



Our Journey to Elena

We had talked about adoption for many years, but didn't really get serious about it until early 2006. We had friends who had adopted and they referred us to Hands Across the Water. I'll never forget visiting HATW's office to learn more, and then when our home study began, thinking to myself "wow, this is really happening!" It was so helpful that HATW could not only provide all the official information that we needed, but they were willing to share their own personal stories of adoption, and reassure us that while the pain of waiting for our child would be great, it would be worth it in the end. They were so right!

After 6 months of paperwork and fingerprints and home studies and everything else, I opened up my email on December 28 to find pictures of a beautiful baby girl and HATW asking us if we wanted to accept the referral. We had been waiting so long and yet it still seemed to be surreal. But we said **yes yes yes!!!!**

We traveled to Guatemala to visit our baby in March. I can still remember as if it was yesterday walking into the hotel and setting eyes on her for the first time. I still have to catch my breath! There was no doubt in my mind that we and this baby belonged together! We spent a wonderful 3 days with her, and having to leave her until the adoption could be complete and travel home to the U.S. was the hardest thing I've ever done.

I won't sugarcoat it: the daily ache of waiting for her, and wondering when we could be joined with our baby was horrible. Day after day after day went by; I had a hard time focusing on anything else, but at long last, we got word that PCN had approved it, and we could travel back to Guatemala to bring our baby home. What a joyous day that was, albeit extremely stressful!

Our parents and my siblings and their kids were all so anxious to meet their new family member, and they wanted to come to the airport so they could meet her as soon as possible. But HATW encouraged us to take extended introductions slowly, so as not to overwhelm her. As they said, every sight, smell and sound will be new to her, and so it is important to take it slowly. Our families weren't thrilled, but I still think that is one of the best pieces of advice we ever received, and believe it was crucial to Elena's wonderful adjustment to life with us.

Almost 7 years later, I truly cannot imagine life without this precious creature in our lives. We have biological and adopted children, and while it's a cliché, it's absolutely true that there is NO difference in how we feel about any of our children, regardless of how they came to us. I will forever be grateful to HATW for helping us complete our family in a beautiful way.

