

Jena Heath: Tell me about where you live. Are there other adopted kids from China where you live? Do you have friends from the Families with Children Adopted from China? Do you do the holiday celebrations, that kind of stuff?

Zoi Kunkle: I have two friends from school that were adopted from China. We're friends with their parents, more one than the other.

Jena: That's nice. You have other kids who have something in common with you about your background.

Zoi: Yes.

Jena: Have you ever had to put up with kids who are not adopted or not Chinese asking questions about where you're from? If you have, how do you handle that?

Zoi: I do get asked questions sometimes, but not that much. It doesn't really bother me that much.

Jena: It doesn't sound like anybody's really intrusive about it. They don't keep at you about it.

Pat Jacobs: It's fair for her to get asked a few questions. Typically, she's question, question, question, question.

Jena: I see. She can dish it out, so needs to be able to handle it too when they come her way.

Pat: Yes. We were at a friend's that run a bed and breakfast and have horses in Alberta two years ago.

Zoi: I got to gallop on a horse.

Pat: Gary said to Zoi, did she want to come out to the barn with him? Then my husband, her dad Roy, they headed out. Roy comes in two hours later and says, "You need to come get Zoi. She hasn't stopped asking him questions the whole time they've been there, and he's not used to that." She fired them for about two and a half hours. She had to learn, I guess.
[laughs]

Jena: Sounds like you might like to do what I'm doing someday. Get yourself a tape recorder, and climb on your horse and ride the range, and go meet cool people, and ask them a bunch of questions.

Zoi: That would be fun.

Jena: You might be a journalist one day, my dear. What are you thinking about? Do you have any thoughts about what you might want to be when you grow up?

Zoi: When I grow up, I want to do something with animals. I kind of want to be a vet, but I kind of don't want to be a vet. If I was a vet, I might have to do surgery on an animal. I wouldn't want to have to do that.

Jena: I can understand that. The taking care of them and being around them would be fun, but the cutting them open part would be hard to handle for me too. Can I talk to your mom for a minute or two?

Zoi: Mm-hmm.

Jena: Pat, I'd like to ask you a little bit about your decision to adopt and your decision to adopt from China. When did you make that decision? How did it all go for you?

Pat: I, of course, am one of those older moms. When my husband and I got married, we discussed the adoption thing at different points in time. My parents were missionaries in India for years. My oldest niece is adopted from India. We discussed the adoption thing for some time, but on and off. I said to him, "We can't keep talking about this. We're getting old enough, we either need to do it or not do it." You get to that stage in life where that's the reality [indiscernible]. He said, "Let's do it." Then I started researching it. India was a closed door. I said that we need to go ahead. India was a closed door. I had in my head that we must have ongoing connections with whatever country we [indiscernible]. That's my [indiscernible]. That, to me, was India, China, or Mexico. Those are the ones that I looked at. We've been already building homes in Mexico for a number of years. We've actually created this [indiscernible] schools. Mexico seemed to be another closed door at that point in time as well.

[indiscernible] my sister-in-law was from china. I knew they were planning to have children. Then we started the China route, which was very much an open door at that point. I felt like it would be good for her to have cousins who were part Chinese. The cousins, my parents' grandchildren, the first one's from India; the next four are blonde; the last three are Chinese or half-Chinese. With Zoi, that's somewhat by design. I felt very, very definite about that. I know different people have different viewpoints. That was mine. I didn't want to say, "I don't really know much about where you're from, never been there except [indiscernible]." [indiscernible] born and raised in Shanghai and came to Canada through Hong Kong. Her family's all back in China. That was a big motivator for me [indiscernible] China.

Jena: What year did you adopt? What was the finalized month and date?

Pat: Zoi, June 12th of 2006. It's been extended recently, but we were dealing with an adoption agency that dropped the ball. That extended it early on. I'm one of these that feels like, "Maybe that was the way that it's meant to me," because I did have to go back to work.

Jena: How old was she when she came home?

Pat: We got her the day they believed she was ten months old.

Jena: Given your desire to stay connected to China and the ability to do it in a way that a lot of families don't have -- a lot of families, they had no familiarity with China until they started the adoption process. It's through the adoption -- this is true of me -- where you've learned more and more and become more familiar. Your situation is different. I wonder how it informs your thinking about the lack of information about the kids' early lives. Did that ever bother you or concern you? How do you think through all of that?

Pat: Maybe this sounds [indiscernible]. That never concerned me, maybe because my oldest sister is in that same situation.

Jena: The whole "We must find out what happened," which is a powerful urge for some -- everyone's very different. I've spent the whole year talking to adoptive parents. There is no consensus on this at all. It sounds like having had adoption in your family too, you had a kind of understanding and were at peace with it, what you know and what you don't know.

Pat: Yeah. Now, Zoi would like to learn. That's part of why she wanted to get involved with this. She would like to learn. To me, we'll do what we can do. However, I know there's some question about whether all the information that everybody's received is accurate. I've read some things on there, I don't know. There's certain things I know that aren't. I tend to think that she was located when they said she was located and where. I actually was able to look up the address up on Google Maps, and I come up with it. It was interesting. I didn't know whether I would be able to do that. They indicate she was found in front of a public market early in the morning, which to me says that was a mom that wanted to make sure she was found.

Jena: You broke up a little bit there. She was left in front of a public market? Is that what I heard?

Pat: Yeah, early in the morning. That says that the birth mom wanted to make sure she was found so she'd be taken care of.

Jena: Is Zoi still there? Is it okay if I ask her a little bit about her desire to know more?

Zoi, your mom was telling me that you were interested in doing this, being interviewed and telling your story on Our China Stories, because you have some interest in knowing more about your early life in China. Do you think much about your birth family? If you do, would you be willing to tell me a little bit about what you think about?

Zoi: I sometimes think about them. I mostly just have questions for them about other family. When I was in second grade, our teacher had us write this note to someone. I wrote a note to my birth mom in Chinese in case I ever find her. I have this little box that I put it in. I took a picture of it, of the outside design and the inside design, just in case I ever lose it so I can rewrite it.

Jena: That is really cool. What kind of questions would you ask? Let's say you could meet your birth parents. What would you ask them?

Zoi: I would give them the note. Then I would also ask them, "I was wondering if you guys had any other children." It'd be like I was giving them an interview, kind of.

Jena: Good idea. It sounds like you're curious about whether there might be brothers and sisters in China.

Zoi: Yeah. My mom said when -- who found me?

Pat: Someone from the market called [indiscernible].

Zoi: When they found me, my mom said that I was wearing clothes that might have been a little too big. My mom thinks that they might have been from maybe an older sister.

Jena: That makes sense. It's a bit of detective story. There are clues. You wonder what they might lead to.

Do you have other children?

Pat: Pardon?

Jena: Are there any siblings? Does Zoi have adoptive siblings?

Pat: She has three older half-sister and brothers. I sent a picture of them.

Zoi: I have one sister and two brothers.

Jena: How old are they?

Zoi: My brother Willy is thirty-two. The oldest brother that I have is thirty-four. His name is Robby. My sister's name is Kimmy. She's twenty-nine.

Jena: I saw a picture of you with your older brothers and sister. It looks like you guys get along really well. What's it like having siblings? They're really grown-ups.

Zoi: It's fun but also kind of hard because they don't live with us. I mean, it's not hard. My oldest brother and my sister and my nephew all live in one house in Tacoma. My other brother Willy and her girlfriend are in Sicily, so they can't come down for as much stuff because they're gone a lot.

Pat: Because they're on the other side of the world.

Jena: Would you like to go back to China sometime, Zoi? Have you been there since you came home when you were a baby?

Zoi: No, not yet. My parents and I have been thinking about it. We were thinking about doing it last summer, but then it didn't work out. I think we are going to do it one of these summers.

Jena: Is it something that you really want to do?

Zoi: Yeah. I know it's not a hundred percent that I'm going to find them, but we can still try.

Jena: I see. If you go, maybe you never know. You might be able to find your birth family. It sounds like at some point you're going to want to search for them?

Zoi: Yes.

Jena: You'll be able to speak to them because you have Chinese. That's really awesome.

Zoi: Yeah. I think we might still need a guide. I'm not sure. We don't know our way around.

Pat: We're still in touch with the guide that we had when we went to get her in the first place.

Zoi: We're good friends with her.

Jena: Really? That's fantastic. You have this friend and contact who you've known from the beginning who I'm sure would be willing to help you whenever you're ready to go back. Do you think, Pat, that you all would do a heritage tour at some point?

Pat: Probably, yes. There's different options that way. I would like us to be able to do something for a little more extended period of time.

Jena: Where you could stay over there for a bit?

Pat: Yes.

Jena: I understand. Zoi, I interrupted you. You sounded like you had something you wanted to say.

Zoi: And it might be helpful if she can because even though I've taken Chinese class, just in case I forget a few things. I think I'm pretty good at speaking Chinese, but sometimes I forget the more detailed words and stuff.