hannah and Larry never grew apart. We were talkin' this morning how we had the anger at first when we first divorced. We had it for a while like people do, but that's all gone now. We're better friends than we ever were when we were married. We would do anything for each other. We support each other in every way. It's a good deal.

Jena: It's interesting because we have a couple of divorces in our travel group. We have one death. One of the fathers was in remission with melanoma and died. I've interviewed some families where there's been divorce. To me, it's a really important part of the story because we're like everyone else. Our lives are like everybody else's lives. They go through transitions

just like other people's transitions. It's important for everybody to also see that these transitions are very manageable. People get through them and come out, actually in certain ways, sometimes better, not the way you expected when you went in.

How is this for you, Hannah?

Hannah: I remember we were walking into a Walgreens or something. This was about the time when my mom and dad were getting a divorce. My mom asked me, "Hannah, if something ever happened to me, would you rather live your dad or your cousin?" I was like, "This is the most ridiculous question ever. What are you saying? I'd always choose Dad. What are you saying?" I thought that was the most ridiculous question ever. Why would she ask something like this?

Brenda: I was doing my will. I had to designate a person. If something happened to me, where would you want to go?

Hannah: I was like, "You must be insane. I choose Dad."

Jena: How is it for your that your dad's long distance? How has that worked out for you?

Hannah: I just love what we have. Sometimes when I was younger, I'd get really upset when he'd leave. My mom would hate for him to come because I'd get so attached. I'd just cry whenever he left. Now that I'm growing up, I'm realizing he's coming back. Why should I be upset? When I was younger, it was hard that this was long distance. Now, I just love what we have. Now when I see him, we can go do fun things. He doesn't have to be the bad parent. Mom's got both jobs.

Jena: Lucky mom.

[laughter]

Larry: Dad's vacation guy.

Brenda: Oh, my goodness. They travel.

Jena: It sounds like you guys have really come to a good place. Does it feel any different at all to be officially Hannah's dad?

Larry: Probably just a little bit, but not a great deal. We always had a real strong relationship anyway. Probably just a little bit. It is official that she was in my will just like the older two daughters are in my will. A little bit because it just now is official. My feelings toward her, no. It's always been very strong. Just making it official that is in fact there if something happens to me that there isn't a question for social security purposes or that, that she's my daughter and she can be taken care of on that side. She's a great kid. It's a blessing. She's pickin' my nursing home.

[laughter]

Jena: What prompted you to ask your dad to finalize the adoption?

Hannah: I think we were talking about it when I was twelve or so. We just never got to it. I was like, "I actually want this. We need to get this done. Let's not just say it but never do it. Let's take action and do it." I don't think I felt a huge difference after he adopted me. I've always seen him as my dad. There's no one else. I just wanted to make it "official official."

Jena: What do you think you'll do with your Chinese, go to college, major in Chinese? Do you have any goal in mind?

Hannah: It'd be cool to see what living in China would be like, not permanently and move to China and become a Chinese citizen, but maybe spend a few summers there or something, go back for a longer time than just three weeks this summer. That's how I want to use it, and become fluent. I want to be fluent in Chinese, Mandarin.