EMBRACING THE FUTURE OF INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION
Dear Readers

You may remember Autumn Gresh. In 2006, a 13-year-old girl from China asked Jian Chen, Holt’s China program director, for help – “Will you find a family for me?” she asked. Jian knew that in a matter of months, Autumn would lose her intercountry adoption eligibility, and would miss out on her chance of having a family. Jian and Autumn prayed for a miracle. With the help of Christian music group NewSong — who met the shy but determined girl in 2006 — the Gresh family learned of Autumn’s heartbreaking story. What followed was a whirlwind effort to complete Autumn’s adoption and bring her home.

Just in time, Autumn had a family. But for many older children in China, just shy of their 14th birthdays, the months continue to pass…and time and hope continues to slip away. We make every effort to highlight older children in China on our blog and in Holt’s magazine. Through Holt’s advocacy and the advocacy of Holt supporters, older children in China go home to families. Sometimes, sadly, it doesn’t work out.

Not everyone can adopt an older child. But right now each of us, as Holt Ambassadors (see ad on back page), have a wonderful opportunity to help older children in China find families before it’s too late.

Autumn spent her 14th birthday with her family. She found her way home.

Autumn is one success story. On page 12, read an article she wrote, entitled “Homes”. Just last year, Lucas Kolb was adopted by a family in Nebraska. His story can be read on Holt’s blog at www.holtinternational.org/blog/2011/02/happy-14th-birthday-lucas/

Now it’s up to us to come alongside the other children and help them find their homes…just in time.

Go to www.holtinternational.org/waitingchild to learn more about adopting older children in China.
Who Will Answer For the Children?
Moving Our Mission Forward

For over 55 years, Holt International has focused on finding homes for orphaned, abandoned and vulnerable children. It’s what inspired Harry Holt in the beginning and it’s what continues to inspire us as an organization each and every day – children in the arms of loving and safe families.

Today, we see the pictures and videos, the heartbreaking news broadcasts of people around the world struggling to survive in the midst of extreme poverty. With difficulty, we watch as starved children continue to go without food, their parents unsure of how to provide their children’s next meal or safe shelter.

Ultimately, someone needs to step in and care for these children and families. As I visit countries like Vietnam, India and Haiti, I find myself overwhelmed with a sense of compassion, concern and a longing to help where I can. It’s difficult to explain in words what the need truly is to keep children from perishing within their own country, but when words fail, action speaks. This is the time to do more.

While Holt helps many children through intercountry adoption, there exists a growing population of children whose lives are changed for the better when they receive life-saving assistance in their birth countries. Holt manages many humanitarian projects around the world with great success, and we will continue to grow in this area. But we need your help.

However you support Holt, I pray that you will continue this support, just as we will continue to provide children with loving, stable families. Together, we can make a difference. Children all over the world need our help, and we will continue to answer the call.

Thank you for joining with Holt as we further our mission.

For more information on how you can help children in Holt’s care, visit: www.holtinternational.org/whowillanswer

Kim S. Brown | President
Adopting a child with special needs takes commitment, flexibility and a willingness to love abundantly – like parenting any child. Three families, all who adopted children with minor, correctable needs from China, share their stories. The profile of children available for adoption has changed. These families represent a new generation – families saying “yes” to adopting a child with special needs. Beth Smith, Holt director of services for China, introduces their stories.

Nothing to Lose

The Rand family represents a new generation of adoptive families — experienced couples parenting older biological children, yet not ready to stop parenting altogether. They are the new generation of families choosing to adopt from China. Many families are open to considering minor special needs children, but the fear is how “minor” is the correctable need? The Rands were ready to consider a child from China with a minor correctable issue and they were pleasantly surprised that many of the children have very minor issues! — Beth Smith

I got “the itch” shortly after my husband and I decided for sure that we were not having any more children. We were so very blessed to have three healthy, beautiful daughters. What more could we ask for? I had the itch, nonetheless, and after discussing our many options, adoption seemed to call to us.
Our decision to adopt a girl was not even a decision really. Though we would have been happy with a boy if we had one anywhere along the way, that was not the path chosen for us. Girls are just what we know and do best.

What a great life experience for our very lucky daughters, and a wonderful opportunity for us to grow as a family while reaching out to a little girl halfway around the world.

A friend of a friend had adopted 3 children from China through Holt, and that was all we needed to hear. Holt was our choice. After starting the paper chase in April 2007, our dossier was logged in with China in June. After a few months, we were very discouraged to hear of the increasing wait times for adoption within China.

We had heard a little about the Special Needs option but didn’t really think it was right for us – quite frankly, it scared me! After exploring it a little and learning that we were in control of the types of special needs we were willing to consider, we decided to fill out the minor/correctable conditions list.

By the time we were finished researching the different conditions, it seemed we hadn’t really selected many that we were okay with, but we finally submitted our list to Holt in December. I’ve always believed things work out the way they are supposed to, and I knew our perfect fate was waiting.

Just 4 months later, I got “the call” at work and was overwhelmed with excitement, nervousness and anxiousness. As I listened to the details of our new daughter, I was overcome with joy! I called my husband to tell him the news and anxiously awaited the email with the official written information from Holt, and the pictures of course!

After a delay in getting the email (it seemed like DAYS, but was actually just a few hours), we KNEW she was our daughter. Xi Nian Qiong was born October 12, 2007 in Kunming, China. She was found the day she was born and taken to the local orphanage. She was born with a small hole in her heart and a tiny bump above her right eyebrow. Our wonderful physician reviewed her file for us very late that night and gave us the medical “OK.”

The hole in her heart was likely to heal on its own and if not, would require a very minor procedure to fix, and the bump above her eyebrow was likely purely cosmetic. We received an update in July that she was living with a foster family – this was very exciting news! We also received additional photos – what an incredibly beautiful baby we were to be blessed with.

We left for China in September, and were united with Calista Hope on Sunday, September 21, 2008. Words cannot describe the emotions of that day. What an absolutely perfect little girl we were chosen to be the forever family for.

We had a wonderful trip, with Holt guiding us and helping us every step of the way. At the medical check-up in Guangzhou, we were told her heart had healed. We were very excited but wanted to wait until we returned to the U.S. to confirm this. Upon our return, our physician did indeed confirm that her heart had healed on its own and the tiny bump was purely cosmetic and nothing needed to be done with it. We were blessed with a perfectly healthy little girl AND shortened our wait time incredibly.

We had our daughter home with us by October, just a short 18 months from our initial application to Holt.

Calista fits in with our family perfectly. There is no doubt that she was born into this world to be a Rand girl!

SueAnn Rand | Maitland, Florida
Endless Rewards

I often tell families who come to Holt with the image of adopting “a baby girl with pigtails” that there is another wonderful option — Why not consider adopting a boy? Many people don’t realize that there are so many boys waiting for families in China. For couples who have entered the program dreaming of parenting a girl from China because they think, only girls are available, it can take tremendous flexibility to shift their image from a girl to a boy. Images are very powerful. But for couples like the Sturgeons, who ultimately chose to adopt a boy, the shift allowed wonderful things to happen. — Beth Smith

Our road to adoption was almost 15 years in the making. My husband Troy and I always knew we wanted children. We just figured we’d complete our family in the traditional manner. After several failed pregnancies and an unsuccessful IVF attempt, we began to contemplate adoption. Initially we focused on domestic/infant adoption, going so far as to pay the application fee and attend some classes. Something just didn’t feel right for us. At first we tried to ignore those nagging doubts, but eventually we were led to watch a Holt-sponsored webinar, because other Holt families had recommended the agency so highly. When the webinar concluded, my husband and I turned to each other and smiled. This was right. This was what we were called to do. Adopt from China.

Of course, there was still much for us to learn. After close to 15 years of waiting, we had certain expectations. We’d waited this long, we wanted the “perfect,” healthy, baby girl – shiny black hair in pig tails, a Cupid’s-bow mouth, and dark, almond-shaped eyes. Well, we DID get our perfect child, the perfect child for us. That child just happens to be a boy and happens to have some special needs.

When we realized how long the wait would be for a healthy infant girl, we began to re-evaluate what it was we wanted. We wanted to complete our family. With discussion and prayer, we decided to trust God and be open to a child with special needs of either gender. God doesn’t make mistakes! We were quickly matched with a beautiful boy whose special need was a ventricular septal defect (VSD).

Aiden is an amazing child with a gentle soul and a beautiful sense of humor. His smile lights up a room and his laugh warms everybody’s hearts. Happily, his heart has all but healed itself. Our pediatric cardiologist called it nothing short of a miracle.

Now, that’s not to say we haven’t met with challenges. Since coming home, we’ve learned that our son has complete hearing loss in his right ear and a few other minor medical issues. But what childhood is completely free from surprises or struggles? Aiden is a remarkably healthy, bright, 3-year-old with enough energy for two toddlers! We wouldn’t change a single thing about him. He is the light of our lives.

Our experience has been so positive and wonderful; we pray we can adopt a second child, of either gender, through Holt’s program again. Soon. We would, and frequently do, recommend it to anybody contemplating adoption. The rewards are endless.

Diane Sturgeon | Sioux Falls, South Dakota

LEFT: The Rands brought Calista home 18 months after applying to Holt. Calista, shown here with sisters Kennedy, Addison and Delaney, and parents, Joe and SueAnn. ABOVE: The Sturgeon family brought Aiden home in 2010. Shown with parents, Diane and Troy. Many children in China with minor special needs are waiting for families. Boys have an especially urgent need for families. To learn more about adopting a boy from China, go to www.holtinternational.org/china
The New Faces of China Adoption

The miracle of the “match” with a child and the right family inspires my work each day. Families come to Holt with various expectations about the term “special needs”. It means different things for many people. Rick and Kathy Rees came to Holt with a lot of professional and personal experience with children — children with physical differences or mental challenges. They were prepared for and welcomed the challenge of adopting a child with a correctable physical condition. But the match with Jazmyne was an unexpected blessing for their family.

— Beth Smith

March 15th, 2008 — an e-mail popped up on our computer. Beth Smith thought she might have identified a child for us — a child with a minor condition that fit our updated medical conditions list. She concluded the e-mail by saying that she would call us soon! We updated our medical checklist, prayed over it, sent it out and waited. At 8:23 p.m. the call finally came. I was scratching down every word I could, waiting for the bottom line: “What was her condition?” And finally, it came: “And she has an extra toe on each foot,” said Beth. I will never forget standing over our tiny laptop, watching our daughter’s grainy picture emerge!

Because Rick and I both work in special needs education fields, we felt we had the skills to help any child, with any disability, live up to their full potential. Never in our wildest dreams did we even entertain any thoughts that our child would be exceptional.

Today, Rick and I spend a lot of time with Jazmyne. We work with her a lot, but certainly cannot take all of the credit for how smart she is. And, of course, the twist of fate — such an ironic twist — is that she was adopted through the special needs process for simply having an extra toe on each foot.

Jazmyne has seven doctor’s kits and proclaims: “I’m going to be a doctor when I grow up!” While in China, she spent a lot of time with the orphanage doctor. The doctor even went so far as to travel with Jazzy to make sure that we knew that in her professional opinion, Jazmyne was not “special needs” at all, but in fact, “gifted!” The good doctor was absolutely correct in her opinion! I have no idea if Jazmyne will keep on the course of wanting to be a doctor, but I can tell you something for certain: whatever she chooses to do in life, she will be successful.

Rick and I were so relieved to get Jazmyne’s surgery behind her. When you agree to take a child with a minor, correctable need, you know that you are most likely looking at some kind of surgery. Before the operation, we did a lot of research and concluded that the procedure was safe and necessary. Back then it all seemed so easy and for Jazzy’s surgeon it was — but for us it was anything but simple. Both legs were in casts after the surgery so she wouldn’t try to walk on them.

These “Special Needs” children are children who have such promise to be “normal” in every way, despite what initially appear to be their imperfections.

The surgery was tough, but when Jazzy is 17 years old and puts on those heels that match her prom dress so perfectly, she will not give a second thought about what it took for her to be able to walk without pain or to have those shoes fit her. Our Cinderella will never know the full extent of the miracle that takes place when that dainty little slipper glides on to that precious foot so easily... but Mom and Dad sure will!

Kathy Rees | St. Helen, Michigan

Jazmyne came home to Rick and Kathy Rees in 2008 with an extra toe on each foot. “Today, Jazmyne excels in preschool and is the star of her dance class, gymnastics and skiing classes,” says Kathy.
Traveling to China was an eye-opening experience. I had the opportunity to see my birth country, learn about the Chinese culture and experience the friendliness and openness of the Chinese people. Most were curious about why 23 Chinese girls were in a large group of Caucasians. But when it was explained that we were adopted and the Caucasians were our parents, most of the people were excited for us. Experiencing the Chinese traditions was exciting. I went to a market in my home city and saw how ordinary people make a living by selling cooked food, fresh fruits and vegetables, livestock and clothing. In America, we don’t see something that big and productive every day.

The country itself is big and beautiful. We went to the countryside and saw the mountains. I liked seeing some of the famous tourist sites, like the Great Wall and the Forbidden City. But I really enjoyed seeing the sites that weren’t so well known. We attended a foreign language school and took a couple classes with the students there. I was surprised to see that the schools are so different than they are in the United States. I enjoyed seeing the students’ reactions to Americans coming to their school. They spoke very good English and Chinese.

Going back to Mother’s Love, my orphanage in Nanning, was very touching. I saw the old building where I was taken care of for a couple months before moving to a foster home. We were the last group to go to the orphanage before it was to be torn down. It is sad to know that my orphanage will no longer be there, but brand new buildings for all the homeless children and disabled orphans are there for the children to grow up in.

I was fortunate enough to get to meet my foster parents. That made me really happy. They were happy to have me come back and meet them. They told lots of stories and gave me a picture of my foster mother and me on the day I was adopted – a special memory that I will never forget. I now feel more complete about where I came from and know who touched my life before I was adopted and brought to the United States.

If you are considering joining next year’s tour, I would recommend it. It’s a great experience. I feel more at peace with myself, and I can say I’ve seen China at its very best.

I not only made lifelong friends — friends who truly understand what I’ve been through as an adoptee — but I made lifelong memories too. ☛

Maggi Yiju Liebetrau | Elk Point, South Dakota
Calen, 3, and Karie Joy Tavares-Alvernaz, 23 months (both from Korea) — Hilmar, CA

Jae Ryan Kayne, 3 ½ (Korea) — Fanwood, NJ

Max, 15, Miles, 12 and Katelyn Douglas, 14 (All from Thailand), with mother Sally Tereau — Gresham, OR

Caleb, 17 (Thailand), Stephen, 14 (Korea), with dad Richard Norris — Cumming, GA

Sean Reed, 6 (China), with big brother, Eric — Overland Park, KS

Fikru, 5 (Ethiopia), Zoe Edelawit, 2 (Ethiopia), and Jacob Densmore, 7 — Los Alamos, NM

Kaelyn, 13 (Korea), Tyler, 17 (Korea), Sadie, 5, Gavin, 7, with parents William and Dawn Jones — Woolwich Twp, NJ

Mail original color prints to: Holt International magazine P.O. Box 2880, Eugene, OR 97402 or upload digital photos at holtinternational.org/submissions
China, Thailand and Korea

Adoptees and their families recently returned from heritage tours to China, Korea and Thailand. Holt heritage tours are designed for adoptees and their families to experience the customs, culture and history of their birth country. Central to the tour philosophy is the adoptee’s personal story, and personal journey. To recreate this story, Holt strives to coordinate visits to adoptees’ orphanages and reunions with foster families, whenever possible. This year, the trip was a great success! Welcome back, heritage tour participants!

India

Holt staff recently coordinated with Raising Hope to provide therapy equipment, toys and musical instruments to three of our partners in India. A non-profit organization based out of Illinois, Raising Hope provides safe, stimulating play equipment and educational supplies to children living in orphanages and foster care throughout the world. “With the new toys and instruments in the basement, where we have the informal school, the place has been transformed,” says Mary Paul, director of Vathsalya Charitable Trust (VCT). “The colors have brightened the place and of course our children are vying with each other to use the car, horse and cycles. The teachers are very careful to give the children their turns and they have learned to share these gifts too.”

Vietnam

From Oregon to India to Vietnam, coordinated efforts to serve children and families truly span “around the globe.” In the spring issue of the Holt magazine, Minalee Saks, executive director of Birth to Three, described a workshop she led last February — in India. Birth to Three is a non-profit organization in Eugene, Oregon that provides parenting education and support for families of young children. Organized by Holt, the workshop drew 19 social workers from six countries for a four-day training in Birth to Three’s “Make Parenting a Pleasure” curriculum.

At the end of the workshop, the participants returned home to put Minalee’s practices to work — making the act of parenting both more enjoyable, and more effective, for families from Ethiopia and Uganda to the Philippines and Vietnam. In Vietnam, the two social workers that participated are making quick progress.

With the lessons still fresh in her mind, Holt social worker Nguyen Thu Ngan led a one-day training session for fellow social workers and staff in Vietnam. In turn, the Holt-Vietnam staff will soon begin training families we serve throughout the country — beginning with 50 struggling families we support in the north, near Hanoi. The children of these families are all in preschool, and all at risk of neglect or separation from their parents. Through basic support services, we are helping these families give their children a safe, stable home. And now, thanks to Minalee Saks and Birth to Three, we can help them become better parents for their children as well.

For more country updates, visit Holt’s blog:
www.holtinternational.org/blog
Homes
“A home is where your family lives,” says 17-year-old Autumn, who was adopted from China in 2007, just shy of her 14th birthday.

I had lived in three different homes while I was in China. One of my homes was the orphanage where I lived for two years, beginning when I was still a baby. I was adopted from the orphanage by a single Chinese man who I had to call “Dad”. I lived with him in my second home for about seven years until he passed away. My third home was living with a woman who was about 50 years old and had been related to my dad. She didn’t really want me at first, but she had to keep me because she was related to my dad.

I never knew what a home felt like until I was adopted by my American family when I was almost 14. A home is where your family lives – a family who loves you and cares about you. It’s a place where you feel safe and happy. I love my home in America. There are five of us in my home. I have a sister who’s three months younger than me and a brother who is 20 years old and attends Penn State University. I also have a mom and dad. My mom is a book author and speaker. She’s also a good chef at home. She cooks delicious Chinese food. My dad owns a small Christian high school in State College, where I attend every day. It is a very fun and good school. The school encourages us to intern for Secret Keeper Girl, and I’ve been on a lot of trips with them.

Autumn Gresh | State College, Pennsylvania

Ministry to Tweens Promoting Modesty & Helping Children in Need

- How can young girls dress with both fashion and modesty?
- How can parents and daughters avoid conflicts over clothing?
- How can girls develop a healthy body image and be confident in the face of peer pressure?

These are just a few of the topics covered by Secret Keeper Girl in an updated, engaging two-hour presentation for 8 to 12-year-old girls and their moms. The event includes discussions on internal beauty from a biblical standpoint along with upbeat worship, a fashion show for young girls and a hilarious look at fashions from the 50’s through the 80’s.

During the program, Secret Keeper Girl founder, Dannah Gresh, also tells the adoption of her daughter, Autumn (story to the left), and how people can help other children through Holt’s child sponsorship program.

For more information and dates, visit: www.secretkeepergirl.com
The Light Others Give to Me
A seventh-grader shares his award-winning essay

I have been given two types of light, from two different mothers. One mother gave me God’s light of life. The other mother lights my path from day to day through comfort and guidance, from the day that she first saw me. They have never met each other, but in their hearts, they knew that they were to share a common candle, that they had a special connection. My birth mother gave me the spark of life that God wanted, and my adoptive mother tries to illuminate His principles to guide me. My birth mother gave me up because she loved me enough to give me a chance to live. My adoptive mother wanted a child, and God lighted my path to her. These are ways that others give me light.

My birth mother was a loving person. She must have seen God’s light, because she did not choose abortion. Instead, she chose to go through those nine months, and then put me up for adoption, trusting there was another woman, living in the darkness of longing for a child, who could give me a chance to live. My adoptive mother wanted a child, and God lighted my path to her. These are ways that others give me light.

My birth mother was the person who has raised me, and brought me comfort when I was troubled because of her love for me. She felt that her child was out there, all she had to do was ask for God’s guidance.

When I was born, my birth mother knew that I had a family out there that wanted a child. She gave birth to me because she felt that it was the life that God chose for me. When my adoptive mother first saw me, she said that I was the light of her life. God’s plan was evident to her. She would raise me to the best of her ability. My adoptive mother is the person that I know will always be there in my darkest hour, and will always help me when I need her light most in my life. She will be the person that will find me when I’m in the dark, and will walk with me and guide me back into the light.

My birth mother loved me so much, she gave me up so that I could live and share my light with others, in a way God planned. When God sent the message to my mom, and illuminated her world, she knew that she was destined to have an adopted child. God cast light on all three of us in different and beautiful ways. I have been given brilliant lights in my life from my birth mother, my adoptive mother, and ultimately, God.  

Dan Noonan-Day | Cedar Falls, Iowa
Passing the Torch
When an adult adoptee adopts

“Are you okay with adopting?” asked Judy.

Startled, I wondered, how could I not be? I was adopted. But this wasn’t about me; this was about our commitment to become a family. In that moment, adoption ceased to be an abstract idea and it became our unambiguous decision to transform lives.

Like many of our friends, we married later in life, established our careers, traveled and lived well. However, when we were ready to start a family, we discovered that conceiving came with unexpected challenges. Ultimately, it mattered to us less how we became a family, so long as we did.

And so, on a warm Sunday evening in June 2008, we sat at the kitchen island and completed our application with excitement and trepidation, and embarked upon our adoption journey. Conceived in our hearts that evening, we knew we were becoming parents for our baby boy.

Family and friends could not have been more genuinely happy and supportive. My mother cried joyfully while my father quietly reflected upon their decision decades earlier. Judy’s mother smiled such that we knew she had long-reserved room in her heart only to be filled by the embrace of her new grandson.

Time has stood still twice in my life – watching the sunlight-silhouette of Judy approach our wedding altar, and on an otherwise unremarkable July 2009 afternoon when my cell phone pinged, alerting me to an incoming photo and call from my wife. Our son was waiting for us in Seoul.

The vibrant colors of fall signal metamorphosis, and so it was fitting that in November 2009, we received our travel clearance and expectantly flew to Seoul. Taking no chances for delay, we made a subway trial-run to the nondescript Holt building a day before our appointment. (It actually helped calm our nerves so we could then enjoy Seoul’s exciting sights and sounds.) The next afternoon, when escorted into the nursery to meet our son and his foster mother, the entirety of Judy’s body ached to hold him.

With the requisite documents completed, we guardedly returned to our hotel with Gordon and watched, entranced, as he took his first nap in our care. Our list of things to do was straightforward: bottle, diaper, sleep. It was only later, in the small quiet hours of daybreak, that we exchanged the timeless unspoken glances of all new parents – “now what?”

Gordon is our miracle and it is unfathomable to imagine life without him. From first steps to first words, reading and beyond, his nature is one of eager discovery. While watching finches in the yard one morning, he triumphantly declared, “Birds eat dirt!” And on a recent vacation, while collecting hermit crabs and shells along a white sandy shore, he gleefully marveled at brilliant tropical fish nibbling at his toes. Without doubt, he is all-boy, playful and inquisitive, and we truly are his parents as he is our son, and together we are a family.

Before returning from Seoul, we spent an illuminating day with Molly Holt, the woman who signed my adoption papers 40 years earlier. Over lunch, she candidly described the challenging future awaiting orphans then and now. Unquestionably, I have been granted the gifts of family, education and social mobility. My parent’s love transformed not just one little boy’s life, but now two. Serendipity? Divine providence? Who could have foreseen the impact of the Holt ministry?

As an adult Holt adoptee, I occasionally wonder how it informs my approach to fatherhood. Will my experiences be relevant to Gordon? Should I be more intuitive about identity? Of this I am certain: just as I was lovingly raised, Gordon will always know of his beginnings – not as a reason for solicitous gratitude, but to understand the richness of family and the blessings of life.
For Judy and me, our hope and charge is that Gordon will grow in body, mind and spirit. If we do this right, he will know the security of family love, he will chart his own course in life, and he will be prepared to serve others. Perhaps one day, he too will be okay with adoption.

Lawrence Vallandigham
Mountain View, California

LEFT: The Vallandigham family.
Lawrence and Judy, with son, Gordon.

For the first time ever, the Winter Jam Tour Spectacular will rock the West Coast – kicking off November 3rd in Denver, Colorado!

This is BIG news for West Coast fans of popular Christian music artists, including Kutless, Newsboys and tour host NewSong...

And even BIGGER news for children!

Every year, NewSong artists inspired thousands of concertgoers to sponsor a child in need. And now, they’re hitting 11 more cities – all out West!

This could be huge.

But first, we need your help. We need 100 volunteers to sign up new child sponsors at each concert. Volunteering is easy and fun, comes with FREE entry and a FREE CD, and takes 4-5 hours of your time – all to change a child’s life forever.

To find a concert near you or to sign-up to volunteer at a concert, go to www.holtinternational.org/winterjam
When you’re a traveler, you meet “interesting” people. I put that word in quotes, because if you’ve been backpacking before, you know that “interesting” can mean just about anything.

During my recent journey through Southeast Asia, I would sometimes wonder, “What’s interesting about me?” Compared to some of the characters I met, I didn’t think I was that special. I met a minimalist traveler; he only owned 40 things and all of them were in his backpack. I met a celiac traveler; he was on a mission to show how easy it is to travel, even if you’re allergic to wheat. I met a crazy traveler; he had thrown a grenade at a cow in Cambodia. And then there was plain, old me — “Hi, I’m David and I’m from the U.S.” Not that cool.

But what I’ve come to realize is that you don’t need to have “a thing.” Traveling is personal. We all travel for our own reasons, even if we’re not aware of them at the time. And that’s why I’m writing this article — to tell you why this trip was an especially interesting trip for me.

I was adopted from Seoul and this was my first time back in Asia. And that is kind of a big deal. As a Korean adoptee, there have been times when I didn’t feel like I belonged in America. This sense of belonging is something I’ve thought about my entire life — as do most adopted children. That said, it would help to cover my background.
In 1985, I was adopted when I was 4 months old by my loving parents. I grew up in a nice suburban town in Hunterdon County, New Jersey. My sister (also a Holt adoptee) and I were a few of the only minorities in town. My grammar school was predominately white. My high school was predominately white. By predominately white, I mean if someone said, “He’s Asian...”, that was enough to identify me. And yes, I attended Gettysburg College, which is also predominantly white.

Excuse me if I’m making this sound negative, because I don’t mean to. I love my teachers, friends, and family. I love my grammar school, my high school, my college. I was treated like any other person — it made no difference what I looked like and that’s how it should be. But let’s be real, I stood out. Throughout life, I’ve been very conscious of the fact that I was the only Asian person in the entire room. Not uncomfortable, just aware. So this made traveling in Asia a little more “interesting,” because somewhere in me was that little kid who remembered sitting in an all white classroom thinking, “Do I really fit in here?”

In October 2010, I quit my job to pursue my dream of traveling independently and chose Southeast Asia because it’s notoriously backpacker friendly. One of the things I was curious about was how it would feel to be surrounded by people who looked similar to me. It was an experience I had never truly had before.

Looking back, I was naïve in thinking that I would immediately bond with someone simply because I shared some of their physical features.

After an hour on a bus or a train or a boat in Southeast Asia, I would look around — all Asian people. Everyone in their own conversations, in their own worlds. But I didn’t feel any more connected to them than if I were on a bus at home with all white people. Somewhere in my head, I thought that being in an Asian country, surrounded by all of its culture, would make me feel more comfortable — to me, it didn’t.

People would come up to me and start speaking in Thai, Cambodian or Vietnamese, and I would have to politely say that I only spoke English. Situations like these are a little awkward.

One time, I was on a sleeper train in a cabin with three Vietnamese men. Even though they could only speak broken English, we were making decent conversation. I thought I’d try to explain my background and it reminded me how complex adoption can sound: “I was born in Seoul...But I’m from the America...I don’t speak Korean...My parents are white...My sister’s adopted from Korea, too...But no, she’s not my real sister. I mean she’s not my biological sister.” What a mess! They’d just do the patented tourist bale-out — the smile and nod. And I don’t blame them.

What I’m trying to say is that even at 25 years old, being adopted can be confusing. It can still feel like you’re stuck right in the middle. As a child, I certainly didn’t look similar to any of my white friends or family. And during my travels in Asia, I didn’t feel any more connected to people who looked similar to me. Yet, when I fill out any kind of form, I still mark the little checkbox that says “Asian.”

This isn’t one of those articles with a profound, happy ending. It’s one of those articles with an honest ending — if you’re adopted, you’ll always be learning new things about yourself. Even as an adult, new questions about your background will arise. And that’s what can make your journey especially interesting.

David VanArsdale | Clinton, New Jersey
Winter Jam 2011 Continues on the West Coast!

It’s official! For the first time ever, the Winter Jam Tour Spectacular will rock the West Coast – kicking off November 3rd in Denver, Colorado. This is BIG news for West Coast fans of popular Christian music artists, including Kutless, Newsboys and tour host NewSong…It’s even BIGGER news for children!

For six years running, Holt has teamed up with NewSong to raise awareness of orphaned, abandoned and vulnerable children overseas. Every year, in jam-packed stadiums from Georgia to Ohio, NewSong artists inspire thousands of people to sponsor a child in need. Already in 2011, Winter Jam has beat all records – recruiting more Holt sponsors, and changing more children’s lives than ever before! Thousands more children now have food to eat, clothes to wear, a safe place to sleep and a loving person to care for them.

And NOW, this fall, Winter Jam 2011 will continue out West – rocking the hearts and minds of Christian music fans in 11 more cities, from Ontario, California to Tacoma, Washington! Go to [www.jamtour.com](http://www.jamtour.com) for more info!

Graduate Photos:

Attention Holt Graduates: Deadline for photos of Holt adoptees who have graduating from high school and college is September 1st, 2011 for the fall issue of the magazine. For a graduate submission form, visit us at [holtinternational.org/gradsubmissions](http://holtinternational.org/gradsubmissions). Or email Ashli Keyser at ashlik@holtinternational.org to receive a form. If you submit a graduate form online, please confirm with Ashli that it was received.

Calendar Photos:

The Holt yearly calendar is a great place to publish a photo of your Holt adoptee. Send us your best photos by August 22nd. Please upload digital images (3 megapixels or higher) to [holtinternational.org/submissions](http://holtinternational.org/submissions) or mail glossy prints 4 x 6 to 11 x 14 to Calendar Photos, Holt International, P.O. Box 2880, Eugene, OR 97402. We cannot use inkjet or digital prints, or studio photographs.

Holt Events:

The upcoming New Jersey Gala and Dinner Auction on September 24th will raise money for Holt’s Special Needs Adoption program. “As an adoptive parent, I have experienced the joy and blessing of adopting through Holt,” says Jackie Miller, the New Jersey Gala chairperson. “I also know that there are thousands of children who still do not have families and those of us on the auction committee are determined to do all we can to help those children. I hope you will join us for this wonderful evening of friends, fellowship and fun—all while making a difference in the life of a child!”

The Portland dinner and auction will be held on October 22nd, at the Portland Marriott – downtown waterfront. Visit [www.holtinternational.org/events](http://www.holtinternational.org/events) for more information and to RSVP or contact Sandi Mehl at sandim@holtinternational.org.

**Georgia**

October 23, Marietta — Holt Family Picnic at Lutheran Church of the Resurrection, 3:30 – 6:30 p.m.

**Iowa**

September 24, Le Grand — Holt Family Picnic at Le Grand Community Park

**New Jersey**

August 20, Lakewood — Holt Family Picnic at Pine Park

September 24, New Jersey — Gala and Dinner Auction to benefit Holt's Children with Special Needs Program, The Westin Princeton at Forrestal Village

**Oregon**

October 22, Portland — Gala and Dinner Auction to benefit children in Holt’s care in Korea

Get the Info

Holt Family Picnics — For information or to volunteer at a picnic, contact Sally Dougherty at sallyd@holtinternational.org.

Holt Adoptee Camp — For Holt Adoptee Camp information, contact: Steve Kalb at stevek@holtinternational.org or go to [www.holtinternational.org/camp](http://www.holtinternational.org/camp)

Day Camp — For Day Camp information, contact: Michael Tessier at michaelt@holtinternational.org or go to [www.holtinternational.org/camp/daycamp.shtml](http://www.holtinternational.org/camp/daycamp.shtml)

Events — For Events information, contact: Sandi Mehl at sandim@holtinternational.org
Jamie
Born 10/20/02, Africa
Jamie loves to play outdoor games and sing, especially songs with gospel lyrics. She is meeting motor and social milestones, but has a speech delay. Jamie attends an early learning and occupational therapy center where she receives speech therapy. Her caregivers report that she follows commands, and is driven and responsible, with great interpersonal skills. Jamie waits for a family who has parented past her age and has access to the speech therapy she needs. Read her full story: www.holtinternational.org/blog/2011/07/jesus-loves-jamie%e2%80%a6-and-somewhere-a-family-is-waiting-to-love-her-too/

Hallie
Born 8/12/09, Northeast Asia
Hallie can wave bye-bye and say single syllables. She was born at 36 weeks. Her birth mother reportedly drank 3 or 4 cups of alcohol a week during the early stages of her pregnancy. She also smoked. Hallie was born with cleft edges of both lips, for which she received surgery in 2010. She also received heart surgery to close a VSD. Hallie has retinopathy of prematurity and has slight pale optic disks of both eyes, as well as a deep sacral dimple of her spine. Her October 2010 check notes that she is at a 10-11-month development level and that she can walk while holding on to furniture. She needs a family who can provide her with the ongoing medical care and therapies she will need.

Christina
Born 3/2/99, China
This beautiful, shy young lady with dimples currently lives with a loving foster family. She can say a few simple English words and enjoys surfing the Internet, watching TV and drawing. She was found in February 2000 with a birth note that stated she had epilepsy. Since she began taking medication, she has been seizure-free for over 3 years. An EEG test result was normal. Christina makes friends easily and loves helping her foster mother with chores. She needs a family prepared to help with grief and loss issues, who has experience with adoption and parenting past her age. Read her full story: www.holtinternational.org/blog/2011/07/all-she-hopes-for-is-a-family/

Jimmy
Born 8/25/01, Southeast Asia
Jimmy is ready to be a son. He had a normal birth and has been generally healthy and developmentally on track since coming into care. His birth mother was in prison when he was born and she did not come back for him after her release. He gets along well with staff and other children at his care center, and likes to play with the cats there. He also enjoys playing soccer. A skinny boy, he has an abnormally large stomach. His motor skills are excellent. While cognitively delayed, Jimmy is a fast learner and extremely bright. A successful family will be one who is knowledgeable about institutionalized children, who can honor his history and culture, provide him with education and emotional support, and who will show patience for reciprocal love.

For more information on adopting these and other waiting children, contact Erin Mower at erinm@holtinternational.org

www.holtinternational.org/waitingchild/photolisting
The Holt Ambassador Network is composed of individuals who share the Holt story and raise awareness in their communities about the urgent needs of homeless children around the world!

You can help by making people aware of Holt’s work, raising funds and finding potential adoptive families. Here are other ways you can help:

- Speak at your church, school or civic club
- Organize a fundraiser, garage sale, bake sale, event
- Network your online friends into action for children
- Volunteer at a Holt event, artist concert or picnic

To sign-up or for more information, go to: holtinternational.org/ambassadors