

# Just call me Mama

Shortly after we started our paperwork to adopt Leo, I began a journal to chronicle the experience. Early on, I found myself signing each entry “Love, Mommy.” I just assumed that I would be “Mommy” and John would be “Daddy.”

About 18 months later we were standing in a stark government waiting room in Hunan Province when Leo walked into the room. The lady with him leaned down and told him in Mandarin who we were—and she used the Chinese terms “Mama” and “Baba.”

Within 24 hours Leo—who was 2—had started calling John “Baba,” and I quickly became “Mama.” With all the other changes happening in Leo’s life, we were happy to let him take the lead on something—especially something so minor. Why would I care? At long, long last, I was a mother. My son could have called me almost anything and I would have been delighted.

As it turns out, “Baba” fits John better than any other term we could have picked for him as a father. And Daniel happily followed his brother’s lead. When we’re spending time with cousins and friends, it works well that almost all the other mothers are “Mommy” or “Mom.”

Because both our children were born in China, I also like that we are able to use the Chinese terms—though our pronunciation of them is far from perfect.

A few months ago one of our friends traveled to China to adopt her daughter. When she asked whether there was anything she could pick up for us, we couldn’t think of much. After all, we were just there in August and—even though our boys would disagree—we only need so many spinning, flashing musical “Pleasant Goat” cars, after all.



But I did have one request.

On our trip to adopt Leo, we picked out a “Baba” baseball cap with the Chinese characters for Baba on it. On our trip to adopt Daniel, we spent time finding

necklaces with the Chinese characters for both the boys' grandmothers—and hooray for China, where the father's mother goes by a different grandmother name than the mother's mother. It never occurred to me, however, to pick up a “Mama” necklace for myself.

When our friend returned home with her beautiful little girl—who is tremendously popular with our boys—she also brought me the most beautiful “Mama” necklace.



Now I'm set. And when I write in our sons' journals—not nearly as often as I should—I sign them “Love, Mama.”