

March 2008

David and Susie have been living and working in central China for more than twelve years. During that time they have experienced many changes in Chinese society and in their own lives. Currently they are taking a short sabbatical break in the UK before returning to China in the early autumn.

Settling on the Far Side of the Sea

Looking back over the last twelve years incredible changes have taken place for millions of ordinary Chinese people and the small expatriate community living in our city. When we first arrived in China as language students in September 1995, we were required to live on the university campus in a single room sharing kitchen and bathroom facilities with an elderly Japanese gentleman. The only convenient way to communicate immediately with family in the UK was by public telephone at around £2 per minute. All overseas calls into our room required the caller to speak basic Chinese with a switchboard operator. Within a few months of our arrival, direct telephone lines were installed on the campus and the first foreign teacher managed to secure an Internet connection into their flat. Later the same year, the first local supermarket opened in the street outside our campus although it took several more years for the street to be covered with tarmac!



After one year of language study we became English teachers at the same university. In the next four years leading up to the new millennium, we continued to see many developments on our campus and throughout the city as a whole. As well as witnessing the arrival of modern architecture and new technologies, we also started noticing many changes in the social behaviour and daily lifestyle of our Chinese students. In the early years most of our students would be eager to participate in an evening 'freetalk' in our flat as there were few other forms of entertainment! As nightclubs and Internet bars began appearing throughout the city, attendance at 'freetalks' steadily declined. Thankfully there

are students who still appreciate the opportunity to speak with a native English speaker outside of the classroom and some of these continue to express a genuine interest in the Christian faith. Although materialism is having a major impact on young people in China, there are those who continue to seek spiritual meaning in their lives.

Our experience of China changed significantly in the new millennium when we moved from teaching English to overseeing the Academic department and moved from our campus accommodation into a flat within the local community. Currently all of the language students and most of the English teachers in our team live within the same local community. For us this has been an encouraging development as we sometimes felt like we were living in an 'expatriate ghetto' on the campus.

Without a doubt, our greatest experience of China has been fostering Edwin - Susie tells our story....

Our 18 months fostering Edwin (Haohao) were full of amazing things - even the American case worker exclaimed; "It's a God thing!" We prayed for help and the Lord answered; who to foster, whether we could adopt him ourselves, where he would go to live and who with.



We decided to 'bridge foster' a child in the time of waiting between entering a childcare unit and joining their adoptive family. In one of our team locations, most 'expat' families include several little additions! When Sunday school goes out of

the main meeting for classes, half of the congregation leave the room ...

But who? With so many children in our care, we asked for Father's guidance. Of three children suggested by Sally from Hephzibah, it was quite clear – Katie cried loudly when we tried to get to know her. Mingming wanted to go back to his favourite carers. But little Edwin settled into Dave's arms and gazed at us. We were startled when he very clearly said 'Hello' – miraculous at 4 months, in a Chinese environment! My regular visits became focussed on him. "Has he even noticed me?" I wondered, as the various shifts of carers came and went. I prayed for some connection with the little guy. One baby amongst the 30 cots in the Rose nursery was all tangled up



in his bedding, struggling and unhappy. I went to help and Edwin surfaced, beaming an enormous smile and reaching out for a cuddle!

Edwin was born without a left foot. Handicapped people in China face superstition, rejection, and

almost no access to public transport or areas. Our care for those with special needs prompts people to ask very direct questions; "Why do you love these children?" "Is there hope for them?" "Do you know their parents?" "Are you just using them to earn money somehow?"

When we were helpless and needy, The Lord rescued and adopted us. He loves to restore us to all we were created to be. People see this enacted as we include these children in our families.

Here am I and the children God has given me, we are signs and symbols in Israel of the Lord God Almighty who dwells in Zion.

Isaiah 8:18

As time went on we began to ask; "Can we keep him? Yet Your will be done..." It became apparent that Father had plans in place! As my Mum prayed, overlooking the sea in Cornwall, she saw a sea gull with a damaged wing which flew out across the ocean, strong and ready for life. We were encouraged to release Edwin to God's destiny. Then at the New Wine Bible Week a stranger gave Mum Psalm 139:9: "Though I rise on the wings of the dawn and settle on the far side of the sea, even there Your hand will sustain

me, Your right hand will hold me fast."

Contact between foster families and adoptive families is not usually arranged. We asked God to help us. During a retreat in the Abiding Peace resort a word came to me: 'Lifelink'. We typed it into Google and discovered an American adoption agency! They encouraged us to communicate with his 'matched' family in Illinois! The family are fervent Christians and have already adopted a daughter from China. We met them several times through Webcam internet links, exchanged emails and photos and even spent a whole day together visiting Edwin's favourite places and friends before the adoption. Such wonderful preparation! PTL! We became good friends and are staying in touch.

In the prosthetics centre we met amputees and staff who were very kind to us. (Nobody else had congenital disabilities! The provision of artificial limbs is expensive and health care is not free of charge. Families are only allowed one child and want that child to be healthy and strong.) A nurse wrote a poem for us, bilingually, called 'Pass love on'. Love you give away to others is still there after you've gone and blesses more people... The nurse doesn't know the Lord yet so as further children in our care require treatment we will offer her a Bible.

Letting go of Edwin was terribly hard but loving him is worth it and we chose to love him unreservedly, even knowing there'd be pain involved. Mark 5:19 says: "Go home and tell ... of all that the Lord has done for you." We have returned to the UK and still miss him a lot but can rejoice in all He has done and trust Him to help us in the future (2 Samuel 7:12).

When we return to central China in the autumn, David is expecting to step down from leading the Academic department and take up other responsibilities within the work. Also our joy of having been parents is leading us to begin adopting a Chinese child of our own. Thankfully recent changes in the law seem to indicate that we can complete most of the process from within China.

Blessed are those You choose and bring near to live in Your courts! We are filled with the good things of Your house, of your holy temple. Psalms 65:4

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Kathy Porowski – CFC Coordinator P.O. Box 10444, Santa Ana, CA 92711-9998.
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