

NEWS » CHINA CARE JOURNAL
**VOLUNTEERING AT
THE CHINA CARE
HOME-- DAY 17,
SUMMER 2010**

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Day 17 by Jane Zhao

For the past week, I have spent my time bonding with infants and toddlers suffering from various health problems ranging from anal atresia to heart defects to spina bifida. Some children have already had surgery while others must wait until they are healthy and strong enough. Once a child has recovered from surgery, she/he returns to the orphanage and enrolled in one of Half the Sky's programs. Once a child is seen as mentally and physically fit, her/his file is then sent to the CCAA, allowing the child to be adopted by a family from anywhere around the world.



Two of my favorite toddlers, Long and Yan were able to return to their Half the Sky center yesterday. Long Long was born with a heart defect. His chest bears a long red scar from the surgery that saved his life. With a high forehead and large, dreamboat eyes, he stood out among his peers and captured my heart. He called me "Jie Jie" (older sister) and went with me on many adventures to the playground.

Yan Yan was born with a brain tumor. When she arrived at the China Care Home, she had lots of hair, but when I arrived, her hair was short and prickly and my fellow volunteers and I initially mistook her for a boy. We quickly realized our error when we noticed that she had a penchant for dressing up, giving kisses, and carrying around hairclips to go in her future long locks.

Saying good-bye was tough, especially with Long Long. He kept pulling on my hand, saying, "Jie Jie, don't leave me." I said good-bye to him at least fifteen times, thinking each time was the last. The most heart-wrenching moment came when I told him that we had a chance of meeting one another again in the future he replied, "No, I'm never going to see you again! Don't leave me, Jie Jie!" With each word, he shook his head wildly, trying to fight the tears that had begun to well up in his eyes. It took nearly everything I had in me to recall that his leaving the China Care Home was a good thing—that it took him one step closer to living a normal life, to being adopted by a couple who would dote on him and love him as a their own son.



Even after being here a relatively short time, I already feel very close and attached to these children. Words cannot describe the admiration I feel for the nannies at the China Care Home. The children call the nannies their mamas, and the nannies similarly call the children "sons" and "daughters." One of the nannies even spent her own money buying a jade necklace for her "son" and hair bands for her "daughter." The care that takes place is very personal, and the entire facility is run very professionally. Having seen the China Care Home with my own eyes, I am even more impressed that this entire organization was founded by a sixteen-year-old teenager.

Being here has been incredibly inspiring. I am simply amazed by how minor a factor one's age plays in altruism. Being here has made me feel like I can do anything, as long as I set my heart and mind to the task. I am really starting to believe that altruism has no boundaries. All of my fellow volunteers are different--some are serious, some are light-hearted--but all came to the China Care Home with the same purpose: to help others. It makes me feel good being around this many kind-hearted and motivated individuals. I hope all of our relationships with China Care and China's orphans do not end with this trip. One day, I hope to return to China myself and be the one performing these life-saving surgeries.