

Chapter Sixteen

Cast your bread upon the waters...

Ecclesiastes 11:1

In C.S. Lewis' book, *Prince Caspian*, when Lucy told Aslan "I thought you'd come roaring in and frighten all the enemies away," Aslan told her, "...things never happen the same way twice." That could be said of my journey.

I knew from the beginning I wanted two children. After seeing how God worked in Manisha's adoption, the miracles and answered prayers, I assumed the second one would go much the same way. It didn't. When things happened the first time, I was changed by them. When I started the second adoption, I wasn't the same person I was when I adopted Manisha.

The world never remains the same either. Countries change adoption requirements. Some countries close adoption programs while new ones open.

Our thoughts are way too limited to begin to comprehend what God might be doing. Isaiah 55:8 says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord." I had no idea how different things would be the second time around. I am glad I didn't know.

When Manisha was five, I began to talk with her about adopting "a little baby sister." She was excited and couldn't wait to have a "playmate." I am not sure she understood it all, but it was the beginning of a long process to prepare her for a new arrival.

I wanted to adopt again from Nepal, but Nepal only allowed families to adopt one boy and one girl. I wanted another little girl. I also wanted to use the same adoption agency. The only country the adoption agency was licensed to work with that met my criteria of a single mother with one daughter was Vietnam.

Vietnam was expensive. I spent a lot of time counting the cost financially. Could I afford it? Did I have the energy to raise a second child? Could I give two children what they needed emotionally, physically, mentally, academically and spiritually?

With the Lord helping me, I thought I could do all those things. I didn't want to be so fearful that my fear prevented me from taking the risk. I was stepping out in faith that God would provide.

In the spring of 1997, I contacted the adoption agency and began the process of filling out forms. I bought a book on Vietnam published by the same company that produced the book I had bought on Nepal. I began to tell people, "I am adopting again, this time from Vietnam."

I was surprised that things were not the same this time around. I didn't have the support from my family or friends. I got comments like, "Don't you think being a single parent to one child is enough? How are you going to handle a second child?" All the comments came from well-meaning Christians, but nevertheless, they were negative and discouraging.

If Manisha had been struggling in school, I would have given all of my attention to helping her and not pursued a second adoption. Since she was three when she arrived here, she would have been considered at-risk for developmental and mental delays.

Health problems would also have been a red flag, but Manisha had never been sick with more than just a runny nose or fever and I hadn't missed a day of work since arriving home from Nepal.

One weekend, my church had a women's retreat, and though I'm not much of a retreat person, I decided to go. I wanted to be alone with God to pray earnestly about my plans for a second adoption. I left Manisha with the Murphys for the long weekend and drove with some friends to Daytona Beach, Florida.

I sought solace and prayed fervently asking God to show me His will. One evening I took a stroll along the beach, and I said, "Lord, if I find the perfect conch shell, I will take that as a sign that you are leading me in this direction."

I didn't find just one conch shell, I found many conch shells. I quit counting them after a while. They were all perfectly formed baby shells. I picked up one that was particularly beautiful and squeezed it in my hand.

"Thank you, Lord, for giving me this sign."

The next day, Sunday, as we gathered in the restaurant for lunch before heading back to Gainesville, there was a raffle. The first prize was a beautifully handmade baby scrapbook.

I said, "God, if you want me to adopt another child, please let me win this as another sign." There were at least sixty women in the room. I won it. As I walked up to receive my prize, I had goose bumps. I knew God was speaking to me.

However, during the next three years as I experienced the darkest hours of my Christian life, no pictures adorned its blank pages. I wondered if I had misheard God. Why was I going through this trial?

When I told people that I was hoping to start proceedings on a second adoption, only my dear friend Sylvia encouraged me to pursue my dreams. Her words were like a sweet, soothing balm to my aching, crying heart. She never swayed in her encouragement to not give up.

In the spring of 1997, when Manisha was a kindergartner, I proceeded with my adoption plans, sending in my paperwork to begin the process and half of the \$12,000 required to submit the application. I had my home study updated and we began the "waiting game" in anticipation of another little girl joining our family sometime in the near future.

On a trip to Atlanta, I had my fingerprints done while visiting my extended family. A month later they were returned rejected. Over the course of the next eight months, my fingerprints were redone three more times; at the Gainesville Police Department, the Alachua County Sheriff's Office, and a fourth time at the Immigration and Naturalization Center in Jacksonville. It took eight months to get them approved.

In the meantime, an opportunity landed unexpectedly in my lap as a brand-new career was emerging on the scene. Broadcast captioning up to that point had been done on a limited scale by just a handful of companies in the nation. I had taken a test with the National Captioning Institute to see if I would meet their entry level to become a real-time broadcast captioner.

Sometimes we commit to things without knowing how much work is involved. Closed captioning was one of those things. It took hours of painstaking effort over the next five months to pass their on-air test, all while working full time and single parenting.

In my commitment to complete the captioning training and get on-air by December 1997, I had not paid a lot of attention to Manisha's schoolwork. I didn't realize how far behind she was until the end of first grade.

One day, on a rare occasion, she rode the bus home. I had walked up the street to meet her as she hopped off the steps. She handed me some papers and took off skipping down the street

toward our house. I glanced through the papers and among them were her test scores from the Iowa skills.

The results were in the bottom percentile. Glen Springs Elementary had enclosed an application for her to attend summer school to help her achieve grade level before she began second grade in the fall.

I was devastated. I felt like I had failed her. How could I not have been aware? In the back of my mind, I also remembered what I had told myself. If there were health problems or school problems, I wouldn't do another adoption. I had failed the first grade as a child and I couldn't let it happen to her.

Over a year had passed since I had begun the application process. Due to all the glitches, my I-600 Petition to Classify an Orphan as an Immediate Relative still had not been approved. Many problems caused my documents to be redone multiple times. By March 1st, I had not received anything even remotely resembling a referral.

I began to have doubts if this was what God wanted me to do. In my heart, I felt like God had led me to begin the process. Why would He lead me down this road and abandon me now?

I had Manisha tested by a private school psychologist to get more information on her poor school performance. I received a comprehensive psychological evaluation a few weeks later. Based on the results, I knew there was only one choice. I would join the ranks of homeschoolers.

I gathered as much information as I could from friends at my church about homeschooling. I was a newbie, clueless as to how to do it or what materials to use.

I drove to Orlando to attend the Florida Homeschooling Convention in May. When I arrived, the parking lot was so full I couldn't park on-site. As I walked through the front door, it seemed like every homeschooling parent in Florida was there. I was completely overwhelmed.

I went to the Exhibit Hall where hundreds of exhibitors had every possible book or curriculum a homeschooler would want. I came away with one overwhelming feeling. God had called me to homeschool Manisha. I didn't know how I would do it working two jobs, single parenting, and trying to prepare for a second child, but somehow I would do it.

I joined a Christian homeschool group with experienced parents and absorbed as much as I could from their mistakes, their successes, and tried to be patient.

In April of 1998, we received a referral for a four year old little girl. I briefly thought about it but my gut reaction was I wanted a younger child. I never received any pictures.

In June, we took a vacation at the beach and my mother joined us in Jacksonville. Shortly before we left, I received a referral for a baby around ten months old. I was excited about the referral, but the adoption agency called me back soon afterwards and told me the baby tested positive for hepatitis B. I didn't know a lot about hepatitis B but the idea scared me.

I spent the vacation debating whether this was the baby God wanted me to have. The thought of homeschooling Manisha and having a baby with a significant medical condition seemed a little overwhelming.

Upon returning from vacation, I reluctantly called the adoption agency back and told them that I wasn't at peace about adopting a baby with hepatitis. I didn't like the idea of full disclosure to daycare centers and the thought of being shunned by others.

We had been homeschooling for a few weeks and Manisha was making good progress. I had hired a reading tutor during the summer that came once or twice a week and worked with her. I tried to imitate the skills the tutor used so I could be a more effective teacher.

When the hot Florida days of summer came to an end, we received our next referral, Thi My-Sa, in August. I was certain this must be the child that God had for our family because she

was dark-complexioned like Manisha and could easily have passed for her sister. The pictures showed her sitting in a crib in an institutionalized setting. She had a sad demeanor and my heart was touched. She was observed being beaten at a grocery store and was rescued by onlookers.

I hoped things would move quickly and we could bring her home soon. I prayed for her daily and began to prepare for her arrival, but soon affliction would pierce my heart.