



Jiangxi China Orphan Aid

Altrusa International of Longview-Kelso Foundation

working together with Amity Foundation in China

Heritage Trip: Nanchang adoptee provides scholarship to orphan

The train is approaching my destination: the city of Nanchang, China. I look through the window and absorb as much as possible of the outside landscape. My heart is fluttering with nerves. I am about to visit my birthplace, which I have no memory of. It's as foreign a place as it can be. And now, after a 17-hour flight and 4-hour train ride, I am about to return home to give back to my childhood orphanage.

I was adopted from a Chinese orphanage when I was 15 months old. I now live in the United States, leading a normal life like any other child here, worry-free, going to school, having friends, and practicing rhythmic gymnastics. However, I always felt connected to the orphans, particularly those with birth defects or other health-related issues, because the government does not provide the funds for them to get special education and treatment.

As I grew older and learned about my heritage, I could not help but wonder what life is like for those orphans and what the future will hold for them. I also wondered if there was a way I could help them.

In my freshman year of high school, my English teacher assigned us a project to overcome a personal challenge. The idea of raising funds to help Chinese orphans struck my mind.

I conducted some research, looking for ideas and opportunities. An organization called Altrusa International of Longview-Kelso Foundation caught my attention, because it has been helping orphans in Nanchang (my birthplace) since 1998.

I wrote to Dr. Gurrad, the organizer for the orphanage projects, to ask for guidance. She welcomed my initiative and sent me a list of children in urgent need of financial help. Some of the kids have serious physical defects and





T.F. with his foster mom.

needed money for life-saving operations. Some of them have mental disabilities that needed financial support for special education. A seven-year-old boy, T.F., is among them. He has Down Syndrome, and needs \$850 for a special kindergarten program. I decided to help this particular boy.

With all the information I gathered, I decided to launch my fundraising campaign with a letter. I wrote it from my heart on the boy's behalf. Overcoming my fear of rejection, I sent the letter out to neighbors, friends, and coaches. All the people who received my letter were very supportive and responded with extraordinary generosity. I got my first check from Angela, the daughter of a family friend. She donated all the money she earned from a summer job in a supermarket. Within three weeks, I raised more than \$850. I was very excited to achieve my goal in such a short

amount of time. After my campaign was over, I decided to visit the orphanage and T.F., who is now living with a foster family... and that's how I came to be on this train.

The train finally stops at Nanchang station. Once again, I set my foot on the land I once belonged to. The emotions of sentimentality and anxiety are overwhelming. After establishing my footing, my mom and I go to the orphanage. The director warmly welcomes us and introduces us to T.F. When I present him with a gift, his eyes brighten and he beams with a big smile. Upon prodding by the caregiver, he cheerfully sings me a song and follows me around wherever I go. We manage to converse with each other and take several photos together. I can feel his excitement; he eases up my nervousness.

I feel so rewarded knowing that such a fine boy could benefit from my fundraising efforts. I have no doubt in my mind that T.F. will live a productive life with proper education.

By A.W.