

Momma's Girl

It's pure pleasure to shop when someone you know is expecting a baby, and if a mother-to-be knows her baby is a boy or a girl—good-bye yellow; hello pink or blue! Indulging your little one before he or she arrives is one of the pleasures of pregnancy. Okay, it's the only pleasure of pregnancy.

Walking around the baby section of a store, feeling the warmth and softness of the tiny clothes, cuddly stuffed animals, plush bedding, and then imagining how nurturing it would be for your child to have that same tactile experience . . . that's nourishment for the pregnant woman's soul.

But in my case, I wasn't actually pregnant. I didn't know my baby's gender with any certainty; I didn't know her age, her size or where she lived. That's the way it often is with international adoptions. Unfortunately, my shopping had to wait.

The best I could do was pray that we'd be matched with the baby we petitioned for from the China Center for Adoption Affairs: a healthy, female infant between zero and twelve months of age. I prayed she was well cared for and loved while waiting for her forever family. And I prayed for patience . . . it would be months before we received our referral, and I'd permit myself to shop.

Then one delightful morning in May 2005, the floodgates opened! Our social worker called us with joyous news: An eleven-month-old baby girl from the Jiangxi Province of China was waiting for us to bring her home. She had spent the past year of her life in the loving care of a single foster mother and hadn't spent one night in the orphanage. God answered our greatest prayers. We'd been matched with the perfect child we'd dreamed of. A single caregiver in a private home loved her for the first year of her life.

Finally, the wait was over. "Let the shopping begin!" I rejoiced that beautiful, fateful day. Well, those weren't exactly my first words . . . but that thought entered my head almost immediately.

I frantically looked up our baby's height and weight measurements on an online U.S. clothing size comparison chart I'd found, deciding six to nine months was my target. Recognizing that we'd be traveling to southern China in July (and that would be downright tropical), I had a plan. Buy conservatively for our trip, buy a few items for our immediate return, but save the real shopping for the days after I had held my child in my own arms and could pinpoint her actual size.

That first day out, I bought pretty pink onesies and non-slip socks. I bought delicate sundresses with matching sunhats. I bought bright-colored bathing suits and cozy pajamas and fancy barrettes and knitted cardigan sweaters. I was in love . . . with my daughter and the bags I was filling to the brim in her honor. This was the tangible sign I had wished for to prove that my dream was becoming a reality.

My other children, deprived of the shopping euphoria, wanted in. My oldest son picked out a soft, plush, white kitty cat with a bell in its belly that jingled pleasantly with

every shake. My middle son picked out a pink, fleecy blanket with matching satin trim, one of those blanket-bear combinations.

Back at home and in her room, I hung my daughter's dresses in size order in her closet. I opened the packs of onesies and socks and laid them out neatly in her drawers. I made up her crib with her new pink sheets and a pastel crib bumper and placed the stuffed "friends" that my boys had picked out for their sister in the corners near where she'd lay her head down to sleep.

Before leaving my daughter's room that night, I smiled with satisfaction. Very soon I'd travel across the world to bring home the most precious gift since the birth of my sons: the beautiful baby girl that I'd longed for—and longed to shop for—all my life.

Karen Lynch

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