

Jena Heath: Tell me about your decision to adopt -- why -- and to adopt from China. How did you make that decision?

Kathryn Thompson: We met when we were thirty-six and thirty-eight and got married late in life. We thought about giving birth and having to do IVF. It seemed not right. We were trying to make a decision that weekend. Then an old friend from Seattle I hadn't talked to in eight years happened to call. She had adopted from China. I was like, "That's where our daughter is." It was this gut feeling that felt so right. We went forward with that.

Jena: Were you on board with this idea?

Scott Davis: Yes, I was. It clicked all of a sudden. It was great.

Kathryn: You said, "Well, it's not my first choice, but okay." Now, I can't believe you ever said that.

Scott: I don't even remember saying that, to be honest with you. You remember it.

Kathryn: He can't believe he ever said that because he's been fully on board ever since we proceeded.

Jena: Once you were moving forward, how did it all go? How did you figure out what agency to go with? What was the process like for you?

Kathryn: I called all different agencies. People sent me brochures. I wasn't on the computer then. We started the process in '97 because we got her in '98. We'd settled on Bay Area Adoption Services in Mountain View because Shou-Ching was in San Rafael. It was like, "That's easy." We only ever went to our agency two times. It was all dealing with her. They gave us reference of a lot of people that had adopted that had agreed to be called on the phone. They were like, "BAAS is great, but really, Shou-Ching was amazing helping us through this whole thing." That helped us settle on her.

Jena: Who's Shou-Ching?

Kathryn: She's the person that handles all the Chinese adoptions for Bay Area Adoption Services in Mountain View.

Scott: She grew up in Chengdu, China, Sichuan Province. That's where Grace is from. Camille's close by there in the Sichuan Province.

Jena: With Grace, this was '96?

Kathryn: We started the process in '97. It was a year and a half from starting the paperwork to getting her.

Jena: Did it go pretty much as advertised? Were there any glitches or delays?

Kathryn: That was the whole thing about China compared to other countries. It was so predictable, every stage of money and paperwork. It was a lot, but it all went really smoothly.

Jena: During the time you were waiting it sounds like they had resources for you to reach out and get to know other couples who were waiting, or families who had adopted?

Kathryn: Was that FCC that we went to? What was that we went to in the city?

Scott: Families with Children from China.

Kathryn: We were the only ones with no kids. We were going to everything and just ogling other people's kids. [laughs]

Scott: We could hardly wait.

Kathryn: It was like, "Wow. This is real. These people just came back."

Jena: How long were you in China? How did the trip go?

Kathryn: It went well. We were there ten days. That was pretty standard. We flew into Hong Kong, then went to Guangzhou, then flew to Chengdu.

Scott: We went from Hong Kong to Chengdu.

Kathryn: Oh, Hong Kong to Chengdu, and then back to Guangzhou to the Chinese consulate. Then we flew out of Hong Kong. It all went smoothly. We both haven't done any international travel. We were pretty tired. There were times another couple gave us vitamins. It was pretty overwhelming being handed a barely seven-month-old baby. There was so much support. We were one of seven families in that case. We all helped each other out.

Jena: What was the process like for Camille? That's how many years later?

Kathryn: When we came back with Grace, I knew right away that I wanted to go again. That took some time. At some point two or three years later I said, "Can I just do all the paperwork that doesn't cost any money?" Scott agreed to that. Finally on my birthday, he kept saying, "What do you want?" I'm like, "That's all I want." He said in the card, "Okay." That took two years from start to finish because we weren't pushing it like we did. I was waiting for him to be okay with it.

Jena: Were you nervous about a second child?

Scott: A lot of that was due to financial difficulties. I'm a contractor. It's just not stable. It scared me to take on more expense. It worked out. I'm so happy we did it.

Kathryn: All our parents were really on board. I remember your dad being realistic like you going, "Well, now you're going to be workin' forever."

Scott: It's true.

Kathryn: He could see it with Grace, but to go five years later and start over was like -- he worked every day of his life too.

Jena: How old are you both?

Kathryn: I turned fifty-eight last June.

Scott: I turned sixty.

Kathryn: I would always think of it in terms of if I had given birth, I would've given birth at forty and forty-four. Somehow that was important to me. Because people do that, it seemed like, "Okay. People do that. I can do this."

Jena: Do you think much about origins? How much of that is on your mind or not on your mind about the birth story or the birth parents? Is that something that you think much about?

Kathryn: I do think about, more so in the first few years of getting Grace. I wonder. I read a lot online about people searching and some people having success. I wonder if there'll eventually be a database of doing DNA testing. It sounds like that might happen someday.

Scott: For me, our daughters haven't really expressed that much interest in finding their birth parents, so I don't think about it too much really.

Kathryn: We've always said that there is no way to go about it. I'm hoping maybe someday there will be.

Jena: It sounds like you feel like it's something your daughters would lead, if you did it at all. Is that correct?

Scott: For me, yes.

Kathryn: It feels like from what I've read you just follow their lead and support whatever they want to know.

Jena: It sounds like you made a lot of effort to keep Chinese culture in their lives. You sound pretty active with FCC, at least in the earlier years when Grace was younger. How important was that?

Kathryn: That was really important. We still do most of the events that they sponsor. They've developed friendships and some people that they only see two or three times a year. I think it's important to them.

Scott: Grace's boyfriend, they're both eighteen years old. He's from a Chinese American family, fluent Mandarin. She gravitates towards -- most of her friends are Chinese, some adopted, some not.

Jena: Does it help that you live in the -- I guess this is considered the Bay Area -- that you live in the Bay Area and it's pretty diverse in terms of Asian cultures?

Scott: It's very diverse if you travel from where we live twenty miles to San Francisco. We're in kind of our own world right here. It's a good reminder to head over to the city now and then. Grace, she travels over there a lot with her friends. They go over there to restaurants and shopping.

Jena: She gets out and about?

Scott: She gets out and about, which is good. If you spend all your time in Marin County, there's not much diversity at all.

Jena: Did you deal with questions or things that other people asked you that you'd just as soon not be asked, or were you pretty much in a community where everybody gets it?

Kathryn: There's always questions. People have said rude things. I remember being at the post office. Camille was probably about four. This man said something, "China?" "Yeah." "Oh, yeah. They don't like girls there," and went on super negative. I'm trying to educate him. "No, that's not it." I don't have an infant. She's listening to this. One time this woman that worked at the variety store was asking personal questions. "Why? You couldn't get pregnant?" You assume that that's it, that people don't just choose it. "How much did the whole thing cost?" not saying how much did the kid cost, but would you ask somebody that gave birth "What was your total hospital bill?" That's private information.

Jena: What did you say in response? How did you shut it down?

Kathryn: I answered the guy at the post office with -- I started to educate him then I realized, "Eh." So I gave really quick one-monosyllabic answers. The one in the variety store, we were paying and checking out. I sort of started to answer and thought, "What am I doing?" I walked out. Later on it's always like, "I wish I said, 'such and such.'"

Jena: The zinger that you think about in the middle of the night. [laughs]

Is there anything that you think that people should know about adopting or about having a family with two different ethnicities?

Scott: The fact it's two different ethnicities has expanded our lives. It's wonderful learning about Chinese culture and being involved in a lot, not a lot, but a couple different organizations. Our kids volunteer. For me, it's been wonderful.

Kathryn: With both our girls, we've always talked from when they were babies and couldn't even understand, everything was out in the open, what we knew and didn't know. That's important. There was never a time where something was a surprise.

Jena: You feel like, "Be very straightforward, answer questions?"

Kathryn: Yeah. Talk about everything from the beginning just like you would tell their birth story or something. Then when they start to get it, it's always been there and doesn't feel nervous or anything.

Jena: Great. I want to thank you both. This has been awesome.