I was adopted from an orphanage in China when I was nine months old. My parents had spent the previous year anxiously anticipating our meeting. It took a lot of paperwork, money, and a lot of wondering if it was really going to happen, but I was now Alexa Brill, daughter of Jim and Karen Brill. It was an instant bond, an instant love between a child and her parents just as any other. Arriving at the airport in Green Bay, Wisconsin, February 23, 1997, my new family was waiting: aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, and my ten year old sister, Courtney. Many more connections of this instant love were made between me, a little Chinese baby, and a group of people that were now my family.

These connections define how I view my family, race, and myself. As I grew up, my adoption and my race were just facts, something I always knew and celebrated. My parents never had a big sit down with me telling me that I was adopted. There were not any specific experiences when I suddenly realized I was a different color than the rest of my family or that I was inherently different from other people around me. Race has always been only a small piece of me that is not a defining characteristic. I sometimes forget that I came from a place completely different than where I was raised, a place and culture I have no attachment to.

I have never dwelled on or wondered about my biological parents or what the circumstances of the first months of my life entailed. Any curiosity of my Chinese culture is that of a person who loves to learn, not as someone who came from there. Instead, I come from a small town where my beliefs and opinions were shaped by American culture. I have never felt like an outsider or faced discrimination from neighbors, classmates, or others within my community. My town and my family have treated me and thought of me as one of their own,
more of a Brill from birth than an adopted extension of the family. In this way, I have always thought of myself as a Brill.

My family is mine to keep and stay without any interruption. My cousin wrote about my experience perfectly: “You can tell that you were made just for our family. You have our “Brill” characteristics; sometimes good, and other times not. You talk fast, just like our grandfather, you’re smart, just like your cousins, and you’re beautiful, just like your sister. You would think you came from our blood, but instead you were MADE IN CHINA.”