

SEPTEMBER 2018

I was born in the year of the fire rat. I was born in the Zhuang Autonomous region in Guangxi, China, Nanning City. When I was a few days old my birth parents weren't able to keep me anymore. My birth parents laid me gently down on the concrete pavement. They said their last goodbyes, they got up quietly like bunnies and crept into the evening under the full moon. I soothed myself and kept myself warm in my blanket.



Caption: Lucy at Mt. Hood Kiwanis Camp 2017

The next morning, I was found by a nice kind-hearted person who took me to the Nanning Social Welfare Institute in Guangxi, China where I waited for my forever family. When first I arrived I was assigned to a crib and a crib mate. My crib

mate and I would soothe each other when we cried. We heard each other's cries. We had to be strong for each other. Until the day we had a family to call our own. At 20 months my parents adopted me because they wanted to adopt a Chinese baby girl--that was me. They wanted to share their experiences with me and teach me things.

My parents gave me and my sisters opportunities to connect with our Chinese culture in various ways. We went as a family to this Chinese Heritage Camp and Chinese language school in Denver, CO. My family and I also went to a Chinese Heritage Camp in Portland, OR. Both Chinese Heritage Camps had cultural workshops, gift shop, cooking, arts and crafts, resources and adoption workshops for the campers and families to take part in together. I enjoyed being surrounded by other Chinese adoptees who looked

like me. I felt complete and happy hearing their "red thread" stories and going through similar experiences as me.

How my Chinese culture shaped me to the person who I am today: it is who I am as a person and the genes that my birth parents gave to me. For example, my double eyelids, beautiful lips, my tan skin and my thick dark black hair. It's how I express myself through my Chinese dance and my ceramics and mostly my writing. I enjoy sharing my Chinese culture with other people and most of all sharing my red thread journey.

I like to learn, I always wanted to go to college. I always had a dream of going to college after high school. I took a placement test at PCC Sylvania and I looked at the class schedule. The ones I wanted to take, the times were unavailable. And then last year I went to the TCIO (Think College Inclusion Oregon) information night and I thought about it and I applied and got in.

I thought it over and I eventually wanted to go to college and fulfill my dream. To get into TCIO I had to write a personal statement about why I wanted to go to college and how I would help myself. During my 1st year in TCIO I had a busy schedule. I was still in the Community Transition Program for students with a modified diploma in high school, and I was working and going to college part time. And on top of that academic coaching and academic advising and seminars once a month. My first class was called Health, Happiness, and Human Rights and I learned a lot of stuff. The class changed my thinking about how people view health and happiness and how we see human rights--how other people see it. Human rights should be for everyone, not just one person. We all have rights, that is what it says in the constitution and we should all be happy.

"An invisible red thread connects those who are destined to meet regardless of time and place or circumstance. The thread may stretch or tangle but it will never break."

–Chinese Proverb

Some of the work for the class that I was most proud of was going to the Portland Art Museum and doing a creative project and performing my Chinese dance for the class – that was fun.

When we went to the museum we looked at a painting about Indian boarding schools and how children were treated in those boarding schools—they couldn't practice their traditions. It is like when you take someone's culture away, it affects their health and happiness but mainly their human rights. I liked studying different cultures. I like comparing that thinking to my own Chinese dance. I thought about how the Native Americans' culture is just as important to them as my Chinese dance is important to me, so I did a dance for the class to represent what I learned from that painting. I learnt from this assignment that other people who are different from me have a life too but probably they have a different life than me. They are just a person like me, nothing less.

The course was about our responsibilities to the world and made me think of the stuff going on in the news like the lives of the people in different countries from ours. Like the conflict in Syria and the Middle East made me think something about them. How war affects health and happiness and human rights.

I would tell new students starting in the Think College program that TCIO changed my life in a positive way. I always wanted to go to college and meet new people. Having an academic coach helps you a lot. They are always with you and want you to be successful. They are always standing by you. And take advantage of the clubs and the classes at the Rec Center, too. My student mentor for my Freshman Inquiry course, Grace, always told us take care of your pals and do

self-care. It is fun and TCIO changed my life. Just enjoy it. You will be proud when you complete it.

So, when I imagine myself, finished with my certificate I will be very proud. I have my life after college all planned. After TCIO, I graduate in June 2020 and I will go to PCC and get my 1



Lucy at Mt. Hood Kiwanis Camp 2018 (a camp for children and adults with disabilities, www.mhkc.org/)

The Think College Inclusion Oregon-Career and Community Studies program at Portland State let me dive into my own personal interests. Having an academic coach has been the best thing ever. Think College is a great opportunity for young adults with intellectual disabilities to get job development and have a four year college experience like any other student. I have enjoyed it. I will miss it when I graduate, especially the academic coaching.

-Lucy

year Certificate. I want to become a paraeducator and work with a Life Skills classroom, maybe with Portland Public Schools. And then, maybe, I want to live on my own and have a dog and travel to China and volunteer at my orphanage in China and take care of the kids. I would go over there for the summer and do volunteer work. I will take care of the kids at my orphanage, maybe paint the room and just give them love. They might know what love is but not how I do with a family and having friends. That is my dream.

I am saving money for this dream. I have been saving lots of money from my work and I have a dreams map. And I have my goals, my life goals for 5 years from now. So now I can refer to that. So that is my plans after college. And then travel, like my mom and dad did before they adopted me. Travel to a lot of different places. See different places. Taste different foods. Awesome.

Author Information

LUCY BALTHAZAAR is currently in her 3rd year of Portland State University's Think College Inclusion Oregon-Career and Community Studies program (TCIO-CCS), and she works as support staff at Helen Gordon Child Development Center, the on-campus child care center on Portland State Campus.

LYDIA FISHER is an instructor in the Portland State University Studies program, and she has taught TCIO-CCS students in her Freshman Inquiry classes since the program first enrolled students in the Fall of 2016.

GRACE PIPER was the undergraduate peer mentor for Lucy's Freshman Inquiry course. Grace is a Women and Gender Studies graduate and is now working for a non-profit called Toolkit Project PDX publishing teen activists, working in freelance design, and working with plants.