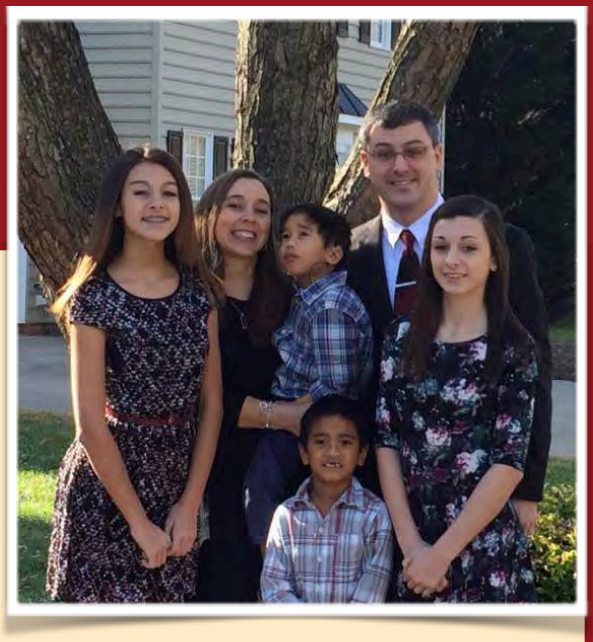
Signs for Hope

PrayerLetter December 2015

1st Annual SFH ASL-Immersion Family Retreat
June 2 -5, 2016

I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.
Psalm 121:1-2



Most of us have heard the phrase "God equips those He calls." When it comes to adoption, and specifically deaf adoption, this is definitely the case! Signs for Hope is instrumental in providing support and resources to many deaf adoptive families. God has used SFH in a mighty way and continues grow the ministry. Communication is vital and often resources are hard to find for families learning sign language. That is why I am so very excited that SFH's first ASL-immersion family retreat is scheduled to take place in June.

Our family of 4 adopted two brothers from the Philippines over 3 years ago. Our youngest son is deaf and has several other special needs. We learned basic signs to communicate with Luke by watching the Signing Times videos, books, and the Internet. In addition, my oldest daughter and I have taken two ASL courses. Although this is helpful, having a dedicated weekend to immerse the WHOLE FAMILY in ASL will be so beneficial! I have been praying for over two years to make this dream a reality. The retreat will be a safe place for the whole family to learn more ASL, hone ASL skills, and be encouraged by meeting other deaf adoptive families. Surely, God will be glorified through this gathering!

It takes prayer, planning, volunteers and funds to make this family retreat a reality. Please prayerfully consider a year-end gift to make this SFH ASL -Immersion Family Retreat an affordable reality to families who desperately need it.

- Jo Anna Crawford

One of the ongoing requests I receive from our SFH families adopting deaf children is, "When are we going to have a time to get together?" I have been praying about, researching and trying to plan an event like this for the past 3 years, as have some of our families. Another great need many families share is how hard it is to find appropriate and beneficial ways to help them improve their American Sign Language skills. Many of our families do not know many Deaf folks and some do not know any. God has answered our prayers and we have combined these two requests/needs into our first ever, annual SFH ASL-Immersion Family Retreat at Bonclarken Conference Center just south of Asheville. We are asking God to touch hearts to donate the funds necessary to scholarship families who desire to attend and to help pay the costs for some amazing Deaf families to also attend to help create that Christian ASL-rich Deaf environment we so desire our families to experience. The cost for the accommodations and use of the facility alone for approximately 15-20 families(depending on how many family members in each family), 5 – 7 Deaf families and SFH staff is about $10,000. Daily food for each family is in addition to that. Many of our families have multiple children and some have multiple deaf children. Your donations are tax deductible and should God touch your heart to give towards this much needed family retreat you can do so securely on the Signs for Hope website or mail a check for any amount to Signs for Hope, PO Box 460, Fairview, NC 28730. Join with us in praising God for this amazing opportunity and pray with us as we make all the plans and preparations for this exciting event.

Deaf Adoption, Up-close & Personal
Deaf Brothers Reunited! ONLY GOD!!

We featured the Bergeron Family's story of Deaf adoption last year in the January 2014 SFH PrayerLetter. Jon and Shelly first obeyed God's call to adopt a deaf child from the US Foster Care System, Tanner, about 8 years ago and then again, Jian, about 5 years ago from China. I had the privilege of meeting Jian for the first time at the Empowered to Connect Conference in Houston, TX the fall of 2013. He willingly came and shared his story with our SFH families who attended our Deaf Adoption Chats, in the evenings. He was transparent about many things that happened to him in the orphanage and about how he felt about being adopted. He had just turned 14, when Jon and Shelly brought him home from China and was Chinese Sign Language fluent. He quickly learned ASL. You and I cannot begin to imagine how challenging this has been for all of them...but...GOD!

Through some fascinating occurrences, and because of technology being what it is, Jian was reconnected to his Chinese biological brother this past summer. I have been granted permission to share with you some of this amazing God-story from Shelly's blog.

Bergeron News, October 25, 2015, BROTHERS REUNITED!

We've just returned home from China and I am finally making the time to write an update on the latest miracle that is a part of Jian's story. We'd like to write more and in more detail, but for now, want to be able to share the highlights of the story.

The short version of how his brother found him [Jian] is this: In June, after joining a Facebook group of others adopted from his orphanage in Nanjing, China, Jian reconnected with a nanny he knew from his orphanage. She reconnected him with another girl from their orphanage who posted his picture on QQ (Chinese Facebook). A former classmate of Jian's [biological Chinese] brother, Wu Lei, saw the picture and told Wu Lei, who then contacted the girl who posted the picture. She told Jian, and he didn't believe her. She was then able to connect the two through a QQ video chat. As soon as his brother saw him, he started crying and told Jian he was so sorry and he'd been looking for him for years. They were able to communicate through Chinese Sign Language (Jian had lost some, but, picked it up again quickly) because Wu Lei is also Deaf.

From that point on, the two of them talked to each other every morning and evening (due to the time difference) throughout the summer. He [Jian] also was able to connect with and meet his biological parents as well. Wu Lei is older (25) and grew up with his parents. After Jian was born and determined to be Deaf as well (and they were unable to "cure" his deafness), and due to the one child policy, as well as the culture (where a son takes care of the parents), having a second child with a disability, was unmanageable. So, he was brought to the orphanage at around 1-2 years old, and Wu Lei was about 6-7 years old, and remembers seeing his brother leave in a basket on their mother's bike, and never seeing him again.

Several months before Wu Lei found Jian, Jon was asked to speak in China and Shelly was privileged to be able to go along. We decided after that, if Jian wanted to, we would take him along as well. Some generous friends offered to pay for Jian's ticket, and we were able to arrange our schedules for the two of us to go for 1.5 weeks for him [Jon] to speak, and then Jian would fly to Shanghai, and we would all meet him there and then stay for the week with our friends in Nanjing, the city where Jian grew up.

So, the rest of summer went by too slowly for Jian, but finally the day arrived! We flew in to Shanghai and Wu Lei and our friends met us at the airport prior to Jian coming in. Wu Lei hugged us and we all cried as we finally met in person. We then went to wait for Jian's plane and he could hardly wait. His heart was pounding and he cried as he hugged and saw his brother for the first time in about 18-19 years. (Jian did not ever know that he had a brother, so it was his first time to meet). It was a very emotional time for all of us and a true miracle that Jian's brother has found him after years of searching. The brothers talked (signed) all the way to Nanjing on the subway and train, comparing their height and muscles and catching up.

Jian & Wu Lei meet after almost 19 years!

Wu Lei plays soccer for the Chinese Deaf Olympic Team and Jian plays football for the Texas School for the Deaf in Austin.

On Friday, we went back to visit the orphanage and then the Nanjing Deaf school. It was difficult and emotional for Wu Lei to see the orphanage and know this is where and how his brother grew up.

We then went to the Deaf school and saw many of Jian's old friends. They were able to talk to one girl Wu Lei had met in December 2010 (2.5 months after Jian was adopted) while looking for Jian. It broke his heart to find out his brother that he'd been looking for now lived in America and he had no way to connect with him, but he was happy that he had been adopted by an American family. They had a fun time together playing some basketball, catching up and learning about life in America.

Saturday, we went by train to Zhenjiang (the city Jian was born in) with a friend who came along to interpret for us to meet Jian's birth family. It was another very emotional time. Jian's birth parents, several cousins and other extended family members came as well. Note by Becky: None of Wu Lei's family knows Chinese Sign Language. We then went to their home (where Jian was born) where he met his grandmother who took care of him as a baby. We had tea together, and then went to a nice restaurant where we were treated to lunch (including soft shell turtle (the meat and the shell.) We were able to share the story of my grandfather [Shelly] living in the same area that Jian was from and Jian was able to share with them about the opportunities he has as a Deaf person in America.

Throughout the week, we would often comment, what an unbelievable story we are a part of, and who are we to be chosen to be entrusted with this story?? We also fell in love with Wu Lei as the week went on. He is so tender hearted, thoughtful, sweet and kind. He would always make sure we were safe crossing the street (no small feat in China), guide us around on the subways and trains, and always make sure we were taken care of whatever we were doing.

Jian also shared with his brother daily how God brought him to this place, and it was His plan. He explained that the gods in China don't encourage people to adopt!

An email from Shelly recounting all the specific answers to prayers they had shared before their trip.

We often felt like we were in a dream during the week. We could hardly believe that we were there and the reason we were there. We kept saying: Could you have ever dreamed 5 years ago that this is what we'd be doing? We originally thought someday we'd come back, then over the last several years as things were getting worse and worse with Jian, we didn't foresee us ever going back with him to China. And then, there we were! It was a very emotional week, and we just couldn't believe we get to be a part of this story that God is writing! It just seems so unreal and miraculous - and that God chose us to witness it first hand is hard to imagine!

Charles and I saw Jon at the Together for Adoption Conference in Durham the first weekend in November. Jon says Wu Lei is planning to visit their family next summer here in the states and reiterated to us how kind and thoughtful Wu Lei is. He then shared how Jian was so impacted by his brother's sensitive nature as well and that Jon reminded Jian of his own sensitive nature, very similar to Wu Lei, deep down when he allows it to surface.

Please pray with us that God will continue to spread His gospel throughout Jian's family.

From my heart to yours…

I trust your celebrations of the Messiah's birth have been filled with some wonderful memory making with your family and loved ones. Having Joseph and Kate here for a few days, along with Rachel and Marc, is easily the highlight of my Christmas season.

The close of another year always brings with it a time of reflection for me and I suspect the same for you. Had you asked me in December of 2014 what I thought God would lead us to in 2015, I would have mentioned only a small portion of what He did actually lead us to do in 2015. So many foundations for trainings and supports for our families and those who care for deaf children became much more well defined in 2015 than ever before and some that had not even been thought of or explored prior to this year. To summarize how God helps me reflect appropriately and with His perspective on 2015, thankfully, I have to say it really is much the same as what the past seven years have been. As I shake my head in utter disbelief and truly humbled by what God does do in spite of me, He is constantly reminding me…"Trust Me, I have called you and will equip you to do this work and I will do it through you, IF you will allow Me." Please pray with me that we will not miss one thing He has planned for Signs for Hope in 2016 and all for His glory!

I do love you, but He loves you more!

Becky

"When Love Is NOT Enough" is the title of my newest blog post.

Now may the God of peace,
who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus,
that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will,
and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ,
to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.
Hebrews 13:20-22

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