

Starting the adoption journey: my two cents

Every June Catholic Charities holds a picnic at Kinder Farm Park for its adoptive families. This year it was part-play date, part-reunion, as the boys slid, climbed, and explored one of the best playgrounds we've visited.



In between catching Daniel at the bottom of the slides and pushing Leo on the "rocket ship swing," John and I had a chance to reconnect with some of the couples we waited with a few years ago, see our social worker friends, and encounter some new families.

One couple we met Sunday is waiting to travel to meet their first child, a 3-year-old boy, in China, so they had lots of hopeful excitement—and questions. We talked about attachment, airplane entertainment, and the parenting challenges and joys that we have experienced—recognizing that theirs may be completely different. As one of the Catholic Charities social workers is fond of saying, "Your mileage may vary."

Toward the end of the afternoon, after Leo got to pet a baby calf named Alice and Daniel saw his first rabbits up close, we were cleaning off our picnic table. It had been a practically perfect day—sunny, but with a gentle breeze—and I had just dramatically spilled cranberry juice on what had been my white Capri pants.



The boys—who skipped their naps that day—were starting to fade, and we were getting ready to go. As I was gathering trash from the table, a woman approached me and introduced herself. She didn't want to keep me long. She just wanted to ask one question.

“What advice would you give,” she asked, “to someone who is starting the whole adoption process at the very beginning?”

I stopped. My mind worked back through the years, rewinding through all the decisions we made on the journey to our two sons. I thought of picking an agency, compiling piles of paperwork, learning about medical needs and travel and finances and Chinese culture. For what felt like a long time to me, I couldn’t even respond. I didn’t know what to say.

Then I looked into her eyes and realized she didn’t want to talk about the adoption process. She didn’t want to talk about choosing a country or how many times she would need to be fingerprinted.

With vivid clarity, I remembered being in her shoes, unsure whether God was calling us to adopt, and reading books—many of them frightening—that were trying to prepare us to be adoptive parents. It was, by far, the most difficult moment of the whole journey for me—that first step.

With a sudden flash of relief, I knew what to say. “Don’t worry,” I said. “This is the scariest part of the whole process.”

I hadn’t even realized how tense she was until I watched her start to relax.

We talked more. I told her that for us it became a matter of taking a leap of faith, of trusting that it was God’s plan. We had to realize that it might be hard, but it would be worth it. For us, we had to stop reading some of the scarier books and start trusting. We had to know we would be in it together—husband and wife, supported by God. And we have seen His fingerprints every step of the way.

One of our friends, who just adopted her 3-year-old daughter in March, had come with us to the picnic. On our way home, as our three children—each born in a different part of China and each perfectly matched with our families—dozed, we talked about that part of the journey. Our new mom friend agreed that part of the journey had been the scariest step for her, too. She remembered how her aunt told her at that moment, “Leap and the net will appear.” And it did. Now her beautiful daughter is home—and our boys think she’s so much fun.

I keep thinking back to that conversation I had on Sunday. Maybe I could have said something insightful or inspirational or truly intelligent. But, standing there in my juice-stained pants, that was the best I could offer. Somehow, though, it seemed to be just what she needed to hear.

I hope that woman and her husband find the courage to make that leap—and find a child waiting to become part of their family.

