

## Adoption, at warp speed

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**The Johnson family pulled off the nearly impossible with a bit of help from U.S. Bank.**

They call it warp-speed adoption, and it's nearly impossible to pull off. But the Johnson family believed they could do it. They had to.

"Michael called me at work and said, 'I really just think he's our son,'" says Ashley Johnson, who works for U.S. Bank in Paducah, Ky. "And I said, 'I think so too.'"

Thus began the most intense pursuit of Ashley's life. She was going after a miracle, cramming a year-long international process into just three months.

Isaac, the boy who had captured their hearts, was about to turn 14. Once that happens, Chinese children can no longer be adopted internationally. They age out of the system and have to live on their own.

The Johnsons hadn't been looking for a new family member. They were settled into a comfortable, busy life: Ashley is a treasury management consultant at U.S. Bank, Michael a civil engineer. Nights and weekends are filled with sports and activities for Grant, 13, and Claire, 10.

Isaac came into their lives through a Facebook post Michael happened to see one day. An American who volunteers at Isaac's orphanage in China was pleading for a family to step forward and give him a home.

Something about the slight boy with the mischievous smile touched the Johnsons. Within 24 hours, they had talked it over with the kids and gotten on speakerphone with the volunteer to find out more.

If you're meant to do this, a friend told Ashley, you'll feel desperate, as if Grant or Claire were the ones stuck in China. And it was true – she'd never felt a greater sense of urgency.



They contacted five agencies before finding one, the Great Wall China Adoption Agency, that agreed to help them. Next came the paperwork rush. They needed physicals, pay stubs, tax returns, fingerprints. A social worker did an exhaustive home study. The kids submitted drawings of what their new family would look like.

Everything had to be notarized, verified by the Kentucky secretary of state, reviewed by Homeland Security, sent to the Chinese embassy and back. Ashley drove some documents to the state capitol herself. Once she brought her adoption binder into a restaurant with her, because a storm was brewing outside and she was afraid it wasn't safe in the car.

### ***The kids' drawing***

White-knuckle stuff kept happening. A delivery truck broke down with their most important documents inside. Ashley's passport got held up in Washington, and a church friend had to get a congressman to intervene. On one of her daily calls to the adoption agency, she broke into tears, begging them to check the mail one more time for the official letter from China.

Finally, word came. Somehow, miraculously, they had beaten the deadline. Isaac was theirs.

Michael and Grant went to China and brought him home on Sept. 24, 2015, helped in part with \$2,500 from U.S. Bank's adoption assistance reimbursement program.

"It was so exciting," says Ashley. "It felt great to just have my whole family together, to have them back."

Isaac's English has improved immensely since then. He calls the Johnsons mom and dad, and he's taught his siblings how to play chess. He's also a big fan of magic. He has a stockpile of supplies next to his bed and loves practicing card tricks on the family.

It's not always easy. The sudden addition of another teenager has created new parenting challenges for the Johnsons, but also new blessings. And through social media, Ashley is still in close contact with the international adoption community, including a private Facebook group that was instrumental in guiding them through the warp-speed process.

"I was up til 11:30 last night messaging with someone on Facebook that I've connected with," Ashley says.

Not long after Isaac arrived, Grant noticed something else that felt like fate's final word on their journey. If you line up the first initials in their names, you get MAGIC.

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***Isaac showing one of his tricks to Ashley and Michael***