



Families With Children from China Spring Newsletter 2009 Austin, Texas

Letter from the Prez....

The other morning, my three year old and I stopped by to welcome home another three year old who had arrived the week before from China. The two little ones did the whole parallel play deal. One happily raced his little car on the coffee table while my girl explored the nuances of the Dora the Explorer talking backpack. I sat there on the couch with my friend, the new mother of two now, and thought how simple this scene appears and yet, without a doubt, it was nothing less than a true miracle unfolding right before our eyes. These beautiful and smart little people sharing a moment together over juice. How far they both have come. How far we all have come.

Seven years ago, a few months home from China we stumbled into Jane Hunters' FCC Central Market playgroup on Tuesday nights and found a community that understood so much of our journey. It seemed as the children grew, we felt a little less inclined to be so involved but what I know now is that just the opposite is true. Positive cultural identity activities are so important and adoption reinforcement voices just about always need to be heard. The other idea I learned is that parents need support just as much as the children do. We need to keep walking together on this path. I look forward to walking with you.

Becky Harding
President, FCC Austin

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Upcoming Events

DRAGON BOAT FESTIVAL



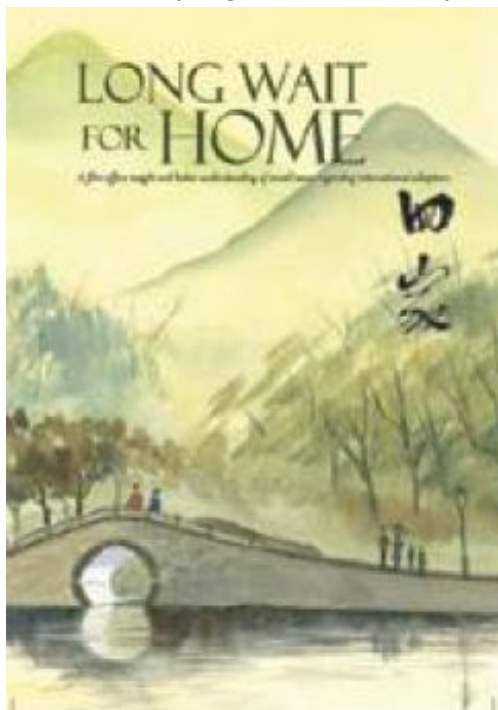
Come on out for the 11th annual Dragon Boat Festival on Saturday, April 25 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on the Festival Beach on Lady Bird Lake (aka Town lake). This 2000 year old Chinese tradition is sponsored by the Asian American Cultural Center. It is a free of charge outdoor festival featuring plenty of great Asian entertainment, vendors, food and, of course, the racing of the dragon boats all day long on the lake. The boats usually have 20 paddlers, 1 drummer and 1 steer person guiding them.

Please stop by the FCC Austin table to say hello. We will be selling our red Year of the Ox t-shirts and Asian children's books. In addition for this festival, we will have parasols for sale with a space for decorating the umbrellas as well. This is a great event and we hope to see many of our members there. For more information and a map go to www.asianamericanc.com/

Families With Children from China - Austin Chapter and University of Texas China Care Chapter
announce the first annual jointly hosted

Single Parent Appreciation Day
Sunday, April 19, 2009
1 pm to 3 pm
at 9219 Partridge Circle
Austin 78758
(FCC Member - Heather Hardin's home)

- * Single parents - You may drop your children off to spend 2 hours with the China Care college students who will engage him/her in cultural activities with other FCC families participating in the China Care playgroup. FCC adults will be present for the entire event.
- * Too shy to participate? If you are a FCC member and you know of an amazing FCC single parent, then this is your opportunity to help us acknowledge the extraordinary work they do. Encourage them to contact us and/or bring them to the event yourself.
- * Single parents participating will enjoy a gift bowl of delightful tokens of our respect and appreciation of all your hard work. Simply contact Becky Harding, FCC president, to register you and your child for the event by the Friday, April 17 deadline. Email bjh0902@aol.com or call 246-1574.



Adoption Knowledge Affiliates, Austin FCC, and
UT School of Social Work present:

Long Wait for Home

A film by Dr. Changfu Chang

Saturday, May 16, 3 to 5 pm

For the first time, we sit face to face with birth parents who share with us the hard decisions they have made and the emotional toll they have suffered; we go to orphanages and take an intimate look at the living conditions of children usually inaccessible to film crews; we also converse with a wide range of ordinary Chinese citizens and scholars on the subject of international adoption."

– Changfu Chang
[LoveWithoutBoundaries.org](http://www.lovetwithoutboundaries.org)

This 50-minute film is the culmination of more than five years of research and 100 hours of footage by Dr. Chang and his crew. Dr. Chang has introduced the film to many FCC chapters across the country. He will share information about the making of the film and about his interviews with birth parents in China. For more information on Long Wait for Home visit: <http://www.lovetwithoutboundaries.org/lwfh/index.html>.

Tickets will be sold at the door Saturday May 16, 3:00 - 5:00 pm. \$5 for AKA and FCC members, \$7 for non-members. Event will be held at University of Texas School of Social Work, Utopia Theatre (San Jacinto & East 20th Street). For a map to the School of Social Work visit <http://www.utexas.edu/maps/main/areas/stadium.html>.

Breakout sessions with Dr. Chang, AKA, and FCC representatives will follow the screening. This is an adult event. If after viewing the film you'd like to share it with your children, discounted DVDs will be available.



A Look at Adoption Knowledge Affiliates

by Becky Harding

Our May 16 event with Dr. Changfu Chang provides us with an unique opportunity to partner with Adoption Knowledge Affiliates. As Dr. Chang's film focuses on the stories of Chinese birth mothers, it seemed a great idea to invite AKA to be a part of this exciting project. For those of you unfamiliar with this organization, as their web site states, "AKA is a place where adopted people, birth parents, adoptive parents and others are coming together to find a depth of understanding unimaginable before."

President John Marostica suggests, "Your membership may find the special fellowship AKA offers refreshing and helpful. AKA's concept of offering support to all members of the adoption triad is not only unique, but enlightening and engaging as well. Only when one hears the 'other side(s) of the story' can they fully understand the complexity of the lifelong process that adoption brings to the lives of each and every members of the triad."

Monthly meetings are held on the third Monday of the month at Westover Hills Church at 8332 Mesa. The 7 pm meetings usually feature a speaker followed by small group discussion. In addition, the organization has an extensive lending library of materials. They also sponsor a annual conference in November.

Hopefully, we have started what will be a long and equally fulfilling relationship with an organization that offers meaningful educational resources, on-going programs and emotional support to everyone associated with the adoption triangle.

For more information visit the AKA website <http://www.adoptionknowledge.org>

CHARITY HIGHLIGHT: Philip Hayden Foundation

By Kristi Quadrato

Ever wonder how your membership fees are used? They are "paid forward" to many charitable organizations so FCC-Austin families can collectively impact a cause much bigger than ourselves.

Do you recognize this little guy? His smile? His apparent love for life? If not, let us introduce him. This is Cameron. He turned three just this past February and "loves loves LOVES" attending preschool at Little Lambs. He is eager to show any visitors all the new things that he learns in school, including counting to ten in both Chinese and English. Oftentimes he comes back from school singing all kinds of new songs.

He easily sounds like the happy boy that lives down the street, doesn't he? His story, however, is very different. He lives with Treacher Collins Syndrome (TCS), a genetic craniofacial birth defect. The most common problem associated with the syndrome is bi-lateral hearing loss. Those with TCS who live elsewhere go on to live very normal lives with the help of hearing aids. But Cameron deals with his syndrome in the middle of China where these resources are widely unavailable. The songs and number-counting that he so enjoys reciting today could've easily been absent had it not been for the gracious service and hearts of the Philip Hayden Foundation.

Cameron is one of the lucky orphans in China to have found a home at Philip Hayden Foundation's Shepherd's Field Children's Village. He received his first hearing aid in September of 2008. Speech therapy will continue and a recheck will be done soon to see if he needs another hearing aid. With all this medical care and heart-felt attention, he has clearly flourished. PHF says "Cameron is a very happy boy who is rarely seen without a smile." Oh how his life could've been very different had his path not been crossed with that of the PHF.

The Philip Hayden Foundation was established in 1995 by founders Tim and Pam Baker. Their organization - named after a late friend who died unexpectedly while on a compassion mission in China - initially wanted to provide tangible support to local orphanages.

They have since changed their primary work to establish many foster villages in Mainland China for at-risk and special-needs orphan children. PHF showers them with love and needed medical care (including corrective surgeries) with the hope that the children eventually find loving families to adopt them. Approximately 95% of the orphans in their care are special needs children, most of whom were abandoned by their parents because they were born "broken". PHF's philosophy is to take in these so-called "broken" children and transform their hopelessness into beautiful stories of redemption and love through a four-step "Providing Hope" program: Intervention, Foster Care, Surgeries, and Adoption (see chinaorphans.org for more information).

With more than one hundred children currently in their care, Cameron is only one of them. But Cameron is special to our FCC-Austin family because we are honored to once again financially support his care for another year. Thanks to our faithful families who have renewed their membership, we know that our money is truly making a difference. How can one argue otherwise after seeing the infectious smile on Cameron's face?!

For more information on Treacher Collins Syndrome, visit www.trauchercollins.org.



In the Spotlight..

The Walker Family by Stacy Cone

When you enter the home of Paul and Kristin Walker, the first thing you notice is a gorgeous giant Chinese fan hanging on the wall of the dining room. They live in a beautiful two-story, red-brick house in North Austin with their sons, Ben (11) and Josh (13), and their adopted daughter, Lauren (6, Taizhou, Jiangsu). As you move further inside to the living area, you see some other pieces of Asian art scattered here and there among the family's decorations, which include a few happy, colorful, framed drawings and paintings by Lauren. The house reveals something special about the Walkers themselves: their profound love for Lauren has transformed them from the more ordinary American family they once were into the more extraordinary multi-cultural family they are now, one that blends their family's identity into a new American and Chinese mix.

Kristin, out of whose big shining blue eyes a very vivacious, caring, and sincere spirit seems to brim when she's talking, is the first to acknowledge that adopting Lauren has brought a lot of changes to the world, all good ones. "We've met people," Kristin explains, "who have turned around and initiated their own international adoptions after meeting Lauren." That's something very positive for those parents and children, she agrees, but Kristin is adamant that Lauren's adoption has profoundly changed the whole Walker family's perspective about nearly everything. One of their sons now plans to become a pediatrician, and he specifically wants to treat and help heal children in China's orphanages. "Our spirits have been changed," Kristin says, shaking her head affirmatively, "all for the better." She adds, "Adopting Lauren changed everything about us. How we think. How we feel. How we spend money. Eating at a restaurant matters more to us now because that same money could help a lot of orphans back in China."

The Walkers probably wouldn't tell you unless pressed, but they actually have helped a lot of orphans back in China. After returning home with Lauren, they started up an orphan and adoption ministry through their church and remain active in that program. The ministry serves orphans in Mexico, Ethiopia, and China and provides support to adoptive families. Kristin also began volunteering for Love Without Boundaries, an organization dedicated to improving and changing the lives of orphaned and impoverished children in China through humanitarian aid efforts. It was while volunteering for Love Without Boundaries that Kristin found her second daughter waiting for her in China.

It happened when another Love Without Boundaries volunteer emailed Kristin a picture of a third-grade girl named Li Xiao Shang. The volunteer asked Kristin to circulate Li Xiao's picture within the Christian community in hopes of finding an adoptive American family.



Although Kristin circulated the picture, she knew in her heart the little girl was meant to be her daughter. She quickly sent the picture to Paul at work. After seeing it, he said "yes" to what is about to be the family's second adoption from China. The Walkers began the paperwork a year ago to adopt Li Xiao and are now waiting to travel. They expect to bring "Annie" home anytime from late June to late August, boosting the Walker family member count from five to six. "We always felt we had another daughter in China," Kristin says, "but we didn't know how she would come to us."

Annie's adoption, however, hasn't been short or easy. It's involved a long, painful wait. "In our wildest dreams, we never thought it would take so long," Kristin says. "It's been so hard to wait. Very hard." As Paul and Kristin both explain, starting last May, the Hague Convention changed a lot of rules concerning international adoption. The changes basically added a new layer of bureaucracy to the process that has effectively slowed adoptions way down.

It took the Walkers about 18 months to adopt Lauren. It's been a slower process to complete the paperwork to adopt Annie. But what has made the wait for Annie seem even longer and harder is that this time their daughter knows they are coming and is herself waiting for the bureaucratic wheels to turn. Kristin explains that she and Paul adopted Lauren, their six year old, in 2003 when she was just eight months old. Because Lauren was just a baby, she never knew the Walkers were waiting for her and didn't experience the wait the way an older child would.

But this time things are different. Annie is an older child, and she's well aware of her impending adoption. She wants it to happen, and she's even written a short letter to the Walkers telling them so. Knowing that Annie is waiting for them has made the wait seem particularly arduous.

(continued on page 6)



Annie Walker

In the Spotlight.. The Walker Family *continued from page 5*

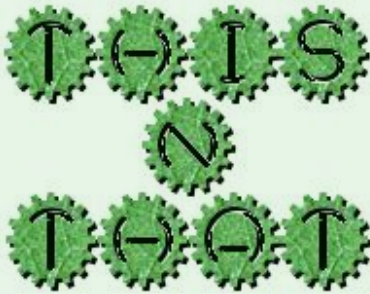
But to help the time pass more quickly and to keep in contact with Annie, the Walkers write to their daughter, too, and along with their letters about once a month they send gifts—in particular, a pink dress which Annie requested. They pray she receives what they mail to her, but there's no way of knowing for sure. Annie is living with a foster family in Guangdong Province, but she attends school and receives her mail at an orphanage nearby. They'll know when they travel to get their daughter whether she's gotten all the albums, cameras, outfits and letters full of love that they've mailed.

When that time comes and the wait is finally over, with Annie in tow they plan to travel a bit in China, including to Beijing and the Great Wall. At this year's FCC Chinese New Year event in Austin, they picked up "Year of the Ox" t-shirts for everybody in the family. They want to wear them for a much anticipated photo of the family—complete at last with Annie—when they visit the Great Wall.

If all goes well and as planned, perhaps the Walkers will be able to share their picture with our FCC members in an upcoming newsletter. In the meantime, FCC wishes the Walkers every success on their trip, the best of luck now and in the future, and thanks each member of the Walker family, including Annie, for participating in this profile.

❖ With the end of the school term coming to a close, the University of Texas China Care chapter will celebrate this year of playgroups with their annual banquet on Friday, April 24 from 6 pm to 9 pm at the Belmont restaurant on 6th Street. Tickets are \$35/adult and \$10/child and proceeds go to support the charitable work of Half the Sky and China Care for the children who remain in Chinese foster homes and orphanages. For more information, check their web site www.texaschina.org

❖ Be sure to check out the *Adoptive Families* magazine downloadable articles from our FCC Austin web site. Go to www.main.org/fccaustin/ under "resources." With titles such as "Dear Teacher," "How to be an Adoption Advocate," and "Accurate Adoption Language," these printable articles can help us navigate the challenging waters of school and community with detailed advice and suggestions.



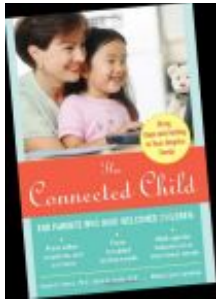
❖ We started a FCC Austin Yahoo discussion group as a place to ask and answer questions and to converse with other members of our FCC community. If you like to join, go to http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Austin_FCC_Community

❖ Angela Meek has helped design an awesome FCC Austin general informational flyer to help us spread the word about the opportunities and events we offer. If you would like to carry around some flyers for that moment in the grocery store when you see a family that looks like ours, contact us and we will mail you a supply. In addition, we will have them available at the Dragon Boat Festival.

❖ Special thanks to Becky Roberts who has ordered and sold the new and used Asian children's books at the Moon festival and at Chinese New Year. This is a not-for-profit service FCC Austin has offered to our membership and the response has been great. We plan to continue this service at the upcoming festivals. If you have any title suggestions, feel free to email Becky at Rebeccaroberts7@aol.com

❖ Several folks in our membership have suggested that we offer a group camping adventure in the fall. After discussions, the officers agreed that we are woefully unskilled in planning this project and would ask someone more experienced with this type of event to volunteer to lead us forth into the camping world. Anyone? Contact Becky Harding at bjh0902@aol.com if you think you are the leader for this project.

❖ Free for lunch or dinner? Looking for some adult conversation and the joy of not having to get juice for anyone? Check our web site (www.main.org/fccaustin/) under "Just for Moms" for details.



The Connected Child Book Review

By Pat Morgan

For those of you who don't know me, I am a therapist who works with children and adults in Austin. Many of the children I work with are adopted from foreign orphanages or from American foster care. These are children who feel the impact of deprivation or instability in their first years. The book that I urge parents to read and the one that I quote the most is The Connected Child, by Karyn Purvis, PhD., David R. Cross, Ph.D., and Wendy Lyons Sunshine.

Karyn Purvis and David Cross direct the Institute of Child Development at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth (www.child.tcu.edu/index.htm). Their mission is to support the needs of families with at risk children. What is exciting to me is their very holistic view of how to address the needs of children "from a hard place". In the first chapters they explain the attachment process that is the building block to a healthy and functioning child. The language that they use is very clear and non-clinical. Ms. Purvis and Mr. Cross paint a clear picture of how trauma and deprivation affect bonding.

What sets this book apart from others on adoption and attachment is the simple way the authors talk about neuropsychology/biology, sensory integration, and nutrition. When there is neglect in the early years it is not just the emotions that are affected. Neglect impacts a child's brain and neurology. It affects the way a child processes information that comes through the senses: touch, smell, hearing, taste, proprioception (our sense of position), and vestibular (how we move in relationship to gravity). Can you imagine what it would be like to have an over sensitivity or under sensitivity in any of these senses? In a child, these problems can look like behavior issues at times.

Ms. Purvis and Mr. Cross compel us to look what is driving a child's troubled behavior and guide the reader in how to do that. They give excellent, non-punitive ways to intervene with a child when behavior is off. They have pro-active strategies to head off conflicts. Their information on supporting good brain chemistry is not detailed but a great place to start.

I appreciate having such a concise and well written resource to direct my clients to. I used to recommend a list of books that no parent who actually had children, jobs, and lives would ever have time to read! The Connected Child is a single resource that summarizes many others and I recommend it to the FCC community.

~ Pat Morgan is also the mother of an 11-year-old daughter from China.



Red sofa moment: Kayli, June 2004

Chinese New Year The Ox Arrived in February

by Becky Harding

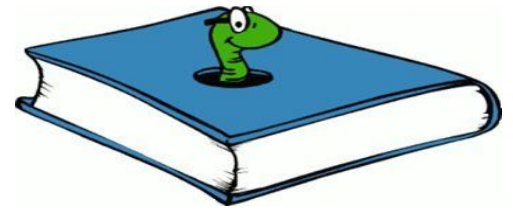
Our Chinese New Year celebration this past January at The Gateway Church was, according to all the responses and written evaluations, a huge success. For those families who were there, thank you for supporting the event in such a positive way. The silent auction raised more money than ever and we were able to donate \$2000 to our charities that include China Care/Half the Sky Foundation, Grant Me a Chance, Love Without Boundaries and the Phillip Hayden Foundation. Thank you.

Thanks also to the awesome China Care volunteers who serve food and manned the craft tables for us. It was our first time to work with these exceptional young people at our CNY event and it went very well. In addition, the performances and the introduction of student narrators were very well received. What a beautiful moment to have our children speaking in both English and Chinese about their sense of being Chinese-Americans. Of course, the dragon dancers brought magic and exuberance to the close for us.

It was an exceptional time and the community we share we certainly celebrated in full force.



Book Club



by Abby Turner
abby814@austin.rr.com

When our children were preschoolers, I belonged to two playgroups. One on Saturday and one on Wednesday. As all of our children started school, I realized I wanted and needed to continue visiting with other adoptive parents on a regular basis while my kids were elsewhere. Several activities came from this need and I wanted to share with you about a couple of them. The groups have not been exclusively FCC groups but they have involved adoptive moms. I belong to a book club, a mom's night out, and a lunch group. These groups are open to new members or can be used as ideas for you to build on.

Our book club is all adoptive moms with children of various ages. We began meeting seven or eight years ago. Over time we have evolved and changed to find what works for most of us. We currently have 15 members but rarely do more than 5 make a meeting. We meet on the first Wednesday of each month. We began meeting at homes but found it too distressing for the hostess. Now, we meet in a restaurant and eat while we discuss. We try to choose a place that connects to theme of our book. Sometimes the connection is pretty thin but sometimes it really adds to our experience.

We choose our books by group consensus. Members bring suggestions and we pass them around and pick what interests us. We have read fiction, biographies and nonfiction. We often choose books that have won an award, like The Man Booker Prize or the Pulitzer. We sometimes choose an adult book and a young adult book in the same month that we feel are related and aren't too long. We definitely try to pick a title that is available in the library and does not have to be purchased.

Our discussions remain casual and unstructured. We all say what we liked or did not like about the book and we often use a readers' guide to start a discussion. We also use this opportunity to talk about our lives and kids, our jobs, and problems. We talk about the food and we talk about other books we've read. I have a wonderful time.

We encourage members who did not get to read the book to come anyway. If you are thinking about beginning a group, keep in mind that it helps to have someone who will facilitate the organizing. For our book club, I send out the emails and I try to find a readers' guide and have some book choices. But others provide input and it is a group effort. I make it a priority and rarely miss my night out with my friends.

Feel free to contact me abby814@austin.rr.com if you'd like to join our group.

*** As I mentioned, I also belong to a Mom's Night Out. We meet at a restaurant on the last Wednesday of the month. This is a larger group and is open to any adoptive mom. Sandi Ross keeps the list (email Sandy at rosyk@austin.rr.com). A few of us get together most Wednesdays around noon for lunch also. I can be contacted to get on the email list for the lunch group.*

Some recommended reading for FCC families...

The Journey to Mei
 by Freddie Remza

The Red Blanket
 by Eliza Thomas, Joe Cepeda

The Lost Daughters of China
 by Karin Evans

Grace from China
 by Jacqueline Kolosov

We See the Moon
 by Carrie A. Kitze

I Love You Like Crazy Cakes
 by Rose Lewis

Silent Tears: A Journey of Hope in a Chinese Orphanage
 by Kay Bratt

TEEN / TWEEN FOCUS: GIRLS CONNECT GROUP

by Kellena Page and Pat Nealon

Our babies are growing up! As the average age of our children increases, we've come to realize that FCC's events need to change with them. FCC's goal and vision this year is to make our community embrace all of our children's age levels. We have already started this by teaming with UT China Care to promote more teen/tween friendly events such as Girls Night In. Plus, we are making the Autumn Moon Festival a REAL Moon Festival by holding it in the late afternoon and evening at Brushy Creek Park. Plans for this year's festival include a lighted lantern parade, floating home made boats on the lake with lighted candles inside, and much more.

We would like to create a **Girls Connect** Group this year and we need your help. We are very lucky this year to have Pat Nealon, our co-VP of Events, on the FCC Board. Pat comes to us from New York with her own tween, a fresh new perspective, and this wonderful new idea. Pat explains about Girls Connect:

"As our FCC children grow up, FCC chapters are working to engage the older girls in our community. I recently moved to Austin from New York City, where my daughter Sophie had the good fortune to be a member of the first Girls Connect group. Girls Connect was organized by 2 FCC moms, Lisa Arongino and Jennifer Maslowski, as a place where girls 8-16 could meet other adopted Chinese girls about being adopted, and where the older girls could act as mentors.

Girls Connect combines fun, crafts, orphanage support and mentoring. The girls were divided into 3 age groups, with each older group responsible for a younger one. The mentoring responsibilities including making sure that each girl was playing and engaged, and leading any conversations about adoption topics. The meetings took place once a month. The structure and content of the meetings is and was a work in progress but generally followed this framework:

The whole group would meet for a takeout dinner, salad and dessert at a large playroom and breakout room in an apartment complex. The girls would do a simple crafts project to be sold at FCC events to support orphanage programs. For example, the girls decorated pens and pencils, made small purses and cellphone charms. Then the older girls had about 45 minutes with each other to discuss that week's topic, as determined by the older girls in advance. After that, the large group would hang out together doing fun stuff like board games, Chinese jump rope, nail decorating, and generally running around. The crafts activity was often focused on arts with an Asian cultural basis such as calligraphy or origami or dance. We had a visit from a local author. There was a free raffle and a goody bag every week.

Having the girls be in charge of the programming, and having (most of) the parents leave during the meetings were key elements of Girls Connect. It was the belief of the organizers and parents that the girls needed to direct their own conversations about adoption, or more bluntly, talk about what they wanted to talk about instead of having their non-Chinese, non-adoptive parents decide what would be meaningful for them. As we know, girls may not be willing to share all of their feelings in front of their parents, so two or three adults would supervise the proceedings while the rest of the parents would go out, usually meeting up for dinner at one of the local restaurants. The older girls got school credit for their participation as mentors and planners. Jennifer and Lisa set up and ran the meetings for the first year and then recruited a regular volunteer roster from among the parents of the participants.

My daughter was so lit up with excitement and happiness after these meetings that I knew this idea was working from the first night. Since she was, at the time, in the 8-year-old group she mostly got to hang with her friends, eat good food, meet some "big girls" and get free stuff once a month on a Friday night. It was a great way to wind up a busy school week. As an added benefit, a few of us single moms would get a mom's night out at a restaurant where there were tablecloths and a wine list for an hour or so. Like any other program it continues to evolve. Many many thanks to Lisa and Jennifer and all of the volunteers who make it work."

Let us know what you think and if you would like to be involved in creating this community and space for our children to grow. Don't forget that we need ideas that include our boys as well! Please email kellenapage@yahoo.com with your suggestions and ways that you can help.



Monday FCC Play Group: Kathleen Lee is the moderator and can be reached at volpelee@hotmail.com. Most of the girls are age 4 and 5, Chinese, Caucasian, and Taiwanese. The group is open to anyone who wants to join. The group meets mostly at local parks in the north Austin area. The group message board is: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/AustinFCCMondayPlaygroup/>



South Austin Play Group

South Austin Play Group This group is a very active, fun, growing, well-attended and especially welcoming FCC group with both girls and boys adopted from China and other Asian countries. The kids' ages range from 1-6 primarily, but a few older siblings and friends, both adopted and biological, often come to events, too. This group meets regularly on Tuesday afternoons from about 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. They usually gather in a South Austin park, but also meet in homes, go swimming, go camping, and take all the kids to plays, zoos, the rodeo, and festivals in the Austin area. For more information, contact Dianne Harwood at di@austin.rr.com.

PLAY GROUPS

The Pflugerville Play Group is a lively and energetic group, meeting Friday mornings from 10:30 to noon. During the school year the kids range in age from 4-5 years then during the summer the age range is 4-9 years. Right now the group is meeting at parks in the Pflugerville area. During the summer, the group will meet at a community pool. The group occasionally meets for a potluck dinner on Saturday night. Also, a couple of the dads are trying to start up a monthly daddy play date that meets on Saturday. For more information, contact Alexa Hinds at agh1126@yahoo.com

The DragonfliesGroup is the newest playgroup, for girls born in 2002 and 2003. The group is just getting organized, with their first meeting scheduled April 19th and a follow up get together scheduled May 17th.

For more info, contact Angela Meek at ammeek@att.net or visit the yahoo group at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Austin_FCC_Dragonflies/



Pflugerville Play Group

Too Old for Play Groups?

by Abby Turner

When Austin FCC began in 1996, parents began to get to get their children together for playgroups. We found groups of adopted children and adoptive parents fit our needs in a different way from neighborhood groups. We loved our children meeting others who were adopted. We loved discussing our kids and issues. I belonged to a Wednesday Playgroup and a Saturday playgroup. Wednesday Playgroup was the most successful. We rotated choosing homes, parks and pools all over Austin meeting each (you guessed it) Wednesday morning and staying together until nap times came. Our girls developed friendships and we felt reassured that they had peers with similar challenges. Of course, our children grew older. Then they started school. Many of them no longer had any contact with adopted friends, just when they needed them most.

Our solution was Panda Sisters. Panda Sisters was open to all girls who belonged to FCC who were 6 or 7 at that time. The girls chose their name and had a more active role in choosing locations. We met only once a month on a Sunday afternoon. It was lots like playgroup; pools, parks, craft activities. There were originally 15 girls. We continued to rotate "hosting". Panda Sister worked great! The girls enjoyed their time together and continued friendships that we, parents, felt were important. Pandas does not really meet now. As the girls aged, they began to drop out. It was impossible to schedule around lessons, sports, and school activities. They began to value peer relationships at school and resist time with less relevant friends. It happened at different times for different girls but about 11 to 13, their interest waned.

Many of us had a younger child or new playgroup friends who were starting school. These kids (still all girls) got together and named themselves Red Lanterns. Red Lanterns is an active group of girls about 9 through 11. They have been together since preschool but have added members and are happy to add more. Not all of the girls are adopted from China but all are adopted. My youngest, Ashlyn, is a happy participator. We meet second Saturdays at 10. We take turns choosing locations and activities. The ladies made gingerbread houses at HEB in Dec and we visited the zoo in Feb. The girls favs are parks and pools and free play. Although we have a large list of members, usually 5 to 10 girls attend and they can barely wait until the next activity. We have a yahoo group to communicate. If you have a girl in this age group you can contact me, Abby at abby814@austin.rr.com, to join.

As parents, we are still working on possibilities for the older girls. Smaller groups of girls may work better. Activities that are less supervised (Parents are so not cool.) may appeal more. My daughter, Alisan, who is 13, still expresses interest in seeing her FCC friends. She enjoyed her time hanging out with them at Chinese New Year. It is my hope that China Care will pick up some of the girls who are over 10 and keep them connected. I think contact with young adults would be great for all the girls.

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American Children with Chinese Faces

by Benita Rubinett, LCSW

There is much to consider when contemplating how to provide children adopted from China with opportunities for exploring and understanding their complex identities. There is no magic way or perfect time to talk about adoption issues with your child. Some children have a lot of curiosity at an early age, and others rarely mention it without prompting. No matter what you say or how you tell the story, you do want to be deliberate about how you portray adoption itself as a way of forming families and how you acknowledge your child's racial identity and cultural background.

When children are very young they accept adoption so matter-of-factly that they are likely to bring it up quite frequently on their own. But through the years talking about adoption becomes more complicated because what children are wondering about or being affected by, and what we want them to know or want to protect them from, become more complex. As challenging and difficult as it may be, you want your children to bring their questions and concerns to you, and you must be prepared to help them sort out complicated, bewildering and conflicting emotions.

Why is it important to give your child a firm foundation to build an identity that includes her cultural roots and heritage? To begin with the obvious, most international adoptions are also interracial. No matter how firmly your children are bonded to you, your extended families, social networks, religious communities, or to any other groups you might belong to, their race remains unchanged. They are American children with Chinese faces.

A generation ago, many adoption professionals told families adopting internationally to assimilate their children as much as possible. We now know that this advice was misguided; not only were these children deprived of their rich and meaningful cultural traditions, they were left disconnected from a profound part of themselves. Racial identity is fundamental to who you are. Suggesting that race "doesn't matter" will ring false to the child who experiences and learns early on that racial distinctions are real and significant. Instead, they are likely to perceive that discussing race makes people uneasy, and the topic goes underground with little opportunity for enlightened exploration.

An American girl with a Chinese face named Bridget O'Leary is Asian to the world-at-large, and that facet of her identity needs to be recognized, affirmed and nurtured. Bridget needs to be able to have a sense of comfort walking in two worlds; the world she knows about and the world that thinks it knows about her. There will be many times when the fact that her life story began in China will have little relevance to the present moment. But like race, this early narrative remains unchanged. It will, however, unfold and be expanded upon continuously, and Bridget will benefit from being grounded in awareness and appreciation of the way of life and many legacies of her first country, regardless of the ongoing journey she chooses for herself.

Groups like FCC, where children have opportunities to see other families similar to their own and know other people with similar stories, can be such a vital part of identity integration. The challenge is to knit together an identity that incorporates "and": where the many aspects of one's self, both known and imagined, can reside in a sense of wholeness and belonging. We want our children to know - and be - themselves.

**Benita Rubinett, LCSW is a psychotherapist in private practice with a special interest in issues relating to infertility, adoption and relationships. She also prepares adoption home studies.*