

Parrie Liu: I was actually homeschooled for first through twelfth. My parents didn't really -- they've done public school, private school, Christian school. They didn't really like that. I was homeschooled. I liked it. It was good.

Jena Heath: Let me make sure I understand. There's seven total children, or eight children and you have seven siblings?

Parrie: There's seven total.

Jena: Seven total children. You were homeschooled. How many of you were homeschooled simultaneously?

Parrie: When I younger, there were three of us. As I got older, there were two. Then my sister graduated. There's a big gap between me and my sister. She graduated and for -- I can't do the math. Around thirteen, maybe a little younger, junior high into high school, I was by myself. I did the co-op where I do homeschool classes with other homeschoolers. I volunteered. I did get out of the house.

Jena: You had interaction with other students, obviously in a co-op model. You're the youngest of seven?

Parrie: Yes. I'm the youngest.

Jena: How do you feel about being homeschooled? I guess you don't have any comparison between homeschooled and having gone to an institutional more traditional school. It sounds like you got a really good education at home, set you up to study biology in college and become a pediatric radiologist.

Parrie: There were some stuff I couldn't do as a homeschooler. That's okay. I worked really hard. I did video school. I saw a classroom. I wasn't naïve to the idea of what a classroom looks like. Also, I had public school friends too. Even though I didn't go to public school, I knew how it worked in a sense. Also, when I went to homeschool co-op, I knew how to interact with adults. It's not like I'd never seen an adult or a teacher in my life. As a college student, I didn't feel too shocked. The only thing was it required more walking around campus. I don't think homeschooling hurt me. I've made the Dean's List twice. I figure I was okay.

Jena: It sounds like you were definitely okay. Tell me about why you were interested in doing this and telling your story. Obviously, you have stuff on your mind and things you want to express. What do you know about your early life? How old were you? What do you know about the circumstances? Were you in an orphanage? Were you cared for by a Chinese family before you came home?

Parrie: This is where it gets interesting because I've never heard of an adoptee having this situation. Actually, I don't remember a lot. I'm going by what people have told me. Recently,

I got in contact with one of the former orphanage workers. She's European. She volunteered there for ten years. I got some good information from her, pictures. According to her and the document she showed me, I was actually four days old when I went to the orphanage. There's a debate on when my actual birthday is. I'm just going with the legal one. I stayed there for three and a half, four years depending on the birthday you use. I was loved, apparently. From the pictures, I looked very happy. I know with the orphanage, I was diagnosed as slow and mentally retarded. I beat that odd. They probably thought I was slow because of my disability. I walked really slow. I guess physical, they thought it was mental too. I don't know. I had pneumonia. I found out from one of the pictures. There was a note on the back. That's pretty much it. I don't really remember a lot, just stories from people.

Jena: I have a couple of questions from this. The first is how did you find this European orphanage worker? How did that all come about where you two are in contact?

Parrie: That's an interesting story. This makes me sound like a really weird person trying to stalk her. I found the [indiscernible] Social Welfare Center has its partner with International China Concern. I got on the ICC website. I contacted them. I showed them a picture. I specifically said, "Who is this blonde lady?" They got back to me. They got the email. They were like, "Would you like to contact her?" My intention was just to say thank you for taking care of me. She was the one that took me to my parents. She played a big part in my life. I just wanted to thank her, but then we started building a relationship. Now, I'm in contact with her quite frequently. It's really nice.

Jena: Where is she from? What country?

Parrie: I told her that I wouldn't give the specifics of where she lives. I want to respect her privacy.

Jena: I understand that. You were able to have a kind of rapprochement, a moment of important reconnection with your history. You said you kind of stalked her a little bit. Obviously, you were really interested in finding out about your early life. Can you tell me about those feelings? When did they start? Do you remember? What kinds of questions have you asked yourself over the years?

Parrie: I don't really think these feelings started all of a sudden. I've always wondered what happened those four years of life that my parents weren't involved. I just wondered. It took me a while to find contact information with the group. Then it took me a while to be brave to email them. Then I finally showed the picture. That's how it all started. It was really cool "meeting" her and getting to know her again. That's pretty much it.

Jena: How did your adoptive parents feel about all of this? Did you talk with them about your wanting to reconnect and find out some information?

Parrie: From what they've told me, they thought it was really cool that I got to reconnect with someone who took care of me. They remember her in China. They were in China for a little bit. They really liked her in China. They were really happy I got to meet her again.

Jena: Then you also mentioned that you have a disability. What's the nature of your disability?

Parrie: It's hip dysplasia. It can be very hard to walk long distance.

Jena: Is there any corrective surgery that can be done or has been done?

Parrie: Actually, in China, I was supposed to be fostered to go to the US, get surgery, but then China said no for some reason. I don't know why. When I was adopted, I got evaluated here in the States. I got surgery. It didn't do as much as they wanted to. If they did more, it could risk me not walking at all. My parents decided, "She can walk." At that time, I wasn't in a lot of pain, so it was chosen to not do more.

Jena: How old were you then?

Parrie: I was four... five. I'm really tired. I can't think right now. [laughs]

Jena: That's okay. You're giving us the ballpark. Do you walk with assistance? Are you able to walk on your own? Do you need a cane or a walker or a helping instrument of any kind? Are you pretty much able to get around on your own?

Parrie: I can get around on my own. I walk kind of slow than the average person. I get there eventually. If I had to run from a bear or something, I could. I just would really hurt afterwards.

Jena: Suffice it to say, I think if any of us had to run from a bear, it would hurt afterwards. There are probably many people who are not disabled who could not run from a bear. This says that you're in fine shape. What story do you feel like you want to tell? What's out there about adoption, being Chinese, being adopted, or both? Is there any sort of thing in the public narrative that gets under your skin that you feel needs some correction?

Parrie: I can think of two right now. The first one is that -- some may disagree. I've noticed adoption is always painted as one-sided. I recently wrote an article on No Hands But Ours. It's an adoption site. It's adoptive parents giving advice and all that stuff. They give really good advice actually, giving tips on post-adoption and how you can help your kids and stuff like that. I wrote an article recently about adoption looking on both sides of the coin. I used a coin analogy. I used that because I feel like adoption is viewed one-sided a lot of the times by the public or even sometimes adoptive parents, not my parents, but generally. I feel like it's always viewed as a happy -- it's amazing. It is amazing, but also people need to realize when you get your adopted child, it's not going to be beautiful all the time and going to bond with them. They're going to go through struggles. You're going to go through struggles while

you're going through the same family life. The second one would be maybe biculturalism. Maybe this is a misconception. Parents or people need to consider or think about -- for a lot of international adoptees, considering the birth culture and whatever country you got adopted to, just use America for instance, it's hard for the adoptee to be like, "Am I Chinese? Am I just American? Am I both?" That's another thing to consider.

Jena: Have you seen the documentary *Somewhere Between*?

Parrie: Yes, I have.

Jena: What did you think of it?

Parrie: I thought a lot. I thought it was a good movie. It was emotional for me. I did cry. I did like it. I do feel sometimes somewhere in between, as the movie suggests, about my identity.

Jena: About being Chinese, being American, being actually somewhere in the middle? When you grew up, were you in a community that had many other Chinese people or even Asian people? Did you guys do the Moon Festival and the Chinese New Year? How much Chinese cultural stuff did you do, if any?

Parrie: I know when I younger that I don't remember, we had this adoption group. We did stuff with them. We don't actually have a lot of Asians in my neighborhood. I saw Asian people. I don't want to imply that. I wasn't best friends with many. Also, I reconnected with some other adoptees that live near me. We lost connection because we were young. Then we got busy with our lives. We reconnected. I started doing stuff with them. I've done some Chinese stuff on and off. It's only been recently it's been more consistent. I have more time. I'm more available.

Jena: This is may be wrong. I'm just wondering. Do you think it may be also more consistent because you're older? I'm wondering if when you went to college, are there other Chinese students who you're meeting, Chinese American students? I've been talking to a lot of adoptees. College seems to be a very pivotal experience in many ways, including this way, because suddenly you're in this broader community. There are other students who are of all different ethnicities who are coming into an awareness about their identity, their ethnic identity and these kinds of questions. You have more of a community to share this stuff with. I wonder if that's also happening with you. Are you meeting other students who also have questions?

Parrie: Yes. I would say that as I've gotten older, I met more people. I recently, a year ago, met this girl who came from China. She's not an adoptee. She's actually a foreign exchange student. That's the word. I've recently come in more contact with more people. A couple of the professors at my university are Chinese. I got influence from them. Yes, I would agree. As I've gotten older, more opportunities have come.

Jena: Have you been back to China at all?

Parrie: No, I haven't. I want to. The timing, money, is not available right now.

Jena: Maybe later?

Parrie: Yes. I would definitely consider.

Jena: I read your piece that you mentioned that you wrote. I thought it was very thoughtful and balanced, considerate. You obviously feel like sometimes parents are not really emotionally prepared for the transition that will happen when they bring a new adopted child into their home. It's not, as you say, this fairy tale. Can you offer parents from your perspective now as a young adult, if I asked you to offer parents who are newly bringing children home a key piece of advice, what would it be?

Parrie: It would depend on the age of the child. If you don't bond with your child at first, whether the child's a baby or thirteen -- I bonded well with my parents -- it takes time to really bond. You can't expect once you get your child, you're going to love your family forever. It just takes a while to get used to that.

Jena: That's really good advice. The way that children express their anxiety in a new situation can be very varied depending on the age of a child. An older child may act out or may be difficult for a while. My daughter was two when she came home. She was a toddler, which is an age that can be tough. Kids, they're trying to push away a little bit and find a little toddler independence. She had been talking a lot in Chinese. She was speaking a lot and suddenly got back here and, boom, she couldn't communicate. She was extremely frustrated. Who could blame her? She had some pretty serious tantrums over the course of the first year.

I was very fortunate that my mother's a very smart woman who taught reading and language and later taught Latin. She had an understanding of language. She said to me, "This will stop the minute she can express herself verbally." That's exactly what happened. Shortly before her third birthday, she started to be able to really express herself in English. She never had a tantrum again, never. Now, she's ten. I had to figure out how to ride that period out and to try to set boundaries. You can't let your kids run roughshod all over the place, for anyone's sake, but also to understand this was part of her adjustment and probably also part of her bonding. She was figuring me out. I was figuring her out. I think your advice is really good advice. Be patient, and things will settle in?

Parrie: Yes.

Jena: Is there anything you'd like to put out in the world, any thought or idea that you would like to get out there that you want to make part of this interview?

Parrie: No, I don't think so.

Jena: I want to just tell you that I really have enjoyed talking with you. I got all your material. We will put your story up on the site.

Parrie: I'm very excited.

Jena: Great. I wish you the best in school. I hope you have a great semester. What year are you now?

Parrie: I'm a sophomore. I'm studying biology and a minor in Spanish.

Jena: Wow. How's your Spanish? Did you do a lot of Spanish at home?

Parrie: No, my parents don't speak Spanish. It's actually quite funny. I'm more fluent in Spanish than am I in my first language.

Jena: Did you start studying Spanish in college? Were you studying it when you were homeschooled as well?

Parrie: I took Spanish in high school. I hated it. In college, the reason I actually took Spanish was to get out of communications and English. I really hate talking to an audience in English, so I thought it'd be better in a foreign, non-English language. I chose Spanish.

Jena: Do you hate talking to an audience in English because you feel shy?

Parrie: I don't like people staring at me. I get a lot of stares anyway. Them staring at me is really hard.

Jena: You get stares because of your hip?

Parrie: Yes. That's why I think it is. I'm pretty sure it is.

Jena: That must be tough. Does anybody ask you stupid questions?

Parrie: Yes. Also, that reminds me of something of my pet peeve about adoption. If you're special needs adoption or if you're even healthy adoption -- those are probably really bad terms to describe it -- strangers need to know not to ask really ignorant questions. It really gets under my skin when people are asking, "Are those your real parents?" out of the blue. It's not in the appropriate context.

Jena: How do you respond when you're asked questions like that?

Parrie: It depends if I want to be nice or not.

Jena: When you want to be nice, what do you say?

Parrie: "Yes, these are my parents."

Jena: When you don't want to be nice, what do you say?

Parrie: "Yes, they're real. They're not made out of plastic."

Jena: I bet that sets them back a pace or two.

Parrie: Yes.

Jena: Sounds like you can handle yourself, Parrie Liu.

Parrie: Thank you.

Jena: Can we keep in touch?

Parrie: Sure.

Jena: You can update your story on the site. As the years go by, if you want to add to it, over time update about what's going on in your life, what's happening, I want you to know that you're very welcome to do that. You can always contact me. I'll help you. You can get on the site and do it yourself. It's totally up to you. I'm hoping that the people who participate will keep us up to date on how things are going in their lives.

Parrie: That's cool. I hope to be more involved in the adoption community. That's the reason I wrote the article and then also contacted you. I'm also looking maybe interning at an adoption agency, see if that works out.

Jena: That sound great. You would be a wonderful voice, a wonderful addition -- you will be and are -- to the really vibrant and wonderful conversation that's going on among adoptees. I want to thank you again for talking with us.

Parrie: Thank you for having me.