

# AHH Special Needs Program

Paul and Mary Jackson have adopted four children from China. Two of their daughters were adopted through AHH's Special Needs Program. In February 2002, Paul and Mary Jackson adopted Li, a girl living in an orphanage in Huai Bei, Anhui, China. Li, whose special need is being a bilateral below elbow amputee, was adopted at age 9. In May of 2003, Paul and Mary Jackson adopted Olivia from Gui Gang, Guangxi, China. Olivia's special need is a heart defect, and she was adopted at 16 months. Here is their story.

## *Testimony*



My name is Mary Jackson. My husband Paul and I have four daughters from China, all adopted through A Helping Hand Adoption Agency. While our first two daughters, Madeline (adopted 3/98 at the age of 14 mo.) and Sophie (adopted 5/00 at the age of 10 mo.) were adopted as "healthy infants," our second adoptions were both "waiting," or Special Needs, girls. I would like to introduce them to you here.

Li (pronounced "Lee"), a bilateral below elbow amputee (she has no hands) came into our family in February of 2002 at the age of 9. During the entire time we waited for permission to travel to adopt her, I was worried, scared, and fearful that I was inadequate to be the mother-to-be of an older, "handicapped" child. A child who (just to add a little more stress to the situation) spoke no English, and had never been to school.

When I would express my fears, my husband would just smile very lovingly and tell me it would be okay, I was a great mom, just look at how wonderful our younger girls were, how this would be teamwork and we would provide a wonderful home and love for this child. I wanted to adopt her, but I was so scared.

Our extended families, unfortunately, shared my fears. We understood that they were, in their own way, trying to protect our hearts. What they did not understand, however, was that God's hand was indeed behind our commitment to adopt Huai Li. Late one night as I lay awake in tears because I was sure I wasn't up to this calling God was giving to us, I very suddenly and very strongly was caught up in a profound, huge surge of love and a feeling of absolute, perfect peace. I actually felt God speaking inside of me; He told me "Everything is going to be fine. Have faith in me. I am with you." I quieted; eventually my tears stopped, and I grew calm as I rested in God's love and presence. I still had some fears thereafter, all the way up to the moment when Li and I met our family at the airport, but I knew God was with me, that he would not give me anything to do that He wouldn't give me the strength and means to do. And He has TRULY, truly blessed this adoption! While the first few months were naturally a bit challenging, they were also filled with love and humor and our home became filled with God's presence. Li found that she had a secure, loving family with a mother and a father and sisters who loved her; she had a community that rallied around her and she developed friendships that are strong and continue to this day. She discovered artistic talents, academic abilities (she was selected as a Woodford Middle School V.I.P. earlier this year) and athletic skills, the excellence of which has gotten her selected for the Woodford County Middle School Girls' Soccer team! Our wonderful daughter Li, a gift from God, has achieved so much in her few years here with us, and she knows that she can do as much as she is willing to work hard for.



And she has found Christ, and she knows that He has a plan—a profound and wonderful plan—for her life.

Meanwhile, we have all had our lives changed forever by her presence and by her commitment to God. Of course there have been times of stress, challenge, anger, worry, and disappointment—the type of times that come in everyone's life, be we American or Chinese, handicapped or able-bodied. But the blessings we have received because we chose to follow God's direction, even when it initially entailed fear and discomfort, are countless. We have learned so well that we can do everything with God who sustains us.

Following Li's adoption, we decided yet again to adopt a special needs child. This time, God identified our child to us by matching the name we had chosen, Olivia, with a child that Helping Hand had surreptitiously (they thought!) also named "Olivia" for the Waiting Child list. Jiang Xiao Shi, soon to be Olivia Tucker Jackson, was 16 months old, and was described as having a ventricular septal defect. Because neither Paul nor I are in the medical field, we naturally sought the counsel of our family doctor regarding Olivia's medical condition.



We were told that her heart defect appeared to be "minor," although the fact that she appeared very young and very small in her referral photographs did not escape us. Indeed, when I received her in Nanning in May of 2003 (in the middle of the SARS epidemic, traveling a week before China closed its doors to all foreigners for six weeks), Olivia was tiny—in the negative 30th percentile for weight, and stubbornly refusing to eat anything but the smallest morsels of food (her foster mother had also advised me of this).

Once I got her home, however, and she joined our family, she responded well. She was immediately entranced by her big sisters, especially Sophie, and while her bonding to Paul and I took a bit longer than with our daughters who had been adopted as infants, she soon became quite "stuck" on the both of us. She loves to help me baby-sit for our friend's child, loves to help around the house, and especially loves to help Paul with his carpentry and plumbing jobs!



Today, Olivia is a super-active, smart, independent, fun-loving four year old who loves being with her family but also loves preschool and playing with friends. At the time of this writing, she is scheduled to have a scope done of her heart defect next month, the results of which will determine if further heart surgery is needed. We are confident that, whatever her prognosis, God will guide us and remain with us, and with her, throughout her life. She, too, is a gift from God and a blessing to all who know her.

Paul and I are always willing to speak with prospective adoptive families regarding special needs adoption. Please contact us if you have any questions.

May God's peace be with you.

*Mary Jackson*

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