

# Sponsor child visits Solina WI

Most Canadians know about the Canadian Save The Children Fund (Cansave). Many have sponsored needy children in various parts of the world, either individually or as part of a group. A few even visited their child when travelling in the West Indies, or in far eastern or African countries.

But rare indeed is the sponsored child who — 19 years after becoming the "daughter" of a group of ladies half a world away — makes the long and costly flight to meet her Canadian foster-mothers.

It began as a suggestion of the late Mrs. Mileta Taylor, a past-president of the Institute, in the spring of 1963. Discussions followed. Motions were made (Girl or boy? What age? Which country?) and in September of that year Solina W.I. became the proud "parents" of 10-year-old Ng Lai Ching — a tiny, dark-haired, wide-eyed, shy-looking little girl recommended for sponsorship because (as the Sponsorship Committee of St. James' Settlement in Hong Kong wrote), "... this child is excellent both in her studies and also conduct, and if she gets help she might be able to continue her studies in school and to have a brighter future."

During those 9 years of sponsorship a warm friendship developed — even though, as per Cansave regulations, all communication was through the St. James' Settlement. The child is not given the name or address of the sponsor (this presumably being to prevent any possibility of harrassment by unscrupulous "entrepreneurs").

Her first letters were carefully, beautifully written in Chinese, with accompanying translations. There were frequent photographs, to show us how she had grown. There were her own delicate, hand-made Christmas cards each December.

In April of 1967 she proudly wrote us her first letter in English, telling us that her Chinese Christian name (Lai Ching) means stability and self-control, and asking, "Will you give me an English name that has the same meaning, and is suitable for me?" She became Mary Jean (later changed to Carol, for easier facility in Chinese).

In that same letter, in reply to our questions about her future plans, "If I have a chance I want to be a doctor but if not, I will do other things for society..."

Five years later, an excited letter: "I want to tell you good news." She had entered the matriculation course, after completing her secondary school training. Now she had passed all examinations of the Medical and Health Department of Hong Kong, and had been accepted as a student nurse at Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

With this letter was enclosed the Annual Report to Sponsors: "As a student nurse Lai Ching will earn \$453 HK a month. With her wages the family can be maintained more adequately; therefore sponsorship is recommended to be closed..." And they asked, did we wish to continue our correspondence with Lai Ching, on a direct basis?

So began the second phase of the friendship of Solina W.I. and Carol Lai Ching. With the restrictions and rules of Cansave now lifted, her "my dear sponsors" now became real people, and direct communication cleared the way for exchange of personal letters, photos, gifts, not possible before.

Her letters became documentaries of challenges and hard work; courses completed and examinations passed; of top marks aimed for (and won); of graduation (1975) from student nurse to the coveted "nursing sister" status.

Her letters spoke more often of her wish and hope, "that someday I may come to Canada and meet you all." But though she continued to save and to dream, the time was not right. Her brother, also a clever and gifted student, was now entering University. And as Lai Ching had been supported in reaching her goals, she was now supporting him as he undertook the long, hard road of a student of Law.

When her letter arrived saying Carol Ng Lai Ching was actually coming — was in fact leaving in just a few days — the ladies of Solina W.I. quickly followed their initial stunned disbelief with action. Phone calls, confirming time and place; plans for her reception, entertainment, lodging. Time would be short (only 2 days, since she was on a tour and also had a friend in Toronto); how to make the most of every moment...

Then suddenly, she was standing there — in Solina Hall where, 9 years ago, the Women's Institute voted to adopt her. Tiny, dark-haired and wide-eyed. But no longer a shy-looking little girl; instead a very poised and lovely young woman. A little bit nervous, and very excited (as were the ladies waiting to meet her) but as happy and delighted to meet her Canadian "family" as they were to meet her. "Now you are not just picture," she smiled, encircled by welcoming arms reaching out to make sure the too was real!



Carol Ng Lai Ching is greeted by Fay Vice, Secretary-Treasurer and Alma Langmaid, President of Solina Women's Institute.