

A SILENT MIRACLE

By Wendy Docter & Elaine Post
As Told to Sarah Harmon

This is the story of four profoundly deaf friends in an orphanage in Nanjing, China, who found themselves true sisters in two homes in Michigan only a mile apart.

With four birth children at home, Wendy and Art Docter first found themselves on the road to adoption in 1994. After bringing home their first Chinese daughter, Anye Wu, in 1996, they were surprised to learn that she was moderately to profoundly deaf. Little did this family know that Anye Wu would be the crack in the door to a much longer adoption journey.

One day, Wendy called Deniece Hess at CCAI about a little girl in the Waiting Child Program named You Ya. After learning more, Wendy surmised her family would not be traveling this road. You Ya was so profoundly deaf that the family could not communicate without sign language, and none of them knew sign language. However, the family felt God's will made clear to them, and in July 2002, eight-year-old You Ya, now Amy Lin, was united with her new family. While in China, Art and Wendy felt their hearts moved by the children Amy was leaving behind in the orphanage. Amy had had a makeshift family comprised of three other deaf girls including You Mei, Amy's best friend. In all of Amy's pictures, these two girls were holding hands. After Amy and her new family headed home, You Mei was not forgotten.

The Doctors' good friends, Charles & Elaine Post, were thrilled to welcome Amy home. Like second parents to the Doctors' children, the two families shared a deep love and respect for one another. When the Posts saw pictures of Amy's friend You Mei, they knew that this eleven-year-old girl, with the sad face, was meant for them. Once she was on CCAI's Waiting Child list, the Post family quickly went to work on the paperwork to adopt You Mei, who, now known as Anna Mei, came home on Valentine's Day 2004 to three excited older sisters. Amy and Anna, once best friends in an orphanage in China, were reunited in the United States two years later, as part of families who lived only one mile apart.

But the miracle did not end there.

When Anna arrived home, she and Amy began praying and praying for their other two friends to find homes in the United States as well. Anna had been given a goodbye letter from her friend Chu Zhi Lin just before she left China. In it, Chu Zhi Lin expressed how much she wanted a family too. Wishing they could have taken Chu Zhi Lin home with them from China the first time, Elaine called Deniece Hess at CCAI to see if adopting Chu Zhi Lin would be possible.

The Chinese government does not allow children fourteen or older to be adopted internationally, so the Posts and Doctors began a race against time. Chu Zhi Lin and the fourth girl left in the orphanage, Yang Shao, had only months before they turned fourteen and lost the chance to be adopted forever.

In what can only be described as a miraculous set of circumstances, the two girls appeared on the list of Waiting Children, and the Post and Docter families compiled two more dossiers in a matter of weeks and sent them to China after the Posts had been home with Anna for only one month. The

Chinese government, in light of the amazing opportunity these last two girls had to be adopted before turning fourteen, gave special permission for the one-year-after-placement rule to be waived. Elaine and Wendy traveled to China together to meet their newest daughters, Grace and Summer. Grace was adopted with just three days to spare before her fourteenth birthday.

One can only imagine what must have been running through the minds of four profoundly deaf teenage girls, reunited thousands of miles away from the orphanage in which they forged their first "family." Walking down the airport concourse, surrounded by mobs of people with balloons and banners, was surely overwhelming, but also what their families describe as an incredible moment brought together by the hand of God. Reunited with their husbands after a long adoption trip, Elaine and Wendy finally felt they would be a family again, able to weather any storms.

Now, almost one year later, all four girls have received cochlear implants. Through a processor worn behind the ear (like a hearing aid) to a system implanted inside the head, the neurons send a signal to the nerve for the brain to respond. As Wendy describes it, receiving a cochlear implant is not like automatic hearing, but rather like being born.

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Just as an infant learns to respond to her mother's voice and make beginning ba ba ba sounds, so must a deaf person learn to respond to and interpret the sounds received via the implant. While the process is slow and communication is crude at first, Wendy likens the implant to one of the greatest gifts in the world. The girls now have the opportunity to communicate in a world of sound. Blessed with a cochlear implant team near their homes, the Doctors and Posts are hopeful for even more improved hearing technology in the future.

The four girls thrive in their Oral Deaf School, all in the same class. They have blended with their families beautifully and love their siblings dearly, but the road was not always easy. Wendy feels that no family can be prepared for the damage done to older children existing in an orphanage for so long. The four girls were found abandoned between the ages of three and six, and occasionally they deal emotionally with life issues in this age range. When a family adopts an older child, says Wendy, along with it comes the great brokenness of their past. Part of that, for these girls, is never having dealt with their own abandonment, since, being deaf, they had no clear way to communicate this with others. The girls referred to their abandonment as "being thrown away" in sign language.

Elaine knows it's natural to expect issues brought about by a thirteen-year-old child being part of a family for the first time after having fended for herself for her whole life. She advises that families need to be aware of and prepared for these kinds of issues for older children. Rather than discouraging families from traveling down the road of an older child adoption, she advises prayerful consideration along with education and support for families considering an older child.

The Post and Docter families believe that orphan children are not forgotten by their Creator. They draw strength not only from each other, but also from the God who put this miraculous adoption journey together. Four daughters of China, reunited in America, receiving love, family, and hearing – a not-so-silent miracle anymore.

