

The Potter Family Adoption Blog

Our Trip to China to adopt Julie Grace Potter.

December 15, 2005



We all slept well again, although Larry and I both have colds. Larry felt better yesterday but isn't so good today. We're almost out of medicines for us, so it's good we're going home tomorrow. Julie woke up happy and smiley. She is very cuddly first thing in the morning, giving each of us a big grin when she sees us. As soon as she is fully awake, let the playing begin!

We gave her a bottle, which she drank down completely. Unfortunately, nearly all of it came back up within minutes of finishing. That convinced us that the new formula is not good for her, and that we needed to get some of the original kind we were using. We cleaned Julie up in the bathtub, one of her least favorite places. Poor little one had to take a bath on top of the yuckiness of throwing up. She survived and so did we. We all went to the breakfast buffet and Julie ate eggs, French toast, and regular toast. All of that stayed in fine, but she was acting cranky, like she didn't feel 100%.

After breakfast, we took a taxi to the Friendship Store to buy water, crackers, and formula. Julie had perked up by then, taking in all the sights around her. She had a ball riding up six floors of escalators! When we checked out, the cash register printer broke and wouldn't print the charge slip. We had to sit and wait while a technician fixed it. Our whole shopping experience today made me long for home. I really like China, but there really is no place like home. I hope Julie will grow up to feel like America is her home too, even though her first home was very far from there. My two-week experience as a member of a racial minority doesn't give me nearly enough insight to help her grow up that way. I just pray that people will be good to our sweet baby girl, but I know that won't always be the case.

We took a taxi back to the hotel, this time without any unexpected pit stops! We fed Julie a bottle around noon and it all stayed in. Yaaay! I'm so surprised that formula brands could be that different, especially considering that Julie eats almost anything. In any case, Julie went down for her nap around 1PM. We had to work with her to quiet down again, but she did better than yesterday.

At 2:30 we woke Julie from her nap in order to meet our group in the lobby at 3:00. While we were waiting for the rest of the group, Larry and I met the general manager of the hotel. It turns out he grew up in Chicago! He congratulated us on our adoption and said how much he enjoys seeing the children come back in a few years when their parents adopt again. He said they look so happy. What a neat conversation. When our whole group arrived, we took photos on a reddish couch in the lobby. They came out really well. All the kids could sit up since they were a little older (all special needs). None of them cried.

We boarded the bus and headed to the US Consulate visa department. We had to leave everything on the bus, including cameras and bottled water. They did let us bring in Julie's bottle though. We were very grateful, since it was just about time for her to eat. We went up to the fifth floor, where we showed our passports and went through security. We entered a large room full of US parents holding Chinese babies. I wished I had my camera! We had to show copies of our and Julie's passports to a woman behind a window in order for her to verify that we were who we said we were and that we were actually there. When everyone was ready, a man appeared and told us a little bit about the work of the consulate. He said that last year they processed 8000 visas for children adopted from China. That makes up a little more than a third of all international adoptions to the US in a year. Wow. After the information session, he had us all stand, raise our right hands, and repeat after him. Basically, we affirmed that all the information in our paperwork was true to the best of our knowledge. When the oath was over, our guide received and passed out documents to each family. We got Julie's passport back, with an IR3 visa in it. She can enter the US officially now! We also got the famous "brown envelope" that we are not allowed to open. We are to give that to the customs and immigration officials at our port of entry and they will know what to do with it.

We went back to the hotel and played for a little while, until it was time for dinner. We decided to try the hotel buffet, which turned out to be really good! We wondered why we didn't try it sooner. During dinner, we got to meet Brian Luwis, the president of our adoption agency. He and his wife are in China adopting their fifth child, a girl. We got to meet her too. What great timing! We really enjoyed talking with Brian, his wife, and their friends who are also here adopting. It was interesting to hear a little of his perspective as someone "higher up" in the adoption circle. He has entertained officials from the CCAA in his home, so he is fairly well connected. It was also fun to introduce Brian to Julie, since he has a special role in her adoption. When our dossier was finally finished back in May, Brian hand-carried it to China. He just happened to be going on a business trip that weekend, so he took it with him in his luggage and dropped it off at the CCAA. We have a picture of him holding the box, standing on the steps of the CCAA. That's even better than a FedEx tracking number! That aside, Brian is a really friendly, humble, conversational person. Our dinner was also a little sad, since it was the last time we'll see some of the friends we've made on this trip. Larry and I are the last ones leaving tomorrow, so we will go to the airport alone. I sincerely hope that we have a reunion sometime in the future. I want to see how everybody's children grow and change!]

One last thing about dinner. We were serenaded by a guitar-playing, harmonizing trio of musicians! We couldn't quite figure out what nationality they were, but we think we saw a Cuban flag on one of their lapels. They sang "Que sera, sera," "You are my sunshine," and "When the saints go marching in" to us. Very fun. Julie didn't know what to make of it though. I'm guessing that music is a new thing for her. We'll change that quickly!

After dinner, Larry and I fed Julie half a bottle (only half because she'd eaten so much table food at dinner!) and put her to bed. She complained a little, but did OK overall. After she fell asleep, we packed everything up. It really wasn't too hard since we gained a lot of space with our new piece of luggage. At this point we're all ready to go! We'll have breakfast in the hotel tomorrow and then catch the 9:30 shuttle to the airport. Our flight to Hong Kong leaves around 11:30, and our flight to Chicago leaves around 6:30. Yes, we will have about 6 hours to spend in the Hong Kong airport. Please pray for our travels, especially for Julie. We hope her ears do better this time, and that her sleeping isn't too terribly messed up. This will be our last post from China! Our next update will be from Illinois, back on Central Standard Time. Thank you for sharing this amazing journey with us!

Erica, Larry, and Julie

Thursday December 15, 2005 - 07:33am (PST) [Permanent Link](#)

December 14, 2005



Today was a really good day. Julie woke up after 11 hours of uninterrupted sleep. It was the first night that I didn't hear her coughing every few hours. What a blessing! We went to the breakfast buffet and had a fun time together. Julie enjoys touring the room, touching all the Christmas ornaments that are hanging from the ceiling. After breakfast, we went to the playroom with Julie's friend Cheyanne. The two of them had fun exploring all the toys.

Larry stayed in the hotel room from 11 to 12 while our guides went to the US Consulate on our behalf. We didn't get any phone calls asking for more information, so that's a good sign. We're almost done with our paperwork!

We could see that Julie was getting tired and needing a nap, but she is becoming more resistant to sleep. When we first got her, we could put her in her crib and she would sit there quietly. Now she will protest. I believe this is a good sign, even though it is something we have to work on. She has learned that crying gets her something, like attention from us. She has also learned that there is a lot going on and she doesn't want to miss it! I would also guess that she has more energy now that she is eating well. She was happy to fall asleep in my arms around 12:40PM. I put her on the bed and she slept for 2 ½ hours.

Julie was all smiles when she woke up. In fact, today was a very smiley day. Now that she is feeling better, her happy little personality is shining brightly. She giggles so easily! We had a fun round of kiss-the-neck giggling, change-the-diaper giggling, tickle-the-belly giggling, and more. We really enjoyed our time together today.

After naptime, we took a taxi back to Shamian Island. We walked through the White Swan Hotel to admire the fish ponds and waterfall. Julie could have stayed there all day, watching the fish swim by and the water crash down. After that we shopped some more. We were able to get much more done with Julie feeling well. Larry was really in his element, cracking jokes with the shop owners and talking them down to a lower price. I think Julie will be a lot like her daddy in that way – they are both hams! As soon as Julie sees a camera, she puts on a show. She also blinks her eyes tight, anticipating the flash. What a smart girl! At 5PM, we met some other families for dinner at Lucy's. Julie was her usual voracious self, gladly eating tidbits of sweet and sour chicken from my plate. I even fed her with chopsticks! The pictures are very cute. She looked like a real toddler dressed in her new pink outfit and wearing real shoes.

While we were in our final store for the day, one of the saleswomen started cooing at Julie, then held out her hands to hold her. Julie went to her gladly, which still gives me mixed feelings. I am glad to have a friendly, social child, but I want to make sure she knows who mom is. I stood right there the whole time, watching the lady play with Julie. On our way out, another saleswoman wanted to hold her and Julie was happy to go to her too. My instincts told me that it was OK to let the women play with her for that little bit of time. I wouldn't let others feed her, comfort her, or do any other exclusively parental things, but this seemed different. For now, I will wait patiently for the moment when I know for sure that Julie prefers us over anyone else. She has definitely decided that Larry and I are both good things in her life. Whenever we walk somewhere, she stays with one of us for a while, then reaches out to be carried by the other, then reaches back to the first after a while longer. I haven't seen her reach out for anyone but Larry and me, unless prompted somehow. I think it's great that she enjoys both mom and dad.

We caught a taxi at the White Swan and headed home. We hadn't gone far when the taxi pulled over and turned off the engine. He said something to us in Chinese and got out of the car. We thought the car had died. We weren't sure what to do! Then we looked out the back window and saw our taxi driver run to the railing and begin to relieve himself! It was hysterically funny. Larry even managed to snap a few photos from behind. We laughed and laughed, quieting ourselves just in time for the cabbie's return. He was out there a long time! At least he stopped the meter from running. Ha!

We finally got home around 7PM and started calming down for the night. I gave Julie her last bottle of the day, but unfortunately not much of it stayed down. We ran out of the formula we had been using so we bought some Chinese Enfamil at the store. I'm not sure if that is causing the problem or if she just ate too much tonight. I guess we'll see how it goes in the morning. We had another battle trying to put Julie to bed. We tried the same thing as last night, letting her crawl around on our bed for a while. She was content with that, but as soon as we put her in her crib she cried. Finally, Larry just had to stand by her crib, talk to her, rub her back, and keep putting her back on her tummy. Eventually, she quieted down and zonked out. We want her to realize that she's OK and that we're nearby, but that she has to go to bed when it's time. I wonder how it will be when we're in our own home with a new crib in a separate room. Our plan is to stay flexible and see what works.

Until next time,

Erica, Larry, and Julie

Wednesday December 14, 2005 - 09:37pm (PST) [Permanent Link](#)

December 13, 2005



Well, Julie coughed through the night again and woke up grumpy. That makes 7 straight nights of coughing. We've used about half a bottle of PediaCare, which seems to work for about 4 hours at a time. This morning we made the decision to give her the antibiotics we brought from home. The doctor's instructions said they were for "fever and bad upper respiratory symptoms, for presumed ear infection." We've been holding off on giving them to her because she hasn't had a fever since that one day last week. But then we noticed her poking her fingers into her ears and decided that it couldn't hurt to give her the medicine. Well, guess what?!?! It seems to be working! Yipppeeee! We had such a better day today! Julie is back to crying only when she is trying to tell us something specific, like "I'm hungry" or "I'm tired," as opposed to general, non-stop crying and fussing. We are so relieved! She's been grinning at us, playing with us, and making lots of cute faces at us. Thank you for praying!

I do want to say one thing for the benefit of those of you who are in the waiting phase of this process. Last night after Julie finally fell asleep, I finally came unraveled. I just started crying, wondering what we had gotten ourselves into and feeling like a terrible person for even thinking that way. Well, today I talked to

another mom who had talked to another mom and we are all going through the same thing. We all look at each other and think “they’ve got it all together” or “their baby is so easy, what’s wrong with ours?” when in actuality, we’re all facing challenges of some sort. Every baby is going through issues related to eating, drinking, pooping, sleeping, bathing, attaching, or any number of other things. This is a hard thing we’re doing! I felt so much better to hear that many others have entertained the thought “did we make a mistake?” I know that we didn’t, but I want to say it “out loud” so that you can know ahead of time that you may be surprised by the things you think and feel in the midst of everything while in China. The adjustment process goes two ways. We don’t expect the babies to adjust right away, and I’ve learned that we shouldn’t put pressure on ourselves to adjust right away either. It’s ok to feel what you’re feeling and to talk about it with others in the group. Sitting at home with a referral picture (or waiting for one), it’s hard to imagine anything but pure joy and love for your child. That’s how it should be, but that’s also outside of the reality of a child who isn’t sleeping, who is screaming, who isn’t eating, or who just won’t respond to you. So, hold onto all that love and commitment, but don’t despair if you encounter negative, confused, or sad feelings that take you by surprise. God knows what He is doing! OK, enough of the soap box...back to our day.

At 10:30 this morning we all met in the lobby to take group photos. We formed groups according to the province our babies were from, except for the special needs families. We just formed one group all together. Many of us dressed our babies in the outfits we bought on Shamian Island. They looked so beautiful! Julie also had on her new squeaky shoes, which she finds fascinating. (For those of you who don’t know, squeaky shoes have a little squeaker in the heel so that the shoes make noise when the baby steps down on them.) Larry and I wore our new shirts as well. We got a few nice family pictures, although we just can’t get Julie to smile at the right moment!

After the group photos, we tried to take a picture of just the babies sitting on the steps. This was to replace the famous “red couch” photo that many families take at the White Swan hotel. Some of the babies cried, some fell over, and some did just fine, like Julie. The pictures are cute. Even better, though, is the picture Larry took while standing behind the babies, looking toward all the parents with their cameras! How funny to see all the intent parents trying to capture photos of the babies! I’ll put one of those shots in today’s photo album.

After the photo shoot, we rode up and down the escalator a few times since Julie just loves doing this. She likes going up the best. There have been a few times in the last week that she has gotten so excited about something that she has started squealing with delight. Going outside, seeing the hotel fountain in Fuzhou, and riding up the escalator are some of those times. We love it when she does that! I am guessing that she will have the same reaction when she first sees our cats. Unfortunately, that will probably send them running to hide under the bed. Hopefully they will become good friends after a little while.

Every time we ride the elevator, we use Julie’s hand to press the buttons. It’s fun to press the up/down button outside the elevator because it causes a loud “ding” and then one of the indicator lights starts flashing. We don’t think she quite understands the cause and effect yet, but we want to give her lots to experience and process.

One neat thing I’ve noticed today is that Julie is starting to wrap her arms and legs around me more when I am carrying her. She didn’t do that at first. I don’t know if it because she is getting stronger or because she is attaching more, or maybe both. Whatever the reason, it is a great feeling!

Julie fell asleep at 12:15 for her nap and slept for 2 hours and 45 minutes! We certainly have a sleeper! That’s when mommy and daddy can get some things done, like writing blog posts and washing bottles. She woke up crying once during her nap, which is really unusual. Larry picked her up and then gave her to me and she settled down and fell back asleep. We think she might have been dreaming and gotten scared. I am so thankful and amazed that being near to her parents brings her comfort! She is learning who we are!

This afternoon, the rest of our group took their oath at the US consulate, giving them permission to bring their new babies into the country. We will do that on Thursday. That meant we had the whole afternoon and evening free. It’s actually been really good to have some extra, unscheduled time. It helps us figure out a routine for Julie and learn what she needs. Naps are not optional for optimum functioning!

This evening we joined the Lennards in the hotel playroom. That was fun! Julie got to play with all kinds of new toys like giant leggos, balls, and stacking rings. She didn't know what to do with most of it, but that's ok. We had to leave at one point to go change her stinky diaper – she's really good at making those! It's funny how Larry and I both do everything, like dress her, change her, bathe her, etc. I guess it's like when you first get married and you go everywhere together and do all the shopping together. We'll learn to divide the labor in time, I'm sure. Right now it's just fun to share all of this.

We got back to the room and got some McDonald's for dinner, which Julie gladly helped us eat. In fact, she got this very intent look on her face. French fries are serious business! Around 7PM we thought it would be good get Julie to sleep, especially since she was rubbing her eyes and acting tired. Well, she wanted nothing of it! She cried in protest. After an hour of holding and rocking, we decided to just let her play on the bed with us. I guess you can't force sleep! Larry and I were both really tired and started to fall asleep while she played in between us. At one point she realized that she didn't have our complete attention anymore. She crawled up to Larry's face, put her nose to his nose and said "ehhh!" really forcefully! Larry opened his eyes to see Julie's little face right there, causing him to bust out laughing. I started laughing too. What a cutie pie! Julie seemed really pleased that she made us laugh, based on the big open-mouthed grin on her face. It was a great moment, like God was reassuring us that we would grow to enjoy each other as a happy family. Shortly after that, we put her in her crib and she amused herself until she fell asleep around 9PM. I wonder if Larry and I will always go to bed at the same time as Julie, or if we will still have a life in the evening. I guess we'll find out!

We hope you enjoy today's photos! As always, thanks so much for emailing. Your encouragement has meant a lot to us.

Blessings to all,

Erica, Larry, and Julie

Tuesday December 13, 2005 - 10:43pm (PST) [Permanent Link](#)

December 12, 2005



Today was the US Consulate appointment for most of the families in our group. There are about 4 families who won't have their appointments until Wednesday, including us. Those who did have their appointments today just needed to be in their rooms near the phone while our guides went to the consulate on their behalf. Consequently, we all had a slow morning with no agenda. Larry, Julie and I took a walk around the hotel. We found the outdoor pool and circled it a few times. It is not warm enough to swim, but we had fun looking at all the plants and flowers we could find, touching each one. I captured some good photos of Julie making faces at Larry.

We spent a lot of time just playing in the room today. We are trying to teach Julie to clap her hands. She watches us and lets us clap her hands together. She even tries to do it herself, but her wrists are fairly floppy and she ends up with her fingers intertwined. Every time we clap we say “yaaaay Julie!” It will be sweet when she says “yaaaaay” back to us! We also got out the stacking cups today. We tried to play with them in Fuzhou, but Julie wasn’t really interested at that point. She wasn’t able to do much with them except stick her hand inside a cup. Today she was able to grab one cup and pull it out of the next one! She even used her thumb in the process. It is such a little thing yet such a big thing. It’s amazing to see her progress. We were so pleased to watch her figure out how to put the cups back inside each other. She doesn’t get it every time, but she can do it. Then she learned to play a game with Daddy. She would take one of the cups, drop it off the side of the bed, look at it, go back for another cup, drop it over the side, and continue until all four cups were on the floor. Then Daddy would help her slide her feet over the edge of the bed and land on the floor. She would then crawl to a cup, pick it up, give it to Daddy who would put it back on the bed, and the game would continue. It was wonderful to see her actually play! We were also happy to see her actually understand something we wanted her to do. She figured out that Larry wanted her to go back for each cup and give it to him. It’s a challenge not being able to communicate to her, especially when we want to comfort her. This too, will come in time.

Another neat thing about today is that Julie is really trying to walk. She is getting better at pulling herself up, and she can remain standing for longer periods of time. We helped her walk over to the mirror and then propped her hands up against it. She stood there for quite a while making faces at herself. Then she slowly moved her feet so that she inched along the mirror toward the wall. She got to the corner and wasn’t sure what to do. We realized that she is afraid of “falling” from standing to sitting on her bottom. She did so once and started to cry. Instead, she looks for one of our hands to hold onto while she slowly lowers herself down.

This afternoon we went to Shmian Island to shop. The shops are set up to cater to foreigners adopting Chinese children. There were so many cute things! We got a silk outfit for Julie, as well as tops for Larry and I. Part of shopping on the island is bargaining for a good price. I’m not very good at that so I leave it to Larry. They accept Chinese and US cash but no credit cards. We actually ran out of cash and had to borrow some from another family in our group! We need to go back later this week because we didn’t get everything we intended. We still need to buy some gifts, as well as an extra suitcase for the trip home (that was our plan all along).

I had some interesting conversations with a few of the shop owners while we were on the island. All of them asked “where is your baby from?” and “how old is she?” They sure know how to get a parent talking! After talking a while, one shop owner asked “why didn’t you want a perfect one?” referring to Julie’s nose and mouth. I could tell that she was sincere in her question, desiring to understand why someone would choose the path we have. In retrospect, I should have said “she IS perfect!” but I didn’t think of that at the moment. Instead I said something like “we don’t care about that,” which was my way of trying to say that we don’t see her as imperfect at all. I explained that we have many resources at home to help her and that she needed a family just as much as any other baby. It was a good conversation. Most people don’t comment on Julie’s face, unless it is to say what beautiful eyes she has. One shop owner did directly ask us “will you be able to fix her lip and nose?” Again, we answered with factual information. Everyone we’ve talked to means well and wishes the best for the babies. We haven’t felt offended by questions at all.

Overall, Julie has been very fussy today. It seems like she was either sleeping or crying, interrupted by brief moments of playing. Of course, we only take pictures of the good moments, so our photo albums don’t tell the whole story. It’s been really hard, actually. We don’t know what is wrong or how to help her. She cried at breakfast, she cried on the island, she cried on the bus, and she screamed at night after we gave her some teething medicine. I’m sure she doesn’t like people sticking things in her mouth, since she’s had so much of that in her life. She surely has memories of her surgery and recovery, and they’re probably scary and painful. When we give her medicine, she usually cries when she sees us coming but stops when she realizes we’re done and it didn’t taste bad. Tonight she just kept screaming. I think she went on for about an hour before she fell asleep in my arms. It was very stressful for us. We wonder if we’re doing something wrong. It’s also hard not to fear that this might just be her personality. We have no baseline to compare with, so we don’t know how she “normally” acts. Besides, her “normal” has just

changed so much that she may not know how to act either. Please pray that God would give us wisdom to know how to care for this little person. This is the child He gave us, so we must be the right parents for her. We'll keep you posted.

Erica, Larry, and Julie

Tuesday December 13, 2005 - 04:36pm (PST) [Permanent Link](#)

December 11, 2005



Sunday, December 11, 2005

Guangzhou, China

Today was a relatively relaxed day. We all slept well and woke up in time to enjoy the breakfast buffet together. After her bottle, Julie ate some eggs, hash brown, banana, and bread. The only thing she spit out was a piece of a grape. In fact, she seems willing to try anything we put in her mouth, and most of it she likes. Besides a grape, she has rejected baby food, yogurt, and rice cereal. We think she likes things she can chew better. Her favorite food seems to be whatever it is that mommy is eating at the time. We have a funny picture of Julie putting my diet coke bottle to her mouth, since that's what she saw me do! We didn't let her drink any, of course, but it was really cute. She also figured out a fun game with the empty coke bottle. Daddy held it by the top in front of her until she grabbed it and pulled it away. Then she'd drop it and the game started over. It was great practice for gripping things. She learns new things every day!

Today started with a visit Guangdong Folk Art Museum. It was absolutely beautiful. The building itself was made up of open courtyards and walkways along many different rooms full of art. The carvings in the building were worth looking at in and of themselves! One of the rooms contained ivory carvings that were truly amazing. I can't imagine how they carve so many details. Ivory carving is illegal now, but the existing pieces are stunning. Julie fell asleep while strapped to me, which I love. After the museum we went to a tea house where we saw a demonstration on what makes a quality tea pot. The good ones don't drip down the side at all when you stop pouring. It was impressive to watch. Larry and I bought a tea pot, a tea holder, and some little tea cups. We haven't bought many souvenirs yet, but this one we both really liked. After the demonstration we were free to browse and take part in another tea ceremony. They had six kinds of tea to sample. I should have known, however, that Julie would melt down before I even had a chance to sit down and try the teas. Perhaps she just doesn't like tea!! We mixed her up a bottle and she chugged it down. We hoped that would settle her but it didn't really. She was happier when we got back on the bus and it started moving.

When we got back to the hotel, Julie fell asleep for 2 ½ hours! I guess she needed the sleep. When we

first put her down for her nap, we draped one of the bed comforters over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the top of the crib to make it darker. We could hear Julie babbling and amusing herself for a while. Then we heard a strange sound and looked over to see that she had grabbed the edge of the comforter and pulled it down to the mattress. She was climbing the comforter! The next thing we saw were two little eyes barely poking over the top edge of the crib. It was so funny. There's a picture of that in the photo album for today. We ended up taking her out of the crib and she fell asleep on our bed. It seems to be a good nap spot.

Julie woke up cranky so we gave her another bottle. Then our friends, the Lennards, came to visit from down the hall. Julie was still fussing away. Our friends suggested that maybe she was teething, which we know she is. She sucks on her fingers and sleeves constantly. Silly us, we never thought to give her teething medicine. We broke out the Oragel and fought our way into her little mouth. Amazing! She was a happy girl after that. I was so relieved that her crankiness finally settled down some.

For dinner, the Lennards and we ordered out from Danny's Bagels, a take-out place that serves western food. We got a pizza, breadsticks, and garlic bread. It was actually pretty good! Julie ate a little bit of everything, including some ham off of our pizza. She's also getting quite conversational while eating her bottle. She'll look up at us and make all kinds of noises, waiting for us to repeat them. Her favorite sound is "ehh!" She will also blink one or two times and wait for us to do the same. Those are sweet moments. When she's not eating, she will say "ma ma," "ga ga," and "la la." She also has quite the repertoire of faces, which she loves to practice in the mirror at herself. It's so funny to watch her! She'll shake her head back and forth, blow bubbles with her tongue and bottom lip, scrunch up her whole face, open her mouth wide, tip her whole head way to the side, stick her tongue out and waggle it back and forth, among others. I wish we could upload video clips more easily. It took 9 hours for the last one to load! I guess it'll have to wait until we get home.

Next post to follow very soon....

Erica, Larry, and baby Julie

Monday December 12, 2005 - 08:54pm (PST) [Permanent Link](#)

The Potter Family Adoption Blog

Our Trip to China to adopt Julie Grace Potter.

December 10, 2005



Saturday, December 10, 2005

Guangzhou, China

Ahhh, last night and this morning we experienced a classic first-time parent moment. Just as I put Julie to bed, I smelled a stinky diaper. I picked her up, changed her, and zipped her sleeper back on. As I put her back in her crib, I thought I smelled her again. Was she not done? I opened her jammies up enough to peek into her diaper and there was nothing there. OK, must have been gas, right? In the middle of the night Larry checked her because he thought she smelled. Still nothing. Hmmmm. Well, we solved the mystery this morning as we took off her PJ's in order to dress her. There was an escaped poop! Poor little girl, she slept with a poop stuck to the middle of her back all night. I guess it must have rolled back there when I changed her the first time. She had just gone, so the rouge poop hadn't mushed down yet, giving it added mobility. We cleaned her up and I don't think she was any worse for the wear. We also had a good laugh! ☺

Today's main order of business was Julie's medical exam. We caught the bus at 9AM and headed over to Shamain Island where the exam would take place. Most US adoptive families used to stay at the White Swan Hotel on the island, but fewer do now that the US consulate has moved off the island. The medical exam consisted of three stations, ENT, medical/surgical, and height/weight. Before we could begin, our family and the other Fujian family had to go next door to get photos taken. We had tried to do it the night we arrived in Guangzhou, but the photographers who had done the rest of our group had run out of film. We got that done and lined up in the medical/surgical line. The doctor listened to Julie's heartbeat and then had us undress her. He looked her over for any unusual marks. He didn't find anything unusual, except a wet diaper! We got her dressed and moved on to the ENT line. The first thing they did there was squeeze a squeaky toy on each side of Julie's head to see if she would turn to it. She did, thus passing the hearing test. Then they put a tongue depressor in her mouth to look in. That did not go over well at all. They ended up gagging her in order to make her open up. The doctor was quite surprised to see Julie's cleft, as if we might not know about it. She called in two translators to ask us about it. We didn't have any special needs paperwork with us because we weren't told we needed it. When one of our guides assured the doctor it was ok, she signed off on the form. Finally, we got in line for the height/weight check. Julie had barely stopped wailing when they took her from us. She started right back in! I didn't hear her length, but I do know that she weighed 17.3 pounds with her clothes on. That's a little more than we thought, which is good! We are convinced that her belly is growing. When we first got her it was flat, but now it hangs over her diaper like it should. It is so cute!

clean baby!

That's about it for today. We hope all is well with you. Congratulations to those of you who received referrals this week! Soon you'll be here in our shoes with your precious little ones!

Sunday December 11, 2005 - 08:40pm (PST) [Permanent Link](#)

December 9, 2005



Friday, December 9, 2005

Today we got to sleep in – yeah! Julie's mood is so much better when she wakes up naturally. We've learned that if it is dark in the room she will just keep on sleeping for 12 or more hours. If we open the drapes she will wake up a bit sooner. Larry is already planning how to darken her bedroom at home, since it is the brightest room in the house first thing in the morning. It figures!

Just before lunch we visited West Lake Park in Fuzhou. It was gorgeous! There were so many people everywhere, which is normal for China. In addition, there were a number of school groups there. When a group would see us, all the kids would swarm over saying "hello" and "good morning" to us, wanting to practice English and see the foreigners. We were happy to talk to them, but it definitely felt unusual to be the center of a mob! At one point, Larry turned on the video camera and the kids went nuts. They all wanted to be on camera! I was standing outside the group watching. When Larry finally emerged from the center of the mass it looked something like the Pied Piper. How funny. Another time we walked to the top of a bridge overlooking the lake to take pictures. A Chinese family spotted us and wanted to take our picture with their son. We posed with him, thinking how funny it is that we will forever be included in this family's photos. I wonder what they will say every time they look at that picture?!

As we were walking out, I got a good photo of a little boy wearing split pants. For those of you who aren't familiar with split pants, they are pants that are open along the center seam. They are a "diaper alternative," if you will. He looked very cute. When we got to the exit, several women approached me and started cooing at Julie. Larry pulled out the card we have that explains what we're doing, written in Chinese. They passed it around, nodded and smiled. One of them even gave us a "thumbs up." It was touching.

After the park, we went to a museum and tea ceremony. Although the guide told us all about the man whose home had been turned into a museum, I couldn't tell you much about him at all. My mind has been elsewhere for much of our sightseeing lately! The tea ceremony was really neat, especially since I love tea. The only problem was that Julie had a meltdown in the middle of it all. Giving her a bottle didn't even work. We had to step out and walk around with her for a while, then give her the bottle, then re-join the tea ceremony. Basically, we missed everything but the sales pitch. Julie seems to exert more of her

will every day, like she is waking up from a very long 18 month sleep and discovering that there is more to life than sitting propped up in a walker. It can be challenging for us, but it is a good sign for her.

Today I started working with Julie on feeding herself a Cheerio. I let her stick her hand in the baggie with all the Cheerios and she started playing with them. Then she made a fist and managed to grab a few. I then grabbed her fist and moved it to her mouth. Once it was there, she was able to get a few Cheerios into her mouth, while the rest fell all over. We tried again and again, with some success. It seems to be easier to put one Cheerio on her open palm and then help her get her palm up to her face. I always thought that this kind of thing was sort of instinctive, but I guess it isn't if no one has every allowed you to even try. Anyway, Larry and I were both so proud that she made a little progress! That's what we have to aim for: a little progress each day.

We had to have our luggage outside our room at 3:30 PM. Wow, our stuff expanded somehow! I guess that's what happens with a baby. At 4 PM we got on the van and headed to the airport. When we got there, our guide got our boarding passes and checked our luggage for us. Isn't it interesting that you don't have to check yourself in? Our guide didn't even need our ID to do it for us. Speaking of ID, we now have Julie's passport. It is a Chinese passport, in her Chinese name, Zhang Lujie. Although she is officially, 100% our daughter, she will not be an American citizen until she reaches American soil. Our guide informed us that our plane was delayed by an hour. Instead of leaving at 6:40, it wouldn't leave until 7:30. Our late night was getting even later. The airline issued us meal coupons which we could take to the gate to get dinner. We said good-bye to our guide and went through security with no problem. We got our meals at the gate but most of us didn't eat them. The plain rice was ok, but the shrimp with head, eyes, and legs was too much for me. I'm not sure what the rest of the meal was.

Julie was starting to get pretty fussy, but who could blame her. It was almost her bedtime and we still had several hours of travel ahead of us. As we were trying to amuse her, we discovered that if we kiss her neck she will usually giggle! That's what the picture is at the top of this blog entry. Too cute! We boarded the plane around 7:15 and had an interesting time trying to rearrange our seats so that I wasn't in one row while Larry was in another. They ticketed our entire party together (two families), but didn't keep each family together. Julie was screaming at this point, which only made things worse. We eventually figured it out and it turned out that Larry and I had an empty seat next to us. We fed Julie a bottle during take-off and she was fine. She didn't even seem to notice that we were flying. I was so happy! Although she was restless during the flight, we were able to occupy her by playing with one of the cups in which they served our drinks. I slowly moved it up over her head, she reached her arm up, I put the cup over her hand, she dropped it into my lap, and we repeated over and over again. I'm glad the flight was only about an hour long! About 20 minutes before landing, Julie started to scream. We couldn't figure out what was wrong until we saw her pull at her ears and realized it was the dreaded ear popping pain from our descent. I didn't have another bottle to give her, and she wanted nothing to do with water poured into her old bottle. All we could do was hold her while she screamed. I felt so bad for her and the rest of the plane, but what could we do? Next time I will have a bottle ready. She stopped screaming when we landed and did just fine all the way to the hotel. By the time we put her to bed it was 11PM, and we had to be up and on the bus at 9AM the next morning. What a schedule for a little person. We are realizing how tough she really is. She has been through so much in her short life. She is our little trooper and we love her!

One last thing. The crib in our new room is more like a play-pen, the kind with netting for the sides. Well, Julie has this thing about textures. She just loves to run her fingernails down anything that feels different to her. Well, you guessed it. As soon as we put her down she started scratching the netting, reaching way up high and scratching all the way to the bottom. For about 10 minutes all we could hear was "rrrrrp, rrrrrp" coming from her crib. Larry and I couldn't help but lie in bed and laugh. She has a lot in common with our kitties at home! Eventually we all fell asleep and another day was done.

This hotel (China Hotel by Marriott) is really nice. They even left a letter in our room saying "congratulations" and thanking us for bringing our love to one of China's most precious resources, its children. They also provided a heart-shaped gift box with a bib, wipes, diaper pin, and pacifier in it. Wow! Our last hotel was really nice too. It was a 5-star hotel with a control panel for all the lighting, electronic "do not disturb signs," a doorbell, a canopied crib, and bathrobes. Probably the nicest thing about that hotel was a special faucet for drinking water right in the bathroom. It was so nice not to have to buy bottled water all the time. The beds were pretty hard though. This hotel is really nice too, but no

drinking water. At least the beds are comfy! Also, there is a Starbucks right in the building and a McDonalds on the corner. What more could we need? Ha ha.

Oh, I also forgot to include one thing about yesterday. The orphanage gave us a copy of the note that was found with Julie, stating her birth date and time. We are so grateful to have it. We were hoping to get the original note, but they said it was in a file somewhere. Actually, Larry accidentally left the photocopy on the table in the orphanage lobby and we didn't realize it until we were on our way home. Our guide called back to the orphanage to ask them to mail the note to us, but they said that the Civil Affairs office in Fuzhou should have a copy in their files too. Our guide said he'd find out the next day and take it from there. We were a little anxious to not have it in our possession, but we just had to wait and trust. It turned out that there was a copy in Fuzhou! On our way to the airport, we pulled over by the Civil Affairs office and someone ran out to the van with the copy. Yeah! This copy was actually even clearer than the first one. What a blessing. We really want Julie to have as many pieces of the puzzle as we can provide. It would have been a real loss to leave without this piece.

Ok, I believe that is enough for now. I'm going to sign off and upload today's pictures. Thank you so much for sharing this trip with us and thank you for your many encouraging emails! We will be home in less than a week now. Please pray for the rest of our trip and for all our health, especially Julie's cold. Thank you!

Love,

Erica, Larry, and Julie

Sunday December 11, 2005 - 12:18am (PST) [Permanent Link](#)

December 8, 2005



Today was a very full day. We had to wake Julie up early in order to feed her and meet the van at 8:00. Most of the day was spent bumping around in the van on the way to and from Xiamen. Our tailbones are all feeling it! In addition, we got to practice making bottles on the run, changing diapers in odd locations, and trying unsuccessfully to get Julie to nap on our laps. She just doesn't want to miss anything that is going on around her! It's funny to think about what we're doing from an outside perspective sometimes. What new parents, at home in their normal routine, would decide to take their baby for a day trip requiring 8 hours of van travel and no naps, the day before flying to a new city? We would, apparently! It will be interesting to see how things change when we finally settle in at home. I guess we can be thankful that we know how to be out and about with Julie at a moment's notice!

The scenery on the drive from Fuzhou to Xiamen was really stunning. It was a beautiful interplay between mountains and valleys, all covered with lush vegetation and spotted with homes and fields. Julie has such a beautiful homeland. I will look forward to visiting it with her one day, sharing in the view together.

When we arrived in Xiamen, the first place we went was Julie's finding site. Our guide found the Jimei industrial district easily, but then had to stop and ask a few people in order to find the exact location. First we located the living quarters for the factory where she was found. Then a local man pointed us down the road to where the gate was. It turns out that they are taking the factory down, so we were lucky to find it when we did. It won't be there in the future for Julie to visit. For that reason alone, I am so glad we have pictures. As for the spot itself, it was dirty and dusty and no place for a baby. The ammonia factory inside was very old and probably unsafe. Even so, I didn't feel anything in particular being there. It was so hard to actually imagine her abandonment at that place. It just looked like a place like any other. Maybe it was hard to imagine because I have never seen an abandoned baby by the roadside. There is a disconnect between my experience and that reality. However, it is indeed Julie's reality, at least her past reality. We took some family photos there, as if to proclaim the future that has grown out of that past. I did take a good look around and wonder who brought Julie to that spot, which direction they came from, why they picked that place, whether they worked nearby, how long she lay there before being discovered at 11PM, whether she was cold or scared, who exactly found her, and if we would ever know the people who gave her life. As we drove away, I wondered if we were passing very near to them, perhaps the nearest we ever would. It is very unlikely that we will ever know the answers to any of these questions.

Next we drove to the finding site for the other baby in our group. After that, we stopped for lunch in a hotel restaurant. I was feeling so tired at that point, both from lack of sleep and also the emotional nature of the day. We fed Julie her bottle which she gladly slurped down and then threw back up. That is the first time she has spit up food, and it took me quite by surprise! I heard a low rumbling and then there was a virtual fountain of formula coming out of her nose and mouth. It's amazing how babies can do that and not seem phased at all! After that, Larry graciously took her to the bathroom and changed her poopy diaper. We are very pleased that she poops regularly. I know, it's not polite conversation to discuss poop, but I'm told that all parents do so and find it completely normal. Her first two poops were like sticky tar, and boy did they smell bad! Then we started sneaking some juice in with her formula, and the lunch poop was lighter and definitely less tar-like. Yay! One item of note: there are no baby changing tables anywhere. I wish I would have brought a changing pad to set on the floor. We've been using a blanket instead.

Our final destination for the day was the orphanage. When we arrived, Julie was finishing her bottle from lunch, which surprised the workers. They had obviously never seen her eat from a bottle. Our guide told them about the special nipple and they seemed pleased. They were not as pleased that Julie didn't have enough layers on! I tried to explain that the van was very warm, but I'm not sure they cared. Oh well! They accompanied us up an elevator to a floor with a locked gate over the elevator entrance. When we got off the elevator, they had tea waiting for us, as well as little boxes of orange juice. It was really touching to be treated like such honored guests. At that point, we were in the main office for the SWI. I could see a big board on the wall with pink and blue tags. I'm assuming that there was one for each child. All in all, the SWI wasn't that big. From what our guide told us, there are relatively few international adoptions from Fujian province each year. Only 100 babies a year are adopted from Fujian, as opposed to 2000 from Guangdong province. It may have something to do with the fact that Fujian is a wealthier region of China, but I am not sure. Our guide said that many of the babies left in the Xiamen SWI are special needs, like Julie.

Pretty soon after we arrived, one of the nannies scooped Julie from my arms and started playing with her. Then she walked around the corner and out of sight. I wasn't sure what to do! Larry and I had prepared ourselves for the fact that they might want to hold Julie, and we had decided that we were ok with that. We figured that it was only a moment in time and that it would mean a lot to the people who had taken care of her. Neither of us had prepared ourselves for the possibility that she would be out of our sight though! We ended up going with the flow and it was fine. Julie didn't seem to mind being passed around, which made the difference for us. If she had cried or even whimpered, I would have jumped to grab her back. Actually, I was a little disappointed that she was so unaffected by being passed around by three or four nannies. I guess I was secretly hoping that she already knew who mom and dad were and that she

would cling to us. It was an awkward feeling to have “my” child not know me from the next person. In retrospect, however, I realize that she didn’t know the nannies either. She didn’t even show any name recognition. I really think that she has never attached to anyone and never learned that she has a name. In the quiet of our hotel room, she really is starting to show signs of attachment and interaction, but when her environment gets too stimulating or overwhelming, she glazes over and focuses her attention on some little thing to pick at with her fingers, avoiding eye contact with anyone. In this case, she kept playing with one of the nannies’ sequined blouses. I am sure that things would be much different if we visited even a month from now. Either way, she is ours now and we will not let go!

We got to visit the baby room, where our travel companions saw the crib that their son had occupied. Julie left the SWI in March of 2004 to go to her foster home, so they didn’t have a crib for her anymore. I walked around the room, stopping to talk to a few of the babies. They were all bundled up and wrapped in down covers, lying on their backs. I’ve never been in a room with that many silent, immobile babies. The first one I talked to stared right into my eyes, so I stayed and cooed at her some more. I remembered what I learned in our attachment classes about how important eye contact is, and I wished I could stay and stare into her beautiful eyes all day. Actually, I wished I could just take her home with me! The next baby I looked in on avoided my eyes. It was sad that she had already moved beyond the point of expecting interaction. How heartbreaking. Even so, I believe the babies are well loved and cared for the best that they can be in that setting. The SWI was very clean and bright, and the workers were very friendly. They put Julie into one of their walkers to show us, but all I could think of was how much of her life had been spent in one so far. I am pretty sure that her foster mom put her in one all day, while the other babies in her foster home sat in bouncy seats. One of our main jobs is going to be strengthening her muscles so that she can learn to walk. Right now she has to work really hard to shakily pull herself up to standing for a few seconds.

Next we went to the toddler room where we were promptly swarmed by little ones wanting to be picked up. That was actually harder than seeing the babies. The kids seemed desperate for attention. One little boy pointed to the shelves in the next room, and Larry assumed he wanted to show us something. We followed him and he pointed to the toys on a high shelf. What he really wanted was for us to get him a toy. When we said no and started to move away, the look on his face was tragic. I could see the some of the effects of orphanage life so clearly in these kids. I wished I could stay and give each of them one-on-one attention for a whole day.

One neat thing was that I was able to take pictures of a baby that friend from our agency will adopt soon. She was so beautiful and active. It made my day to be able to email the pictures home. I know how it feels to wait for any word about your child, so I was thrilled to be on the sending side of information.

We finally said our good-byes and headed out. On the van, Larry showed me a picture he had taken and asked if I recognized it. It was a Jesus fish, the kind you see on cars back home. It was the kind with the word “Jesus” inside it. It was on a van outside the orphanage building! I wonder how it got there. Did a Christian give it as a gift when visiting? Do they even know what it means? That combined with the gift book the orphanage gave to us makes me wonder if someone there is a Christian. Either way, it is great to see the name of Jesus associated with the building where our daughter spent her first nine months. Again, I am reassured that God is in all the details!

On our way home, Julie got quite stinky so we had to find someplace to change her. There’s nothing like the floor of a questionably clean restroom at a rest area! One of the women brought me a stool that I didn’t know what to do with, but later realized that they must change diapers while sitting on a stool somehow. I just kneeled on the floor as Larry passed in wipes. There have been several occasions upon which I’ve thought we must make a funny scene, Larry and I, trying to learn the ins and outs of this parenting thing. Julie is teaching us and tolerating us, for the most part! ☺

We hope you enjoy today’s pictures. Sorry for the delays in posting. It’s just that we seem to run into streaks of days that are packed to the gills with no time left over to write. Hopefully the pace of this week will be a little saner.

God bless!

Erica, Larry, and Julie Grace

Saturday December 10, 2005 - 04:19am (PST) [Permanent Link](#)

December 7, 2005



Wednesday, December 7, 2005
7:45 PM, Fuzhou, China

I thought of something that I forgot to include in my last post. While we were at the notary's office, Julie held up her left hand in the form of the sign language sign "I love you." I know that she doesn't know sign language, but she has somehow learned to arrange her fingers in just the right way to make the sign. Olivia, the Daniels' 4 year old, was sitting with her family across the table from us. She declared, "she just said I love you!" It was really sweet. We've been trying to capture the sign on film, but no such luck yet.

I also forgot to mention that Julie has a little bit of a cold going on. Amidst the craziness that was Monday, we managed to give her eye drops twice, although she didn't like it at all! It seems like the congestion has moved now, since she was coughing and had a runny nose today. She also felt feverish, so we gave her some Tylenol. I'm sure glad we brought all the medicine that we did. Hopefully Julie will wake up feeling better tomorrow. She is asleep now, but there was some major crankiness involved in getting her to that state!

We finally weighed Julie today using the scale in our hotel bathroom – she is all of 15.5 pounds. I can't believe how small she is, considering that she will be 18 months old on December 19th. She fits well into the clothes we brought, all of which are a maximum of 12 month size. She also fits into size 2 diapers perfectly. In fact, she is the same weight that her paperwork said she was in September. Either the September weight was wrong or she has hit a growth plateau caused by her inability to progress in the foods she eats. We do have a big success to share in the area of food though! This morning we loaded up a bottle with the special cleft nipple and started squirting the formula into Julie's mouth. She swallowed it just fine, so we moved the nipple closer and closer until it was on her lip and then in her mouth. She proceeded to do exactly what we hoped for, she ate! It was a joyous moment to see her actually eating from a bottle. As far as we know, she has never done that before. She was able to get so much more food in that way, and we didn't have to face her crying every time we would remove the medicine dropper to suck up more formula for her. She ate from the bottle three times today! She also ate eggs at breakfast and Cheerios throughout the day. We think she really likes the Cheerios because they help with her teething. Baby food is still unpopular. I really don't know if she is getting enough food in her, but I figure we just have to get by until we get home and I can ask the doctor all about what she needs. In any case, it was so sweet to feed her a bottle and stare into her eyes.

Today we got back the pictures from the disposable camera we'd sent over a month ago. They are great! They are all of Julie and her foster family. It looks like she had a foster mom, dad, and sister. There were also two other babies in the picture, both of whom have special needs. I'm assuming that the family

fosters several babies at a time, which actually lends insight into some of Julie's "orphanage" behaviors. Her foster home was more like a mini-orphanage rather than a family in the sense I was thinking it was. We can definitely see some of Julie's coping techniques. For example, she can spend a long time staring at her hands, turning them this way and that, twisting her fingers around each other, sucking on them, etc. Often we can see that she is in her own little world, even if we are right there with her. Her favorite comfort position is on her tummy on the bed, all by herself with no one touching her. If we put her in her crib, she will entertain herself, and in the morning she doesn't let us know she is awake. We can see that she is, but she just lies there until we go to her. She is also showing delays in other ways, like not being able to walk at all and not being able to pick up items like Cheerios. She has no concept of feeding anything to herself. We were actually prepared for most of these things, but it is still sad to see. It makes us wish we could go back and be with her up until now, making up for all she missed. The important thing is that we are with her from here on out, and we know that she will catch up.

I don't want you to think that things are going poorly, because they really aren't! We also see progress in just a few days. Julie is beginning to show signs of protest when one of us leaves the room, and she seems to turn to mom for comfort more and more. She is also a very happy girl who likes to giggle and smile. In fact, we have uploaded a video that will only be available for 24 hours. If you have the time to wait for a 100 + MB download, you can get a copy of the MP3 at <ftp://ftp.wheaton.edu/dropbox/LaughingJulie.MPG>. I just love to hear her laugh!

Today we relaxed until 2PM when our guide took us to visit Drum Mountain here in Fuzhou. We drove up a very windy, narrow road until we were about halfway up. What an amazing view! Some of you may know that I love mountains and that I miss them in Illinois. Well, today I got a good dose of mountain glory. We got out of the van at the halfway point and toured a Buddhist temple on the mountain. It was very interesting. Almost as interesting were the stares we got from the other visitors. I guess that 8 Caucasian adults with 3 Asian children might be something to look at! As we were driving away, people in other cars and vans would even wave at us when they saw us go by. Everyone we've met along the way has been very friendly to us, perhaps with the exception of a woman in the hotel elevator who took a look at Julie's face and turned away with an expression of disapproval. I am assuming it is because Julie's face shows signs of her cleft, but who knows. Anyway, so many people have been so nice to us and we are very grateful.

Oh! You should know that the clothing police are out in full force, even here in sub-tropical Fuzhou! When we took the babies back to the Civil Affairs office on Monday, the first thing the nanny did was pull down Julie's T-shirt and look in her coat to see what I had taken off of her. When we visited the health clinic yesterday, we bundled her up so that she had on her sleeper, a zippered sweatshirt, her coat, and socks over the sleeper footies. I thought she looked pretty good! However, the first thing the doctor did when we walked in was to grab Julie's leg, the only part of her with only one layer on. It figures! Now I try to keep a blanket draped over her when we're out so that no one can see if any skin is exposed at the ankle. It's interesting to see how many ways the Chinese believe warmth and heat are important. The doctor also told me only to drink hot liquid, never cold. I am usually all in favor of warmth, but I pale in comparison to those here!

Tomorrow we will go to visit Xiamen, the city Julie is from. We'll get to see her finding site and the orphanage. The trip will take about 4 hours each way and cost a little extra, but we feel it is worth it. I will post all about it when we get back. Thank you for sharing this journey with us! Feel free to email us; it is great hearing your reactions. Today's pictures are posted too, so enjoy!

Blessings,
Erica, Larry, and Julie Grace

Wednesday December 7, 2005 - 04:37am (PST) [Permanent Link](#)

December 5 & 6



Wednesday, December 7, 2005
6AM, Fuzhou, China

Dear Friends,

I am sorry to have kept you waiting for this post – the most anticipated of them all! Unfortunately, I spent all Monday night and all day Tuesday down for the count with a variety of ailments. All the change and adjustment, combined with new foods, no sleep, and a crazy schedule finally did me in. My stomach wasn't too happy, which isn't that bad in and of itself, but the nausea gets me every time. My heart was also racing for hours. I finally went to the clinic in the hotel – what an experience! Everyone was so very kind and helpful, but it is a strange feeling to be surrounded by a dozen people discussing you in a language you don't understand! We called our guide and he called the hotel front desk and they sent an English speaker to meet us. That helped a lot. In the end, the doctor gave me three different Chinese herbal medicines and had me take them in front of her. I know that one of them was vitamin B6, but I have no idea what the others were! She took my blood pressure and it was high, which has never happened in my life. She told me I needed to sleep, so that became my priority. Sunday night I'd only slept 3 hours and Monday night I didn't sleep at all. So, we went back to the room and I got in bed at 6PM. Thankfully I was able to fall asleep and stay that way until around 4AM. I feel much better already. I might actually be able to eat today! OK, enough about me. I know that you really want to hear about our darling little daughter!

Monday, December 5th, we had breakfast at 5:30 AM and boarded the bus to the airport at 6 AM. Our guides gave us our tickets and boarding passes at the airport and we headed to security. They made me open my three bottles of water but they didn't make me drink from them. They just wanted to smell them. I presume they were checking for alcohol or other strange substances. I didn't have to eat any of the Cheerios I had with me either. I guess it's only liquids and powders that concern them.

We found our gate and went to use the restroom. I learned something new there. At home, we form a line and the first person in line goes to the next empty stall. Here, you pick a stall and stand in front of it, waiting for it's occupant to finish. It doesn't matter if you have been waiting the longest when a different stall opens up. It's kind of like waiting in a line at McDonalds.

Back at the gate, we boarded the plane and found our seats. What a comfortable plane! We had more leg room in economy than I've ever seen. The air carrier was China Southern and I must say that they were wonderful. We really enjoyed the flight. It was only 2.5 hours long but they served a small meal and two drinks. In retrospect, I think it was the "pickled vegetable" stuff I put in my congee that may have started my stomach upset. Next time I'll take the western meal (they had both). As we were getting close to Fuzhou I could see beautiful mountains from the plane window. It turns out that Fuzhou stays green all year long. The landscape is so pretty. Oh, there was a virtual baby show on the plane. There were 4 or 5 babies about a year old whose parents congregated near the front of our section to walk and talk. We spent the whole flight staring at the cutest little faces, enjoying the preview of our future.

We landed around 10:40 AM and walked from the plane to a shuttle that took us to the main building. The

temperature was 54 degrees and overcast, much more comfortable than Beijing! When we walked into the airport building, Cheryle Daniels noticed that the music playing in the background was a musak version of Rock-a-by Baby! How perfect. We got our luggage with no problem, and met our guide, Johnson. In Beijing, we had been told that every group would get to go to the hotel before meeting the babies, so we were expecting to settle in, have some lunch, and then meet the babies. Wrong! As soon as we got in the van, Johnson told us that we were going right to the civil affairs office to get our children! The drive would take about an hour. At that point the emotions in the van became nearly palpable. We were going to become parents in an hour! We also realized that we had nothing ready, no diaper bag, no snacks, no anything. There were no plans for lunch, so we shared some snacks in the van and hoped we'd get dinner. Then we enjoyed the view from the van, which even included some water buffalo. Johnson also gave us some paperwork to look over, as well as a copy of Julie's finding ad and a two-page typewritten list of questions and answers about her life and routine! It turns out that Xiamen SWI does this for every family. What a gift. That was just the first thing that made us realize what a quality job this orphanage does.

At about 12:15 we arrived at the Civil Affairs Office. We walked toward a room and I could see a pink sleeve through the doorway. That had to be Julie, since the Daniels' baby is a boy. We went through the door and there she was! They asked me if I wanted to hold Julie, as if I might not! I took her and she didn't cry at all. She looked at me very intently and made some very cute faces. Larry held her and she immediately grabbed his nose. She still finds it fascinating. The Daniels' son didn't cry either. All of our prayers for that moment had been answered. It was a bit chaotic after that. There were about 12 of us plus the two babies in a small office, trying to focus on paperwork while focusing on our new children. Somehow we managed and it was time to go. We were now Julie's guardians! We had been told we would receive a bottle and some formula to give her, but that wasn't the case. So we left there wondering when she had last eaten and what we would feed her next and when.

There was no time to figure it out since we headed directly to a shop to get visa photos taken. They took several of just Julie and several of the three of us. After that we finally went to the hotel, where we had about 1.5 hours to move in and prepare some more paperwork before we had to be back in the lobby to meet the van. We were a little crazed at that point, not knowing what to focus on and needing to focus on everything. Julie fell asleep for about 20 minutes, allowing us to unpack our things and pack a diaper bag. When she woke up we changed her diaper and peeled off a few of her many layers. She had on a T-shirt, two sweaters, a coat, two pants, socks, shoes, and a hat. Under it all she was much smaller! Larry ran to the business center to make copies of our visa pages in our passports. This couldn't have been done at home because they needed copies with the entry stamp on them. We also had to write another statement of our intent to care for Julie and never abandon her. We didn't even have a chance to think about feeding any of us.

We met our guide and Larry ran to the business center again to glue our passport photos to the paperwork. Then we headed back to the civil affairs office to complete the adoption. I thought it was a two-day process, but not in our case. A man named Jack had been hired (I think by the civil affairs office) to expedite the entire process, so somehow we squeezed everything into one day. Back at the office, they asked us some questions like "Why do you come to China to adopt?" and "What can you offer her in her life with you?" and "Can you guarantee never to abandon or abuse her?" Our answers were translated and written on a form which we then signed in triplicate. After that we put our thumbprints over our names and Julie contributed her footprint. We gave our orphanage donation to the director, who had traveled the 3.5 hours to be there. Then she gave us a gift. It is a beautiful locking diary that says "Cherubic Angel" on top, above a baby angel and a little squirrel. The wording on below the angel says "But all who humble themselves before the Lord shall be given every blessing and shall have wonderful peace." Wow! God is in all the details. Inside they glued several photos, including one group photo of Julie and her orphanage-mates with their nannies, one of Julie with her foster mother, one of the gate of the orphanage, one of the building where Julie lived, one of the SWI playground, and one of her building from a different angle. Cheryle was in tears and I was overwhelmed that they would do this for us. Again, I can't say enough about Xiamen SWI. At that point we were handed the official adoption decree in a hard-backed certificate folder that is red with gold writing on it. It was official! Julie was ours! After that we gave our gifts to the orphanage director and then took photos.

We said good-bye to the orphanage director and headed to the Provincial Police Department to work on

Julie's visa. We were not allowed to take photos while there. At this point Julie was getting very fussy due to hunger, but I still didn't know what or how to feed her. Talk about feeling terrible. When we finished there I fed her some Cheerios in the van and she gobbled them right up! She uses her tongue to move food to the side of her mouth without the cleft, which has a baby molar on the bottom! I was so relieved that she liked Cheerios!

Next we went to the Notary's office, which is where they record the adoption and make it "officially official." We had to answer more questions, including the same ones as before plus "What is her Chinese name?" and "What is her date of birth?" and "What health conditions does she have?" We were glad we knew how to pronounce her Chinese name at that point! We gave gifts and took pictures and we were finally done with paperwork.

Next we went to Wal-Mart to buy formula, diapers, water, and baby food. I still had no idea what Julie would eat, so it was a frenzied shopping spree. We had to pay for the formula at the cigarette and liquor counter before we could leave that section of the store. In the end, I think we spent less than \$20 for everything. Julie did fine the whole time, although the pace and stress were starting to get to me. At long last we went back to the hotel for good. On the way, we decided to cancel the next day's plans so that we could have some downtime. Come to think of it, Larry and I hadn't stopped going since the moment we left our home last Thursday.

Back at the hotel, we started learning about our daughter and her needs. We played with her on the floor and discovered that she is ticklish! She has the cutest giggle. She loves playing with the toy keys we brought. She kept shaking them, grinning, and looking at us as if to say "did you see what I did?" Although everything was going well, I finally broke down crying. The emotions and pace of the day were really overwhelming. I was also overcome with a feeling of not knowing how to care for Julie and not feeling like her mom. We had just met yet she was my daughter. That has been improving greatly as we get to know each other, but I want all of you out there to know that it isn't always an instantaneous thing. I also hadn't eaten since breakfast, nor did I feel particularly hungry. We did try to feed Julie, however, and learned that she does not know what to do with a bottle. The nanny told us she has always been spoon-fed, so we tried it and it worked. It takes a long time to spoon-feed an entire bottle, but we kept at it. Since then we've switched to using a medicine dropper, but we hope to teach her to use the special cleft bottles we brought. She also eats soft foods like eggs. She loves eggs, just like me! We are also trying to feed her different flavors of baby food, but she hasn't taken so much to those yet. We did get a very special video of me feeding her and her saying "ma-ma-ma-ma." I'm sure she doesn't know what it means, but I love it nonetheless.

We put her to bed around 10 PM and she slept straight through to 8 AM Tuesday morning. Wow! That was 10 straight hours. We are learning that she is very good natured as long as she gets enough food and sleep. Although she and Larry slept all night, that was my night of running to the bathroom, trying to calm my pounding heart, and fighting nausea. After writing this whole thing I can see more clearly why that may have happened. Monday was unlike any other day of my life. I think I would have fared better had it been split over two days and had we gotten some lunch and dinner and a bit of downtime. In any case, I feel much better now and I am eager to share the rest of our trip with you all! I'm going to stop here for today, but I will try to post more later today. Blessings to you all!

Erica

Tuesday December 6, 2005 - 03:28pm (PST) [Permanent Link](#)

The Potter Family Adoption Blog

Our Trip to China to adopt Julie Grace Potter.

December 4, 2005



Today began with church service at Beijing International Christian Fellowship. We had to show foreign ID to get in. Sherry, our guide, had an interesting view about this. She said it was ok that she couldn't come in with us, because the government was doing that for our benefit. According to Sherry, if the government didn't restrict attendance to foreigners, there would be no place left for us to sit since all the locals would come just to see what's going on and hear English. Also, she said it keeps the service sacred for us, preventing it from becoming one big smoking section. Sherry attends a government-sanctioned church. She said she has never known about persecution of Christians in China, and that religion is very free. She never mentioned house churches at all. None of us questioned her about it. Anyway, the service itself was wonderful. It just happened to be the day of the children's Christmas program! They did such a great job. We really enjoyed singing Christmas songs and watching the kids perform. What a blessing to worship God in such a place, surrounded by believers from all over the world!

Sherry also told us that adoption groups are not the same as tourist groups. She said that tourist groups tend to be very wealthy and somewhat snobby. They ask her all kinds of very difficult and embarrassing questions. She feels like they don't really like Chinese people and that they come to China expecting to see poverty and filth. When they see people doing well they are disappointed. On the other hand, Sherry said we bring "all love" to China and that we love the Chinese people. We come for the babies, which is a "big help." Sherry was the guide for Steven Curtis Chapman's last adoption group. She said he had a great personality and was very kind and respectful, very "typical of adoption parents." It was really heartwarming and reassuring to hear her say such things.

After church, we visited a jade factory. We learned about different qualities of jade, how it is carved, and how it is polished. Then we shopped. Since Julie's Chinese name means "pure fine jade," we really wanted to get her a special gift. We chose a monkey pendant, since she was born in the year of the monkey, 2004. It is A-quality jade or jadite, the best kind. We also got a few inexpensive jade/string bracelets and a "happiness ball" that is made up of several concentric spheres carved from a single block of jade. It represents "family reunion" or "family all together." We even had a very nice conversation with one of the sales girls about my wedding and engagement rings. She had never heard the American tradition of rings before. It was neat to share with her.

Next we went to lunch at another Chinese restaurant. I am not tired of Chinese food at all! After that we drove out to see the Great Wall of China. It was amazing! Larry and I climbed up to the first tower and decided that was far enough. Even after running a marathon only a few months ago, it was hard work! The steps are not all the same size and the incline is very steep. Also, it was extremely cold and windy. We guessed that it was in the single digits with the wind chill. We got some great pictures though (see the photo album for Dec. 4th).

Then it was time for dinner. We went to a fancy restaurant where the waitresses all dress in traditional silk and wear gorgeous headdresses. The specialty was Peking duck. They showed us how to mix it with sauce and wrap it in a flour tortilla-like wrap. Yummy! Of course, there was plenty of other food too, as seems to be the Chinese way. I feel bad about how much we leave on the table!

We got back to the hotel with just enough time to drop off our bags and head back to the lobby to meet the bus to go to an acrobatics show. The show was amazing! It was a combination of gymnastics, dance, and weight lifting. We bought a DVD to show Julie one day (it cost about \$6). It's a good thing that we did, because I kept falling asleep during the show! Many of the other families did too. It was such a full day and we are still not adjusted to the time zone.

Back in our hotel room, it was time to pack. We picked out what we will wear today, the day we meet Julie! Everything else went into our suitcases and they went outside our door with blue ribbons tied to them to indicate they are going to Fuzhou. Around 10PM, the bellboy knocked at the door and took our bags away. Our guides will take them to the airport early and check them in for us. We decided not to carry on our bags since they might be too big. Also, we were told that security would make us open everything and taste or drink it to prove that it is really food or drink. This applies to sealed bottles of water with Chinese labels too!

After the bellboy left we went right to sleep. I woke up at 1AM thinking it must nearly be time to get up (4:45AM). I was wrong! My body is really out of synch. I only slept for 3 hours! At 5:30AM we will have breakfast in the hotel and at 6AM we will board the bus to the airport. Our flight leaves around 8. I wonder what time we will meet Julie! It is just a matter of hours now. I can't believe it. God is very good to us. There is one other family traveling to Fuzhou with us, the Daniels family. They are adopting a 14 month old boy with a heart condition. I am glad we will share this experience with them. Little Julie, your Mama and Bapa are coming!

Sunday December 4, 2005 - 10:37am (PST) [Permanent Link](#)

December 3, 2005



Today started out with a visit to Tiananmen Square, followed by the Forbidden City. It was very cold and windy outside. One sign said -7 degrees Celsius, with is about 19 degrees Fahrenheit. I was so glad I

brought my down jacket and long underwear. Anyway, the sights were very beautiful. Our guide told us all about each building and its history. Tiananmen Square is the largest city square in the world. We walked through 3 gates to get into the Forbidden City, where China's emperors used to live. We learned that it was called "Forbidden" for two reasons. Not only were the common people forbidden to enter in, but the rulers were forbidden to go out. Our guide told us that twenty-four emperors lived their entire lives within the walls of the complex, never once leaving. It is a good thing that the grounds are so large! I was amazed at how it just kept going and going. We also learned that an emperor might have up to 3000 wives. That's one girl per day for nearly 10 years! Larry took many pictures. They can tell you much more than I can, so be sure to check out today's photo album.

Oh! Some of the signs in the Forbidden City had some really humorous English translations. Some examples are "Don't fall down," "Relics, no scratch," "Relics are irretrievable" (irreplaceable, maybe?), and "Way out" instead of "exit." The best one was "star rated toilet" with four stars below it. I just had to see what a four-star toilet looked like in China. Well, it turns out that there were actually two western toilets in the restroom, but all the others were still squatty potties. I decided to go ahead and try the squatty and it was just fine. If you've ever had to go in the woods, it is the same idea. Of course, one unique thing is that used toilet paper does not get flushed. Instead, it gets thrown into a waste-basket next to the potty. That bothered me more than squatting!

After visiting the Forbidden City, we headed to lunch at a Chinese Restaurant. It was incredibly delicious. Chinese is my favorite food!

After lunch we went to a Pearl Market. Rick, the owner, gave us a talk about pearl quality. He even opened an oyster in front of us to show us the pearls inside. There were so many! He accidentally dropped one and Larry picked it up. Rick said we could keep it! Then we had time to shop. We bought Julie some lavender pearl earrings, as well as a matching pair for me. Mine are a little bigger, so we have a mother-daughter set.

Next we went to the Summer Palace. The grounds were gorgeous, as were the lake and bridges. Larry recognized it from a scene in Big Bird Goes to China. We learned about the beautiful paintings lining an outdoor corridor. Mao wanted to destroy them but the prime minister Zhou En Lai had them colored over with a special black pen that would not harm the paintings. After the revolution was over, the pen was cleaned off and the paintings are as beautiful as before. Our group decided to turn around early because it was too cold out.

One thing that has taken us a bit by surprise is the behavior of the street vendors. They are very aggressive compared to anything back in the states. They run over to you and put their items right in your face, asking you to buy them. Usually they use the word "hello" as a lead-in and filler, such as "Hello, Mao book, Mao book, two dollar, Mao book, hello." Also, there are just so many of them. Every time we got out of the bus we were surrounded by at least three or four vendors. The same would happen when we got back on the bus. One woman was trying to sell us bags through the bus window! She kept knocking on the window, holding up her bags, and gesturing about a price. We have found that the best thing to do is to keep walking and not make eye contact. Shaking my head works too. Our guide taught us to say "bu yao," meaning "I don't want." She also taught us to say it very forcefully because it might not work otherwise. Sherry also told us to be very wary of beggars, because it is often a scam. We saw several disabled people panhandling, using their obvious physical deformities as leverage. It was actually quite disturbing. One was a young boy whose feet were all black and swollen. He was pushing himself around on a wheeled palate and kept saying "Hello" over and over. Our guide told us that in Communist China the government takes good care of such people, so we should not give them anything. I don't know what to believe, but we followed her advice.

Next we visited a silk factory. They showed us how a cocoon is spun into a single thread. Then eight threads are spun into a single fiber. We also saw how silk comforters are made. I was surprised how strong silk is. We watched a woman clean the dead worm out of a cocoon using warm water. Then she stretched the cocoon over a metal arch. She did this with several cocoons before removing the whole thing and spreading it onto a bigger arch. The guide asked a man in our group to try stretching one of the multiple-cocoon pieces onto the big arch and he couldn't do it. He turned bright red trying though! The women who do this are very strong. Next we were led into a shopping area. There were many beautiful

items for sale. We looked at the baby dresses because we want to get one for Julie's baby dedication at church. They were much more expensive than the ones we will see later in the trip, so we decided to wait.

After everyone finished shopping, we all got back on the bus and drove to dinner. Erica fell asleep in the bus. Dinner was similar to lunch but with different dishes. Again, it was very delicious. We got back to the hotel and dragged ourselves to our rooms. We were too tired to update our blog, so that is why I am doing it now. Our lights were out by 8PM, and were too. Now it is the next morning and we are only one day away from holding our daughter. We cannot wait!

Saturday December 3, 2005 - 02:28pm (PST) [Permanent Link](#)

December 1st & 2nd



After getting up at 4:30 AM Central Time, we finally arrived in Beijing approximately 24 hours later. I have this strange feeling like the floor is moving, but I assume it is due to lack of sleep and the fact that I've been flying for so many hours! I've posted a picture of the families that were on our flight. Tomorrow we will meet the entire travel group, consisting of 88 people total! To see the rest of our pictures from today, click on the album "December 1 - 2" on our blog main webpage. I'm so excited that we got it to work!

I must say that flying carry-on-only was wonderful. We got all our things into two 21 inch rolling bags and two backpacks. We never had to stand in lines or worry about the whereabouts of our luggage. I guess we'll find out soon how it goes washing our clothes in the hotel room every night!

We've already had a taste of our inability to cross a road in China. It is a strange feeling to start across the street and see cars come at you with no sign of slowing down at all. Naturally, our response was to stop walking. The cars simply swerved around us and went on their way. Our guide told us that if you keep walking they will stop, but if you stand still they won't. We have much to learn (such as always bring tissues to the bathroom because toilet paper is not standard issue). I keep thinking about everything I learned from reading others' journals before me - it is really amazing to be here discovering it firsthand. I can hardly believe we're actually here!

Well, I think some sleep would do me good about now. I just wanted to let you all know that we arrived in Beijing safely. Hope you're all well!

Erica

Friday December 2, 2005 - 04:06am (PST) [Permanent Link](#)