

**Date:** Fri Feb 25, 2005 6:55 am

**Subject:** arrival in Beijing

We arrived in Beijing late last night, jet lagged and slap happy. Zoey danced all around the Peace Hotel lobby to Jimmy Cliff karaoke music. Today we went to the Summer Palace and the Yong He Gong Tibetan Buddhist Lamasary on a cold, windy day. The Summer Palace was originally built in 1750, then razed around 1860 by the French and British and rebuilt by subsequent Emperors. It is a spectacular series of courthouses, walkways, gardens, shrines, bridges, towers for Buddhas, etc. The Emperors invested quite a bit of resources toward this living quarters.



The Tibetan Buddhist temple held a series of shrines for various Buddhas. Chinese were praying and burning incense at these shrines. It's been interesting to travel through Beijing - a very modern city with distinct character and loads of cyclists.

We are being well cared for by our guide Peter Zhong, and several families from our group are here already. Tomorrow more come, and we'll spend the next two days visiting sites around Beijing (Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City and the Great Wall) before we depart early Monday morning for Changsha. We expect to meet Sarah on Monday afternoon.



**Date:** Sun Feb 27, 2005 6:06 am

**Subject:** end of touring...

We are now packing our bags to leave Beijing and head off tomorrow morning for Changsha. This marks the stage in the trip where we will no longer be enjoying tourism, and instead will be focusing on adoption and getting to know our new child. We are excited, anxious, and deeply looking forward to meeting Sarah Xuelian and beginning the process of getting to know her. It's hard to believe that we will now turn to a family of four, just like that.

Today we had a lovely day visiting the Great Wall - where we had a brisk walk/climb, with Brian carrying Zoey in a front pack. She was the hit of all the crowds. We then went to the Ming Dynasty Sacred Walk, where Ming Emperors are buried. Many great stone animals and warriors. We had a nice meal and shopping at the Friendship Store.

Yesterday Brian and Annie went to Tian'anman Square and the Forbidden City. They were impressed with the scale of wealth and grandeur. Sharon stayed behind with Zoey, who is still jet-lagged and getting over a cough (she is much improved today).

We won't be at e-mail for at least two days, but would appreciate messages. We'll send a picture of Sarah next time we post.

**Date:** Tue Mar 1, 2005 12:30 am

**Subject:** Sarah Xuelian: Adoption Day!



Today we officially adopted Sarah Xuelian, after having her with us overnight. Yesterday (Monday), we woke early and flew from Beijing to Changsha, followed by an hour bus ride to the hotel. Quickly settling in, we met as an adoption group for the first time and heard the game plan for the next two weeks. Basically, bureaucracy rules the beginning of each week followed by long waits for R&R. Then, with little time to get stuff together, we re-boarded the bus for the civil offices.

We arrived as another bus was just leaving, full of adoptive parents and their kids. Heart-stopping. We boarded the elevator to the third floor. As we entered the room, Kathy told Sharon that the little girl sitting with her nanny in front of us was Xuelian. Sharon sat down next to them (we could not officially handle her until documents were checked, and we all needed some time to relax and see each other first) while Brian fumbled with the video recorder. Sharon asked

questions that we had prepared (in the bus!). Unfortunately, Xuelian's nanny was not there, but the orphanage director was. We learned precious little, but it was enough.

Finally, Sharon connected with Xuelian, who very quickly went to her shoulder and held her (OK, her arms were outstretched, but she definitely wanted to be held). Much later, Brian got his turn. The room was chaotic, with our ten families and two other groups (seemed to also be American), and more coming after us no doubt. Xuelian was the only one from her orphanage (Yiyang SWI), and the other nine had come early that morning from Yuanling SWI (at least an eight hour ride).

Not much affect from Xuelian on the first day, but she ate well and liked being held by both of us. Zoey and Annie had stayed back at the hotel (Zoey needed to rest, still fighting a virus), and Zoey was asleep for the night basically. She did wake late and saw Sarah in bed, but no chance for them to interact.

Monday was officially "Attachment Day", while Tuesday was "Adoption Day". We got off at 8 am and arrived at the same civil office, now peaceful with only us there. We went first (Yiyang with just us) to answer the requisite questions--Why do you want to adopt? Do you love Xuelian? Will you be with her forever and not abandon her? Then thumbprints (ours) and footprint (hers) and we were official! Photo and notary, plus payment of orphanage donation, completed the tasks. A good thing, as several more busloads arrived (French, Spanish languages were heard). Now all official paperwork was done, except returning next Monday for the children's passports.

Back to the hotel. Now Zoey and Sarah finally had a chance to play together a bit. Zoey was quite excited, showing Sarah all her toys and running around. Both smiled and at one point we had a lively pass the ball (Zoey in Sharon's lap, Sarah in mine). Eating of all a bit sporadic, but the prospect is that we can all rest up over the next several days, with occasional sightseeing. We are getting our hotel suite in order for the duration--we are going to make it!

We have been switching back and forth between Xuelian and Sarah, but are likely to no use Sarah. We don't quite have her name pronunciation down, and she is not responding to it (and we did not fully catch her nickname).

What's up ahead? Nothing Wednesday (may connect with a local contact of Brian's who lives here). Tour of embroidery factory Thursday. Friday we hire a van and go to Yiyang to visit the orphanage (!) where we expect to meet Sarah Xuelian's nanny and see her room, and learn something about the town of 400,000 where she was born.

What a relief! Sarah is healthy and is warming up to us. Our worst fears have not been realized, and life is looking very good.



**Date:** Sat Mar 5, 2005 1:13 am  
**Subject:** Update from Changsha

Sorry for the long delay in posting how things are going. We're doing well. Zoey is feeling MUCH better, and is happy and active. She has been so adaptable, and is a good spirited little traveler. She is the darling of all the wait-staff at the hotel, and they insist on cuddling her and have all taken their picture with her.

Sarah continues to warm to us. She loves Daddy best, and sometimes will not go to mom without a short cry if she has been in Dad's arms. But mom and Sarah had the whole morning to play today, and we had a great time. Sarah is smiling and chuckling now, and makes baby talk sounds. Nothing that sounds like words, with the exception perhaps of "Nai-nai" which means grandmother, and is the term that was used at the orphanage for the head Ayi, or nanny. She says ma, but I think it is just baby talk. Sarah eats wonderfully, and weighs 18.5 pounds (Zoey is now registering in at a whopping 22 lbs., so they are pretty close to swapping clothes). She loves playing and walking with help. She is great at throwing things, and loves to kick the ball too. Sarah even took a few steps on her own, then falls into mom's lap. Her laugh is adorable, and smile contagious. She is a definite charmer.



Yesterday we went to the Yiyang Social Welfare Institute, Sarah's orphanage. The drive was about 90 minutes on a very fast highway.

Scenery was mostly urban interspersed with terraced rice fields. Yiyang, like Changsha, is growing rapidly. It was previously regarded as a very poor area, but there has been development there. Still, we could see a measure of poverty that we haven't seen yet in our urban touring. The orphanage is small, and I'm sorry to say pretty distressing. The caregivers were obviously warm and loving, but the environment itself was pretty bleak and cold. The caregivers were excited to see Xuelian (Sarah) and grabbed her to take her to her old room. She cried - she wanted to be with mom (who was carrying her). They put her in her old crib, which was tiny. There were five cribs to the room along with a nanny cot. Three young babies were in the room we visited. The kids would be put in walkers in the hallway and would scoot around. We didn't see much of kids playing - apparently they were either sitting on their potties or sleeping. We were told there was a playroom, but that the door was locked. There was also a patio with laundry drying. Since there were more scooters out there, I assume the kids also played out there (not on the ground). The sense that we have after the orphanage visit is that the nannies do a great job with basic care, and they do hold the kids (and they laugh and talk a lot) but that there are few opportunities for developmental games/activities. Nevertheless, it is clear that Sarah is a smart, loveable child, and while we see orphanage delay, we think that she'll progress and make up for lost time.



Other than that, we've been hanging out with our fellow travelers (mostly in the play area) and having good bonding time with Sarah. It has been wonderful to have Annie here, who has been great with Zoey and comes up with game after game for her. Sarah also likes Annie, and goes to her without hesitation. It's also great that Zoey is feeling better, because she is such a joy for everyone around her.

We miss you all and look forward to coming home and having everyone meet our lovely daughter. We still have one more week! By Tuesday we should have all our documents from here (passport) and will travel to Guangzhou for final processing and Visa. It should be nice there as the weather is warmer and the area we are staying is reputedly super nice.

**Date:** Wed Mar 9, 2005 1:07 am

**Subject:** Guangzhou--last stop!

We traveled to Guangzhou on Tuesday after a long stay in Changsha. Changsha has its merits, including the nice Martyr's park that we visited on Sunday. We did not anticipate how people would mob Zoey, our natural daughter! Most Chinese have not seen Caucasian children much. Anyway, Zoey and Ana, another 3-year-old in our adoption group, have enjoyed playing together, as you can see in the photo.

Let's face it. Changsha is a dirty, busy city, and we were in a very busy part of town. We did find a nice restaurant kity-cornered to the hotel where we had a few fine meals. But for the most part we had to take hair-raising cab rides or bumpy bus rides to visit nice places. It will always be dear to us as adoption city, where we first met Sarah Xuelian, and we will probably return someday. But it is a big polluted city of 1 million plus 3-4 million surrounding. The rate of apartment complex construction is phenomenal. There is some variety in architecture for commercial buildings, but habitation is fairly uniform and blocky.

Now we are in Guangzhou. The preparation for travel and the journey were a bit traumatic. The plane ride was short, but we were stressed and had two kids now to worry about. The White Swan Hotel, once we got here, is quite amazing. Waterfalls indoors and a special play room for kids. Ample variety of western and Asian food for breakfast. Expensive (we are avoiding the hotels inside for the great variety of local restaurants). And packed with adoption families from all over China (mostly US, as the consulate is here).

Tuesday afternoon we had the infamous medical exam. Three stations and much crying later, we went back to relax, then out to Lucy's for baked potato and curry and satay. A short walk along the Pearl River then to bed. Wednesday morning we went touring to a famous Buddhist temple, with one of the only mother Buddhas. Got Sarah blessed there. Then on to the Chen Art Museum, with stunning works from the Qing (last) dynasty in bone, stone, silk and ceramic. Last stop was the jade and pearl factory, started in 1998 as a government shop to provide quality goods. OK, we bought some stuff.



Now most of our paperwork is done (one last check tomorrow at noon regarding US consulate), and we get Sarah's visa on Friday at 3pm (we got her China passport on Monday). We plan to relax the next few days--walk in the warm air (finally!) and eat in the restaurants. Oh, and shop.

**Date:** Sun Mar 13, 2005 10:24 pm

**Subject:** Home from China

Ah, home at last. We arrived in yesterday, about 36 hours ago, but only feel now as if we are getting settled. The flight was actually relatively easy, as we had two pairs of seats with plenty of room on the longest leg, and both kids slept for big parts. Unfortunately several of us did get some sort of bronchial infection in the last few days in China, and our biggest end game challenge has been coaxing the kids to take their antibiotics. (We also did not have the right kind of antibiotics for this illness, so had to get local doctoring--an adventure of its own.)

The US Consulate part of our official business was fairly mundane, thanks to our host Shirley Hu and a streamlined US process. However, the kids were run down and we did not actually see much of Guangzhou. We did get in some shopping (Brian writes: Dad, I know the shop you mean--very nice) but found it hard to focus on buying things. We now wish we had more, but the main gift from China is of course our new daughter, Sarah. You can see her and six of the ten other kids in our group with traditional hats for babies.

The trip was great, but it was also tough due to illness. Zoey was a real trouper and a great traveler (with the caveat being medicine taking). It was terrific to have Annie with us - she not only kept Zoey entertained, she also ended up making up games for another three year old in the group, and helped take care of Sarah as well. Not to mention boiling water, doing dishes, getting food, shopping, etc.

Eventually we'll post a record of the whole trip, along with more photos, on Brian's web page, but for now, we're just trying to get over jet lag and illness. We are also focused on welcoming Sarah to our family and home, and getting to know one another. Sarah is adjusting very well, all things considered. It's all so new to her, and now the most familiar things to her are these two wierd looking people (Brian and I) whom she only met 13 days ago! Sarah has bonded very strongly with Brian, and is now comfortable with Sharon (me). It's not clear to me that she has any sense that we are "mom" and "dad" - or what that entails, though we use the terms mama and baba/dada with her. She seems very happy - she wants to walk (with assistance) all the time, and chuckles when she gets near steps to climb. She is strong too, and can pull us in the direction she wants to go. Everyday she seems more and more at ease, and she is making fast progress in learning new skills. It is also clear that she has learned numerous "coping skills" from orphanage life. It is now up to us to teach her that she can trust us to respond to her needs and to love her unconditionally.