



Families With Children from China Fall Newsletter 2009 Austin, Texas

Note from the President...

I love the fall. For me, it has always held the promise of a new beginning. As most of you may remember, we promised "more" back in the early spring when we began the new year and we feel as though we have delivered on some of the "more" with our educational offerings such as the Dr. Chang film screening and the Adoption and Schools workshop. We strived for "more " with the community-building trip to see the Terra Cotta Warriors exhibit in Houston and our magical Mid-Autumn Moon Festival rooted in Chinese tradition. And now, as we move into October and get our full fall on, I really do feel as though this is the beginning. Yes, really.

As you read through this newsletter, you will see that your officers have made a significant commitment to more educational and community events with our evening with Dr. Rowena Fong, our support for the Texamalans Joe McDermott benefit concert, our Chinese New Year celebration and, the big kahuna, the week-long Chinese culture camp we are planning for next summer. Very exciting!

The conversation and community spirit at our Moon Festival seemed an affirmation that we are on the right path. Let me take a moment to apologize to the Jewish community for hosting the festival on Yom Kippur. Please accept my heartfelt apology and know it is my goal not to have this type of mistake happen again. This road is a better walk when everyone is together.

~~ Becky Harding
Year of the Ox
Austin FCC President

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Mark Your Calendars

- Dr. Rowena Fong discussion
Sunday, Oct. 25
- Great Wall delegation reception
Wednesday, Oct. 28
- Benefit Concert
Sunday, Nov. 22
- Year of the Tiger t-shirt contest
Entries due Dec. 10
- Chinese New Year
Saturday, Feb. 6, 2010
- Culture Camp,
August 9-13, 2010

Fall Events



" Joy Luck Club 101" or A conversation with Dr. Rowena Fong

On Sunday, October 25, from 4:30 PM to 6:30 PM, Dr. Rowena Fong will open her home to FCC members for a discussion about raising Chinese-American children. Dr. Fong is an honored professor at the UT School of Social Work and has written numerous books and papers about international adoption. Her unique perspective as a Chinese-American adoption scholar should provide us with some compelling conversation.

Note: Space is limited and we are currently at capacity with registered members but have started a waiting list. Contact Becky Harding (bjh0902@aol.com) to be added to the list. Those of you who have already registered should have received a confirmation email with directions by the time you are reading this article. If not, contact Becky.

Great Wall China Adoption honors a delegation of orphanage directors and government officials from China at a Halloween-themed reception on Wednesday, October 28, 2009 from 6 PM - 8:30 PM at the Dell Jewish Community Campus (7300 Hart Lane Austin 78731).

Texas BBQ from Pok-e-Jo's will be served and tickets are \$10/adults, children 2-12 tickets are \$8.50 and children under 2 years are free of charge.

For more information, contact Great Wall representatives at www.gwca.org/ or call 323-9595.

Guatemalan Children's Benefit Concert a Community Event By Becky Harding

The long dry summer wasn't just uncomfortable for the farmers in Guatemala but the lack of rains caused massive crop failure and without that locally grown food, many children living in the region may die from starvation. Texamalans, the local chapter of families with children adopted from Guatemala, led by Kathi Thomas, is organizing a fundraising concert featuring Joe McDermott, with the proceeds going to feeding centers in different villages that serve approximately 650 children. All earnings will go toward purchase of food and gasoline for the transportation vehicles for the centers. For more details go to www.guatemalamission.org/feedingcenters.htm.

The concert will be Sunday, November 22, 2009, from 2 pm – 4 pm at the Central Presbyterian Church at 8th and Brazos streets in downtown Austin. Local multi-cultural organizations have been invited to perform before the headliner, as this concert is a way for the entire community to gather together to help children who truly need some kindness right now. What can FCC Austin members do to help? First of all, we can attend the concert and let others know about it. Joe McDermott is an extraordinary children's performer and the show will be worth the donation just to experience his humor and spirit. Secondly, if you or your child would like to usher the event, contact me (bjh0902@aol.com), as we want to help this cause and this group with our show of support. This is a unique opportunity to stand with others in the global adoption community to say we care about all children everywhere.

For several years, during the Thanksgiving holiday, FCC families walked behind and rode "Goldie," our stunning dragon float in the Chuy's parade. Recently, the regulations for floats and the entrance fees made us rethink our participation. This concert, just few days before Thanksgiving, seems a great substitute for that community event. Gandhi said, " Be the change you want to see in the world." Here's a chance to do just that. Join us.



2010
Year of the Tiger
What will it look like?

Show us your tigers!

Year of the Tiger t-shirt design contest

FCC Austin invites you to design next year's t-shirt. Everyone is invited: family, friends, adults and children.

Submission guidelines:

COLOR: Please use no more than three colors in your design, including the background color

TEXT: All designs must include the following information:

Families with Children from China

Austin, TX

Year of the Tiger

2010

DEADLINE: All entries are due by December 10, 2009

All entries or questions should be sent to Pat Nealon, pnemail@aol.com



Welcome to the Year of the Tiger!

By Kellena Page

Chinese New Year or **Lunar New Year** is the most important of the traditional Chinese holidays, with people often taking weeks away from work or school to celebrate. Although customs vary throughout China, Chinese New Year is a time of reunion, renewal and thanksgiving. Traditionally, people thoroughly clean their houses to sweep away bad luck and make room for good fortune in the coming year, and decorate their doors and windows with red paper-cuts and couplets with sayings about happiness, wealth and longevity. People visit family, dress in new clothes (the preferred color being red), set off firecrackers, and give children and close relatives "lucky money" in red envelopes. Communities set off fabulous fireworks displays. The Chinese New Year feast with family includes such delicacies as duck, whole fish, whole chicken (complete with head, tail and feet), uncut noodles (which represent long life), **nian gao** (sweet steamed glutinous rice pudding), and an assortment of dumplings.

Austin FCC will be celebrating Chinese New Year on Saturday, February 6th, 2010, at Covington Middle School in South Austin. Since our Moon Festival was in North Austin, we decided to balance the event locations by finding a venue in South Austin. We are also making a concerted effort this year to build a closer FCC community and more closely follow Chinese traditions, so the entertainment will be followed by a big dinner together at a local Chinese restaurant. We will have crafts for the children and a professional photographer on hand to photograph your family and capture the events of the evening. More details will follow so please read your FCC emails!

In the meantime, we need donations for the silent auction. Donating to the silent auction is an excellent way to promote your company or simply give to a good cause. (Contact Becky Harding at BJH0902@aol.com to turn in donations.) As always, profits made from the FCC Chinese New Year and silent auction go to charities that work toward bettering the lives of Chinese orphans.

I hope you will join your FCC community in ringing in the year of the Tiger!

Characteristics of people born in the year of the Tiger:

1. Irresistible
2. Selfish
3. Adventurous
4. Humanitarian
5. Emotional
6. Risk-taking

They are compatible with:

Horses, Dogs, Boars

Tigers should avoid:

Monkeys, Snakes

Their best career choices:

1. Politician
2. Artist
3. Athlete
4. Stunt Person
5. Lawyer



Culture Camp is Coming!

By Becky Harding

In the Jon Muth Chinese version of *Stone Soup*, three monks come and teach a village that, "...sharing makes us all richer." Using this universal story as our theme, FCC Austin and the University of Texas School of Social Work will host a week-long Chinese Culture and Adoption Camp on August 9–13, 2010 at the Austin Chinese Church on Dessau Road. FCC president, Becky Harding, and Dr. Rowena Fong, the Ruby Lee Piester Centennial Professor in Services to Children and Families and a professor of social work at UT, have been planning and preparing this extraordinary event for several weeks now. It's time to share our vision with everyone.

The camp will start at 9 am and then finish daily at 2:30 pm. We will provide a snack while participants will bring a bag lunch. Four areas of interest will be featured: Chinese culture – lively, with activities such as ping-pong, martial arts or dance, and then Chinese culture – calmer, with a focus on language, festivals and food preparation. The third portion of the camp curriculum will address adoption areas and issues, as well as exploring tools for self-empowerment. Lastly, campers will rehearse a modified stage version of Muth's *Stone Soup* to present on Friday night at a potluck dinner for family and friends.

We are excited to be working with Pastor Gaylord Tsuei, from the church and FCC member and ACC member, Alexa Hind as our liaison for the project. While we have nearly ten months until this event, it will be here before we know it, so save August 9–13, stay tuned for future FCC communications and materials, and be ready to bring your mung beans, taro root, ginger or carrots to our huge pot of soup.

FCC Lending Library

FCC Austin is starting a lending library! Any member may borrow an item from our collection and keep it for one month. Abby Turner will mail or bring the item to you and you can mail or bring the item back. Currently we have 6 DVDs produced and generously donated by Dr. Changfu Chang. The DVDs, which are all wonderful documentaries on Chinese adoption include *Long Wait for Home*, *Love without Boundaries*, *Embracing World Cultures*, *Peer in the Distance*, *My Unforgotten Daughter*, and *The Willow Trees*. More information about each DVD is available at www.lovewithoutboundaries.org.

We have a VHS copy of *Play and Learn Chinese*. There are also several book titles and a copy of *News China* magazine with an article on child trafficking. You can check the FCC website to see a current list of the collection. Please send any suggestions of books or DVDs that you would like to see in FCC's collection to Abby Turner. We are also accepting donations of books, videos, and DVDs that would be of interest to our members. Thank you! abby814@austin.rr.com

The FCC craft sales were a hit at the Autumn Moon Festival. For more on the Festival, see page 12.



Goldie Thank You

The FCC Board members and families want to extend a sincere thanks to David and Beth Hack for creating and maintaining Goldie's Head. If you haven't seen Goldie, she's a gorgeous Chinese dragon head. She'll be on display at our upcoming Chinese New Year event on February 6th, and she provides a perfect backdrop for children's photos. Don't miss her! Thanks again to the Hacks for making and sharing Goldie with our FCC families and community.

CHINA CARE - THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

By Stephanie Kan

The China Care Foundation began as a non-profit organization that provided grants to orphanages in China. Since its establishment in 2003 by Matt Dalio, China Care has expanded across North America through high schools and universities. The University of Texas chapter of China Care is a student-led organization that dedicates itself to providing an opportunity for a better life for special needs children or neglected orphans in China. Our purpose is to enrich the lives of these children and to motivate youth to make a difference.

The University of Texas chapter of China Care consists of approximately sixty enthusiastic members. Last year we were able to raise \$5000 through our fundraising events. This was enough money to sponsor two cleft lip surgeries and a heart surgery. Our goal this year is to double that amount in the hopes of improving more lives in China. China Care not only impacts the lives of the children, but also those of the student volunteers. Seeing the difference China Care makes encourages our members to strive continually in building better lives and opportunities for children born into less fortunate circumstances.

In addition to fundraising for adoptions, medical care, and renovations, China Care also coordinates playgroups. Members of the organization volunteer their time to interact with children adopted from China in the Austin community. To prepare for playgroups, we plan activities that will enhance the children's knowledge of and appreciation for their Chinese cultural heritage. The children become very familiar with our regular playgroup volunteers, who value the friendships they build with the children very highly. Playgroups take place every other week in Austin and often are the highlight of the week for both the children and volunteers.



China Care is also actively involved in the Big Brother Big Sister program. By integrating this program into China Care, students are given a chance to have one-on-one time with an adopted Chinese child in the community. Our members are able to develop close relationships with the children and offer them support, advice, encouragement, and a listening ear. Our Big Brothers and Big Sisters are all responsible and passionate role models.

We are excited to announce a new location for our playgroups! China Care will host playgroups at the Dell Community Center on Hart Lane on the dates listed below. Check the China Care website www.txchinacare.org for changes to this schedule.

10/11/09 2-4pm Community Hall Room 150D

10/25/09 2-4pm ECP MPR

11/08/09 2-4pm ECP MPR

11/22/09 2-4pm ECP MPR

12/06/09 3-5pm ECP MPR

To get involved with our Playgroups or Big Brother/Big Sister Program, please email us at texaschinacare@gmail.com. You can also visit us at www.txchinacare.org.

Double Double Happiness

Family Spotlight: The Hewetts

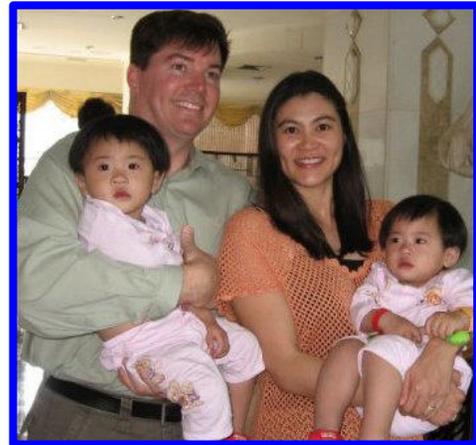
By Dianne Harwood

Out of the worst tragedy, something good may come. Joyce and Pete Hewett knew they wanted to start a family someday, and adoption was one of the ways they planned to build their family. The great tsunami that struck South East Asia in the winter of 2004 orphaned thousands of children. In the aftermath of the tragic tsunami, Joyce and Pete were moved to begin their journey to build a family by adopting an Indonesian orphan. Indonesia does not have a clear policy for inter-country adoption and the tragic tsunami made it even more difficult for the government to manage foreign adoptions. When the Hewetts realized that an Indonesian adoption would not work out, they set their sights on China; Joyce's best friend from college adopted a beautiful little girl, Maggie, in May 1999 from Urumqi. When Joyce and Pete met Maggie for the first time in December 2004, they decided that China was where their child was waiting too. The Hewetts started their paperwork to adopt from China when they returned from the holidays by mailing in the I-600A to INS on January 7th, 2005. Little did they know how much their family would grow in just over a year and a half.

The Hewetts were logged in on May 20, 2005; just as wait times for China adoptions were beginning to lengthen. On March 2, 2006, to their shock and delight, they received their referral for not one baby girl, but twin baby girls! They had indicated in their dossier that they would like twins and that Joyce's great-grandmother was a twin, but they were told the probability of getting referred twins is very low. The news was a delight and a wonderful surprise! In addition, by the time they traveled to get their baby girls in May 2006, Joyce was also pregnant with twins!

The twin girls waiting in China, whom the Hewetts named Grace Ping Fan and Halli Ping Fang, each have their own birthdays. Grace's birthday is on February 17th, 2005 while sister Halli's birthday is on February 18th, 2005. In looking back at their old adoption paperwork Joyce and Pete discovered that their Letter of Petition to the People's Republic of China was dated February 16th, 2005, just one day before Grace and Halli were actually born and Pete's Dad's birthday. Isn't it a wonder how God's timing works?

When the Hewetts arrived in Nanning, with Joyce's parents in tow, the girls, healthy but a little bit skinny, were living in foster care. Once they returned to the U.S. with their precious daughters, Joyce and Pete settled in, learning to juggle life as new parents to 15-month-old daughters.



Four months later, on September 7, 2006, their family grew again with the birth of Violet Ping Mei and Peter Halliday III.

Joyce and Pete calculated that during their peak diaper days from May 2006 to approximately June 2007 they were consuming about 28 diapers/ pull-ups per day! They are proud to announce that as of this summer all 4 children are potty trained. Life in the Hewett house is very active and loud. Grace and Halli are now 4 ½ years old and attend a pre-school twice a week. Violet and Peter just turned 3 in September and are looking forward to starting pre-school next year. The Hewetts also have an incredible super nanny who has played an integral part in all of the children's language development and who provides them with a very positive learning environment during the day. The Hewett children play together, as any four siblings do, in pairs and in groups. To help reinforce their sense of family connection their parents sometimes intentionally pair the children up with a non-twin; after all, they are one big family, not two separate pairs of twins.

The Chinese character **xi** means *double happiness*, not just one happiness, but two. The character is a symbol of good luck, especially believed to bring happy marriages and fertility. I can't think of any better symbol for the Hewett family.



Texas Welcomes Nian'you Zhang

The Kniseley-Lancaster family has embarked on a new adventure this school year – hosting an exchange student from Beijing, China. Nian'you Zhang joined their family in August, only a week before he began his senior year at Austin High School. Born and raised in Lanzhou, the 17-year-old has lived in Beijing for the past four years. This is his first time to travel outside his homeland.

As an exchange student, Nian'you has become part of the family. “He’s expected to be a member of the household,” says Julie Kniseley, host mom. “When he first arrived, we talked about our house rules and traditions and what was expected.” The family has already raised two teenage boys, Joe and Dan Lancaster, who are now adults. Their daughter Xiaoman Lancaster, age 8, has been very excited about the new member of the family. She is taking Mandarin lessons, and Nian'you has been a great resource for her as well as a fun big brother.

Nian'you applied for the exchange student program through the CIEE, the Council on International Educational Exchange, which is hosting 1,300 high school students from 55 different countries in communities throughout the country. Nian'you decided to graduate from Austin High School this year, so he is taking a heavy load of courses required by Texas for graduation, including 9th grade health, 11th grade U.S. history, Government and Economics, two English classes, and P.E. He also joined the AHS math club and the ping-pong club, although the club doesn't have a table yet (calling all used ping pong tables!). He rides a bike two miles to school every day, weather permitting.



Nian'you with family dog, Sammy

CIEE has strict rules for the exchange students: no alcohol or drugs, no driving, and they must maintain a 78 or above grade average. Nian'you has had challenges with speaking English fluently, so he has taken advantage of the AHS tutoring lab for ESL students. The lab is free and open before and after school hours, so he enjoys the time reading aloud to practice his pronunciation and learn new words.

“Nian'you has been a wonderful addition to the family,” says Kniseley. “We’ve learned a lot about Chinese culture and it’s been a joy to watch him grow in this new environment.”

“Another benefit for us has been an excuse to rediscover Austin as we show Nian'you around,” says Kniseley. “We try to do something fun every weekend, so we’ve been to Mt. Bonnell, seen the bats on Ann Richards Bridge, ridden in a horse carriage around downtown, visited the Capitol, and we loved Free Museum Day!” And of course, they attended the FCC Autumn Moon Festival at Brushy Creek Park!



Big Brother/Big Sisters for our Teens/Tweens

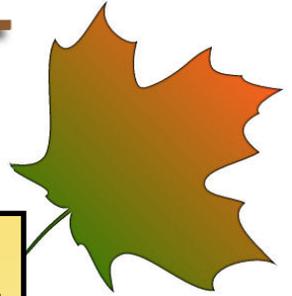
The University of Texas service organization, China Care, recognizes that the older kids might not want to color, snack and play chase with a gathering of younger children so they have designed an alternate program to meet the needs of the older child called The Big Brother/Big Sister program. Interested families can connect with a China Care college student and then they plan activities to meet the individual interest of the adolescent.

FCC member and parent, Toni Raymond, said, “ My girl's big sister is Shirley and they have had some wonderful times together. Once they had a cupcake decorating date and another day they had a pampering party. They LOVED it – loved Shirley and the bonus big sister, Esther, her roommate.” This fall, they plan to continue the relationship and have a pumpkin carving party planned at the big sister's house (no mess for mom!). This one-on-one mentoring is free of charge and tailored to fit in with the busy and active schedules of the young people.

Contact texaschinacare@gmail.com for more information.



SHORT & SWEET



* The FCC Austin web site continues to offer current information about our events and adoption resources as well as contact information and valuable links. Check it out at www.main.org/fccaustin and a big thanks to Tyla Gilchrist and Kellena Page who keep it updated and accurate.

* Brenda Gonzalez leads a new organization called "Families with Children from Vietnam" that has eight families participating from San Antonio to Austin in once a month activities and gatherings. They welcome new members. For more information, contact them at groups.yahoo.com/group/FCVSA.

* Heartfelt thanks to newsletter editor Angela Meek who volunteered to cut bamboo for what became the Moon Festival raft. Angela participated in the monthly Zilker Park Botanical Gardens clean up day and spent the good part of three hours cutting and moving bamboo.

* On September 22, 2009, the Museum of Chinese in America opened its doors in New York City. Maya Lin designed the building that features multiple exhibition galleries, interactive visitor kiosks, a research center and a core exhibition that explores the Chinese-American experience from the 1850s to the present day, including the adoption of children from China. Check out MOCA when you have a chance or visit the web site www.mocanyc.org/

Did you know...

Bamboo is a grass, not a tree? That there are about 1200 different kinds of bamboo? It's the fastest growing plant in the world?

Find out more about this interesting plant at <http://texasbamboosociety.net> or www.bamboocentral.net. You can also take a free self-guided tour of the Taniguchi Japanese Garden, Zilker Botanical Garden or volunteer to help with garden maintenance periodically. See the website or email bamboo@bamboocentral.net for more info.

* Very special thanks to Lucia Markert who purchased the moon cakes for the FCC Moon Festival celebration. Lucia has been helping Austin FCC with this task for several years now, and we deeply appreciate her help!

* Free rice. Answer questions and earn rice for hungry people. Pretty simple concept. This non-profit web site, run by the United Nations World Food Program and partnered with the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University, has two goals - to provide education and help with world hunger. Sponsors make the site function. It's easy. Log on to www.freerice.com/ and for each answer you get right, they donate 10 grains of rice through the UN World Food Program. The subjects include art (famous paintings), chemistry (symbols), English (grammar and vocabulary), geography (countries and world capitals), languages (French, German, Italian, Spanish) and math (pre-algebra and multiplication tables).

Clip art credits:

Page 2 www.teacherfiles.com
 Page 3 Yong Chen, dreamstime.com
 Page 4 Eric Isselée, dreamstime.com
 Page 8 www.webweaver.nu
 Page 11 Freud, dreamstime.com



The Austin Public library has an extensive selection of Asian materials and continues to build its World Language Collection. For more information on locations and availability see www.ci.austin.tx.us/library/news/nr20090729.htm

A Parent's Perspective on Cultural Bias

By Angela Meek

So, it is the beginning of another school year and we made it about seven days before my daughter told me she'd had a sad day. On the way home, she told me the story of the two older third graders who told her she had weird-shaped eyes. I heard more details of the story over dinner and more about how "sad her heart was" during bath time. I did the best I could to reassure her, but felt pretty inadequate at it yet again.

Of course, we are not the only ones faced with this reality. Already several of us have exchanged emails and message board posts on similar experiences. Being a firm believer in "knowledge is power," I've been perusing the World Wide Web for resources and tips on how to handle these issues.

Probably the most comforting point I found was the fact that not every disparaging remark made toward our children is meant to be racially biased or discriminatory. Kids are kids and they're just going to say insensitive things sometimes with little or no thought, and certainly with no premeditated intention to be racially derogatory. This basic reality check takes the edge off my irritation with kids and puts things back into perspective. I found a few other helpful pointers that offer a positive approach to handling unexpected comments as well as reinforcing my child's resiliency.

1. Explore all cultures, not just yours or the adoptive culture. This creates an appreciation of many different races and cultures and prevents the development of racism in your own family against other ethnic backgrounds.
2. Talk about positive and negative racism. Negative racism is pretty clear-cut and doesn't feel good under any circumstances. Positive racism can be a little more confusing. Positive racism is attributing positive attributes to one particular culture (i.e. Asian children are very smart). This is still racism as it classifies a whole race or ethnicity as being a certain way, allowing for no differences. Work to dispel these generalizations both within your family as well as with others in your social crowd.
3. Build your child's self-esteem. Using a variety of techniques to build your child's self-esteem will give him or her a positive outlook and the ability to be resistant to others' opinions. Ways to do this include:
 - a Positive encouragement and praise
 - b Redirect your child's incorrect beliefs
 - c Create a place where your child feels safe and loved
 - d Teach your child to not belittle or berate himself or herself – work on positive self-statements
 - e Coach or role play with your child to teach him or her how to settle disputes or disagreements with others independently
4. Look for local resources. Your community may offer workshops and/or reading material that may help both you and your child through difficult racially-pointed situations. For example, FCC sponsored a free workshop in this past August (Adoption & Schools) that discussed many ways parents can help foster a positive adoption environment in their child's classroom. Workshops such as these provide valuable tools that can be used throughout the schooling years to help recognize sticky situations and decide how you and your child can best handle them. See page 11 for more information on this specific workshop.

The good news is that many of the things we are already doing are giving our children the skills they need to succeed socially. And, where there are shortcomings, there is always time to reinvent our parenting skills or add some new tools.

Resources for this article and additional reading:

<http://kidshealth.org>

<https://www.utdcfsadopt.org/>

<http://www.childdevelopmentinfo.com/>

Your Child's Self-Esteem by Dorothy Briggs



Adoption & Schools Workshop Recap

By Dianne Harwood

On Friday, August 21st Becky Harding (adoptive parent, current FCC Austin President, and former public school teacher) and Deanne Brown (adoptive parent and former public school teacher) presented the first FCC Austin Adoption and Schools Workshop. About twenty-five adoptive parents attended the workshop, which was held at the Asian American Cultural Center. During this informative and entertaining session, Becky and Deanne discussed the following topics:

- 1 What a great school looks and feels like
- 2 How to build a meaningful relationship with your child's teacher
- 3 Tools you and your child can use to navigate the school system
- 4 How to be a positive activist for adoption in your school environment

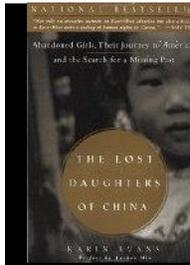
Participants also viewed a video from Include Adoption entitled "A Program for Educators." For more information about the video, see <http://www.includeadoption.com/>.

After the enjoyable (and at times quite emotional) presentation, parents shared questions and comments about their own individual experiences. Becky and Deanne referred to several resources such as a "Dear Teacher" letter and "Tackling Tricky Assignments" which can be downloaded from *Adoptive Families*. Look under "Links" on the FCC Austin website for downloadable articles from *Adoptive Families*.

Many thanks to Cupprimo Cupcakery and Coffee Spot at Spicewood Spring for providing the beautiful and delectable cupcakes enjoyed by all workshop participants!



**Pam Christian,
Adoption & Schools
workshop**



The Lost Daughters of China Book Review

By Angela Meek

The Lost Daughters of China is not a perky fairytale story that leaves a reader refreshed or with a new shiny view of humanity. Instead, it is a very real look, often in a glaring spotlight, at the brutal truths surrounding the adoption of Chinese girls. Despite its raw reality, it is a must read for anyone adopting or considering adopting a child from China.

Author Karin Evans subtitles her book Adopted Girls, Their Journey to America, and the Search for a Missing Past. As she lays out the path of these children, she does so with a blend of journalistic-style facts "*the average Chinese adoption costs between \$10,000 and \$20,000*" and beautiful descriptive prose "*I tried to memorize my daughter's landscape so I could tell her how green the countryside was...how the ridges of the rice terraces curved against the hills...*" The flowery detail and in-depth recounting of her own journey to adopt soften the often harsh realities she encounters on her adoption path.

Evans and the introduction author, Anchee Min, do not mince words as they discuss the number of little girls in China that are simply *missing*. Despite the sense of horror this evokes and despite the reality of the fate of the many missing girls, I still cry tears of happiness when I read this book. Evans so clearly describes the initial journey she and her husband take to adopt, that I am instantly reminded of my own quest and the joy of meeting my little girl for the first time.

The entire book is an up-and-down passage of remembrance for those who have experienced this odyssey and a winding path of realizations about what it means for our little girls to be from China. The book provides lavish and interesting facts about the country's development, population, expansion, and social movements. At the same time, it evokes tears of compassion and empathy when I read the translated notes that Chinese parents have left with the daughters they cannot keep.

This book is intense in its emotions and points but it is a voyage. It's one we should not forget, ignore, or try to dismiss as we raise our children with their vast and complicated heritage.

The Lost Daughters of China, 282 pages, retails in soft cover for \$6.00.

AUTUMN MOON FESTIVAL

By Stacey Cone

"This was the best day ever!" That's how a very tired but super-happy six-year-old Raea Qian-Yi Michie, while being carried to bed, summed up her experience at this year's FCC Moon Festival at Brushy Creek Lake Park. For Raea, the event was more than fun; it was magical. "Mama, the Moon Lady's going to see my wish lit up on the lake, isn't she? I think she'll grant it since she's magic and can do that. But I can't tell anybody what my wish is or it won't come true!"

Raea and the dozens of other children there walked in a lighted-lantern parade at sunset leading down to the park's lakeside, where they made wishes upon small tea lights and cast them off onto the lake aboard a bamboo raft strapped to a decorated boat. Under a rising moon, the kids watched from a pier while the boat floated out on the water carrying the many hopeful, flickering lights. Raea likely felt what many others have said they felt that evening, too; something Raea can't yet fully describe. It's rare and intangible but nonetheless real: the joy of sharing in a community cultural celebration, the mystery of being up late participating in an after-dark special event, and the sensuousness of being outdoors surrounded by trees, parkland, a lake, and multi-cultural families that share a fascinating experience and journey together with their adopted Chinese children.

Magical, definitely. But there was more that was special about this year's FCC Moon Festival. From 4:30 to 7:30 p.m., more than 200 people turned out to relax and enjoy one another's company, have fun with their families, and celebrate the season's change—picnicking, playing ball, and splashing through park sprinklers. And for the first time this year, kids painting parasols, lanterns, and fans at the craft tables were assisted by a team of outstanding volunteers from UT's China Care, a group of college-age students who regularly devote time and energy to playing with, and caring for, Austin-area Chinese adoptees.



And another first for Moon Festival 2009—several special guests came to meet and hang out with FCC families: a couple from China visiting and studying in this country through the University of Texas's Friendship Program; two high school exchange students from China who attended the event with their host families; and Tim and Pam Baker, founders of the extraordinary Phillip Hayden Foundation that since 1998 has provided over 3,000 surgeries, medically and educationally cared for over 4,000 orphans, and helped over 800 children find forever families. The Bakers have moved to Austin, and Moon Festival gave FCC families a chance to welcome them to town.

Always special guests at any FCC event—but a particular highlight this time—were the lion dancers and the drummers accompanying them who performed just before sunset. The lion's gold-colored costume glowed spectacularly in the fading light as FCC families gathered round to watch the fantastic dance. After several minutes, with the big drum still pounding, the lion suddenly leaped away from the crowd and like the pied piper danced down a path leading the children with their lanterns in a parade behind. Soon everyone followed. To the beat of the drum, the whole community moved over a darkening path down a hill to the water's edge where we set sail to the children's wishes and watched the wish-bound tea lights gleam in the dark, out on the water, under the autumn moon. Raea was right. It was the best day ever.

(More event pics on page 13)

2009 MOON FESTIVAL MEMORIES



Kids and adults worked together to create beautiful parasols, fans, and lanterns.

Tim Baker spoke.



The lion dancers performed magnificently.

The kids sent their wishes, prayers, and happy thoughts into the night.



China Care celebrated with FCC.



GETTING READY FOR THE TWEEN & TEEN YEARS

By Jane A. Brown, MSW

The mid-teen through early adult years are when the rubber meets the road in parenting adopted youngsters because these are the developmental stages when identity building intensifies, youngsters are distancing from their parents in order to gain independence, and there is marked increase in exposure to societal influences paired with independent examination of whether parents' beliefs, assumptions, and attitudes regarding adoption and race are valid and useful or are incorrect and not useful. Quite often, parents call on me with admissions that while they'd smugly reassured themselves a few years prior that their child was doing well, and that they'd been right to minimize adoption and race as relevant issues because their child seemed "fine" -- had lots of friends, was happy, had a close and loving relationship with them, was compliant and agreed with what they professed about adoption, and had exemplary behavior—their child now seemed like a stranger who'd replaced the child they knew and loved.

Parent-child conflict, silence, worrisome behavior, and lack of affection or willingness to spend time together had become the norm. While we cannot predict, when individual kids are age 10, whether or not they will be youngsters who have a turbulent time through adolescence, we DO know that a greater proportion of adopted youngsters DO have challenges and that the number and intensity of those challenges are greater than in the non-adopted youngsters, so that a higher percentage are utilizing mental health services during these years. While we do not need to pathologize our kids, we DO need to examine why this is, and look at strategies parents can develop long before their children reach this developmental stage to best ensure a smoother ride through adolescence, a more satisfying parenting experience through that stage, and a greater likelihood that their child will safely reach adulthood with a renewed closeness in their relationships with their parents.

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Parents who practice denial and avoidance-- choosing to believe that adoption and race are not major issues that influence how youngsters value or devalue themselves and shape self-theories in youngsters' minds which may not be visible to others (especially parents), and fail to keep themselves educated so as to be able to develop and practice the specialized parenting skills that help-- may set their children and themselves up for a more difficult time through this important life stage.

1. Develop effective parent-child communication. That means that BOTH parents in a 2-parent family must learn how to read and respond to emotion in their youngsters and how to encourage their children to recognize and express their feelings; and must have self-awareness of their own emotions and how that drives their responses / lack of appropriate responsiveness to their youngsters. Excellent communication skills will help parents avoid the trap of power struggles, and helps them keep their parental power at the stage when their youngsters need them to be able to do that.

2. From the beginning, be a parent and not a pal. There are some things-- following the family rules, behaving in socially appropriate ways, continuing to talk about adoption and race, staying connected to the adoption community, and learning to take responsibility for oneself-- that should NOT be negotiable. Parents, in other words, should not be asking their youngsters whether they WANT to attend adoption workshops, but should recognize that these are PARENT decisions that are not optional because they provide the framework for their children TO be able to talk with them about adoption and race. Parents should also recognize that poor behavior is destined to yield rejection of their child in their child's ethnic community as well as in other social situations. Conveying to one's child that they are "more special" than others may also produce youngsters who bully others.

3. Talk about race and racism, and do NOT tell your child an untruth: that it's possible for adults to be "colorblind" or that that is what is optimal. Youngsters, during the tween and teen years, who DO explore race and racism tend to develop healthier racial-ethnic identity and are less likely to develop internalized racism (identify as White and devalue themselves when they realize that others do not categorize them as White). Anti-racism training can help White parents have a more realistic understanding of racism, White Privilege, and the difference between the experience that they have and that which their transracially adopted youngster will have through life-- important for nurturing continued strong relationships that can survive the challenges of the teen and adult years when adoptees must come to terms, on their own, with being persons of color in a white-dominated society. It is vitally important that adoptive parents recognize that engaging in cultural experiences and celebrations has NOTHING to offer that will help their youngsters develop healthy racial-ethnic identity, even though these are fun things to do, and can help youngsters feel pride in their culture-of-origin.

4. Begin early to provide comprehensive, accurate information about sexuality, including talking with children about reproduction, the role their birth parents played in their beginnings, and how they are/are not like their birth parents, and how their birth parents' behavior is not a script for who they'll be and the life choices they will make. Adoptive parents who minimize or avoid these discussions set youngsters up to develop beliefs and attitudes about their birth parents that may result in trying-out risk-taking behavior.

5. The universal question that adopted individuals grapple with is: Why did my birth parents not do whatever it took to fix their problems well enough to have kept and raised me? While it is important for parents to discuss all of the possible circumstances and problems that may have led to a child becoming available for adoption (and PLEASE don't insist to your child that every child adopted from China was available because of the family planning policy), it is more important to help your child express his or her feelings regarding perceived rejection. The earlier parents delve into this and stop glossing over why the child was adopted, the better guarantee they have that their child will be able to be open and honest with them, rather than hiding their core feelings behind a mask, which is a set-up for behavioral problems down the road.

6. Touch is important! Tweens and teens NEED touch from BOTH parents, although their willingness to give and receive affection may change as they mature. Parents are in charge of finding ways to give touch that are acceptable to their kids: pats on the back, a simple touch on the arm or hand, brushing their hair, respectfully waiting until they are at home to bestow hugs and kisses on youngsters who are embarrassed by public shows of affection in front of their peers.

7. Verbal appreciation of your child needs to be expressed every day. This is even MORE important when there is frequent, parent-child conflict. Many adopted tweens and teens worry that they will become too hard for their parents to handle, and fear that they will be sent away. They need to hear their parents tell them that they are loved, that their characteristics are of value, and that their parents see and approve of much of what they do, even when they do not approve of some of the behavioral choices their son or daughter is making. Write a note and tuck it into a school bag. Write a love message on the bathroom mirror in lipstick. Leave a candy "kiss" on your child's plate at mealtime. Send a loving text message. Even when your child doesn't say so, these love messages matter, and they matter a LOT!

Finally, parents should NOT dread this fascinating and not-to-be-missed developmental stage with their youngsters. While there ARE challenges, there are also satisfying rewards in watching sons and daughters transform from children to adults in a few, brief, precious years. Parents who convey to their children that the goal is not total independence and self-reliance, but INTERdependence-- a mutually satisfying, lasting relationship between adults-- help free their children from fear that they are expected to go-it-alone-- which rekindles abandonment fears. Instead, parents who emphasize that their relationships are changing, and in ways that are healthy and wonderful, encourage and support their youngsters' growing independence and exploration of who they can be as adults-- laying down a strong foundation for a wonderful relationship for the future.

Do you have photos, articles, reviews, resources, ideas or thoughts to submit to the newsletter? Feel free to email them to the newsletter editor, Angela Meek, at ammeek@att.net. We'd love to hear from you!

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The Walker family was featured in our Spring 2009 issue. At the time of the Spring article, they were waiting to travel to adopt Annie. Here the entire united family can be seen at the Great Wall of China, wearing their FCC "Year of the Ox" shirts.

The Walker family wishes to express their enormous gratitude to Grant Me a Chance for their grant toward the adoption.