

And Baby Makes Four

by Ellen

And so, there we were—a family of three. Two formerly inert adults and one extremely active, young child named Lisa who alternately exhausted and amused us. Lisa was adopted domestically, having been born in Alabama in 1998. We loved her the minute we saw her in the hospital's nursery. The nurse caring for Lisa told me she “was tiny but feisty” in a thick southern drawl. I think they call that foreshadowing in literature!

And then quicker than you can say “Lisa get down from there—you're going to get killed,” Lisa turned three and was begging us for a sibling. At first, I just somewhat ignored her, as she was always asking for something. Besides, she had an imaginary playmate named “Honey.” She and Honey regularly had complete conversations. Since Honey would not require potty-training, why not just leave things as they were? By the time Lisa was four, however, I began to think that I wanted to parent another child, and that Lisa would really benefit from having a sibling around the house. Besides, with all her innate energy and highly social nature, Lisa would be a great help, right?

So I raised the issue with Mark. He took one petrified look at me and said “You can't keep up with the first one and you work, so what are you thinking?” (I have deleted the expletives!) One should never underestimate the powers of persuasion of a lawyer who wants a child, however, and shortly thereafter we found ourselves in Dale's office again talking about adopting a second child.

In talking with Dale, I realized my feelings about the type of child I wished to parent had changed since our first adoption. The idea of starting all over with an infant and all those sleepless nights did not amuse me. Truth be told, I am not a huge infant fan anyway. Older kids have always interested me more. (Dale, did I mention this during our first homestudy?) I was also more interested in parenting a girl than a boy. Just could not see learning about front-end loaders at my advanced age. We were also concerned about explaining the uncertainty of domestic adoption to Lisa and how upsetting it would be to her if a particular

situation did not work out. What if we got on a plane, a birth mother had a change of heart and we returned home without a baby? Dale suggested China. We agreed to think about it.

Eighteen months later, Mark and my sister-in-law traveled to China to bring Sara home. Lisa, now six years old and just starting first grade, and I waited anxiously for them to return. Lisa cried hysterically every day her daddy and aunt were gone, and I started to wonder what I had done.

That moment of self-doubt was quickly erased the minute Mark and Sara arrived home. Sara, at 15 months, arrived in our home after twenty-four hours of travel, completely alert, ready to eat and completely ready to become a part of our family. By the time I had fed her twice, Sara was entirely at home and seemed to have accepted us as her family. She had refused to take a bottle in China, and within one week I had her on a schedule that included sleeping through the night. Sara just seemed to know where she belonged.

Lisa and Sara got off to a great start together. Initially, Lisa was beside herself with excitement when Sara arrived home. Friends and relatives were kind enough to arrive with presents for both Lisa and Sara. There was lots of action in our house, and Lisa's teacher gave her a special bag of big sister gifts. Lisa even brought Sara in for show and tell and introduced her to her school's principal. Once the excitement died down, however, we were in for some rough moments. Lisa was clearly jealous of the attention Sara received and upset at having to share the family limelight. More than once Lisa asked us if we “could give Sara back to the orphanage,” even though she knew the answer to that question.

It was a process, but today Lisa loves and is deeply protective of Sara. Sara also worships her and has a special belly laugh for anything Lisa does that amuses her. On the rare occasions when Sara cries, Lisa is the first one there and will often hand Sara one of her most treasured stuffed animals to help calm her down. Yes, they still have their moments of sibling rivalry, but they pale in comparison to

the wonderful moments they share together as sisters. I knew I was in trouble one day when I asked them both to stop jumping on my bed. Instead of stopping, they just looked at each other, then looked at me, burst into insane laughter, and kept right on jumping. At that very moment I knew I had lost control!

Now none of us can remember what life was like before Sara joined our family. With her huge smile, infectious laughter and zest for life, she is a joy. During her naming ceremony at our temple, we told the congregation that we

wished to remember her Chinese birthparents whom we will most likely never meet. We also joked that her birthparents would be very surprised to learn that they had given birth to a little Jewish girl!

So we have become a family of four, and now, of course, Lisa is asking for a dog or a horse. (The horse is a definite no.) Our girls could not have come from more different places. Yet, as sisters, they now have so much in common. Mark and I, although often very tired and cranky, could not be more delighted!