

From the Journal of SallyAnn Esposito-Pellicci

May/June 2006 Trip to Vietnam

Wednesday, May 24th, 2006-6PM through Thursday May 25th, 2006

Our day began with packing and getting ready for our trip to Vietnam to meet our 5 month old son, Thai Binh. My husband and I are experiencing feelings of excitement; joy and an overwhelming feeling of happiness. We were finally going to bring home our son. We boarded our flight from JFK, New York to Seoul, Korea, then to Hanoi, Vietnam. We had met up with the two other couples at JFK and were able to get acquainted - we all hit it off very nicely. There was Joe and Dale from Florida who came with their Vietnamese 5 year old daughter, Gabriella. What a doll she was and really beautiful! They were adopting a 10 month old baby girl and named her "Lilly". Karen and Marco who are also from Florida were adopting a 6 month old baby girl and named her "Kaiya Cathleen Ha". The seven of us were ready to begin our journey.

Friday, May 26th, 2006 - 6:40AM Vietnam Time

We met Mr. Hoang at the airport and we went to The Sunway Hotel. It's very hot and humid this time of year. We received great news from Mr. Hoang - we were able to go to the orphanage today and meet our children. We met our children, the director of the orphanage Mr. Thieu Le Xuan and all the caretakers. The orphanage is beautiful and I did not expect it to be so large.

Monday, May 29th, 2006 Day of "**Giving and Receiving**"

Be sure to dress very nicely on this day and bring small gifts for the caretakers, the director and toys for the children.

Today Mr. Hoang took us back to the orphanage to receive our babies. We were there no more than 20 minutes when they brought all the babies out. It was amazing, just an experience I will never forget. When they brought Thai out I thought "This is Thai, the baby I have been dreaming of all these months - and now we are finally together!" They handed him over to me and he just looked up at me and stared for a long time. He finally gave me a smile and I melted. The people at the orphanage were all very nice and friendly. We were able to take pictures and video footage of the whole event. We were hoping that all the birth mother's would be there but only one came, not Thai's and I was extremely disappointed. I wanted to be able to meet with her so that I can at least tell Thai something about his biological Mother. Mr. Hoang explained that she lives too far and could not afford to take the trip to the orphanage. We gave the director and the caretakers our gifts and they were very appreciative. After the orphanage, we met with the Vietnamese officials. One of the officials spoke English and read to us the Vietnamese laws and theory of family and children with the upbringing and respect of a child to his parents. It was very touching and emotional. The officials asked us if we felt there was anything that they can improve on or if we felt the process was easy or acceptable. We all agreed that the process was extremely well orchestrated and went very smoothly. Our names were called family by family. We got up and signed legal books stating that we have adopted our children which at that point photos were taken. It was a pleasurable moment. Mr. Hoang took all our gifts and will be giving them to all the officials for us. This was such a memorable day, I am so glad they allowed pictures and video to be taken. One of the parents brought a suitcase of children's clothing which the orphanage can use. Even clothing for the older children they need desperately. So if you use one suitcase for donating clothing, you can then bring that same

suitcase back with all your purchases from your stay here.

It is hard to believe that a process we started months ago, filling out forms and pulling documents together, concluded today with our son. Here we are half way around the world, in a government office somewhere outside of Hanoi, we become parents. Although I always knew that adoption would happen, it never seemed quite possible. Adoptions happen all of the time, but today is my adoption.

Tuesday, May 30th, 2006

Today after breakfast we met with Mr. Hoang and one parent from each family went with Mr. Hoang to file for the babies passport at immigration. We all went shopping and I purchased items that Thai can have into his adulthood. By purchasing these items we hope Thai will want to learn more about his culture and heritage as he matures.

Wednesday, May 31st, 2006

Today all the families went with Mr. Hoang to the SOS International Medical Clinic for their physical examinations. Dr. Miller asked that I immediately switch Thai from the Vietnamese baby formula to the formula I brought from home since the one used in Vietnam is used to fatten the babies up and is not as nutritional. I brought with me a formula with Iron and it is Soy based. Thai was fine with it. I was worried about the bottles since I couldn't buy what the orphanage used. I brought some bottles from home and luckily he took right to it. In addition to the exam, the paperwork for the babies' Visa's were done at this time. We also went to a local photo lab where each baby had his or her photo taken for their passport.

Thursday, June 1st, 2006

Today one parent from each family went with Mr. Hoang to immigration to pick up the babies passports. It was exciting to see your child's photograph inside knowing that it's getting closer to bringing the baby home!

Friday, June 2nd, 2006

Today we all moved into the Melia Hanoi Hotel I had brought with me an international cell phone which I had rented – you really don't need it! You can call the US from your hotel room for a low cost. It was great! You will find that you can go shopping with US dollars or Vietnamese Dong; the small vendors take US Dollars as well. The hotel has a screen up at the front desk which tells you the exchange on a daily basis. I highly recommend you pack a calculator which was a huge help to us when shopping!

Saturday, June 3rd, 2006

This morning we had our continental breakfast - what a spread, unbelievable! The food is so healthy for you! The hotel has a pool, so bring your bathing suits! I found out after we arrived home that the doctor does NOT recommend bringing the baby into the pool since he/she is not fully vaccinated, so please keep that in mind.

Sunday, June 4th, 2006

Today we all went to the lake where there is a gorgeous park and bridge crossing over the lake. The people there were very friendly and were so curious to see us and the babies. They asked us questions about them and how we adopted our children. But my response was always that “We

are who is Blessed and fortunate to have such a beautiful son". Once they understood they were so happy for us and the children. They thanked us for us adopting them. Again the country is very poor and when they see us with their children they are very interested as to why? Just be patient and take a moment of your time to try and explain and they will be thankful for it.

Monday, June 5th, 2006

(Be a little dressed up for this interview)

Today we had our first of the two interviews with the US Embassy. Each family went into a secluded room with their baby. We met with two very friendly ladies. They asked many questions relating to the adoption with New Beginnings, the orphanage and personal questions. The Embassy had a strong concern about the adoptions. The interview was not anything to worry about. Just be yourself and relax, it was a pleasure to meet with these very nice ladies. We found out later on that the Embassy sent over two of their people to check out the orphanage. All went well! I must just add something else; today Thai rolled over for the first time!

Tuesday, June 6th, 2006

We are waiting to hear from the US Embassy to see when our last interview will be. It is at this time, that you will be paying and receiving your child's Visa. We also found out that the US Embassy is only open for Visa's on Monday - Wednesday so we are hoping that they can make an exception and see us on Wednesday for our last interview since one of the mother's has been in and out of the hospital. Today happened to be Joe (one of the father's) birthday's!

Thursday, June 8th, 2006

Today was another day of relaxation and we also did some shopping. Yet we are so anxious to now go home! I recommend bringing baby formula, baby unscented wipes, don't buy anything with fragrance as the babies have not been exposed to fragrances and can have a bad reaction to it. Bring diapers, bottles, bottle brush, liquid soap to wash the bottles out. Baby rectal thermometer is very important. Don't bother bring a sterilizer, you can wash out all the bottles since they do not sterilize the bottles in the orphanages anyway. Bring an adapter for the electrical outlet - thank God we did!

Friday, June 9th, 2006

(Again be dressed up for this interview)

Today we were told that the US Embassy will see us for our second interview. Again we met with two woman and it was a very pleasant interview. Again she asked us questions relating to the adoption agency and asked our personal opinion's on the process. All and all it went well. We then had to raise our right hands and she related to us an Oath that the information we gave to her was true. After that we all went to lunch with Mr. Hoang where he received a call on his cell phone stating that the babies Visa's were completed! This was excellent news and we now knew we were going home a few days earlier! He also told us NOT to open the documents of the babies for that is strictly for when we go through Custom's! We also received from him a packet of the babies background information .

In conclusion:

This will be an experience you will never forget! You will be on the other side of the world and truly feel calm and enjoying every moment of it. Even though at first you might feel it's a long

stay, it goes very quickly. As for me personally I was very sad to leave since this is a part of my son, his culture, his people whom I've grown to admire. Be open minded, take lots of pictures and bond, bond, bond with your babies while you are there. Once you get home your families will want to see your baby but please first go to your baby's doctor and have him or her get a full examination and start the vaccination's BEFORE you expose him to the germs we American's are immune to! I would truly do this all over again! I am already planning in my mind how soon we can adopt a sibling for Thai Binh! All the best to you all. I hope to be meeting the next group of families going to Vietnam!