

Becoming American Dad

It was never the plan.

It was just about a month after my wife and I moved in the Daiber Complex in Lewes. We hadn't even figured out where, or if there was a Chinese grocery store nearby. Yet here we were.

Standing on the bathroom floor at 3 PM, we had mixed feelings about a *pee stick* with two thin red lines.

I'm a city boy from the east coast of China, my wife is from a provincial capital near Tibet. We met in college, and it was love at first sight. Throughout the years we've found our common interest in US sitcoms, and were deeply attracted by the carefree lifestyle depicted in the shows. When our 30-hour flight finally landed in the US, we had a bucket list on places to visit and things to do. Parenting is definitely not on it.

We were in our mid-20s when I began my study at St. Petersburg, Florida. We lived in a small condo by the Tampa bay, and the sunset scenery were truly intoxicating. We often took half an hour walk to our favorite local store, and sometimes stopped to see manatees grazing near the dock.

Of course it was not always easy. Both of us are from working-class families, and we knew no one when we got off the plane. For the very first time, we had to learn to survive all by ourselves. I still remember our first trip to the nearest Walmart, which took us an hour on foot since we got no vehicle. We had to Uber our way back home for the purchases and exhaustion. Then there was our first visit to a used car dealership and leaving with the joy of becoming car owners. And our first encounter with the US law enforcement when I totaled my first car. And the first time I went to a court to get that ticket dismissed. None of these would happen to us if

we choose to stay in China, but the bitter sweetness strengthened our relationship with a hint of *camaraderie*.

It got easier as we stayed longer. On our second Thanksgiving, we became friend with an old couple from UK. They introduced us to their Church and we met on Sunday worships from time to time. We went to Universal Orlando for Christmas, and we had a road trip down the Route 1 all the way to Key West when my parents visited us. When we moved to Delaware to continue my study, we had a blast driving 1000 miles on a rental, stopping by Savannah, Raleigh and Virginia Beach.

The pregnancy test became an early gift for our 30s. Just when we thought we've got everything we need to know, there're more to learn. Missed the date to enroll health insurance at UD platform? Apply for the affordable plan. Thanks Obamacare. Free tax software couldn't handle the insurance form? Do the tax all by myself. State and Federal. Need good deal on baby gears? Thrift shops and Craigslist are our new best friends. None of the trouble can compete with the feeling when we first saw our baby on the sonogram. From that moment, we knew our lives will never be the same.

Then there was the pandemic. Fear of the COVID spread like wildfire in our home country, and so did the US. We began to care about the politics and social justice, because although we're Chinese, our baby is going to be an American, and I'm going to be an American dad. I want to learn more about the world he is coming to, and I want to prepare myself for a world with him.

The day my wife was in labor, we spent the whole day in the delivery room with the best care we could ever imagine. It was not crowd or messy like the sitcoms, but comforting and relaxing. We talked about our trip to New York, where *Friends* and *How I Met Your Mother* happened, and

how eagerly we want to do it again with our baby. It was a long wait, but when the sun rose again, we're a family of three!

Several months passed. One afternoon when I put young baby Evan to bed, our journey in the US flashed back. The good, the bad, the embarrassing ones. At that moment, I suddenly realized we're not ourselves anymore. We're Chinese students trying to achieve academically in a foreign country, we're also young parents who live in the US, trying to provide our child the best he could have. We have adopted the life of Americans in a such subtle way, that we didn't see it coming at all. We have not only made new friends in the country like everybody else, but also had the chances to deal with the justice system, medical system, and the government branches all together.

And yeah, we have a baby now. His next appointment with the pediatrician is next week, and he needs a new appointment with the dental clinic. He also needs new carton of lactose-free milk, fresh blueberries and bananas. Oh, and his laundry is done and should be placed back in the drawer.

And just like that, I am becoming an American dad.