Chosen and Grafted Together

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In November of 2016, our 16-year-old sophomore, Gracie, was putting the finishing touches on her second quarter project for school, a family crest with motto. As her family motto, she came up with *Inserta sunt Electi*, which in Latin means “Chosen and Grafted Together,” and began to create the crest from there. Neither Troy ’89 nor I helped her come up with that motto. It’s something she’s known from the time she has been able to understand.

Gracie was handed to me in the crowded hallway of a hotel in the Guangxi Province of China in March 2002. As hotel porters were busy carrying the luggage of the 12 families traveling in our adoption group, staff members from the local orphanage were delivering babies. It was complete joy-filled chaos! “Hagan,” our translator yelled above the noise, and the Hagan family laughed and waved their arms, trying to be seen at the end of the hall. An orphanage worker, making her way through the maze of luggage, porters, and anxious parents, handed little Janie to her mom as the translator shouted, “Siefker,” “Edwards,” and other names, until we finally heard “VanLiere.” A Chinese woman smiled and handed me my baby, the one I had been praying about for years. She had a beautiful face, black slick-backed hair,
firm with hairspray, and black eyes full of curiosity. She looked at us as if to say, “You’re the whitest people I’ve ever seen,” and Troy and I laughed at her expression. We named her Grace Zhenli. Zhenli means “priceless gift” in Chinese, and we think of her as a priceless gift of God’s grace. I held onto her and said, “We’ve been waiting for you!”

We had been waiting for 22 months, longer than the gestation of an elephant, but had been praying for Gracie long before that. Long before we knew the woman who carried her was pregnant, we prayed. Long before we knew that a policeman found her on the side of a busy street, we prayed. Long before we knew that she was safe inside an orphanage, we prayed.

We prayed for the woman who would carry Gracie inside her womb; we prayed for angels to surround her wherever she would be discovered; we prayed for the environment where Gracie would be for the first several months of her life; we prayed for the wisdom to raise her; we prayed she would be a child, young lady, and woman of great integrity and character; and we prayed that she would love and follow Jesus all her life. Long before we knew anything about her, we prayed. And we’re still praying today.

**BEAUTIFUL GIFT**

Both Troy and I felt as if there were another child for us in China. We began praying again for our baby and traveled in 2004 to bring Kate Meili home. Meili means “beautiful gift.” Kate was sucking on her sleeve when they handed her to me, and we discovered that her entire sleeve was wet. We gave her a blanket, and she began to suck on it as well; we realized she did this to comfort herself. By the time we left China, she was no longer sucking on her sleeve or blanket because she had finally found someone to comfort her. We felt as if our family was still incomplete and, when Gracie was four, I asked her if she wanted God to bring her a baby brother or baby sister. She said, “I want God to bring me a baby cow.” She got a baby brother from Guatemala instead. David was smiling when his foster mother handed him to me in July 2007, and he’s been smiling ever since.

**HAUNTED DREAMS**

In God’s perfect and amazing plan, Troy traveled to China 11 years ago with the Christian group NewSong and met a 13-year-old girl who needed to be adopted before she turned 14 and would no longer be eligible, per China’s rules. He took pictures of her and on his return home, had a Skype chat with our longtime college friends Bob ’88 and Dannah (Barker) Gresh ’89. He said, “I met a 13-year-old girl in China and her face has been haunting my dreams ever since. She needs to be adopted in the next several months and you’d be the perfect family for her.” He emailed a picture to them, and Autumn’s face began haunting their dreams as well. They had nine months before Autumn turned 14, which meant that a home study, background checks, and mounds of paperwork and red tape, which normally take two to three years, would need to be completed at lightning speed.

At one point, when time was running out and it looked like an important piece of paper would never make it to a particular office, Dannah called me. I was sitting in an airport

The VanLieres (L-R): David, Donna, Gracie (holding the family crest), Troy, and Kate
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and said, "If God can get Peter out of a jail cell, He can get Autumn out of China!” We prayed, and God used a state senator in Pennsylvania to declare Bob and Dannah’s going to China a humanitarian effort, not an adoption trip. In August 2016, they celebrated 10 years with Autumn! When I meet people who are considering adoption but feel they can’t raise the money, or they list a number of obstacles in the way, I always say, “If God wants that child in your home, He will make a way to get that child in your home!” He’s proven this over and over in the lives of so many families.

FIVE-POINTED STAR

For Gracie’s school project, the sun is the center of her family crest design, signifying God, and in the center of the sun is a star made up of five different colored points, which represents the diversity of each family member. Those five colored points make up one star, indicating in Gracie’s words, “God’s complete and beautiful work in putting us together.” For her in-class presentation, she described the crest as God choosing and gathering her and Kate and David, and grafting them and us together into one family. She said, “It wasn’t by chance. It wasn’t random. It was purposeful and planned.”

We will never know until heaven how many souls were rescued and saved for eternity through the beauty of adoption, but one day, all nations, tribes, and tongues will stand before the King of kings and we will proclaim together, “Hallelujah! For we have been chosen and grafted together into the family of God!”

Donna VanLiere ’89 is a New York Times and USA Today bestselling author with many titles adapted for television, including The Christmas Shoes and The Christmas Secret.

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