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An exhausted Mia Hootsell

photo provided by the Hootsells

## The New Face of the American Family

By Emily Foshee

**SOMETIMES BECOMING A PARENT** is unplanned...husband and wife are enjoying their careers, married life, and have plenty of free time to spend together pursuing their favorite pastimes: traveling, golf, purchasing and decorating their dream home...the list goes on. Then, surprise! She's pregnant. NOT NOW! We don't have time. We wanted to wait five years before beginning our family.

Others, however, begin the journey to parenthood from a completely different place. Some couples have always dreamed of being parents and can't wait to have a child. For many times unexplained reasons, having a biological child isn't possible. But their determination to have a family never wavers. The solution: adoption.

Many families already have biological children, but feel a "tug" in their heart

to have one more. Having another biological child is no longer practical for their family. The solution: adoption.

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"If a female baby is born, she doesn't have a place in Chinese society and is considered a 'non-person' by the government."

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There are other people who long for a child, but are not married. The vast majority are professional women who focused on their careers and, before

they knew it, their prime childbearing years were behind them. But their desire to be a parent became a top priority. The solution: adoption.

Due to the declining number of infants available in the United States, many families and singles are turning to international adoption. Deciding to create a family this way involves a long, carefully thought-out, soul-searching process. Every couple and single person has certainly asked themselves thousands of questions, including:

How do I feel about not having a genetic child? He/she won't have my eyes, my wife/husband's smile or my mom's nose.

How will I tell my child that he/she is adopted? How will I deal with the questions that will inevitably follow?

How will I feel about my child looking different than me?



*The Cheek children in Caroline's birth city, Guigang Guangxi Autonomous Region, China  
photo provided by Leah Cheek*

their sons to carry on the family's lineage and care for elder family members. If a female baby is born, she doesn't have a place in Chinese society and is considered a "non person" by the government and is typically abandoned.

Because it is illegal to abandon a child in China, the family is taking a great risk in doing so.

But this is where an interesting part of the Chinese culture comes into play. Birth moms take their child to a place where

they know their little girl will be found quickly...they're not really abandoning her. They're doing the best they can for her under the restrictions placed on them by their country.

Although it is illegal to abandon children, there is a segment of the Chinese police that regularly patrol areas where babies are left by their families. The police retrieve the babies (many are just a few days old) and take them to state-run orphanages or foster homes. Many parents will hide close by where they've placed their baby, to make sure she's picked up by the police.

The Cheeks couldn't be happier with their new daughter, and are enjoying their new expanded family.

"I've given birth to three children and have now adopted a baby from China," said Mrs. Cheek, "so I've been on both sides of the 'becoming a mom' experience. I can honestly say," she continued, "the wonderment I felt when we learned we'd been granted permission to adopt from China was just as exciting as when I discovered I was pregnant with each of my three children. And the nervousness and awe I experienced when giving birth to my

Can I accept the potential developmental delays and emotional issues that living in an orphanage may affect my child? And, am I willing to proactively address those issues to help my child develop into the best adult he can be?

Last but certainly not least, is adoption affordable for me?

The Cheek and Hootsell families of Frisco enthusiastically answered "YES!" to these and many more questions before they began their parenthood journey.

The Cheek family began their adoption process early in 2004, returning with their baby girl in July 2005.

Although the Cheeks already had three biological children, both parents had been considering adopting a little girl from China. "What was really so amazing," said Leah Cheek, "is that both my husband and I wanted to adopt a baby from China, but we hadn't discussed it with each other. We both feel like our adopting from China was meant to be, because the desire was so strong for both of us."

The Cheeks began researching Chinese adoption, and learned about

the large number of baby girls waiting to be adopted. "When we realized there was such a huge need, we couldn't think of a reason not to adopt," Mrs. Cheek said.

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"When we were granted permission to adopt from China it was just as exciting as when I discovered I was pregnant with my other children."

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Because the Cheek's children were so excited about adopting a new little sister from China, the Cheeks took their children with them to China to finalize the adoption of their new daughter, Caroline Grace.

Learning about the Chinese culture was an exciting part of their adoption journey. Because of the population control in China, families are allowed to have only one child. Families depend on

*J.C. and Mia Hootsell  
photo provided by the Hootsells*

children were among the same feelings I experienced when we saw Caroline Grace for the first time.”

The Cheeks’ experience was so wonderful that they discussed it with all of their friends, including the Hootsells, when they returned home from China. After meeting Caroline Grace, the Hootsells knew they, too, wanted to expand their family through adoption. Their journey began in May of 2004.

“The amount of paperwork required was amazing!” said Mr. Hootsell. “The Chinese government is extremely thorough and meticulous in their approach to screening and approving prospective parents. We had to get dozens of documents approved at local, state and national levels.” These documents were then sent to the adoption agency, translated into Chinese, and then sent to China for approval. “Wading through the mountains of paperwork was the longest part of the adoption process,” the Hootsells added.

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**“We already have a 16-year-old son, and now Mia, our new daughter, has made our family complete.”**

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Like the Cheeks, the Hootsells took their son, J.C. with them to China. Several other families also adopting at the same time brought their children along...some of the children had been adopted from China previously and were going “back home” to meet their new sibling. The 28-person entourage landed in Hong Kong, and toured the city for three days prior to flying to Nanning, the capital of the Guangxi province where the adoptions would take place.

Their group was taken to a hotel in Nanning that provided one floor specifically equipped to accommodate



international adoptions. The official adoption ceremony began when an adoption representative made a brief presentation to the group. Then, the moment everyone had been waiting for! The eight little girls, wearing identical pink outfits, were brought into the room. When each couple’s name was announced, they walked over to the orphanage director, who then presented them with their new daughter.

After more paperwork was completed, they went to the American Consulate to officially adopt Mia. During this process, Mia, who was born April 7, 2004, became a U.S. citizen as well. After a two-week stay in China, the Hootsells returned to Frisco to begin their life together as a family.

The Hootsells felt their daughter was well fed and cared for. “There are just so many babies,” said Mr. Hootsell, “that many times there are two babies to a crib.

But I have no doubt that our daughter was well cared for. The orphanage lacked medicine for shots,

etc, but they did the best they could for these beautiful children under the circumstances.”

“The adjustment has been great,” said Mr. Hootsell. “We already have a 16-year-old son, and now Mia has made our family complete.”

As luck would have it, Caroline Grace and Mia are only four months apart in age. Both families look forward to the girls becoming great friends.

“To me, being biologically related to a child is the least important part of parenting,” concluded Mrs. Cheek. “The most important part is to want that child with all your heart and to love her with all your heart. And, as any adoptive parent can tell you, their child was wanted more than anything else in the world! Going through mountains of paperwork and traveling half way around the world is the best testimony of their commitment to raising their child to be the best adult he or she can be.”

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*Emily Foshee is a freelance writer living in Frisco.*