

Our son's refinalization day in court had a sweet ending

Our adoption of Daniel was finalized in China the day after we met him last August. He became a U.S. citizen the day we landed on American soil, and within a few months we had received his official Certificate of Citizenship in the mail.

Still, just because two national governments had acknowledged that Daniel was our son didn't mean that we had jumped every paperwork hurdle. To get Daniel a Maryland birth certificate, we had to refinalize his adoption in the state of Maryland. And that meant our 2 ½-year-old son had his very own day in circuit court last week.



Daniel's only concern was that I wanted him to wear a suit. His big brother, however, kept trying to figure out what the whole court ceremony meant. And, I have to admit, explaining the necessity of government paperwork is not my strength. I told him that Daniel was already a member of our family, and that this was basically a formality. Still, Leo couldn't really grasp that—and who can blame him?

John and I accepted paperwork and red tape as a necessary—and doable—part of the whole adoption journey, and this was one of the easier steps. After all, at this point we weren't waiting to be matched with our child, or wondering when we would be able to travel to him. We were just trying to get a final stamp of approval to make his life—and ours—simpler down the road.

I figured this was both an extra chance for the boys to wear the suits they'll be sporting at their aunt's wedding in the fall, and also another moment for us to celebrate becoming a family of four. In the end, that was the explanation that seemed to work for Leo, the idea that we were celebrating being a family—and that we'd go out for brunch afterward. So we all dressed up and headed to the courthouse.



The boys were curious about everything, from the metal detectors and revolving door to the fact that Daniel's judge was a man (the judge at Leo's refinalization was a woman).

When we went to the judge's chambers for the ceremony, Leo and Daniel insisted on sitting in their own chairs.

"You're really big," the judge said to Leo.

Daniel wasn't going to let that go. "No!" he said. "I big!" Luckily he wasn't held in contempt of court.

At one point, the judge asked Leo how he liked being a big brother. I wondered how he would respond. The transition to big brotherhood has been understandably challenging, but our boys have come really far in the past 10 months. Sometimes they annoy each other, but they also seek each other out as playmates. They are pals and competitors. They can be hugging one minute and arguing the next. They are brothers, through and through. But Leo wasn't going to get into that with the judge. He neatly dodged the question—twice—to ask the judge about the microphones on his desk.



The judge chatted with each of us, signed the paperwork, and posed for a few photos. Then he sent us on our way.

Minutes later, as we sat at brunch, I watched Leo working on his cinnamon pancakes and thought of how far he has come since becoming a big brother—and how smoothly Daniel has transitioned into our family. Then I heard a gasp and looked over to see John prying the syrup pitcher from Daniel's hands.

"He just drank the syrup out of the pitcher," John said.

Aha. That Certificate of Citizenship is a really classy document—and we had a great time in court last week. But it's moments like those, when you see your son guzzling syrup out of a pitcher, that you realize, yet again, how easily this little—OK, big—boy, born on the other side of the world, fits into your family.

Because, after all, the only real surprise may be that, in this family, there was any syrup left to drink.