



A Little Bit Irish...

Hanna, my seven year old from China, was in the tub. I was helping her rinse the shampoo out of her hair when she asked,
“Am I a little bit Irish?”

My mind swept over some of our recent conversations about our family heritage, and I answered, “Well, ethnically you are Chinese. But since I’m a little bit Irish, then culturally, you are a little bit Irish, too.”

“When did it happen?” Hanna wanted to know.

“When did WHAT happen?” I asked, concentrating on her soapy head.

“When did I become a little bit Irish,” she explained patiently. “Was it when you kissed me for the very first time?”

I paused, shower wand in hand, and watched my daughter squeeze water out of her hair. I thought about the tiny, bundled baby that had been handed to me at the Anhui Hotel seven years earlier, and I remembered how her head felt against my cheek. I hadn’t wanted to scare her; my baby-kiss was soft and swift as I cradled her upon my shoulder. Unremarkable, it was the first kiss of many thousands, yet now, through Hanna, I see it with fairytale eyes:

My first kiss to my adopted daughter infused her with my love, my world, and the generations of my unknown ancestors! Like Sleeping Beauty waking with a kiss from her Prince, the mother-daughter kiss called forth a magical intermingling-- a covenant leaping past genetics, it bestowed Hanna and me upon each other...

My pragmatic daughter had chosen to make sense of the vast, familial complexities of international adoption with a powerfully simple symbol of promise and connection.

“Yes” I said finally. “I think that’s when it happened.”

We were SWAK.



~ Jean MacLeod

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