

"Gotcha Day" Isn't a Cause for Celebration

Sophie Johnson

OPINION PIECE



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This text is adapted and paraphrased from Sophie Johnson's opinion piece. It is an alternate version of the original text, which appears in your student edition.

- 1 I was five-and-a-half years old when my parents adopted me in China and brought me to America. As my mom says, I ran into her arms and have stayed there for the past 12 years. She is my mom. She is my best friend. She is the woman I admire most in the world. But for the longest time, my family marked that day we met in China as "Gotcha Day."
- 2 Lots of families celebrate the day they met their adopted child. But while I appreciate everything else my parents give me, Gotcha Day can be difficult. It can sometimes leave kids like me sad and confused. The acknowledgement that adoption is also about loss is missing from Gotcha Day.
- 3 While adoptive parents may be celebrating a child finally entering their lives, that child in their arms has gone through a lot. The child has experienced abandonment or has been given up for adoption for reasons they may never understand. It's a lot to handle. And sometimes while adopted kids are working through it, their feelings of loss override their feelings of happiness. Gotcha Day is one of those times when we think about our past. We reflect on how little some of us actually know about it. We think about our biological parents and wish we knew them. We want to ask them why they didn't keep us. We think about what our lives would be like had there been no Gotcha Day.
- 4 Some say that adoption loss is the only emotional shock when everyone expects the victims to be happy and thankful. I am happy and thankful. However, I also want to remind people that someone's joyful adoption experience may also involve someone else's sorrow over losing their child. Gotcha Day feels like a day of fake smiles if we don't acknowledge that it's also about loss, not just gain.
- 5 In my family, we now celebrate Family Day. My parents show my brother and me the photos of when we first met. We talk about how my mom fed me a bag of candy that I promptly threw up on her. I tell her how she shouldn't have let our guide throw away the sweatshirt that I vomited on. It was the last thing my orphanage caregivers dressed me in. It was a real, physical part of a past that has many unknowns. (I forgive her. She was jet-lagged¹ and the guide took away the dirty clothes knowing my mom had a suitcase full of new things from America for me to wear.)

NOTES

1. **jet-lagged** *adj.* exhausted from long-distance travel.



6 Every Family Day, we laugh about my little brother's Elvis² sneer and his confusion on the day we got him. I was 7 at the time. We laugh about how I took one look at him and asked my mom if we could get a puppy instead. We remember how my dad threw a ball at his head. My mom screamed and my brother, without even looking up from coloring, caught the pitch perfectly. "A leftie! Yes!!" shouted out my dad, a life-long baseball fan. I'm not sure if the Chinese officials thought it was funny, but we sure laugh about it every Family Day.

7 I love our Family Day. It celebrates our love for one another. And we always end it by lighting a candle for our first families and going outside to talk to the moon.

2. Elvis Elvis Presley, wildly popular singer and actor, also known for his smiling sneer.

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