Signs for Hope

North Carolina Road-Trip

"Consider how the wild flowers grow.

They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will He clothe you —you of little faith!"

Luke 12:27-28

Springtime is my FAVORITE season of the year! I am so thankful our God created this world from such a lovely palate of colors. My senses are heightened by the vast colors of His indescribable creation in the spring. Becoming enthralled by the blooms of trees, bushes and flowers along with newly emerging leaves easily transports me into a renewed awareness of His presence and His love. If this world, in its springtime array on magnificent display, is any indication of what heaven will look like…I cannot begin to imagine its impact, nor if I will even be able to bear to behold its beauty. The only thing more beautiful, more impacting…My Savior's face!

I could not have picked a more impressive time of the year to visit with SFH families and supporters across North Carolina as the week before Resurrection Sunday. I had so desired and planned for this trip for almost 8 months, but other things kept coming up pushing it further and further away. I finally decided in February…I would embark on my NC journey in April and began to set up my route. While I did not have the opportunity to meet with everyone connected to SFH across NC on this trip, there are a vast number of you if you are not aware of it, I did make it to seven cities (even to the NC coast) and spent valuable time with many. I cannot explain to you how meeting face-to-face with my brothers and sisters encourages me and strengthens me to persevere. And the wonderful opportunity to meet with them in their homes added another dimension and the ability to visualize them there in their homes when God brings them to mind.

April has been full of relationship building for me. The week prior to the NC Road-trip I was in Birmingham, AL and Knoxville, TN. In the two weeks of travel during April I have been in the homes of 4 SFH adopting families and shared with the mom of another adopted deaf son. One family, the Johnson's, brought their deaf daughter, Lily, home about 6 months ago. This was my second opportunity to spend time with the Johnsons. The Loo family (Kathy Loo shares their adoption story later in this PrayerLetter) brought Asen, their deaf son home about two weeks ago and the Barnes brought Tie home two years ago this month. Traveling to China, as Larry and Dawn's ASL interpreter to bring Tie home was the first deaf adoption God allowed me to see up close and personal. INCREDIBLE! I will never forget it! The fourth family, the Pledgers, left for China to bring their two deaf sons home two days after they invited me to meet with their family in their home in AL. They are still in China and will be traveling back next week as a family of eight. The fifth family, the Crawfords, brought two brothers home from the Philippines almost two years ago and the younger one, Luke, is deaf. Prayers for these five families and all the other SFH adopting families are coveted as they obey God's call to adopt and as they model His unconditional love for these cherished deaf children so close to His heart!

In addition to all these precious adopting families I was given the opportunity to present a workshop for all of Lifeline Children's Services' adoption caseworkers on the topic of "So You Want to Adopt a Deaf/HOH Child?" The purpose of this workshop was to help build a better understanding of the many ways the adoption of a deaf child impacts the adopting family, especially if they have little to no exposure to the Deaf Community. This is in addition to the challenges learning ASL will bring for the entire family including extended family members if they are not yet fluent. Add to that the diverse educational needs of the deaf child which very few schools are prepared to provide for and the very real possibility the family will have to find a new place for corporate worship that provides either ASL interpreted services or maybe even a Deaf Church—which are very few and far between.

My final charge to these caseworkers, who will begin sharing this information with prospective families, is the same charge I share with all families I meet and/or talk with and that is to make sure God has "called" them to adopt a deaf child before moving forward. This is vital, in my opinion. So that when life becomes much more challenging than expected, for them and for their deaf child(ren), and it will, they can look back and know God is the One who "called" them to this life-long journey of d/Deaf adoption and He will walk with them through it. SFH will be with them, too, not only on the good days, but also on those harsh days. Please pray the best practices for families desiring to adopt deaf children across this country can be raised to a standard that seeks to provide the best possible environment for each deaf adopted child where they can be given the greatest opportunity to not just live a better life than, but thrive.

The last group of brothers and sisters I met with during these two weeks of travel are those who are some of my greatest supporters…those who pray diligently for me. There were seven such meetings between Birmingham, AL and the NC coast. Yes, many of them also support His ministry through SFH financially, as well, and/or give of their time and talents for our families' benefit. This vital group includes some of my earthly family members, too. Sharing, face-to-face, with these treasured ones breathes not only renewed energy and resolve back into my life, but also gives me a deeper realization, once again, that I am not alone on this journey God has called me to and my God knows just how much I need this kind of spiritual and emotional support from them. Pray God's richest blessings on each of my spiritual siblings, please!

Loo Family Deaf Adoption

By Kathy Loo

I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of Him.
So now I give him to the Lord.
For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord.
And he worshiped the Lord there.
1 Samuel 1:27-28

I'm not really sure where to start with our story. Our adoption journey was a pretty long one, even in adoption terms, but in reality, it goes back even further than the day we became consciously aware that we were called to adopt.

Ben and I are both from hearing families (although my mother and brother are both physically hard of hearing, neither are culturally Deaf). Until we adopted, all of our children were hearing and to the outsiders there was no real reason or connection for us to be involved with signing or deafness.

However, God had different plans for our lives. In October of 2011 we recognized that God was calling us individually to the world of adoption. Confessing that acknowledgment to each other was the scary push we needed to really get things going. Ben was involved with some things going on in our local Deaf community that awakened our hearts to qualities and gifts God had given us as people and parents. We were equipped with knowledge, love, and language specifically tailored to the needs of a deaf child, yet there was no deaf child in our home.

That is essentially where our story began.

We didn't have the kind of money needed to adopt and not everyone we knew was in favor of our decision to expand our family. God told us we just needed to do what he asked and he would handle the rest. As our journey began to unfold we were connected with Becky and Signs for Hope. Becky became more than a resource. She became a confidant and a friend. She was someone who laughed with us, cried with us, prayed with us, and prayed for us. Becky was one person we knew we could count on to be brutally honest in this process, no matter what. Without her and the prayers from the SFH team, I am not sure we would have made it from beginning to end.

We hit some major hurdles causing our process to take 2.5 years. That was not an easy thing to face and it seemed like it was never going to really happen. In the end we are able to see why God allowed for the delays, but in the process they were hard to face. On March 31, 2014 we met our son and it was every aching day it took to reach that moment. We have always felt something special about him and thus far, God has shown us exactly why.

Asen (our son) is 8 years old. From what we know he only had about 15 Chinese signs and had been trained orally for at least the last 3 years. We started teaching him signs immediately and within his first 24 hours with us he had about 60 signs memorized. We tried to teach him necessary signs (bathroom, mom, dad, eat, etc) and then others that weren't necessarily important, but were helpful for capturing the attention of a little boy (animals and colors). Within his first week--while still in China--he was retelling Bible stories and making requests.

We tried to go in with several expectations: 1) that he would not like us one bit. 2) that he would have no language and 3) that he was going to be completely traumatized by this entire process.

While we are still in the early stages and some things could still surface, he has blown our expectations way out of the water. He has also transformed our expectations a bit. We figured he was going to be all sign, but now that we see how well he was trained orally, a bi-cultural/bi-modal method is more likely his speed. He loves signing, but we see very much that talking is also part of who he is. His smooth transition and speedy language acquisition has really caused us to have to reevaluate our plans and create plans that work for who he is as an individual.

We see God's hand in our journey, good moments and less desirable ones. Moments where we thought we had it figured out, and moments where we had to recognize that God and we see things differently. We are blessed, even by the extremely hard moments that this process took us through.

Our story isn't over yet, not by a long shot. I truly cannot wait to see how God blesses us, our son, and the world of adoption through what we have experienced. We have had the chance to touch other people's lives with our story and that makes everything worth it in the end. One statement I made throughout our journey was that, "Adoption is as much about growing faith as it is about growing a family." I stand by that statement. We had to step out on faith to make this happen and it was that faith that carried us through. The strengthening of that faith is what fuels what we are allowed to accomplish with this gift God has given us.

How did the Loo family get connected to SFH? I remembered writing about this God-connection, in the Fall 2011 SFH newsletter, sharing about the God-connections that happened at an orphan care conference Charles and I had attended in South Carolina.

"The third connect came at lunch when a woman sat down at our table who was a home study caseworker from Raleigh, NC. When I told her what I do, she looked at me and said, "That is very interesting, especially since I received a phone call from a woman, just yesterday, looking to adopt a deaf child." My husband gave her my business card and the next day I was contacted by the woman she spoke of. I have been diligently trying to encourage this family and help them locate that deaf child God has for them, since that connection. Mom and Dad are ASL interpreters and they sign with their three biological hearing children. And Dad is in the process of getting an additional degree in Deaf Education."

From my heart to yours…

There is so much going on with SFH and my desire is to keep you all up to date with all the God-activity so you are just as much in awe of Him and His work as I am. He is working in very tangible ways and He is working in ways we cannot yet see. I have decided it is next to impossible to clue you in on everything, at this point in time anyway. Recently, I have felt more than ever that I cannot keep up with everything…well. This week, I have made many mistakes and if you add to that the ones over the last month I cannot even count how many times I have forgotten to put something on the calendar (double-booked) or just did not complete some task fully before moving on to the next. And keep in mind I was out of town two weeks out of the last four. I have been asking you to please pray I will not let people and things fall through the cracks, but… My priority will always be people first. God is leading more and more people my way, on a daily basis and somehow He is going to have to provide someone to help with some of the other less pressing tasks. Website maintenance and updates are desperately needed on many pages and I have not even tried to keep up with those for months now. Please pray for God to provide in whatever way He desires to make sure things run more smoothly and my mistakes are much less often and their collateral damage is minimal. It is interesting to note, however, how He sometimes uses my mistakes for even greater and stronger relationship building with some of you. ONLY GOD!

Charles and I fly out for CAFO's Summit 10 in Chicago on Wednesday. This will be our 4th Summit together since 2009. God has always done some crazy God-connections at this international orphan care event; pray we do not miss anyone He wants us to meet. And He always convicts me personally during it, as well. Ouch! We head off for a much needed week of vacation at beautiful Hilton Head when we return.

In closing, you will be blessed to know God is miraculously providing financial gifts in abundance—more so over the month of April, especially—for His ongoing work through Signs for Hope. Please pray for great wisdom and discernment to know how, when, and where He wants these funds to be used for His greatest glory. This is an answer to our continual prayer for Him to impress on the hearts of His children, our brothers and sisters in Christ, those He wants involved with caring for deaf orphans and children through our efforts. We are so thankful we can give Him all the glory for this specific aspect of the ministry, as He alone truly gets all the glory when "fundraising" happens in this way! ONLY GOD! I am forever thankful for those hearts of yours He does touch, for whatever amount it might be, and for your obedience when He leads you to do so. Someday, we will all be able to see how God has used everything we surrendered to Him, our time, our talents, and our money to benefit the kingdom of God, eternally. He is the One who has given all of these to us in the first place!

My Brothers and Sisters, I do love you,

but He will always love you more!

Becky

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. **For our struggle is not against flesh and blood**, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. Pray also for me, that whenever I spea,k words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.
~Ephesians 6:10-20

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In You, the fatherless find compassion. - Hosea 14:3