

Winter, 2004

Dear Doris:

Thank you so much for sending me a copy of your lovely book. What I appreciate about the book, aside from its obvious importance as a critical, huge piece of honest information, is that it represents a multi-layered resource for a parent. In my opinion it is the pictures, along with a somewhat more spare, poetic, and imaginative contextual story provided by the parents, that is most developmentally appropriate for the very young child. Then once the energies of the intellect begin to emerge around age seven, you have provided a wonderfully clear presentation of the myriad facts that attend their profound adoption journey. So it is really a book that can grow with the child and the parents, as a foundation for their developing relationship--that is based on loving truth and authenticity.

I would appreciate your sending me any "order forms" or such that you might have, so I can have those handy in my "Counseling Resources" file in the event that I have a parent seeking a copy. Send them to the address below. Thanks so much, again, for the complimentary copy.

Best,

Marcy Arness

May, 2004

Reviewed by Catherine Carrington, newsletter editor and member of the board of directors for Families with Children from China-Northern California

Before I Met You A Therapeutic Pre-Adoption Narrative Designed for Children Adopted from China

All children delight in knowing how they came into this world and in creating memories of their earliest days from the tales grown-ups tell. At age 7, my daughter, Liana, still melts in giggles when I recall playing peek-a-boo with her as she lay on the diaper table, opening and closing her plump, naked legs while sneaking a peek and then hiding from view.

She begs me to take another step back into our shared history and tell how Daddy crafted a makeshift tent to shield her eyes from the bright lights on the flight home from China. She loves to hear how she smiled and laughed at me in our hotel room, before we'd even known each other a full day.

But go back much further than that, and we hit a void. We know nothing about Liana's early life, except that she was found in a train station in Yueyang. We know nothing about her first family or those months between her conception and birth, when her birth mother nurtured her tiny life so well.

That is the void that Doris Landry's book, *Before I Met You*, fills with both honesty and compassion. Unlike most children's adoption books, *Before I Met You* starts at the beginning, during pregnancy. Through Landry's gentle words and Suzanne Haskew's soulful illustrations, the child imagines what it was like to be inside her birth mother's womb as she went about each day.

"Before you were born in China, your birthmother carried you around safe within her. As you grew, you became familiar with her and her world. You learned what your birthmother did all day by how she moved. You could taste what foods she liked and you could hear her words. Her voice became very familiar and comforting to you," Landry writes. "You were connected to your birthmother in every way for nine months as you grew inside her."

When the story moves to what might have prevented the birth parents from keeping their baby, Landry doesn't pretend to know their circumstances or what they were thinking. She ably explains, at a child's level, the blend of Chinese culture and policy that may have played a role, but she also acknowledges that illness or disability—or some other, very painful, problem—may have been the cause.

Landry's expertise as an adoption therapist clearly shows as she leads the child in exploring feelings about adoption. She starts with the moment of separation, pointing out that even newborns can feel grief. In the orphanage she describes the "aunties" feeding, changing, and keeping the babies warm—but acknowledges that with so many babies to care for, "it was very hard to pay attention to each baby like a mother does... this can make a baby not only sad but mad."

To the child that baby has become, Landry says: "I think it must be very confusing to try and understand how birthparents can "give" their baby to another family to take care of. I wish I had answers for you. Instead, we can talk about all your feelings and thoughts."

By putting a name to feelings a 6- or 7-year-old might not understand and providing a context for them, Landry helps the child explore how her pre-adoption history may influence her inner life today. More important, she makes it safe to embark on that journey inward.

"I promise you this: you won't ever have to be alone with all those feelings. I am strong and will be here to comfort you and keep you safe, for always," Landry writes in the adoptive parent's voice.

Some parents may be uneasy about addressing feelings so directly, worried about opening the floodgates of emotion. But those of us who have older children know that those feelings are there, like it or not, and our daughters need help with them. In a helpful appendix intended for grown-ups, Landry reminds us that it is appropriate for a child to feel sadness when thinking about the loss of a birth family, and that anger is one of the steps in the grieving process.

“It is important to first become comfortable with the idea that your child may be sad as you open the door to her truth,” Landry writes. “In order to gain something, loss needs to occur.”