

Jena Heath: Tell me a little bit about what you know about China. Do you know what province you're from?

Colleen McKisson: I think I'm from Yunnan.

Jena: Yunnan Province. Do you know how old you were when you came home?

Colleen: I was nine to ten months old, I think.

Jena: Have you been back to China?

Colleen: Nope.

Jena: Do you want to go back to China?

Colleen: Not really.

Jena: Why not?

Colleen: The plane pretty much. I'm afraid of heights too and then motion sickness and stuff.

Jena: It's really the traveling there that is what worries you. I know you're on the Chinese drill team in Seattle. Do you like doing that?

Colleen: Yeah. The girls are really nice.

Jena: I remember when I was talking with you when we were visiting Seattle, you kind of indicated, your mom kind of indicated, that she had to insist a little bit that you guys do it. Is that true?

Colleen: Yeah. She forced us to do it. We didn't really have a choice. You start at fifth grade. Campbell had to start at sixth grade because my mom wasn't sure if we should do it or not. Then at sixth grade she was like, "You're doing it." I started at fifth grade.

Jena: I see. Campbell, we should say here, is your older sister who's fourteen, who's also adopted from China. She doesn't really want to share her story. How do you feel about your mom forcing you to do it?

Colleen: I'm kind of glad she did. I really like drill team now. The only thing I don't really like about it is the lipstick you have to put on. Other than that, then I'm totally cool with it.

Jena: Does the lipstick taste disgusting?

Colleen: Yes, it does. I can't even put on myself. I have to have my sister help me. I'm not good with makeup.

Jena: I saw your costumes. They're amazing. You wear these incredible headdresses.

Colleen: They're really heavy too. The shirt we wear, you have to tie it really tight so it doesn't fall down. Sometimes we tie it really, really tight. Finally when we're done, you have to take it off and you feel so relieved.

Jena: Wow. You have to tie it really tight. That's not the most comfortable thing, and it's hot, and you have to wear lipstick, but you like the other girls. Is that basically it?

Colleen: Pretty much.

Jena: Can I ask you another China question? Do you think much at all or not at all or a little bit about where you came from in China and about your birth family? Is that on your mind at all?

Colleen: Sometimes. I sometimes think about what it was like before I went to the orphanage. There was ten days before I came to the orphanage. Sometimes I'm just wondering where was I for the first ten days?

Jena: What does it feel like when you think about that?

Colleen: I don't really feel anything. I just wonder.

Jena: If you ever had the opportunity to try to really figure it out, like go back and look for people, maybe look for your birth parents, do you ever think you would want to do that, or no?

Colleen: No, not really. In Chinatown, when I was really little, I guess there's a lot of old people in Chinatown, and they're always squeezing my cheeks and holding my hand. It's weird. They don't do it anymore.

Jena: When the old people in Chinatown squeeze your cheeks and hold your hand, that feels weird. Does that feel weird because they seem so emotional about you and they don't even know you?

Colleen: Yeah, pretty much. They're always like, "Hi! Hi!" That was when I was really young, maybe eight years old. [indiscernible] always come up, "Hi! Hi!" holding my hand, touching my hand, tapping it. They wouldn't squeeze my cheeks, but they would hold my hand. They wouldn't do it to my sister.

Jena: Are you concerned that if you go to China and look around for birth parents, you're going to get a lot more of that?

Colleen: Yup. Pretty much.

Jena: I hear you. If you had the power to put something out there in the universe and tell other kids about being Chinese or being adopted or both, is there anything that you would like people to know?

Colleen: I was thinking of this one. Be yourself.

Jena: You would tell other adoptees, "Be yourself?"

Colleen: Yeah. Be yourself. I don't know. I'm not good with giving advice.

Jena: That's perfectly fine. It's enough in life to live your own life, much less trying to help other people figure out how to live theirs. Is there anything we haven't talked about that you would like to talk about?

Colleen: When I went to the orphanage -- this is the cool thing -- I was in a adopted group or something like that. My friend Maddie, she was in the same adopted group as me. When my mom and her parents came to get us, to adopt us, we came back and we went to the same school and everything. We became really best friends. We're friends still.

Jena: When your mom travelled to China to adopt you, her parents, Maddie's parents, were also in your mom's group?

Colleen: Yeah.

Jena: You have a friendship with someone who you were a baby in the orphanage with?

Colleen: Yup, at least who lives close to me.

Jena: That's pretty cool. Let me ask you something. Do you guys ever talk about the fact that you were born in China and in the same orphanage? Does that play any part in your friendship?

Colleen: Pretty much. Our teachers already know about it. If there's a new kid, she would tell them all about us. We're really good friends. We're always hanging out. Right after this, her grandma and her are picking me up to go swimming. We always hang out.

Jena: Right after this interview, Maddie and her grandparents are picking you up and you guys are going to go swimming? That's what you're doing this afternoon?

Colleen: Yup.

Jena: I don't really know how to word this, but I'll just ask it. Do you have enough in common now in your lives and who you've become, do you think you'd be friends whether or not you had ever been in the orphanage together?

Colleen: I think so. We go to the same school. They live just up the street from the school. We would have met each other then. We have a lot in common, but she doesn't do drill team. We have a lot in common. I think we would become friends if we weren't in the orphanage together.

Jena: Does Maddie play soccer?

Colleen: She used to. She doesn't want to be on a Select team. Two years ago I was on a [indiscernible] team for Hillwood Soccer. She was on that too. Then most of the team went to Select Soccer. She doesn't want to do it. I'm like, "It's fun." It's really fun, but she doesn't want to.

Jena: Select Soccer, I get it. Not everybody decides they want to continue with it. It sounds like you guys really get along well and have a lot in common. That's very cool. I want to thank you a whole lot for talking with me. It was great to meet you in Seattle. It's great to talk to you now.

Colleen: Great to meet you too.