

Families with Children from China

Austin, Texas Chapter

Spring Newsletter

May, 2015



President's Note

After 3+ years as treasurer and almost 18 months as President of FCC Austin, I can report back on a few things: 1) If you build it, they will come. From a Chinese New Year (see pictures and article this issue) that remains one of our members' favorite events, to Melanie Chung-Sherman's workshops in March, to our retreat May 1-3 at Camp T Bar M, to our upcoming Summer Series, to Culture Camp—the names and faces of attendees may change, but the local commitment to connecting our kids and ourselves to one another and to their heritage never stops; 2) This thing leads itself. As often as not events are driven not just by board members, but also by you all volunteering as well. So thanks for that. And finally 3) the reason this commitment is so strong was most in evidence at our well-attended retreat at T Bar M. The community building was sooo much fun we are already planning another one for same time, next year!

I have one recent regret. I and my daughter Claire-Lily attended Melanie Chung-Sherman's workshops in March. Had I known how amazing it would be, I would have spent more time promoting the event. It was not an event specifically for kids or families "in trouble"—which some might consider as the primary reason to attend a workshop run by a family therapist. It was an event for anyone who cares about their parenting styles, who cares where their kids are developmentally, and who wants both theory and practical tips about what our children may experience as trans-racial adoptees. As an adoptee herself, Melanie has walked the walk and can talk the talk. But this topic is serious. A handful of suicides of transracial, international adoptees have gotten some publicity in recent months—so ensuring that all lines of communication are open and that we and our kids are plugged into resources, should we need them—can very well end up being a matter of life and death. Culture camp parents, your kids are in for a real treat in Melanie, this I know. I interview her later this issue to give members a chance to see what a terrific asset she will be to culture camp this summer.

As I write this on Mother's Day, I salute all of you Mothers—who will be reading this post-holiday—and in advance of Father's Day, salute the Dads involved in our community. As for the grandmas and grandpas, all extended families, friends of the family... it's become a cliché, but the line "it takes a village" couldn't apply more to the FCC community. And what a rich community we have—take a look later this issue of the group shot at the FCC T Bar M Retreat. As always, the kids just love tearing around that camp.

Before becoming involved in FCC I thought it was just a "clique." Seriously! Little did I know that a clique is not a clique when it opens its arms to all. Of course you have to open your arms to it so that it can let you in. I hope you feel welcome to become engaged as much or as little as you wish. That's the point.

Read in this issue about some of the things we have planned for you this summer. I hope you all have a great one, too! Peace to you and yours.

Alan Greenberg

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Summer Series Is Back!

Dim Sum, Pool Parties, and President's Pot luck? What do these things all have in common? Why, they are all part of this year's FCC Summer Series!

Summer 2015 will be here before you know it and the FCC board has already been hard at work planning some fun events to keep us all connected over the busy summer.

On **Saturday, June 13th**, we're planning to meet at **Fortune Restaurant** (N. Lamar) for **Dim Sum!** We'll need your advanced headcount to reserve a table (and maybe even a kids' table?!) to taste some delicious food together and learn about each other's summer plans. Stay tuned for event details.

On **Saturday, July 18th**, our fearless leader, Alan Greenberg, will host his *second* annual **President's potluck at his home**. Last year's potluck was infamous and fun. You won't want to miss this year's shindig, where perhaps he'll dazzle us with a repeat his terrific, home-cooked, beef with broccoli dish. (Editor's Note: Nope... this year it will be Fuschia Dunlop's Chicken with Ginger.)

We are planning a **pool party** the afternoon of **August 2nd**. Stay tuned for a location, which likely will be a public pool once we have them scouted out.

We also are planning a gathering with Xie Wei Chen, a Chinese American who we believe has many stories **to tell us about growing up in China** and about Chinese culture. Additionally, many of the monthly activities that FCC holds during the school year will continue during the summer months:

Wednesday lunch: come out and enjoy a casual lunch with a few FCC Moms! **The next one: June 10th**. FCC Women (we do allow men and kids) meet for lunch. To be included, **contact Abby at abby0814@icloud.com**.

Book Club: Join the monthly book club. Meet some new folks; have some great conversation; read some great books. The book club **meets the first Wednesday of the month, 6:30 pm, at a restaurant whose theme ties to the book** (we hear sometimes they actually discuss the book!) We pick a book that is available at the library and discuss over dinner. It is not an academic group and we do not judge if you have not finished the book. We just love to talk books!

- **June 3:** *Invention of Wings* by Sue Monk Kidd
- **July 1:** *City of Women* by Davis Gillham
- **August 5:** *Worthy Brown's Daughter* by Phillip Margolin

Contact Abby Turner (abby0814@icloud.com) if you want to try it out!

Mom's night out: have some fun and enjoy a night out with other FCC Mom's! **Every last Wednesday of every month**, mothers from FCC get together for a Mom's Night Out. In the summer, the dates are **June 24, July 22 and August 26**. Between 5 and 15 **moms meet at a restaurant at 6:30**. We often have a drink. We mostly talk about our kids. Go figure! If you would like to be notified about the location of this fun and casual event, **email Sandi Sykora Ross at sykora28@me.com**. ❖

Jena Goodridge is a current board member, and Abby Turner past president of FCC Austin.

FCC Retreat Fun

This past May 1–3, some 50+ FCC members gathered together to whoop it up at Camp T Bar M in Spicewood, Texas — about an hour west of Austin. A picture tells a thousand words, so here are several gazillion words worth of pictures. And: Save the date! We're going back Friday to Sunday, April 29–May 1, 2016!



The entire gang!



All ages helped out on meal teams.



Ladies of leisure—the kids are busy!



Tacos: yum!



Tween/Teen lunch team



No shortage of s'mores



Every wall needs a climber...

2015 FCC-UT Chinese Culture Camp

August 10-14 at the Asian American Resource Center



Robyn Stringfellow teaching Mandarin in 2014

Preparations for the 6th annual FCC-UT Chinese culture camp are well underway with camp directors Rowena Fong, Ed.D. and Becky Harding coordinating the process once again. Because of building renovations taking place at Summitt Elementary this summer, the camp has relocated to the new Asian American Resource Center on Cameron Road—where we held our past two Chinese New Year celebrations. The large ballroom and media-sensitive breakout rooms should serve the camp participants well.

“Every year, we try to change some of the format and activities so returning campers can be challenged and this year is no different,” said Becky Harding. The biggest change is that all the adoption journey sessions will be led by Dallas-based therapist (herself an adoptee from South Korea) **Melanie Chung-Sherman**. We are extending the camp day an hour on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday to accommodate Melanie’s teaching schedule. The camp directors also have added a lot more young Asian American role models to the curriculum, including a Skype session with Top

Chef Winner **Kristen Kish**. Harding added, “One of our camp goals is to shore up the children’s ethnic identity and we hope introducing them to some of these amazing people will do just that!”

Harding noted, “One of the most important aspects of our camp is the community we build with each other and with the Asian American community. When we started this camp, we wanted to create a structure for our children to explore the questions that they might have as they grow up. We are proud and happy that this is so clearly happening. The connection our kids make at camp are deep and meaningful. The fact that they now know people who are like them in their high school and college years is awesome. This year, for the very first time, all the counselors are adopted Chinese American high school and college students. We couldn’t ask for better role models for our children. **Alisan Turner** is back for her sixth year as a counselor and will share details about her experience of returning to China this summer as a part of the Half the Sky Foundation volunteer project.”



Volunteers, leaders, and camp counselors



Camper Field Trip to Buddhist Temple

Additional cultural activities will include extensive Mandarin classes taught by **Robyn Stringfellow** and **Shu Zhou**. In addition to classroom activities, these teachers will escort the older classes on field trips to the MT Market, Chinatown Center, an acupuncture school, and a Buddhist temple. Houston-based chef **Dorothy Huang** will return to teach a cooking class and the major cities of China will be featured each day. All campers will learn about the Panda Research Center as well.

Every year, the campers participate in a service project, and this year the campers will be creating placemats for the Meals on Wheels program. Led by teacher and FCC parent, **Debbie Aleman**, the idea of service will be discussed, then placemats will be made and laminated in preparation for delivery to the Meals on Wheels headquarters.

Final tuition is due June 1st and registered families can expect an emailed camp schedule and other information by late June. ❖

Bedtime Breakthrough

By Carrie van der Wal



At first, when Alan asked me to contribute this article, I thought the request was silly, but on reflection, I wish that someone had told me about these tactics several years ago, so why not share?

Our highly energized, almost nine year old twin sons are the kind of kids that absolutely need at least ten hours of sleep. They've also been sharing a bedroom for the past three years, during which they typically would keep one another awake far past their bedtime story each night. About half an hour after lights out, they'd still be awake and playing, so we'd have to separate them to get them to sleep, moving one son to our bed, then carrying him back to his an hour or two later. This happened at least three times a week, sometimes as often as five. Not only was it a hassle, but they were losing sleep—precious to both them and us.

I recently hit on the idea of post-bedtime story guided meditations, and it's working like a charm. Initially, I borrowed/copied children's meditation CDs from the library. Since then, my husband has been playing the meditations through his phone, via YouTube; the boys are only aware of the audio. Though our before-sleeping ritual has now evolved from 30 minutes of bedtime story to 45 or 50 minutes (meditation added), the boys are much more relaxed in general, and at bedtime; they're usually asleep before the guided meditation ends. To put it another way, since we've instigated the bedtime meditations, we've only

had to resort to the move-a-kid-into-our-bed tactic twice in the last two months. And both of those times, the other boy was already asleep; the awake one just needed a change of scenery to get to sleep.

Adding to the magical meditation mix, I'd recently been reminded of the calming effects of lavender. Instead of diving into the essential-oils-with-diffuser rabbit hole, I wanted to try something convenient (and less expensive) first. Soon after starting the meditations, I found "Mommy's Bliss Sweet Slumber Mist" on Amazon. Supposedly, the lavender, chamomile, and ylang ylang extracts in it "promote rest and relaxation." Both of our boys sleep with a lovey blanket,

so I give each lovey several spritzes of the mist right before their bedtime story. They emphatically love the smell and, more often than not, remind me to "Spray Mr. Black!" or "Spray Mr. Blue!" before bedtime. Yes, the loveys are named and, apparently, are far more lovable when misted. We refer to the mist as "The Sleepy Spray," so perhaps it's partly a placebo effect, but whatever it is, it's working, as are the meditations. I truly believe that our sons are benefiting twofold by the guided meditations at bedtime and beyond. I just wish I had thought of all this a thousand nights ago. ❖

Board member Carrie van der Wal is in charge of Culture and Outreach for FCC Austin.

Children's Guided Meditations that We've Used:

- **These CDs are available from the Austin public library:** *Bedtime Meditations for Kids*, *Enchanted Meditations for Kids*, *Mermaids & Fairy Dust*, all by Christiane Kerr, and *Indigo Ocean Dreams* by Lori Lite.
- **From iTunes:** *Starbright—Meditations for Children* by Lucy Bell
- **On YouTube:** *Hot Air Balloon Ride: A Guided Meditation for Kids*, *Children's Visualization For Sleep & Dreaming* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlv6Y1tq1sQ>), *Children's Sleep Meditation Space Adventure Visualization for Sweet Dreams* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5Xppqi6azY>), *STORYTIME Meditation for Children's Sleep | Song & Nature Sounds for Sleeping Kids (The Enchanted Tree)* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a--6xrWV-Jo>), all by SleepEzyTonight, and *The Fairy & Leprechaun Spoken Word Guided Meditation for Children for Sleep & Relaxing* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_-FZ2OvvUcM), by Jason Stephenson
- **The Sleepy Spray:** *Mommy's Bliss Sweet Slumber Mist* ❖

Friends of the Family:
A Series to Highlight those Supportive of our Community

Featured Friend:
Melanie Chung-Sherman,
LCSW-S, CTS, LCPAA



By Alan Greenberg

I had the privilege of attending Melanie's Parent Workshop this past March, and now wish I had known beforehand and been able to share with FCC Austin members what an excellent, wise woman and counselor Melanie is. She combined a rich understanding of what all the research says about attachment theory, identity formation, brain development, and child development with a very human, empathetic understanding of the range of feelings adoptive kids can feel as part of transracial families. Every one of our adopted children is unique and every one of our families is unique. So because everyone is in their own journey, Melanie and other counselors we know are a great resource to FCC Austin. We interview Melanie in this issue of the newsletter so that parents can get to know a little more about her before she works with our kids at Culture Camp. Some of her experiences described below may feel a bit raw but they are her true life experiences and helped make her the person and counselor she is today.

Alan: You and your younger brother were adopted from South Korea in the 1970s into a transracial family in the U.S. I know there isn't space enough here for a full description, but where did you grow up and what was your overall experience as a transracial adoptee?

Melanie: *I was placed with my parents when I was eight months old. I am the oldest of three siblings. My younger brother (non-biologically related) was adopted less than one year after I was placed. My parents gave birth to my youngest brother three years after I was adopted. I lived in Minneapolis, MN until I was seven years old. Minnesota is the home of Children's Home Society, which was one of the largest placing agencies for Korean children, at that time. Before my family relocated to Texas, there were several other transracial adoptees in our neighborhood and school. When we moved to the South, we were literally some of the only Asians in our community.*

I grew up in a predominantly white, working-class suburb outside of Fort Worth, Texas. At that young age, I did not have words to conceptualize the racism and discrimination that my brother and I faced on a daily basis. As an adult, I fully recognize what happened to us. I have distinct memories of blatant, aggressive racism directed towards both my brother and me. Each act was expressed in different ways. I have memories of being called "chink," "slanty-eyes," "ugly," and many other derogatory terms growing up. A vivid memory was when my middle school English teacher, Mrs. Talbert, called me up to the front of class one day and asked me

to empty my locker in front of everyone. She accused me of stealing her books. I knew she did not like me, but I did not understand why. After embarrassing me and giving me a zero, another student found the "lost" book lying on her desk chair. Nothing happened to her. My parents did not advocate for my brother or I—and told me that the incident was a miscommunication, and that it could not be racially motivated. That year, she was awarded, "Teacher of the Year." That incident, along with many other microaggressions, left me confused, angry, and vulnerable well into college. I already felt something was inherently wrong inside because of being adopted. Rather than growing silent, I became a fighter and pushed people away so they could not wound me. Outwardly I projected a strong determination, cool demeanor, perfectionism, silence, and cut-throat competitiveness, but underneath I was extremely fragile, sad, anxious, and vulnerable. Most did not know, but for those who tried to get too close—I would push away. I did not want to be rejected again. I tried to become as white as possible—assimilate into white culture and become that girl that no one would question again. I pushed my Asianness down, but the more

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I tried to push down—the more it came back. That came at a high cost that I did not realize until I was a young adult and lived independently.

My adoptive parents loved us, but that was not enough to protect us from a racialized world. Their privileged status could never shelter us from the pangs of discrimination, but what was more alienating, was the fact that many times their privilege did not allow them a lens to see racism and bigotry for what it was—or how it might affect us, which left me feeling alienated at times. I was told repeatedly that others were “just jealous” or “did not know better,” and to “be nice,” but that did not help when I was taunted at school, church, Girl Scouts, and beyond. The aggressors looked like my parents and adoptive family—to a child, it was very confusing. My parents truly believed we were in a diverse community, but what they did not comprehend was that diversity did not extend itself within our family or world. The vast majority of doctors, coaches, teachers, nurses, counselors, church, friends, extended family, and beyond were all white. Diversity was a construct, not a lived experience. Granted, we attended some Korean culture camps, but the camp counselors were typically white, adoptive parents teaching Korean culture as well. I learned about the basic tenets of Korean culture, but not how to traverse the current American (southern) culture as a person of color.

As an adult, I do not fault my parents because their lived experiences were vastly different than my own. Before my father passed away, we had countless discussions regarding those varied experiences. We learned from one another—and in some instances were able to do some “do-overs.” I would not trade that. Over the years, I have made the conscious decision to actively integrate, or

reculturate, my ethnicity and identity as an adoptee, Asian-American, and woman. I have had the privilege of returning to my birth country ten times and seeking out Korean culture on my terms. I have discovered that being Korean or American is a misguided concept—it is learning to be me. I am a hybrid of many nuanced cultural experiences. These are not mutually exclusive of one another, but inherently embraced by me. My husband and I have made the choice to seek diversity within our community and actively live that out. I find myself at a new crossroads as I parent and teach my sons. They will have their own journey to navigate as they grow up.

Alan: What led you to your career in social work?

Melanie: Honestly, I had not heard of social work until I worked at an international adoption agency years ago. The agency and the day-to-day workings with adoptive families, adoptees, and the adoption process was my first introduction to the field of social work. I actually graduated with my Bachelors in Fine Arts and Theater. (Quite honestly, theatre was the best, and most expensive, therapeutic intervention during my young adulthood).

One of my first jobs in child welfare was as the post adoption assistant for an international adoption agency. I assisted the post adoption director with culture camps, outreach, adoption education, and returning to Korea with adoptive families. It changed my life course. Working professionally in the field of adoption was in my blood. I recognized that to expand my professional horizons and work more in-depth, I needed to go back to graduate school and pursue my Masters in Social Work.

Alan: In what ways does being a transracial adoptee yourself inform your approach to working with others?

Melanie: Beyond being a transracial adoptee, my overall adoptee status creates a valued and informed sanctuary for triad members, which has been previously dominated by white adoption professionals and/or adoptive parents, but rarely allowed space for adoptees or first parents. There has actually been “pushback” within the adoption field as more adoptees are entering the arena and challenging old paradigms and long-held concepts about best practices, particularly regarding issues such as transracial adoption, search and reunion, trauma, grief and loss. These frame assessment and overall treatment modalities. By openly asking and acknowledging how racial microaggressions might impact an adoptee and family system, it opens a different realm of possibility. Most adoptees, if racism has not been addressed, will either minimize or will not know it is racism when it is happening. What might have appeared as rebellion, disobedience, or “attachment issues,” might actually be the result of racialized bullying, aggression, or trauma at school or within the community. There are times in which it is important for transracial adoptees to discuss discrimination with another person of color, and acknowledge the experiences for what they are worth and how that adoptee has processed those experiences. Educating, and at times challenging, adoptive parents regarding their approach to racialized experiences, helps parents address ways to keep their children safe and how to approach their child regarding race.

Alan: How do you address the different age groups you will be seeing at Culture Camp to ensure age appropriate discussions?

Melanie: Every group is unique. Most of the adoptees I work with have come from

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difficult beginnings, thus, many times their chronological age may not coincide with their developmental. I'm trained in Theraplay® so meeting the needs of kids emotionally is vital. There is a thoughtful balance in every group between challenge and engagement, but ultimately kids must feel emotionally safe and secure to begin exploration. That is by far the most important factor for me. All kids have the freedom to "pass." Inevitably, there may be some discussions that may not meet the needs of a child. I want to hear from parents regarding their concerns if that happens. What never ceases to amaze me is that what parents consider "tough" is some of the most vivid, deep, and thoughtful work that kids express when given a loving, nurturing, and patient environment.

Summer Photo Fun!

This summer, take pictures of your family's escapades and share them with FCC. Please send photos by September 1st to abby0814@icloud.com. Photos should not be professionally photographed and should be taken in 2015. The photos will be judged in five categories: You're the Silliest, Wild Adventure, That's Adorable, Quite Creative, and Water Fun. Photos will be judged by non-participating FCC friends and family. Winners will receive a \$10 gift card and eternal notoriety!

Submitting photos will give FCC permission to put them in newsletters and slide shows.

Submit photos to Abby Turner by 9/1 at abby0814@icloud.com. ❖

Alan: How does being a parent yourself—you have two boys of your own—inform your practice of social work, and how does your practice of social work inform your own parenting?

Melanie: It is instrumental. When I started in the field, I was a kid in my early 20s. I wish I could go back and apologize to the parents I worked with before parenthood. I was privileged to be exposed to attachment theory and child development well before I became a parent. By working in a field so intimately tied to me, it has allowed me a vantage point that challenged me to process my adoption and relinquishment. I sought outside professional counsel to make sense of my narrative before I could genuinely sit before clients in

a counseling room or be emotionally present for my children. As professionals, we cannot legitimately walk with others in their hurt, pain, or mess unless we work through ours... and continue that work.

The level of empathy, compassion, patience, and playfulness with my boys and every client has changed within me after I became a mom. I can sit with triad members, many who come to the agency I work with (ChristianWorks for Children), and are broken, lost, and hurting. It is an honor to bear witness with others as they explore their lives and experiences. It is an equal, if not more, of an honor to parent my children. It really is by grace that we, as parents, can get up each day and do our "good enough" on behalf of our kids, families, and loved ones. ❖

FCC Members in the News

Suzanne Roberts and **Sarah Goodfriend** made major national and international news a few months ago as the first same-sex couple to be married in Texas. We congratulate them for their courage and fortitude and patience, and wish Sarah in particular good health going forward. This picture shows them at a press conference with daughters Dawn and Ting. ❖



Chinese New Year 2015

FCC's members celebrated the Year of the Ram on Sunday February 22, 2015 at the Asian American Resource Center. Kids and adults alike participated in crafts, photo opportunities and face painting just to name a few activities. We enjoyed a dance performance by our very own **Rose Morgan** and were treated to the sweet sounds of

the **ACES Chinese Children's Choir**. Everyone enjoyed Chinese food and cake for dessert. We played bingo to raise money for our charitable donations such as Half the Sky Foundation, and of course, finished off the afternoon with a performance from the **Summitt Elementary School lion dancers**. There were squeals of delight from young and old as the dancers wove their way through the room eating red envelopes.

A big thank you to everyone who helped with this event and especially all the volunteers! Planning is getting started for next year so please contact Robin Davis at robinsdavis2010@gmail.com or Amy Harris at amy_harris5@hotmail.com to get involved or provide feedback. ❖

