

Learning from the Past and Seeking Our Future

Although I may seem like an ordinary American teenager, my path to becoming American actually began in Beijing and took me to Hungary via Ohio. My passport actually tells the story of my integration into a new family and society, and how I built up trust toward the people close to me and, more remarkably, the United States government.

Until just a few years ago, I was shocked by the idea of being an American. Becoming American meant having a thin, blue, rectangular “book” with a creepy eagle on the front. And at the time, I didn’t even realize how it could shape my future, except, perhaps, for destroying it. This is because that I grew up in Beijing and I had heard endless criticism about how awful the United States is as a country. This brainwashing propaganda strategy in China greatly influenced my general view of the United States. I thought it was an evil, capitalist country that never kept its nose out of other countries’ business.

I was waiting for a Chinese family to adopt me but, in the end, the only possibility was to be adopted by an American family. This is because in China, people want to adopt younger children and I spent many years living with a foster family that I loved but which eventually kicked me out. Even though the social workers kept telling me that having an American family is a privilege, I found it risky. Thus, being adopted by an American family was threatening to me and so I was horrified to learn that I would be going to the United States. On top of that, my new father was working for the US government. Still, from deep in my heart, I was craving for a family that could take care of me. I don’t mean only physically; rather, I needed to feel safe, like before I was returned to the orphanage by my foster parents.

After arriving in Ohio, life seemed good. I had many friends and I started to feel more comfortable. Still, situations could arise unexpectedly. Even with all of the privileges that I had, I

still couldn't fill an empty space in my heart. Whenever any changes happened, even small ones, I felt hopeless, like I could be taken away from everything I had once again. Soon after, I just became angry about almost everything. Now looking back, I was like an explosive chemical which was only stable at certain temperatures.

All this madness came to a head on a cold, winter night with my new family in Ohio. The bitter air turned to freezing rain and made it a terrible night to drive. Still, I had to take driving lessons to help out with the care of my younger siblings. And as a part of class, Ohio requires all permit holders to watch the uncensored version of a half-hour investigation into major car accidents with bloody scenes throughout, to remind us of the importance of safe driving skills.

After class, my dad tried to show me his trust by encouraging me to drive home. I just didn't know how to express my feelings that day, and I didn't say anything. While I was driving that night, those disturbing images kept floating around my head and they enflamed my emotions after I accidentally crossed an intersection while accelerating. My dad told me to slow down and pointed out my mistake, but I had completely shut down. As a result, I started an argument with him and the fire in my heart was burning like the one that destroyed Rome. I was not being reasonable, and without any logical thinking of the consequences or the goodness of how my family treated me, I called the police.

Everything that happened after was like a hallucination. I felt no difference from the time that I was in China. All my insecure feelings came back, and I was dreadfully panicked. I was completely overwhelmed by the situation and I am not really sure what lead me to my decision to call the police. At that moment, all it took was a lie to totally destroy my family.

A half hour later, a policeman came and knocked on the front door. Truthfully, I was really in a horrible position, I was the one who called the police and I'd heard stories about

people getting arrested for misuse or abuse of 911. Moreover, I didn't even have a single idea of what to say. After talking outside with my father for a minute, a policeman came to the front door. His gleaming eyes looked straight at me. "So you called us?" He asked in a very nice manner like he was a guest visiting us. I said nervously: "I did." I was hoping that the American police would not be as terrible as the Chinese government had described. I didn't really think that this would end well. After telling the policeman an honest version of the story, he told me something that changed my life — "Kai, they are your parents and you should express your feelings with them if you are having troubles. I adopted a child from Russia myself, and it's hard, life is hard."

I can't believe that the sentence which changed my life came from a policeman. Now that I'm in Hungary, I am not ashamed of being an American. Rather, I'm proud of my country, and although there are critics of America, I always remember my encounter with the friendly policeman. Nowadays, when I look at my passport, I can see both my past and future in it. I remain proud of them both.