

A Thanksgiving to Remember (and a Lesson in Gratitude)

It was just days before Thanksgiving. We had been waiting for months and months to find out when we would travel to bring our baby boy home from China.

We had been matched with him in early January, and he had turned 2 just weeks earlier—without us. I was starting to wonder whether we would even make it to China before Christmas.



At the office, I immersed myself in my work. But of course I checked my email from time to time, as I had for 11 months, to see if there were any updates from our adoption agency. And then suddenly there it was—an email with our travel itinerary for China.

We hadn't even received our official travel approval from China. This was obviously a mistake.

Or was it? I called our agency.

Me: We received an email from you with travel dates, but we never received our travel approval.

Man at agency: Oh, no. I must have hit the wrong button. I'm sorry. That's my fault.

Me: So this e-mail is a mistake?

Agency: Yes, I'm sorry. I've been having trouble with the email system. I was at a complete loss. For what felt like ages I couldn't even speak.

Me: So. You'll let us know when our travel approval does arrive?

Agency: Of course. I'm sorry about that.

Me: Yes, for a minute there, I thought you had made my day.

Agency: And now I just destroyed it.

Me: Unfortunately, yes.

Agency: Wait a second. This is John and Rita?

Me (OK, he's just trying to show me he knows who we are): Yes.

Agency: Adopting from Hunan Province?

Me (thinking he's just torturing me now by reading from our file): Yes.

Agency: Born Nov. 10, 2007?

Me: Yes, yes, yes.

Agency: Then this is right. These are your travel dates. I must have sent the TA notification to the wrong address.

Me (stunned): So we are going to China?

Agency: Yes, you'll travel next week. I'm so sorry about...

Me: Stop apologizing. I need to go call my husband.

So after months and months of waiting for a child and after years and years of waiting to become parents, we spent our Thanksgiving packing for China.

That was seven years ago. And Thanksgiving has never been the same.

It isn't because all my prayers were answered in time for that Thanksgiving—though many of them were. It is because I realized that I could feel tremendous gratitude even while still waiting, just embracing the hope and the promise of what lay ahead for us.

In a way, maybe that first Thanksgiving was like that. The pilgrims still had many questions and a long road ahead of them. They had also experienced losses and challenges along the way. But they knew this new land held great potential, and they were willing to embrace the difficulties and believe in all the future held.

It's a reminder for me that gratitude doesn't come just when your cup overflows. It comes when your cup is half-empty, or even empty but with the hope that one day it will be filled. Being thankful when the gifts are abundant is easy. Being thankful for the smaller gifts, or the ones you can't quite see yet...well...that may be when we have to discover true gratitude, being grateful for what we have, what we don't have, and what we might have one day.

I don't remember cooking that Thanksgiving. Maybe John and I opened a can of soup? It's a blur. Instead, I remember filling suitcases, counting diapers, sorting little boy clothes for the 500th time, and imagining our son running through our living room.

And just a few weeks later, we were new parents holding our baby boy in our arms.

