

Ties that bond though cultures apart

American family finds completion with daughter from China

By ANGELA JEFFS

With a wry but happy smile, Jennifer Rose DiLaura recalls the day she and her husband first met their daughter, adopted from China.

"Together with seven other American couples, we were ushered into a room with chairs arranged around the edge, in the center of which was a group of toddlers wrapped up against the cold, with their caretakers. With her photo in our hands, we recognized Ariana almost immediately."

DiLaura still gets emotional when she recalls the moment the near 2 1/2-year-old was placed in her arms, because Ariana screamed her head off at the sight of her, and basically

screamed for the next three days. "It was hardly the romantic scenario imagined, but then I hadn't been looking at events from her point of view."

Having read everything she could find about adoption,



Love of parenting: Jennifer Rose DiLaura, as she was nearing 50, decided to try to adopt a new member into her family. She and her husband were eventually brought together with Ariana, a little girl from China. DiLaura encourages people interested in adopting to "have faith" and enjoy the process. ANGELA JEFFS PHOTO

DiLaura knew that adopted children tend to bond with one parent ahead of the other, sometimes rejecting the other in the process. Usually it's the mother, but not always. In this case, Ariana Rose, who will soon be 4, latched on to DiLaura's husband, Arnold, and her stepson, who'd accompanied them on the trip.

The fact that Ariana bonded with them so fast was a healthy sign, but at the time her rejection was emotionally devastating. "Knowing on a deep level that everything would work out, I just kept walking past her, saying 'I know you're going to love me one day.' "

DiLaura (whose maiden name was Rose) married late. She had an unusual childhood. Although she grew up in Great Neck, N.Y., she spent much of her time trekking to and fro between home and New York City for modeling and acting jobs.

DiLaura acknowledges that because of a busy schedule of voiceovers, commercials and acting jobs, she did miss out on certain aspects of school life. But other experiences more than compensated. Such as when she spent her 13th birthday at Sardi's for an opening night party and had a huge cake wheeled in.

After majoring in communications in Washington D.C., with a minor in psychology, it was back to the bright lights. But after 10 years, the business side began getting her down. She loved the performing, but that was only 25 percent of the job. The rest was finding work, negotiating contracts, preparing for roles.

She married in 2005, after meeting her husband online.

"We don't mind telling people this. It's hard after a certain age to meet prospective partners, so why not? Mind you, I went on some horrendous dates before meeting Army. When I read his mail I was about to give up, but thought, OK, just one more time."

He had two children from a previous marriage. Seeing what a great father he was, she wanted a

child with him. Her own parents had been 44 and 50 when she was born, so being older held no worries. It was when she failed to get pregnant straightaway, and was faced with a string of medical tests and procedures, that she took stock.

"I realized that I wasn't so interested in being pregnant. I just wanted to parent a child. When Arny brought up the subject of adoption, a light went on."

Stressing that she can speak from her own experience only about adoption ("everyone is different"), DiLaura describes how she and her husband went to seminars on the subject and began approaching agencies. "We had to research all the possibilities. They had to assess our situation and needs."

All of which led them to China. Two years ago it was a straightforward process to adopt there. They would not be eligible now as the requirements have changed, and so has the wait time.



Early days: The DiLaura family in the days immediately following Ariana's adoption, after the toddler came to terms with her new mother and stopped screaming. ANGELA JEFFS PHOTO

Countries tend to open and shut and vary their requirements. In some you have to be under a certain age, have been married for so many years. In addition, many agencies in the U.S. are very strict and add additional requirements of their own.

DiLaura was heading for 50 and she and Arny been married less than a year. "Fortunately our agency was run by two women who had been through the experience of adoption personally and their rules mirrored those of China."

The couple filed the necessary paperwork — called a dossier with China — in July 2005, then settled in for a long wait. One year later, Arnold Dilaura was offered a job in Tokyo. They were getting closer,

geographically at least.

In September came notification that they had a referral. Eight weeks later off they were off to China to meet their daughter in Nanchang, where they spent a week finalizing the Chinese part of the adoption.

The group of eight families then moved to Quanzhou, where they spent another week in a hotel while everything was settled at the U.S. Embassy. DiLaura had to cope alone for the second week as her husband had to return to work and her stepson to school, which was tough. But the one-to-one attention worked out: Ariana was able to get over her trauma — thrust into the arms of strangers by nannies who were also very attached. "After that we were OK."

DiLaura does not know much about her daughter's past. "We can only assume and imagine what her life had been like. Obviously, this is the hardest part for Ariana, especially as she gets older. Which is why we are documenting as much as we can now, so that she has a history when she grows up. We are truly grateful to her birthparents. We believe that they and the women at the orphanage contributed hugely to Ariana being a quite exceptional little girl."

Ariana's comprehension is remarkable. And while her speech is a little behind schedule, it's not surprising considering her background. Also, she's growing up hearing any number of languages spoken around her — English, Swedish, Japanese, Hindi, French ("to name but a few") — so there's a lot of information to process, make sense of.



A contented-looking Ariana smiles for the camera in July. ANGELA JEFFS PHOTO

In addition, Arny is Italian on his father's side and Irish, Dutch and German on his mother's. "I'm

Russian and Romanian on my father's side and Romanian on my mother's. So, you see, we really are a world culture family."

DiLaura says the hardest part of having Ariana placed in her arms was the realization that her life was no longer her own. What books explain the mind split involved in being responsible for a child? It's a huge adjustment, she says: "I love it!"

Just watching her daughter doing things for the first time — the logic she employs in putting the world together is nothing short of astonishing. "The surprise and mystery of each and every day. It's such fun. No downside? Well, potty training, perhaps."

After Ariana starts school this month, DiLaura will extend her voluntary efforts to Democrats Abroad and the College Women's Association of Japan.

To those wanting to adopt, she advises doing as much research as possible. "Find the situation that feels right and works best for you. It can be a wonderful process, so have faith."

Blog: www.chinanybaby@blogspot.com

The Japan Times: Saturday, Sept. 27, 2008
(C) All rights reserved

[Go back to The Japan Times Online](#)

[Close window](#)