

Jena Heath: Can you tell me a little bit about your decision to adopt? Why did you decide to adopt? Why did you decide to adopt from China?

Janet Warnke: We wanted to have a child together. I was a little older when we got married. It wasn't coming naturally. We were open to adoption. We saw an advertisement in our church bulletin. "Baby girls from China need homes, are available for adoption." We called the number. That's how we got involved. We went to a support group across the river. First, I had a very lengthy conversation with the lady running the group. Then we attended her support groups. She led you to different agencies, like, "This one's good." She represented no one really but she just said, "These are all good agencies. Decide." The meetings were great. People would come back from China and show their new babies, people who were waiting to adopt. Everybody had something in common there. They would meet once a month. It became like a family group. That's how we started.

Jena: What church do you go to? Do you mind if I ask?

Janet: No, Immaculate Conception in Irvington.

Jena: It's a Catholic church?

Janet: Catholic church.

Jena: The group, when you first started going, they gave general information about why kids were adopted? At that point, did you know anything about why kids were available for adoption from China? Was it a complete learning experience from the beginning?

Janet: I guess we knew because when I had my conversation with Barbara, who ran the group, who was also a mother of two adopted daughters from China -- her girls are in college now -- she gave us a background about why the babies were available.

Jena: Did you have any concerns or worries about international adoption, about being a biracial family, adopting a child from another culture? Was there any of that that entered into your thinking?

Janet: No, not at all. Not for me.

Pete Warnke: Not for me either. I didn't think twice about it. I knew there was a need for homes for these children, as there are for children of all types. I was very interested to find out more. The first meeting I went to, I was hooked. I jumped headfirst into it. We knew it was something for us. It clicked right away. We started the paperwork very soon after that, after our first meeting. We went every month, made good friends. Seeing the new kids coming home all the time really kept me going. I never had any kids before. Jill's my only. It was a long pregnancy for me in a sense. I waited a long time.

Jena: How long did the whole process take from the time you -- this was in 2006 or '05?

Janet: We started paperwork in 2005, got it logged in in 2006. It took six months. Then after that, it was twenty-nine months that we waited. When we first pursued the adoption, we thought we'd have a baby within a year. That's what it said the timeframe was. Then it kept getting longer and longer. We kept following what log in dates were being --

Pete: -- pushed back.

Janet: -- what people were getting referrals and their log in dates. We kept track of that. It was supposed to be twelve months. It was twenty-nine.

Pete: I felt it is what it is. We really had no control over it. I believed that there was a daughter out there for me, that she'd be mine. Whenever it came, it came. When the message came that we actually got matched, it was a special day. From that day forward, every step was even more exciting and more exciting until the gotcha day. It's been great since.

Jena: Did you feel the same way during that time? Was the wait freaking you out at all in terms of what's really going on here? Are we ever going to get this baby? Did you feel like, "This is a process, it'll all unfold?"

Janet: I felt more like it's a process that will unfold. He was keeping track more. I did go on Rumor Queen. I did keep track of all the log in dates and people's referrals. I was also discouraged it was taking so long. The person who runs our support group kept saying, "Be patient. You're going to get the baby that was meant for you." Of course she was right. Now we know exactly what she means by that. She was right on when she said that.

Jena: My experience of this too was -- Americans are used to, "With our will, we push forward. We make things happen." This is a process that requires you to respect that you're not in control of it. This country is going to give you one of their children. There's a certain humility required for that. Sometimes you have to adjust to it, but it all does work out.

Where were you when you got your call?

Janet: It's very exciting.

Jena: Good. Let's hear about that day.

Pete: I can do this one. I work as a police officer. I was on a traffic stop in our town. My phone rang. It was our friend Mary who also was waiting on a referral. She was very excited on the phone. "We got the call. We got the call." I immediately released the traffic offender. I didn't give him a ticket. I said, "You're free to go." I called Janet immediately. I said, "Mary got her referral. Did you get a call?"

Take it from there.

Janet: I said, "No, but my phone message light has been flashing. Some call came in before that had a different area code. I didn't have time to answer it. Let me see." Of course I checked my messages, and it was our agency. She said, "Janet, we have your referral. I don't want to send you anything. I want to talk to you first." We didn't have cell phones. I didn't have a cell phone back then. I called her right away, our -- I forget what you call that person.

Pete: Coordinator.

Janet: Our coordinator. "Yes, Janet, your referral. Is it okay, I'm going to email it to you?" I said, "Yes. Yes." Pete came running up from work. We work in the same town. We both work.

Pete: I was there in minutes. A minute later, I was up in her office.

Janet: She sent me the email. We were very nervous. We're hangin' over my computer. The people I work for, the guidance counselors, were hangin' over my computer too with me, looking. The four of us were there. I turned around and said to someone, "I think we need to be alone." We're seein' our baby for the first time. They were so excited. They ran in the other room and shut the door. We opened up our picture. We saw our beautiful baby. It was the most exciting thing. Then they came running out. It was almost like being in a hospital with a delivery and seeing a new baby. It was so, so, so exciting. I sent my emails to everybody, so excited, so excited. Had to leave work, couldn't work anymore. I went home with our picture and had to go driving around and telling everybody.

Jena: Were you working in Irvington then?

Janet: I was working at the school.

Jena: What did you do at the school?

Janet: I'm a secretary in a guidance office of a middle school.

Jena: You released the offender and say, "Here's a warning. Goodbye. Have a nice day." You run home.

Pete: To her office.

Jena: Run to her office. You said, "We need to be alone." You guys looked at the picture.

Janet: I think it was a superintendent's conference day. There were no kids in school that day. It was just teachers and staff working. There were no students around, otherwise I never would've been able to leave the building, probably, like that or be alone because there would be other kids in the office.

Pete: There were three photos that we were sent. It was a headshot of Jill, a picture of her sitting up, and another picture of her laying on her belly, the typical China photos with a nice background. It was amazing.

Janet: Then they sent us a different name than they originally told us with a picture.

Pete: They mixed up the names.

Janet: We were like, "Which baby are we getting? We love this one that you sent the picture of." They assured us they mixed the names up.

Pete: It was Clara and Jill, I believe. Our friend's daughter and Jill's -- on the pictures, they had the names backwards. Jill's Chinese name was [indiscernible]. Clara was [indiscernible] or something like that. They had the names mixed up. We're like, "We want that one. That's the one."

Janet: "We want the picture that you sent us. We're getting that baby." They were all beautiful of course. But you know, the one that they sent you -- you don't want them to say, "Oh, made a mistake. We'll take this picture away. We'll send you a new picture."

Jena: Right. That first picture you see, that's it. They send you the health information. You do have that twenty-four, forty-eight-hour period. Did you have that information vetted by a doctor? Was your feeling, "We don't care. Whatever."

Janet: They told us to bring it to this doctor who specializes in international adoptions. We were advised. We did, but we were all set. We were in love. We got a great bill of health reference from him. He said, "Everything looks perfect, as good as it can be."

Pete: A lot of the same. At that point, she was --

Jena: -- She's yours.

Pete: Yeah. It was it. Now, we wanted the next step to come. We waited for our travel approval.

Janet: We got our updated picture. That's over there.

Pete: This is one of the updated photos. I believe that date was April 4th.

Janet: 4th was our referral.

Pete: The day we actually saw Jill for the first time.

Janet: It was only two weeks before her first birthday, ten days, something like that.

Pete: We obviously had to wait for our travel approval. Then we traveled on June 5th. It was a little over a month to travel. We were in rock and roll mode. We were goin'. We were very excited.

Jena: Have there been any surprises? How's it been since? I don't mean bad surprises. I just mean what's been interesting or different about it that you might not have anticipated?

Pete: I did my homework from day one. I always researched and asked questions. I spoke to people who had children already. We'd go to picnics and agency events. Going back a little bit more about why China and why Chinese children, I always felt it was a common thread, the success stories and how the girls do so well. They bond very well. They adapt well. They thrive. That was a such a common thing. I can't even think of a negative story from a family. Other countries weren't as lucky at times. There were issues. They had some setbacks. I never had that experience from Chinese adoptive families. That was true with us as well. She took to Janet immediately. She had her moment where she had a breakdown right off the bat. After that, she was ready to go. She was just over a year old. We've been happy ever since. She's been a lovely blessing.

Janet: No surprises. Jill did great. She adjusted well. We couldn't have had a better experience, a great trip. We had a happy, well-adjusted baby. She was healthy. That's the thing about China too. Their program was well-established. You know you're going to get a baby. That was something that attracted us to China. I found out after I pursued it. It was in our church bulletin. Afterwards, I found out China does have a really good program. It's established. You will get a baby. That was very appealing. You don't want to put in all your time and waiting to be denied or not get a baby. I wanted to be guaranteed we were getting a baby also. There were no surprises. It was a great trip.

Pete: The health was important as well. That was another thing Janet mentioned, being a healthy baby. The birth mothers did take good care of themselves. There was good prenatal. The girls were healthy. That was important. That's been true for Jill. She's been very healthy, amazing eater. She has a great appetite. She eats all different types of food. That's totally not me.

Janet: She'll try anything.

Pete: She eats. She's been a really great kid.

Jena: Is there anything that you would like to say to folks? This is an opportunity to share any thoughts about this experience, about adopting a child, adopting a child from another culture, that you feel like people should know.

Janet: People should not be afraid to adopt from another culture. We had a great experience. Now, my heart goes out to all those babies that still need homes. I would've loved to have gone back again. We waited too long. There's a financial aspect of it. I would encourage everyone in the world to adopt at least one child. It was a great experience. I don't consider us, really, a biracial family. I don't think that way about us. It's a non-issue.

Pete: In my mind, she's not adopted. She's just my daughter. We look differently, but that doesn't change how we feel.

Janet: She's never said anything that we look different.

Pete: Being a different race, it never enters her mind, I don't think. She doesn't mention that. It doesn't come up in conversation too much. She's very loved by our family. She's the center of attention here. She has cousins that love her. She's very well-adjusted. She's a very ambitious, smart, little girl.

Jena: Is there anything, Pete, you think people should know?

Pete: The only reason, maybe, I adopted is because I didn't have luck naturally. We didn't have that blessing. This has been a blessing.

Janet: I feel like, "Thank god," because we never would've known. We would've missed out on Jill. I feel so thankful that it worked out this way.

Jena: Sometimes the thing, the monkey wrench, gives you something else that you never would've known about.

Janet: It's true. I do have an older son. Jill has an older brother. This was just as exciting as a pregnancy and a hospital delivery. I would say even more so because we waited so long. The buildup, it was so exciting for everybody, our family and our community, everybody we worked with. Everybody was on it and waiting, and waiting for us to post pictures when we were in China.

Pete: We did a travel blog. We did a blog from China. The anticipation was unbelievable.

Janet: It was a whole community thing.

Pete: Janet was nervous about the trip.

Janet: Flying to China.

Pete: I was reassuring her. "This is going to be the best trip in your life." I was in the Navy. I travelled in the Navy, but it's nothing like going to get your daughter. How could anything

compare to that, this amazing trip, adventure? To set her at ease I was like, "Don't worry about anything. They're going to hold our hands --"

Janet: -- I was afraid to fly over the ocean.

Pete: I was like, "Let's just go. They're going to walk us through everything. They're going to tell us what to do." We had great coordinators in China, this wonderful girl, Katherine, a guide, whatever she was there. She was with us every step of the way. It was amazing. I set her mind at ease and said, "It's going to work out." I did.

Janet: Actually, once I got on the plane, I was fine. We met Mary and PJ, our friends, at the airport. Once I was there, it was easy. I wasn't afraid to fly anymore. It all worked out.

Jena: They lead you by the hand through the entire process. That makes it easier too. Actually, I've never really ever had a trip like that and probably never will again.

Janet: Our heritage trip is easy like that and is exciting and fun. I might be nervous again to make that big trip and that flight. It would be very exciting again. Jill really wants to go back.

Jena: She sounds like she's very eager to make that trip. It's nice because you have these friends who you've stayed in contact with.

Pete: I don't know if we could do it alone, to be honest with you. Them being close with us or somebody in our group, I don't think we'd want to go alone.

Janet: We'd rather go with someone else. It's more exciting. If the girls are from the same place, then why not?

Pete: Let her experience it with another friend that they have common bond with. We're not doing it alone. We can experience it again with families. That's how we want to do it.

Jena: I want to thank you very, very much. It's been great talking with you.

Pete: Thank you. It was fun.

Janet: Thank you. Yeah, this was fun. We love it. It's our favorite subject.

Jena: Thanks. Mine too.