

## He's Got Your Back

By Linda Hillary, MSE, NCC

My friends had returned from China just 3 weeks earlier with their now 15-month-old adopted daughter, Kate. She was only just beginning to toddle without help, and seemed to be absorbing everything about her new family and home. Kate was firmly attached to her mother, and it was obvious that she was growing closer to her father and 14-year-old sister every day. This newest citizen was 5 weeks out of a rural Chinese orphanage and a little reserved with strangers, but I had been visiting often, and Kate was becoming accustomed to seeing me - even though she had not let me hold her that often yet.

This particular evening, my friends were called out for an emergency meeting and needed to be gone for about an hour. She had just had a bath and that wasn't a place for a tentative toddler (almost "newborn" into this culture) so I volunteered to stay with her for that short time.

As they slipped away, Kate did not look for them immediately as we were watching a classical music video for babies while she had a bottle of milk. Television and videos were not part of her short and limited life experience in China, and Kate loves music a great deal, so Mozart and wonderful graphics held her attention for the whole half-hour of the program.

Then as she began to look about for her family - these newcomers who had changed her entire world - I recalled that with her sister's help, Kate had discovered the thrills of crawling up the stairs. With supervision and assistance, she had loved to stretch her legs and do contortions as she had climbed before, reaching for the handrail that was just out of her reach.

Kate was quite unsteady standing at the base, but excitedly crawled up a few steps. Then she found that she could stand erect on a carpeted stair, although she wobbled in every direction. This became quite an exciting game for her as she learned how she could twist her body and use her legs and arms. I stood ready behind her at every move to steady her and keep her from falling, while I watched her enjoyment and sensed the freedom of challenge and possibility that she was experiencing.

Then, all at once, Kate stood up and teetered back and forth, laughing with great joy at her accomplishment. She turned her head to look back at me with excitement but also some strong uncertainty. Daring to move out and explore her world in this way was risky business, as much as she was thrilled with the chance to move unrestricted and try new things. She glanced behind her as if to ask whether I was watching and check to see if I would catch her if she tumbled off this precipice.

After 14 months of hearing Chinese words being spoken, and 5 weeks of listening to English, I did not know how much Kate might understand of my reassurances. When her dark eyes flashed at me with an unspoken question of trust and safety, I just said quietly, "I've got your back." Satisfied in some way in those two seconds and enticed by

the pleasure of her climbing game, Kate turned suddenly and clambered up another step to raise her upper torso very warily as she quivered back and forth learning to keep her balance. She looked back at me again in triumph, making sure that I was still there to catch her if need be.

Again, I said softly, "I've got your back, Kate," and she whipped her little head around to scale another height on the brightly lit stairwell. Satisfied that she could continue climbing these stairs with the security of knowing that I would catch her and protect her, Kate climbed several more steps in the same way and stood on each one with assurances from me that "I've got your back."

Having no idea what that sounded like to a toddler who had had more life changes in a few weeks than most of us do in a lifetime, I was considering what all of this must seem like to her. Then suddenly, I was struck by this object lesson in God's care for us.

As His children, we live our lives risking at every turn and learning how to manage and be in a world that at times we scarcely understand. Sometimes we look for Him to see if He is behind us and protecting us after all, but many times we just stumble and flounder along the best that we can in our own "childish" wisdom and do not stop to remember that He said, "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me." Isaiah 49:15

In fact, the Lord has always "had our backs" in exactly that fashion, and He always stands ready to catch and balance us should we misstep and fall. I recall that we are told in Isaiah 58:8: "Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness [your righteous One] will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard." (Amplified Version). In the Contemporary English Version this reads: "Then your light will shine like the dawning sun, and you will quickly be healed. Your honesty will protect you as you advance, and the glory of the LORD will defend you from behind.

An echo of this guarantee resounds in Isaiah 52:12: "... you will not leave in haste or go in flight; the LORD will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard. (NIV), or "You will not leave in a hurry, running for your lives. For the LORD will go ahead of you, and the God of Israel will protect you from behind." Another way of thinking about that seems to be "The Lord's got your back."

The truth in this was so clear to me as I stayed with this little one through one hour in her unfolding world. How reassuring it will be when we can grasp those promises and hold onto His pledge of care and concern for us as little children in His loving care.

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