

## **MY EXPERIENCE AS AN ADOPTIVE GRANDMOTHER IN MALLORCA**

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### **Abstract**

#### **Introduction**

Although I am not a professional on adoption, besides having two adopted grandchildren, I have participated in two mail lists for a Spanish Adoption association, AFAC (Asociación de Familias Adoptantes en China) for the past 6 years. It is as if I have followed a long distance course on psychology and public relations at the same time and I have learnt a lot about people's reactions to international adoption.

I am English by birth, and now a Majorcan widow for the past 10 years. I explain how the sensation of seeing ones grandchild, either biological or adoptive, is the same as when you see your own child ... a kick in the stomach, and the sensation goes up to your chest and on to the face and the eyelids, and you cannot stop the flow of tears that stream from your eyes. It's the umbilical cord you think, but now I know that it is one of the red threads that the Chinese believe joins us to all the people we are going to meet in our lives. The proverb says that in spite of time, place or circumstance the thread can tense or tangle but it will never break. A lovely proverb and the adopters believe that a red thread joins them to their adoptive child.

#### **Reactions and fears**

I hope that I am not a racist, although my daughter accused me when I expressed my initial doubts about adopting from China. Unfortunately there are many adopters who experience adverse reactions from their parents. This is a shame since probably what they most wish for, after being parents, is the approval and understanding of their family. The prejudices against adoption and particularly against international adoptions, must be run very deep in some people

#### **Difficult moments**

##### **Burocratic slowness and difference in criteria**

The waiting time to obtain the Aptitude Certificate is really one of the most anxious moments above all in Autonomous Communities where they take longer to give it, such as in Andalusia.

Unfortunately there is no homogeny of criteria in the different Communities in Spain and this helps to increase the adopters' frustrations. They see via the mail list the difference in waiting times despite the fact that there is norm in most Communities that the dossier should be resolved within six months.

The other great worry for many adopters is the criteria demanded in many Autonomous Communities that the difference of age between the parents and children should not exceed 40. This criteria does not seem to adapt to human nature nowadays since many healthy women manage to have a child, even without the help of assisted conception, at higher ages.

#### **The gotcha day**

I think that there are many possible difficult moments for the adopted child and the parents and that the first in the case of international attention is what is now called the Gotcha Day. I shall explain the first meeting with my third grand-daughter and the first days in China

I always recommend the adopters, if they can, to travel with their other children, both biological and adopted; the acceptance and adaptation of the adopted child is much better, according to what I have seen and been told.

### **Solidarity to each other but not as a charity**

The word, solidarity, sometimes appears in the press in articles about adoption and these are mistaken about the adopters' real sentiments. They are not showing solidarity with a country and its adoption, but rather are seeking to become parents. They are not impelled by a charitable nor altruistic wish and they are the ones who feel fortunate to be able to adopt. Maybe once they have their child at home they begin to have feelings of solidarity towards the children who remain behind in the orphanages and therefore are motivated to participate in campaigns of aid; but their wish to adopt is not with the view to getting a child out of an orphanage. However they do help each other and exchange information

### **Information and its lack**

Many adopters experience the lack of information from the authorities in the first stage of adoption here in Spain. Luckily the associations and veteran adopters are well informed and can thus inform others.

But not only adopters sometimes have little information. Those who always work in the media often are not well informed and there is a glut in the press of sensationalist articles about adoption. They like to emphasise the adoption costs and so promote the idea amongst the general public of "buying children" and "adoption a la carte".

### **Fragile but fighting people**

I will repeat some words expressed by Pilar Rahola, Spanish journalist and adopter, that adopters are fragile people. I share this opinion because they are very sensitive to comments by other people and the lack of sensitivity from some administrations and civil servants. On the other hand they are fighters and will defend their young like a lioness. They hate to read sensationalist and stupid articles about adoptions since they fear that one day their children will read these articles and suffer

### **At school and explanations**

The bad thing is that children learn from their parents and so prejudices and ugly comments are later repeated at school or in the street. How to explain what adoption means is something that each parent has to learn day by day; how not to fear the word "adopted" and instead to try to avoid the word "abandoned".