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CONTACT: Mark D. Weinstein
Executive Director of Public Relations
[937-766-8800](tel:937-766-8800) (o)
[937-532-6885](tel:937-532-6885) (m)
Mweinstein@cedarville.edu
[@cedarvilleneews](https://www.facebook.com/cedarvilleneews)

International Relations: Adopted Into a New Hope

CEDARVILLE, OHIO - [Melissa Brown](#), assistant professor of [social work](#) at [Cedarville University](#), doesn't just teach caring for others, she lives it.

This September, she and her husband, Tom, adopted a boy from China. The Browns have four children between the ages of 7 and 13, the oldest of whom is Joey, the newest addition to their family.

Brown graduated from Cedarville in 2008 with a bachelor's degree in social work. After working in hospice at Crossroads Hospice, Brown began working at Cedarville University in 2014 as a [counselor](#), and she began teaching full-time at Cedarville in 2015.

Joey first stayed with the Browns in 2015 when he came to the U.S. for reconstructive surgeries at Shriners Hospital for Children. His face was badly burned in a field fire accident when he was 3 years old.

Brown learned from a fellow church member that Joey needed a host family while in the United States for treatment. She and her husband agreed to have him live with their family.

After the first round of treatments, Joey returned to his home in China. But in May 2019, he needed further treatments, so he and his family scheduled for him to return to the United States. The plan was for Joey to be in the U.S. for just six months to undergo one or two surgeries before returning home again.

However, the start of the COVID-19 pandemic prevented Joey from returning to China. Therefore, he remained with the Browns until 2022, as the intense government quarantine in place would make it difficult for an 11-year-old to make an international trip.

On his first trip to the U.S. for treatment, Joey's parents asked if a U.S. family would consider adopting their son. The culture in his home country made it difficult for someone like Joey.

"The disfigurement from his burns caused people to think his family was 'unlucky' and would make it difficult, if not impossible, for him to excel in school and in society," Brown said.

While Brown's family had initially declined adoption, they were asked again in 2022, and this time, they agreed and began pursuing the formal adoption of Joey.

"We had to wrestle with whether it was really in the best interest for him to have permanent separation from his family," said Brown. "It could be simple to say that he could have a better life here, but that would just be from the perspective that we have more opportunities here. Most people wouldn't agree to be adopted out from their families just to have different or better opportunities."

To process the adoption, the Browns needed an attorney skilled in both immigration and adoption, which are two separate specialties. Brown compared it to finding a doctor skilled in both cardio and neuroscience.

“We told the Lord that if this is what he wanted us to do, then he would have to make it happen, with both finding an attorney and providing the financial means to complete the adoption process,” said Brown. “We found one attorney from Dayton that was able and willing to help us. And the Lord has provided the money as well.”

And the Lord opened every door that needed to be opened. Dr. Chao Liu, assistant professor of psychology at Cedarville, from China himself, assisted the Browns in translating court documents, becoming a mediator between the Browns and Joey’s parents.

“I keep thinking of how the Lord protected Joey, and how the Lord has his hand on Joey’s life,” Brown shared. “When his parents decided to send him around the world, Joey had no idea what type of home life he could encounter. The Lord placed Joey in a family that cares deeply about him and wants what is best for him. This has nothing to do with us as parents, and everything to do with God’s providence in Joey’s life.”

Joey’s life is a blessing to others. He has adjusted well to life in America and is making many friends. He is doing well in school and is hopeful about the future. Joey maintains contact with his family, talking with them every month. He keeps them updated on what he is doing and what he is learning.

Brown compared Joey’s life to that of Joseph in the Bible.

When Joey initially came to the States, the Browns wanted him to have a name that was easy for his peers to pronounce. So they chose the name “Joey.” He decided at the time of his adoption that he’d like his legal name to be Joseph, retaining “Joey” as a nickname.

“When we chose the name Joey, the parallels between Joey’s life and the life of Joseph in the Bible were never on our radar,” Brown said. “In the Bible, Joseph was removed from his family, but he was able to bless them years later. And just like Joseph, Joey will be fully immersed in a different culture. But in his heart, he will always be Chinese. He will always be Zexi Xu, his parents’ son. And our prayer is that he will be a blessing to his birth family in China.”

Located in southwest Ohio, [Cedarville University](https://cedarville.edu) is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 5,456 [undergraduate](#), [graduate](#), and [dual-enrolled](#) high school students in more than [175 areas of study](#). Founded in 1887, Cedarville is one of the largest private universities in Ohio, recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, including its [Bachelor of Science in social work](#), high graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings, and the #4 national ranking by the Wall Street Journal for student engagement. For more information about the University, visit cedarville.edu.

Written by Sarah Mummert

Photo Captions

1- Melissa Brown with her adopted son, Joey

2- The Brown family

Photos by Melissa Brown