

<b>DATE:</b>	April 10, 2008
<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>Presentation by two American families on their experiences of adopting a child abroad.</b>
<b>ABSTRACT:</b>	The parents of adopted children, one from China and the other from Guatemala, describe their reasoning and the lengthy, expensive, but worthwhile process of international adoption in two very different places in the world.

### **Fun Fact Question:**

*Can you explain these statements made by two American couples hoping to adopt a baby? - “We wanted a girl, so we went to China.” “We wanted a boy, so we went to Guatemala”*

China, Guatemala and Russia were all possibilities for Brian and Robin Cooper as they looked for a place to adopt a baby girl. With Robin’s two teenage boys and their own thirty-something ages, they were not candidates for a domestic US adoption. China was the best option (see “Fun Fact Question”). The Coopers began the process with FTIA (Families Through International Adoption). Their first challenge was lots of application paperwork, which took four months to complete. Their second challenge was waiting nine more months to receive a referral with a couple of photos of their prospective baby girl.

Amy Clark, working through a Guatemalan organization, agreed that the application process can be exasperating. She cited their own difficulties because a notary had endorsed their paperwork with a slightly different signature. Both families had to make trips for documentation to both the Indiana and Kentucky state capitals.

### **Seven Chinese baby girls**

Luckily for the Coopers, the rush before a Chinese national holiday speeded up their process so that in a couple weeks after the referral, the Coopers and six other FTIA prospective families began the long flight to Beijing and on to the capital of Hunan province.

Seven baby girls from all over Hunan province (a six-hour bus ride for their daughter) were brought to the civil affairs building to meet their prospective parents. The Cooper’s nine-month-old, whom they named had been found abandoned as a newborn. The Coopers’ were given the baby’s mother’s note – her birth date written on a cigarette carton scrap and her tiny shirt. The other babies did not even have birthdates, all having been found abandoned, results of the one-child policy and the expense of birth control and abortion in China. Two more weeks were required in China to complete the paperwork, with a final exit through the US Consulate to make their daughter an American citizen.

### **Guatemalan adoptions**

Amy said that they had previously gone through the entire paperwork process and accepted a referral for an infant boy in Belarus, when that country’s adoption process was closed. Learning later that there may be a 25% chance of a Belarus adopted baby having fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, she is thankful. Guatemala’s international adoptions too have been shut down recently, due to questions about unethical practices of **several** Guatemalan attorneys who handle adoptions. Thankfully, the Clarks worked instead with an American organization, All God's Children International, that helps pregnant birth mothers get training and healthcare in Promise of Life homes and then cares for the babies in Hannah’s Hope homes. Unlike the typical experience in China, where birth mothers are seldom known, in this American organization,

Amy had to send a scrapbook about their home life so prospective mothers could choose to whom they wanted their baby to go. After the choice was made, the agency kept in contact through monthly DVDs and photos and Amy went to Guatemala to visit both the birth mother and their prospective three week old son. After seven more months, during which there was more paperwork, such as DNA testing and procedures at the Guatemalan Family Court, the Clarks were finally able to make a second trip to bring “Bobby” home, also now as a US citizen.

**“The kid is free...”**

...everything else costs money! Though Amy, Robin and Brian were unanimous that their babies were all worth the time and money, they did agree that foreign adoption is an expensive process. There are fees for everything from the home study to the application. There’s airfare – to China for the Coopers and two trips to Guatemala for the Clarks. The Coopers were told to bring \$4,000 to China in “new, crisp \$100 bills.” They said their total expenses came very close to the estimate of \$18-20,000. For the Clarks, the cost ran up to \$35,000, including a \$5,000 donation to Hannah’s Hope Guatemala, which supports orphanages for older, non-adoptable children as well as helps care for and train the birth mothers. All adoptive parents, domestic and foreign, receive an \$11,000 tax credit for five years.

**Follow-up**

Both families are delighted with their adopted children and with the adoption (a “wonderful experience,” said the Coopers.) Amy keeps in communication with Bobby’s birth mother through Hannah’s Hope Guatemala. She said she will let him decide when he’s older how much contact he wants to have, but she hopes he will want to return to Guatemala some day to visit his birth mom. The Coopers attend an annual get-together with all seven Indiana parents who brought their Chinese babies home together.

Both families have had their children warmly received by their friends and families. The “craziest question” Robin gets about 3-year-old Sydney, who has been in the US since she was seven months old, is “Does she speak English?”

**Fun Fact answer:** *In China the official policy of a couple having only one child and the traditional, especially rural, preference for boys have meant that many orphanages have many more girls than boys. In Guatemala this is not the case and so it can be easier to adopt a baby boy there.*

### END ###