

Children's Bridge

INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION CONSULTANTS



making families happen



CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Thanks to photographer Nicole Nel for taking so many wonderful photos!



The Children's Bridge 20th Anniversary Celebration

Celebrate Together!
"Making Families Happen
for 20 years!"

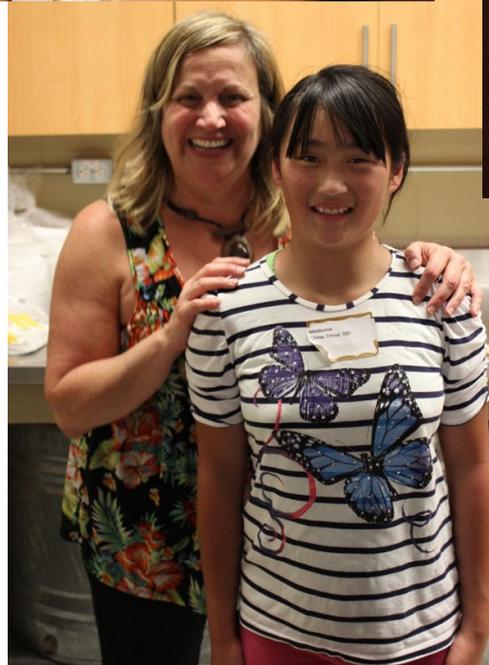
Saturday August 9th, 2014 marked The Children's Bridge 20th Anniversary Celebration at Lakeside Gardens. We enjoyed this wonderful occasion with over 370 children and families in attendance (a sold out event!).

Families enjoyed the following entertainment and activities:

Thai Dance Troupe of Ottawa
Tae Kwon Do with Tae Eun Lee
Afro-Caribbean Dancing with
Tarrah Mauricette
Chinese Dances with Cleo Page
and Kateleen Jian
Junkyard Symphony with Jonny
Hallyu – K Pop Dance Team
Dovercourt Bouncy Castle
Games and Facepainting
Craft Tables
Multicultural Foods

Many thanks to The Children's Bridge staff team, volunteers, children, teens and families for making the day a huge success! It was a day to remember!


Children's Bridge



My Motherland Tour

By Tamlyn Joy Ah Jin Stewart

What do you think of when you hear the country, Korea?

Well, most people might think of Korean food or, maybe even anime.

Do you know what I think of?

My motherland.

At the end of June my mom, dad, and I flew along with three other families to South Korea. Neither of the families had been back (or had never gone) to Korea since 2002, including our family.

On the first day (the day after we flew in), we went to SWS (the Social Welfare Society). Unfortunately we could not meet up with my foster mother but we did get to go into the nursery and play with the “older” babies! We went to the nursery with the Slot family and had the most amazing time! I was holding this ‘chubbier’ baby boy who was adorable. I called him Joey!

After SWS we went to eat lunch, we ate bibimbap, it was delicious!

The next day we went to Everland, it reminded me of the Korean version of Disney! My favourite ride was definitely the one that took you up in the air and flipped you every which way! (Including upside down.) We also went on this “jungle trek” boat where we saw a bear walking right beside the bus/boat! Everland was definitely my favourite place we went to while we were in Korea!

My favourite meal we ate was chicken ginseng soup! It was so tasty! But, I think I put a little too much salt in it!

After we ate, we went to make kimchi. Before we made kimchi, we tried on hanboks, I hadn't worn a hanbok in almost three years so I was excited to try one on!

When we made kimchi we had to put on gloves to mix the paste into the cabbage leaves, it was way too messy for me!



CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

MY MOTHERLAND TOUR CONTINUED...

That was our last day with Lara, our tour guide and Jake, our bus driver. I don't think any of the families wanted to say goodbye to them! Lara was so kind and nice, she was the first tour guide I'd ever met and would've definitely been the nicest if I had met any others, and Jake was the greatest bus driver I'd ever had! We had an amazing time on the tour and in and around Seoul!



The next day, we flew with the Jeffery family to Jeju Island. Jeju Island was very beautiful and mountainous.

We went to see the spirited garden and met the creator of the garden, Mr. Bum-young Sung. He invited us to have tea with him and he autographed his book for us!

That night, we went to this "noodle house" and ate noodle soup; the noodles were absolutely enormous and so long, too!

Two days after that, we had to fly back to Seoul. It was pouring outside because of Typhoon Neoguri, so we weren't able to see any other attractions. The night before we left we did have a chance to try Jeju's "best fried chicken". I had to admit; it was the best-fried chicken I had ever eaten!



While we were sitting in the airplane heading back to Canada, I was looking at my photos that I had taken on my iPad of Korea and realized how beautiful, mountainous, breath-taking, amazing, and pure my motherland really is.



GAME PLAN

By Natalie Corbett Sampson

The black flies buzz around my head and get caught up under the bill of my ball cap. The kids are losing focus, some are crouched and digging in the infield dirt, others fidget with their gloves or hats, but I call out to bring their attention back to the batter. The batter – that one's mine. I tease her that she's three apples tall; her strike zone is minute. Her straight black ponytail lies on her back reaching her waist. She's strong. She's smart, concentrating on the pitcher and the ball coming in. With a swing and a crack the ball sails just foul of the third baseman and she grins, proud of the hit.

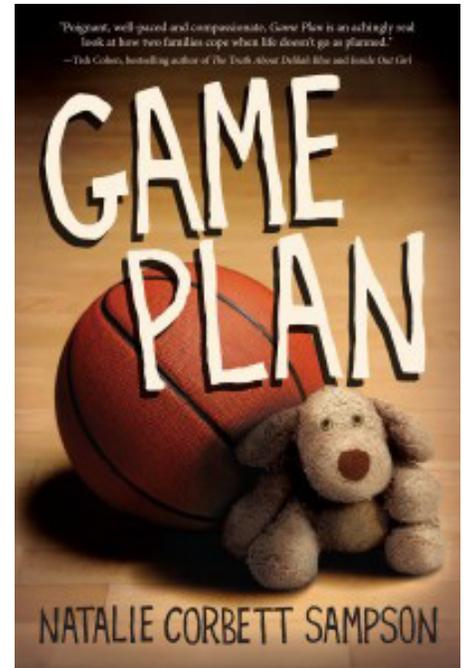
Like any momma, when I watch my girl it's hard for me to believe she's grown so much, that she's eight and that she's mine. There was a time when I feared I wouldn't find her.

AnnaWen has been home with us for almost six years, and there are still moments when I look at her and can hardly believe it. We entered the adoption process when changes were swift and unpredictable in the China programme. When we logged in with the China Center for Adoption Affairs (now the China Centre for Children's Welfare and Adoption), our anticipated wait was to be eighteen months. That wait eventually ballooned to over seven years, but we followed fate and switched to the Waiting Children Program and ultimately it took two years to adopt our daughter. The process faced changes in both fees and rules, slowed referrals and rumours of shut down ... the uncertainty was crushing. Even six years later, watching her bat at the practice, I'm still kind of surprised we found her. I don't know if that wonder will ever go away.

During our adoption process I kept a blog. Somehow getting my thoughts organised enough to string words together helped me work through and keep the stress in check. Once I was home with Wen the blog was complete, like our family, so I stopped writing and moved on to other projects.

It's an understatement to say that adoption changes everything. We sought out resources to address the questions and emotions we were feeling and anticipating. Research and workshops and reading equipped us well. But I was unprepared for the way I would feel about Wen's birth family. I knew going in that we would have little to no information about who they were and why they couldn't keep her. I didn't think it would bother me as much as it has and continues to do – especially her mother. Every moment that I'm grateful for the privilege of knowing and raising AnnaWen I also wonder who she is, where she is, and how she handles not having her beautiful daughter with her. I worry. I pray she's okay. Not knowing eats at me.

I have gained a new respect for mothers who lose their children through adoption, and that drove me to write a book about one brave girl. Ella Parker is a high school student who chooses to place her baby for adoption after an unplanned teenage pregnancy. I know Ella is not AnnaWen's mother, and Ella's story is not hers, but writing the novel allowed me to process the possible emotions Wen's mother may have felt – may con-



tinue to feel – in a way that brought me some closure to my questions. We didn't find our daughter through private infant adoption but I was able to use my experiences and feelings from our waiting time to also write about an adoptive mother, Katherine. Katherine's story parallels Ella's as they both work through the process of making the right decisions for themselves and their families.

Game Plan is a novel. It's fictional, but it's true. The foundation of the story is the miracle of adoption and the painful truth that while one family is created another is lost. The dedication reads: "An eternal thank you to the Mama who shares my girl, for giving her a shot and giving us the piece that completes our family." But of course it's not enough, it'll never be enough.

Thai Family Reunion - July 2014

By Lori Osmond

My husband Derek and I adopted our son Joel from Chiang Mai, Thailand in April, 2012 when he was almost 3.5 years old. Throughout the process, we were fortunate enough to connect with several other families from the Thailand program, through social media, internet forums and the Children's Bridge chat group. Over the years we supported each other through the wait, shared our hopes and fears, and rejoiced as referrals came in and children came home with their families. Strong friendships were formed through our shared experience, and our family was even lucky enough to share travel and board meeting dates in Thailand with the Tilley / Maloney family.



In the summer of 2013, my family and the Phelan / Perry family traveled to Boston as part of a reunion of families with children from Thailand. Most families were from the United States, and we really enjoyed the trip and the opportunity for our boys to meet each other and other children from Thailand. Discussions about a Canadian reunion began, and it was decided that we should hold our event in Toronto to coincide with the Taste of Thailand Festival.

Hall of Fame. All seven families met at the Taste of Thailand Festival on the Saturday afternoon, and the Hand / Lennon family kindly hosted our whole group for a BBQ at their home that evening. We had a wonderful weekend exploring the city, meeting new friends, re-connecting with old

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

On the weekend of July 17-20, seven families met in Toronto, coming from St. John's, Halifax, Ottawa and the Toronto area. We planned several events that the families could join in as they wished – Centre Island, dinner at the Old Spaghetti Factory, Blue Jays game, Ripley's aquarium, and the Hockey



THAI REUNION CONTINUED...

friends, and watching our children build friendships and have a great time laughing and playing together. We marveled at how fortunate we are that we were able to meet so many wonderful families through our adoption experience.

Some highlights of the reunion weekend, from the kids and their parents:

Joel, age 5, when asked what he liked best about the weekend: “Everything! Having fun with all my friends. But now I miss my friends. Next time can we do it for 10 days?”

Allison, mom to Tyler, age 4: “By far the best part of the Thai Canadian family reunion had to be the BBQ that one of the families in Toronto hosted. This gave the kids a chance to play, be noisy and just have a great time getting to know each other while we had a chance to really get to know some of the families that we had just met for the first time this weekend and as well as catch up properly with some old friends. Another highlight for me and Jon came earlier the day of the BBQ at the taste of Thailand cultural festival at Nathan Phillip square. At one point I was chatting with another family when I looked up on stage to see my 4 year old son, Tyler, taking part in a Thai dancing lesson. My husband Jon told me that when the announcer asked for volunteers, Tyler dropped his food (very unusual for him) and ran on stage where he was the only child.”

Tina, mom to Jack, age 3.5: “Jack enjoyed playing with his old

and new friends and was really interested in watching the Thai dancing and Muay Thai demonstrations. Exploring the city was fun, too. Jack says his favourite thing was the Hockey Hall of Fame with Joel and Jaxin.”

The weekend was a wonderful experience for all of us. Love to our Thailand family – we can’t wait to do it again soon!



Welcome

WC CHINA

Welcome home to Lilah, Wu Qiu Shi (**Guangdong Province**), daughter of David and Michelle of Dundas, Ontario

Welcome home to Kaelyn, Bai Wei Yong (**Guangdong Province**), daughter of Nelson and Nancy of Mississauga, Ontario

Our Journey to Cate

By Leslie Tutty

In October 2012 we received the call we had been waiting for, the news that a little girl was waiting for us in Thailand. The official referral of our beautiful daughter Cate came a few months later - a truly amazing day - and one of those moments you just never forget. The shaking hands and breathless excitement as you open the envelope that contains all the precious details and first pictures of your child. Of course the tension that day had been made a thousand times worse as I was forbidden to open the envelope until my husband returned from a business trip that night; what torture! My husband Jason and I had already been in the process of adopting from Thailand for just over 3 years from our initial application submittal. What followed our acceptance of Cate's referral was an even more excruciating 13 months wait to travel to Thailand to bring our daughter home. As the Thai New Year, Cate's 3rd birthday, and finally Christmas passed us by without much news of a travel date, I began to think we might never get there. It was truly one of the hardest things I have ever had to endure. Even just through the limited updates and photos we received of Cate in those 13 months, we had become very attached to her. The pictures we received of her opening gifts we had sent for her birthday were amazing, but couldn't quell the heartache of not being able to experience it with her in person. Finally finally after so many long months of dealing with delays, red tape and political upheaval in Thailand, the day we had longed for arrived.

Jason and I travelled to Bangkok in early April of this year, staying there for 5 weeks. Our time there was longer than most other families due to special circumstances obtaining Cate's documentation for entry into Canada. While initially wary

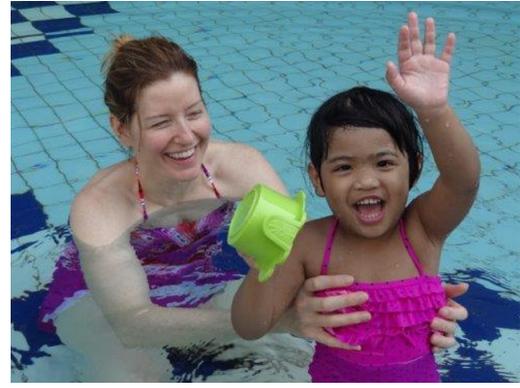
CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



First day with Cate at TRCCH (Thai Red Cross Children's Home)



Hotel pool



JOURNEY TO CATE CONTINUED...

being away from home for so long, looking back wouldn't change a thing. Our extended stay allowed us to see so much and gave us so much alone time with Cate. It enabled us to begin to get to know one another without external distractions or pressures and to start the bonding process.

The flight there was an interesting part of the experience as we were able to get a small glimpse into Asian culture in Taipei and flying on a Thai Airways. It was a long series of flights to be sure but an enjoyable experience. We arrived in the afternoon and met our wonderful coordinator Karn at the airport in Bangkok. A truly amazing and beautiful person, Karn was our voice in Thailand and provided so much support and guidance to us throughout our stay. I cannot imagine our journey without her. April being the hottest month in Thailand, we were



Cate and Karn

certainly hit with a wall of heat and humidity leaving the airport. Most of our days there were close to 40 degrees Celsius, 50 sometimes with the humidity, but it was definitely a welcome change from our cold and dreary spring in Halifax. Jason and I checked into our hotel and despite being somewhat exhausted from our trip, started exploring the city that night. We visited an area of the city known as the Asiatique, a cluster of shops, restaurants and attractions on the Chao Phraya riverfront. This was a wonderful area of the city which we returned to a few times during our stay.

The next morning was the first time we would meet Cate. We were escorted by Karn and our faithful shuttle driver to the Thai Red Cross Children's Home where we were shown through the office area and introduced to the director and her assistant. It was only a few anxious minutes later that we saw Cate for the first time.

She was very shy, hesitant and guarded with us, but we were able to play a bit with her for a couple hours that morning and then again after lunch in the afternoon.

It was very difficult to get her to interact with us. She was extremely quiet and fiercely stubborn, but just being able to comb her hair and read her books was amazing. The staff at the Thai Red Cross was wonderful and the children there so happy and so well cared for. I often comment that how well Cate is



Thai Dancers on the street

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

JOURNEY TO CATE CONTINUED...

now is a testament to how much she was loved and cared for at the Children's Home. We are so very thankful to all the caregivers and staff that had a hand in Cate's initial upbringing.

The last night on our own was spent at a small Thai restaurant by our hotel. All the food we had in Thailand was so fresh and delicious and this was no exception. We certainly miss all the wonderful spicy flavours, fresh fruit and coconut juice, iced coffee and especially all the yummy street food.

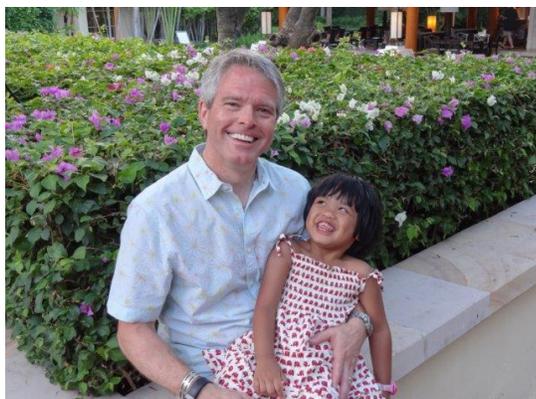
The next morning we returned to the Thai Red Cross Children's Home to visit with Cate again and present our gifts and donation to the staff. This was the day that Cate would come back with us for good and leave all she had known for the past 3 years. It's hard to even imagine what she was thinking but it was evident by her demeanor that she knew what was about to take place. It was a day filled with a lot of emotion and nervous energy but also a lot of process, documentation and preparation for the days ahead to get everything to the Canadian Embassy for our return home. Finally after a very long day of new sites and sounds for Cate we settled back at the Hotel and I fed my daughter for the first time. It was such a surreal feeling and she was so quiet and withdrawn it is hard to equate that little girl with the one we know today.

Adopting a toddler, as we would soon learn, comes with its own unique challenges, made a thousand times worse when they don't speak a word of English. Besides the initial shock of becoming a parent and caregiver, there is suddenly a small stranger in your midst with a fully formed personality and thoughts and feelings about how things should be. On top of all that she is

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



Getting lunch



Hua Hin



Yummy Giant Coconut

The Grand Palace



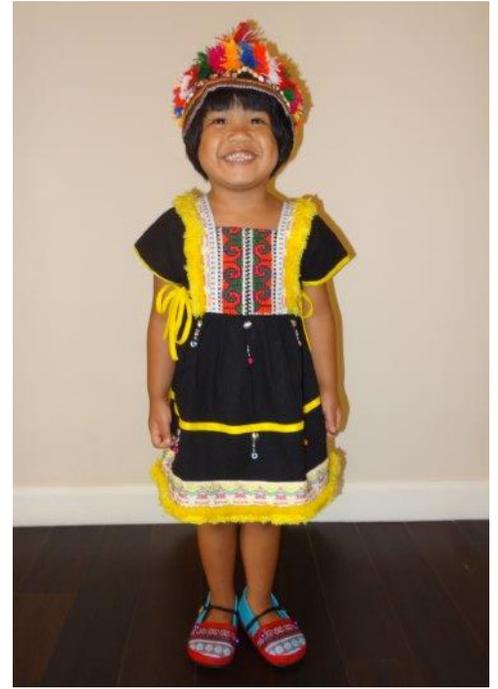
JOURNEY TO CATE CONTINUED...

grieving the loss of all she has ever known - which for a toddler is a big world. As much as I thought I was prepared for my new role, my ill conceived expectations were thrown out the window on day 2. The little girl I thought I knew from the pictures, the one built up in my mind from the past 13 months of waiting was gone and we started all over again, together, getting to know one another and starting to attach. As much as the first few days were overwhelming, and sometimes still are, for the most part Cate adjusted with us extremely well, and as I always say to my husband - she stepped out of that Children's Home and never looked back. While Cate did regress during our time in Thailand, most notably with her eating habits and the fact that she wanted to be carried non-stop, her days were filled with so many new experiences, and it was amazing to see her blossom as she became more comfortable with us and her new surroundings. Our first few trips to the hotel pool, Cate screamed at the water and wouldn't even put her toes in - she had never been to a pool before. By day 5 we couldn't get her out of the water! By the end of the trip she was a fearless swimmer, jumping in by herself with only her floaties on. Along with our daily trips to the pool, we tried to keep Cate very occupied and as we soon discovered she loved being out around people and seeing new things. She was a good traveller and we were able to experience a lot of the city with her.

Since she refused to be in the stroller for the first few weeks, almost every day we took the Sky Train or walked with her to a new destination in the city. We visited the Grand Palace, Reclining Buddha, Tallest Buddha in the World, Jim Thompson House Museum, the National Art Gallery, Queen Sirikit Park, the Funarium indoor playground, Ocean World, many of the various malls around the city, the Chatuchak weekend market, Safari World, rode a tuk tuk, took the river boat transport system, and explored the streets of a Bangkok. We were also able to experience Songkran (Thai New Year celebrations), which was a crazy time in the city with much celebration and water fights in the streets and yes, we did get wet!

Closer to the end of our stay, we took a 5 day holiday in Hua Hin, a resort area about 3 hours outside of Bangkok. It was a wonderful break from the city and the first time we felt relaxed and like we were on a bit of a vacation. Cate, who had never seen or touched sand before, resisted before we could get her to walk on the beach. It was incredible to see her so uncertain of this foreign substance as she likely thought she would be swallowed up in it, never to be seen again. After a few demonstrations and placing some sand in her hand, she timidly placed a toe on the sand. It would take a couple days for her to become fully comfortable with walking on the beach. Cate loved the ocean and

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



Cate in her traditional Thai Outfit purchased at the weekend market



Songkran



JOURNEY TO CATE CONTINUED...

various pools on the resort and even went down the large water slide a couple times. The staff there, and the people of Thailand in General, were all so friendly and just loved Cate; I think every staff member knew her name a day into our stay!

By the end of our 5 weeks in Thailand it was definitely hard to say goodbye; the people, the food and the culture were all so amazing, but I was ready to come home and introduce Cate to her new life in Canada. Our trip back was uneventful and Cate loved the plane - of course it didn't hurt that she slept for nearly 12 hours during the longest leg of the flight!

We have been back home for nearly 4 months now and Cate is thriving. We are so blessed to have such a wonderful little girl in our midst. Babbling away in English now, she loves the outdoors, canoeing, hiking and the beach. She is a very strong willed little girl who loves being around people and out seeing and experiencing new things. We often talk about Thailand with her and look at all the pictures from our trip. She remembers her first home with fondness and we assure her we will return to visit when she is just a bit older. Our journey was so many things; overwhelming, frustrating at times, exhausting, amazing, challenging, life changing, and filled with so much joy. As our daughter was officially handed off to us at the Department of Social Welfare board meeting 3 weeks into our trip, an elderly Thai woman on the Board looked at us and told us very directly to make sure that one, we didn't spoil her and two, to please take good care of her. A very emotional send off from Thailand, but as the journey continues, we will spend the rest of our lives taking very good care of little Cate, our wonderful, beautiful daughter.



Arriving home - Halifax Airport

