

Finding their child by faith

Despite cultural barriers to adoption, couple felt guided by their own star -- and yes, it was in the east

By Wendi C. Thomas

[Contact](#)

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Judy and William Ragin wanted to adopt. Adopt internationally, and adopt a girl.

They'd had the longing to do so, a longing that came from God, since before they were married.

Three biological sons and 10 years later, the Ragins brought Harris McKenzie Qing Ragin home from the Guizhou province of China in April.

In the process, they may have made history. Chinese officials and several U.S. adoption agencies have told the Ragins that they are the first African-American couple to adopt a baby from China.

"We weren't looking to make history," says Judy Ragin. "We wanted to fulfill a desire that we believe God had placed in our heart."

Today Harris, now 23 months old, will celebrate her first Christmas with her new family.

On the day that Christians celebrate the evidence of the improbable promise the angel made to Mary and Joseph, the Ragins have in little Harris their own proof that God's words always come true.

Before Judy was married, she was told it'd be difficult for her to conceive. So she and her husband had always contemplated adoption; they'd even talked about it during their premarital counseling.

But shortly after the pair married in 1996, Judy became pregnant with Daniel, now 8, so the couple put their adoption plans on hold. As soon as they resumed planning, she became pregnant with Justin, now 6. Then came Bill, now 5.

But their desire to adopt never waned. When they led their sons in their bedtime prayers, they thanked God in advance for their baby sister.



Photos by Lance Murphey/The Commercial Appeal

Harris McKenzie Qing Ragin, 23 months, is spending her first Christmas with her adoptive parents, William and Judy Ragin, and brothers.



Harris does her best to keep up with her brothers Daniel, 8, (left) and Justin, 6. She's even gotten into some mischief with the next-in-age to her, 5-year-old Bill.

In 2003, the couple began the formal process, and they felt led to seek a child from China.

As children, both Judy and William had friends of different races, so adopting a child who isn't black never struck them as unusual. For those who asked why they weren't seeking a black child, Judy had a ready answer: "We're already raising African-American children."

Plus, their goal was to move as God directed them, and that direction was to China.

But not only was the interracial, international adoption unusual for the adoption agencies they consulted with; Chinese officials also told them it'd never been done before.

Months into the adoption process, the Ragins were told that the Chinese government wouldn't allow a black couple to adopt a Chinese baby. Their home, they were told, wouldn't be culturally enriching enough.

"We went back to God," said Judy Ragin, who is a stay-at-home mom. "We immediately went back and we said, 'Father, if we missed you, we need to know.' "

Their pastor, Apostle Sidney Malone of New Growth In Christ Christian Center, reassured them that they hadn't misunderstood what God had told them. Malone told them that doors would open for them in China. The government's "no" meant little, because God had already told them yes.

With help from Sen. Bill Frist's office, the Ragins learned that China had no official policy banning the placement of Chinese children with black couples.

In April, they flew to China to get their little girl.

They'd wondered how the Chinese might react to them not just because of their skin color but also because they would be adopting a Chinese child. They were pleasantly surprised by the warm welcome and amused when William, a project manager for a major local company, was mistaken for Michael Jordan.

In the family's Collierville home, Harris does her best to keep up with her brothers. She has had few of the adjustment difficulties the Ragins were told adopted children usually have, like refusing to make eye contact or be held by their new parents.

Giggling and smiling, she scrambles around the house in brown buckle shoes, eating the crumbs in a box of vanilla wafers. A typical toddler, she says "Mine" when a visitor reaches for the pop-up book she's holding.

Just recently, William Ragin said, Harris and her partner-in-crime, brother Bill, created a waterfall in a bathroom sink. Bill stopped up the drain with toilet paper while Harris squirted liquid soap into the waterfall.

When the satin bow on her skirt comes undone, she goes to her father to re-tie it. Captive to the burst of hyperactivity that often precedes nap time, Harris stumbles and starts to cry. She runs to her father, who scoops her up. Within minutes, she's sound asleep.

When Harris is a little older, she'll start to learn Mandarin and her entire family will visit China. But what's more important than her race or her country of origin, the Ragins say, is her spiritual identity.

Says Judy: "She's in existence today because God said so."

To contact Wendi C. Thomas, call (901) 529-5896.