

PEOPLE: Families share common bond after Asian adoptions 15 months ago



All together for Thanksgiving are two-year-olds Christina, Kiera, Xiao-Jing, Emma, Natalie, Charlotte, Rachel and Sarah.

Giving thanks for eight precious gifts

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
STAFF WRITER

The most noticeable thing at Linda and Chuck Cundari's house last weekend was the pitter patter of 16 little feet.

About 15 months ago in China, eight couples, each carrying a bundle, boarded a jet and headed home to Canada. The bundles were of equal weight and equal value — about 15 pounds and priceless.

All Asian and all girls, the bundles had names — Emma, Natalie, Charlotte, Sara, Kiera, Xiao-Jing and Christina. The Stouffville-bound bundle was Rachel Margaret.

In Chinese, Rachel means 'little lamb.' That's what she is. She's precious. She captured our hearts," said her father, Chuck. Her middle name is in honour of Linda's late mother.

Last weekend, the bundles, now two years old, left their homes in Oakville, Ottawa and Cambridge and headed to Reesor Place, near Preston Lake. Rachel

was having a party. It was not only her birthday, it was a celebration of life for all the families.

While in the large playroom at the Cundaris, the two-year-olds did what toddlers do. The parents, meanwhile, looked back on the summer of '97 — the moms and dads remembered the day they adopted their babies. The eight families were brought together by Children's Bridge, a non-profit, international adoption agency based in Ottawa.

Children's Bridge chief administrative officer Jennifer Dawson.

The adoptions in China are the most straight forward, not only in terms of the wait, but the complexity. As well, China has the healthiest children," Dawson said.

Rachel's adoption took about 10 months for completion; in Canada it can take up to seven years.

While the Cundari's adoption application was being processed, Rachel spent her first 10 months in an orphanage in Nan Feng, a two-hour air flight from Beijing.

In most parts of China, families are

restricted to having one child, while some in the rural agricultural areas, a couple can have two, Linda said. If the Chinese law is broken, severe fines are imposed upon the already financially strapped parents.

Since boys are preferred children in China, the birth of a girl is seldom celebrated. Some try to hide their baby daughters. They live in seclusion and constant fear of the authorities. For most, baby girls are born in secrecy only to be abandoned at about two weeks old.

Some of the baby girls are left in train stations, near police stations and near orphanages. "They're left in places where they'll be found," Linda said.

Human rights groups world-wide are trying to alter the plight of the newborn girls in China. While Rachel and her seven little friends have brought great joy to their Canadian families, they were all rescued from a life of extreme hardship.

It's difficult to comprehend that because of a political situation, compounded by poverty, these eight tots were abandoned. Today, like Rachel, they're the picture of

health and happiness. Each is beautiful and each has a winning personality.

About 5,000 baby girls from China have been adopted world-wide. The majority go to the United States. Of those, Children's Bridge has handled 400 from the People's Republic of China.

"Our goal is to help families adopt internationally," Dawson said. "We are a non-profit, federally incorporated organization, run primarily by adoptive parents."

When Rachel first met her mom and dad, she was frightened. She wouldn't have a thing to do with Linda. Meanwhile, she clung to Chuck and wouldn't let go. "It took a few days for her to relax," Linda said. "Her acceptance of me was gradual."

Today, Rachel makes it very clear. Linda is her mommy.

"Rachel is a happy, bright and healthy. Her life is full of promise. As well as mommy and daddy, her sister Amy, 18, brother Robert, 16 and Lianne, 13, love Rachel dearly.

Rachel is their little lamb.

Ratepayer groups come together in name of growth

Residents get ready for united battle against growth

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
STAFF WRITER

Ratepayer groups from across Stouffville will form a united front to maintain the strongest voice possible, *The Tribune* has learned.

On Tuesday evening, representatives of citizen groups including Stouffville Residents' Association, Pride and Preston Lake (PPL), Friends of Musselman's Lake, the Vandorf Residents Association will meet privately to discuss a common agenda.

The umbrella group is being spearheaded by Stouffville resident Jim Priebe.

In addition to writing letters, making phone calls and attending town council



JIM PRIEBE
Spearheaded ratepayer group movement

meetings, we need a forum to have our voices heard. Ideally, this would take the form of traditional town hall meetings, organized by town councillors so long as they aren't controlling the agendas," Priebe said.

The Oct. 20 gathering is crucial, Priebe said. "The various groups from across Whitchurch-Stouffville will meet to see if enough common ground exists to form a larger umbrella group," he said. In addition to the community-wide residents' associations that exist now, a municipal-wide association is needed to lend strength to the res-

idents' cause, Priebe said. "The main goal is to insist planning for the entire municipality be completed, with no areas left out."

People who live in the Preston Lake area feel isolated, resident Chuck Cundari said. "The focus seems to be on the town of Stouffville. There's a communication problem with the rest of us. We need a grassroots approach," Cundari said.

Considerable growth is expected in Whitchurch-Stouffville over the next 20 years, bringing its population to more than 30,000, a number Priebe feels is too high without more priority placed on controlled growth.

But officials insist the town and the region are strict enough with the types of development are conducive to land use in Stouffville.

A town-wide watchdog group will help Musselman's Lake and Ballantrae, which is expected to double in size to 1,200 over the

next few years, resident Mike Watson said.

"We're going to help each other when issues in our specific areas come before council," Watson said.

Vandorf and Preston Lake ratepayers have joined forces before. Working in conjunction with Vandorf, Preston Lake has been petitioning council for a Secondary Plan, something that will define, amongst other things, what type of business, industry and development can take place in the area," Cundari said.

As well, Preston Lake and Musselman's Lake share common concerns, Watson said. "We're both concerned about lake drainage and development."

As development continues to expand into the heart of York, PPL's efforts to protect its little corner of the environment could have a ripple effect on the rest of the region," Cundari said.

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