

Jena Heath: I'm going to ask some basics first. How old was Helena when she came home? What province did she come home from?

Elena Triginer: Helena came home four years ago in August 2011. She comes from [indiscernible] Province.

Jena: How old was she when she came home?

Elena: She was almost eleven, ten years old.

Jena: She's fourteen now?

Elena: Now, it's fifteen.

Jena: I want to ask a little bit about what your life was like in China before you came home to Barcelona, Helena. Where were you living? What do you remember?

Helena Hong: [Chinese]

Shanshan Zhang (Translator): I came from [indiscernible], [indiscernible] Province, China. It's in the northern eastern part of China. I lived in a rural area for six to seven years. Then I moved to a bigger city to school for about one year. Then I went to a orphanage for two more years.

Jena: Before you went to the orphanage, who were you living with?

Helena Hong: [Chinese]

Shanshan: I'm not sure. I lived with my parents, but I'm not sure if they are my birth parents. It's a family, a couple that I thought were my parents, but I don't know.

Jena: The whole time that you were living with them, did you think that they were your birth parents?

Elena: [Spanish]

Helena Hong: Yes.

Jena: At what point did you doubt, did you question whether they were your birth parents? How did you come to not be sure?

Helena Hong: [Chinese]

Shanshan: I didn't have this idea. It occurred to me on the day that went I to the orphanage to sign the contract.

Jena: What is the contract?

Elena: She was told that she was not their daughter. That was the reason because they didn't have the hukou. That's the reason because she was left at the orphanage. Only less than one year after they [indiscernible] of the orphanage, ask her if she want to be adopted or not. She was agree. That's the reason because I could adopt her.

Jena: Helena was living with this couple and believed that they were her parents until the time when she was taken to the orphanage?

Elena: One day their parents wanted to talk to her. They told her, "You are not our daughter. You were left in a street. We picked you up. You were with us as your parents, but you are not my daughter. That's the reason because I have to leave you at the orphanage." It was exactly the same day.

Jena: How old was she when that happened?

Elena: It happened when she was nine, eight years and a half, nine years. It was in month of April when she was eight years and a half.

Jena: Until that time she had no question in her mind that she was living with her birth family?

Elena: Never had a question about that.

Jena: When she went to the orphanage and had to sign the contract, at that point she thought, "What is going on here? Why am I having to do this?"

Elena: At first, she was left at the orphanage. She understood that she was left because her parents were not their parents. They couldn't take care of her. That's the reason because when in the orphanage, you have not a family, if you want to have your own family, you must be adopted. She accepted.

Jena: She accepted. Was the contract really the way that the orphanage got her consent to be placed for adoption?

Elena: She was aware that the paperwork were prepared for adoption more or less the month before she was effectively adopted.

Jena: Helena, can you tell us what this felt like? You were nine years old. You were living with the people who you thought were your parents. What was it like when they gave you this news that they were not your parents and that you were no longer going to be able to live with them?

Helena Hong: [Chinese]

Shanshan: I cried for a long time. It feels like the sky has fallen. It's extremely heartbreaking. I'm very sad.

Jena: Did you have brothers or sisters who lived in the family with you? Were you a single child?

Helena Hong: [Chinese]

Shanshan: A sister from the same mother, different father.

Jena: Once you went into the orphanage, you were there for about one year, is that correct? She was in the orphanage for about one year?

Elena: One year and a half.

Jena: Did your family visit you?

Elena: [Spanish]

Helena Hong: [Chinese]

Shanshan: They visited me on the spring festival and important festival occasions. It's about three to four times a year. One thing is the orphanage did not encourage visits from foster parents. On the other hand, the rural areas they lived is a little distant from the orphanage. It's about one night's drive.

Jena: What was life in the orphanage like? Were people nice to you?

Elena: [Spanish]

Helena Hong: [Chinese]

Shanshan: In the orphanage, there are some elderly kids. They were nice to me, very caring. Basically in my time in the orphanage with other kids, they are very nice. The teachers were little different and was not as optimistic. They were straight. Sometimes they would use physical punishment.

Helena Hong: [Chinese]

Shanshan: Maybe I came into this orphanage out of special reasons so the teachers there treated me a little bit differently. They would not allow me to sleep together with other children. I had to sleep alone in a different room. The teachers seemed to be especially stricter with me. I was punished more often than others.

Jena: Did anyone explain to you why you were treated differently? Did you figure it out the longer you were there?

Elena: [Spanish]

Helena Hong: [Chinese]

Shanshan: I feel that the teachers were stricter with me. For example, if I make the same mistake with other children, usually I would receive more severe punishment. I feel this is unfair to me. They seem a little gentler to other children.

Jena: Helena, I want to understand a little bit too about your mom's decision to adopt.

Did you decide that you were going to choose an older child? In other words, did you purposely say, "I want to adopt a child who's a little bit older?" Or in the process you got a match with child who was older, and you didn't anticipate that?

Elena: In 1995 when I decide to adopt a child, then the social services told me that my average for a child was from one to four years old. While the time was going on, I felt that child [indiscernible] was too much to me. I decide to try with an older girl. When I decide to change, they allowed me to adopt a child over six. Then in the [indiscernible] adoption program, the special focus program, I met Helena. I accepted her immediately.

Jena: 1995 to 2004?

Elena: I had to spend six years.

Jena: Wow. That's a long wait. Is that typical of the wait in Spain right now?

Elena: Yes. The same as in United States because the decision of the families grow up very much from 2005. Then the childs that could be adopted from China was decreasing a lot in all these years. There was more demand to adopt a child and less over from China.

Jena: When you decided to accept the referral for your daughter, what were you told about her background? What was your understanding of her circumstances?

Elena: I studied a lot about that. I am a mother of a twenty-six years old boy with a learning problem. He has TDH. I don't know how they say it in English. It's attention deficiency.

Jena: Attention Deficient Disorder.

Elena: I learned so much that I thought that probably I could be able to deal with background with another child. I know that it depends of the child, not only the past of the child. Helena

is very assertive. She works very hard to be happy, to improve, to have a good future. I'm very proud of her. The possibility to have another kind of situation was very big of course.

Jena: Were you told that she had been living with a family until a year and half before she came into the orphanage? What did you understand about those circumstances?

Elena: What I was told is that she was abandoned when she was born. She was picked up by a family. She was living with a family for eight years. Because she didn't have papers and because she didn't have the hukou, she was left at the orphanage. That was the history they explained Helena, they explained to me. Thanks to the social networks, she had news last year from this family. That news broke everything.

Jena: How did that happen? We're going to ask her now. How did she reestablish contact through social media with the family she had lived with? I'm going to let Shanshan ask her in Chinese.

Shanshan: [Chinese]

Helena Hong: [Chinese]

Shanshan: I contacted them through QQ and WeChat. They are on the front list on my WeChat. When I posted something on my friends circle, they can see that. Sometimes they would comment on my postings. Last August, I posted something about Father's Day. They commented that they were forced to give me up. They were forced to do so. They were my birth parents. I felt very confused. I felt there's some lies in the whole process. On the second day, the Chinese dad, they told me that they give me up because I was too naughty at the time and because my school grades were not good enough and I do not make them proud of me. He said something very critical of me, picking my faults. We stopped contact after that. For about one year we had no contact. I pulled him into the blacklist.

Jena: Good move. I thought I had heard every story. I have to tell you, I've not heard a story like this.

Elena: I knew. That's the reason because I thought could be very interesting for you. It's completely different from any other one.

Jena: How do you deal with not knowing, Helena? What do you make of all of this, Helena? How do you make sense of it? What do you believe and what do you not believe at this point? Do you believe they are your birth parents, or do you just not know?

Elena: [Spanish]

Helena Hong: [Chinese]

Shanshan: On one hand, I think there's a greater chance that they are my birth parents because I look like my sister from a different father. On the other hand, I'm not sure because I and my sister from different fathers so I don't know whether the fact that we look like mean anything.

Jena: Have you ever wondered or thought or suggested that you do a DNA test?

Elena: Yes, of course. We will do in the next future when she's ready. Maybe in two years or three years, but of course we will do that.

Jena: Do you think that they would consent?

Elena: I don't know. Probably with some [indiscernible]. I don't know. If it's possible, we will do. We have to ask, as well, to the orphanage director, why in an orphanage that there is only two or three people left for adoption, why she?

Jena: Was she on the waiting child list or the special needs list, Elena, because she was older?

Elena: Special focus list.

Jena: I've never heard of that. We call it waiting children here. It's usually children with disabilities. It sounds like a different category.

Elena: It's different category. It's child who's very difficult to be adopted because she was very old. That's the only reason. It wasn't in the special needs list as a focus list. She was considered as a difficult child to be adopted, not for me, but for most people.

Jena: In this process with a special focus child -- normally if it's an adoption that's not from the waiting child list for instance, you are matched with a child and the decision is made for you. In this adoption were you able to say, "Yes. This particular child is the child I want to adopt?"

Elena: Exactly. It works exactly as in a special needs program. I was suggested to a child. I decide yes or not.

Jena: Now, I want to hear about coming to Spain and making a new life in Spain with your family. How is that for you? Is it hard to trust that something isn't going to suddenly change because that's what happened before? Do you feel pretty secure that this is where you're going to be?

Elena: [Spanish]

First of all, I would like to tell you that when a child is over ten years, must sign their agreement to the notary agreeing to be adopted, not the normal child but all that are ten

years. She had to agree with the signature that she accepted that adoption. She did it very convinced.

Jena: Had you been able to spend much time together before she made that decision?

Elena: [Spanish]

Helena Hong: [laughs] [Chinese]

Shanshan: Five minutes.

Jena: You must have had a really good feeling about your mother.

Shanshan: [Chinese]

Helena Hong: [Chinese]

Shanshan: It's about that. I feel that the orphanage is not place I want to stay. I want to start a new life. I want to try something new. I saw my mom's pictures before. I feel that this family can make me happy, going to find happiness in this family, so is easy, quick decision to make.

Jena: Had you had other families who had made any overtures? No? Doesn't matter. What matters is what's now.

Elena: What I know is that when she asked to be adopted was in the month of May. I adopt her. I accept her at the end of May. I went to pick up her at the end of July. She's my daughter from the second of August.

Jena: I'm sorry because I cut off the beginning of this recording. I didn't turn it on in time. Remind me of the year again, the year that you brought her home.

Elena: 2011.

Jena: You started in 2005 and came home in 2011.

Tell me about your life. What do you like to do? What's school like? What do you enjoy? What do you like to do with your mother? Tell us about yourself now.

Elena: [Spanish]

Helena Hong: [Chinese]

Shanshan: School, now, is better. When I came to school at the beginning here, because of the language barrier, it was a little bit hard. Now without that, things began to become better.

I've made friends at school. I feel very good. In the family, I feel very good. This is a very harmonious family. Other family members are very caring of me. We are on good terms. Now, I feel better. I feel happier than in the past. I feel that was a right decision to make. There's no regret.

Jena: Is there anything that you miss about China?

Helena Hong: [Chinese]

Shanshan: I have some good friends in China. I miss my good friends there. I want to visit them if possible. Also, I like Chinese food. That's something I miss here. There are Chinese food in Barcelona, but they're not as authentic.

Jena: Elena, are you a single parent? You have two children?

Elena: The first one, Alex, comes from my marriage. Then when I got divorced, I decide to adopt Helena alone.

Jena: What do you do? What's your profession?

Elena: I work in a pharmaceutical company in [indiscernible].

Jena: Helena, what are you interested in in school? Do you think about what you want to do? Do you want to go to university?

Elena: [Spanish]

Helena Hong: [Chinese]

Shanshan: I want to go on with math or go with some psychology work to help people like me who experience big changes in life. Another profession I want to do is translator. I know in Chinese. I know Spanish. Those language are my advantages. It would be good to work with languages, to take full advantage of this.

Jena: Look at my friend over here. She can speak a lot of languages.

Shanshan: Two. [laughs]

Jena: Two good ones. She speaks better English than my American students.

Do you have any contact now with the family that you lived with in China who may be your birth family, who may not be your birth family? Are you in contact with them at all now?

Helena Hong: [Chinese]



Elena: [Spanish]

Helena Hong: [Chinese]

Shanshan: For now, I don't want to have contact with them because to cut off contact happened one year ago. I do not feel I have recovered from that. Going to live in a foreign country is my personal decision. I think I may have a brighter future when I make this decision. When I make this decision, my Chinese parents were not very positive. They were kind of negative of my decision. I don't want to contact them right now. I need time to recover. If I contact them now, the sad memories will come to me, so after a while maybe I'll go back to China after some time.

Jena: They took you to the orphanage and yet when you had the opportunity to be adopted and to live in Spain, they didn't want you to go?

Elena: [Spanish]

Helena Hong: [Chinese]

Shanshan: They didn't disagree to let me go. It's my personal decision. It's my right to decide. One night before I flew from [indiscernible] to Beijing to sign the contract, they talked to me. They told me if I couldn't live a good life there, I may not be able to return.

Elena: I can't hear her.

Shanshan: Sorry. I repeat.

They didn't disagree not to let me go. They didn't say they didn't want me to go. It's my right to decide --

Elena: -- nine years old.

Shanshan: The night before I flew from [indiscernible] to Beijing to sign the contract, the Chinese parents talked to me. They said if I couldn't live a good life in Spain, I couldn't return. They give me some pressure. They didn't disallow me to go, but they told me some uncertainties about the future which scared me in some ways.

Helena Hong: [Chinese] [Spanish]

Elena: [Spanish]

Helena Hong: [Chinese]

Elena: [Spanish]

Shanshan: Last year, my Chinese parents told me that if I become their pride one day then they would welcome me to return and to live with them.

Jena: How did that make you feel?

Elena: [Spanish]

Helena Hong: [Chinese]

Shanshan: At that time, my mom now told me that from legally or in life I'm her daughter. It is impossible for me to return to China and continue living with my Chinese parents. What I felt at that moment is that they are very selfish. When I first came to Spain, when I remembered them, I recall the good memories of my Chinese parents, the care they give to me. When they said those things I felt my dreams about the past, my good dreams about the past was shattered.

Jena: I think you're a really amazing young woman.

Elena: I'm very proud of her. She's very smart. She's very clever. She's very deep. She has a very deep mind. She's very clever.

Jena: We wish you all the very best, Helena, and every happiness with you and your family.

Shanshan: [Chinese]

Helena Hong: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Jena: Xiè, xiè. Zài jiàn.