

# AHH Special Needs Program

In July of 2005, Steve and Vanessa Poling adopted Owen, a little boy living in an orphanage in Jin Zhou, Liaoning, China. The Polings have adopted three children from China, and they adopted Owen when he was 2 ½ years old. Owen's special need is an ear deformity and deafness in that ear. Here is their story.

## *Testimony*



The journey for our son began very differently than the journeys we traveled for our two daughters, both adopted from China through A Helping Hand. On a visit to our library in September 2004 I found myself surfing the Internet while waiting for Mama and the girls to locate books and videos. Know this—when our family left the house that morning for the library visit, our family was complete. We were our family of four: Mama, Baba, and two happy and beautiful little girls. We had not discussed nor considered adopting another child. For reasons still unknown and understood, I went to AHH's site and began looking through the photos and descriptions of the children on the special needs list. I had looked at several children on the list and had come to a little boy called Stevie. Just as I was ready to move on I heard my wife say, "Who's that?" She stood over my shoulder and looked at this little boy's picture. He really didn't look very happy--sort of a blank stare into a camera. The information indicated that he had one deformed ear and was deaf on

that side. My wife commented that this little boy looked very much like me when I was that age. In fact he did. I'll also add that my name is Steven, and I was called Stevie as a child. I logged off, we checked our library materials and headed for the car. Before we had left the parking lot, my wife stated emphatically that we had to go get Stevie. From this point forward there was never any doubt that we really did have to return to China to get Stevie. He was from that point forward our son forever, and had been from the very beginning of all our lives.

We contacted Grace Shelton at AHH to learn more about Stevie and the adoption process for special needs children. I won't go into the details of the paperwork, what I will share is some of the "miracles" we experienced while working on our documents and waiting for travel time. We were blessed many times by several angels both in China and the West. Through Grace, we were contacted by a woman who runs Packages of Hope, an organization helping orphanages in China and other parts of the world. This angel had been to our son's SWI in Jin Zhou, Liaoning, and had worked with him. She led us to another angel, a Canadian woman who had taught at a university in Jin Zhou and was a project coordinator for Packages of Hope. She in turn led us to a Chinese university professor and a student in Jin Zhou who had met our son and worked with him on different occasions. Each angel had many pictures of him at the SWI and had a great deal of information to share with us. Our Chinese angels went the extra mile to visit our son many times after we had met



via e-mail and sent many pictures to us. They also took pictures we sent to them of our family to show our son and those caring for him. I know this might sound like a trivial matter, but to us it was nothing short of a miracle.

In June of 05 I traveled to Shenyang, Liaoning to meet our son and welcome him into his new family. Mama stayed at home with the girls for a very long two week wait. This being my third trip to China for adoptions, I was fairly well prepared and comfortable with all aspects of the trip. Every need was met and all went very well. I first met our son in the lobby of the hotel in Shenyang. With him were the orphanage director and two staff members. Very pleasant and professional people, they spent an hour or so with my son, our AHH guide and me in my hotel room. We took a lot of pictures and exchanged information. I was very impressed at how concerned the orphanage staff was regarding how our son, now named Owen, would get along with me and how I would get along with him. This let me know that he had been well cared for and indeed loved by those people involved in the first months of this life. After they left, Owen and I continued to become acquainted--we shared some cookies and fruit and played with a few toys. Later that evening we even had a visit from the Chinese college professor who had sent so many photos to us! She had traveled quite a distance just to make certain that Owen was going to be all right! It really didn't take her long to realize that we were meant to be father and son.



After a wonderful two weeks in China, Owen and I boarded our flight to the US. Though only a little over two years of age, he was an excellent traveler. Upon arrival at our home airport, we made our way to Mama and Owen's two new sisters. To everyone's amazement and joy when Owen first saw them he broke away from me and ran to Mama's open arms. Never a doubt that this boy was our son!

There were three other families in my group to China; each adopted a child who was labeled special needs. Owen's special need is a congenital condition called Microtia. We have seen our family doctor as well as a specialist at Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. We have learned that future surgeries can give Owen an ear that will look like his other "normal" ear, and in all likelihood hearing can be restored in that ear. All said and done, we don't see the special need. He is our son. He is healthy, happy, well-adjusted, bright, funny and has very much found his place in our family—his family. The special need didn't drive us to adopt him. I really don't know of anyone who has adopted a special needs child who was driven in that way. Each child is adopted because that particular child was meant to be a member of his or her family, and not because of any special need. All children have a special need and that is the special need of all of us—to be loved in a loving family like ours and yours forever. I truly believe that when you think you know it is right to adopt a child, special needs or not, it will be right for your family.

In God's time,

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