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Clarion Review

Anything But Easy: A Memoir of a Special-Needs Adoption from China
Marie Spiess
CreateSpace
978-1-4528-4398-8
Three Stars (out of Five)

Thousands of orphans live in China. Mary Spiess's heartfelt debut book, *Anything but Easy: A Memoir of a Special-Needs Adoption from China*, chronicles the addition of Kaia to the Caucasian Speiss family, from the couple's decision to have a third child to their daughter's life today. Kaia was born with a cleft lip and palate, a condition easily corrected by surgery after the family returned to America. Helpful advice for adoptive couples, some focusing specifically on adopting from China, is interspersed throughout this travelogue/personal story.

On the plus side, the author depicts in poignant detail the trials and triumphs of getting an adoptive child to bond with new parents. Kaia dwelt in an orphanage prior to joining the Speiss family, and the descriptions of the child's confused, scared, and aggressive behavior during those initial weeks will break readers' hearts. Speiss offers useful lessons for coping with night terrors, as well as anti-social behavior, due to being reared in an orphanage. In addition, she provides valuable advice about adopting from China from the adoption requirements to the importance of gift-giving. As a memoir about one family's adoption experience, *Anything but Easy* is an adequate, if too short, account.

The chapters feel rushed in some places, but overlong in others. For example, the author breezes through what led her and her husband to transracial international adoption, but spends an inordinate amount of time talking about what they did each day in China, and how much food costs. Although both she and her husband kept journals of the trip, these primary sources are rarely quoted.

Upon meeting her Caucasian brothers, Kaia takes to them readily, but has a harder time accepting her adoptive father and women who appear Chinese. Spiess does not mention these bonding issues in depth or give advice on how to cope. Instead, she devotes more page space to Kaia's medical issues, or to the names of everyone the Spiesses met on their trip to China. In passing, she mentions that Kaia will be one of the only people of color in her rural town, but says nothing about how the family will address this.

Speiss and her husband clearly educated themselves about adopting internationally, and the author herself is a member of Families with Children from China, yet she fails to properly explore some issues regarding international interracial adoption. Readers may wonder whether the author wrote the book for herself, Kaia when she's older, or prospective adoptive parents. Trying to serve three audiences results in a useful, touching, albeit uneven work. *Anything But Easy* is a fine starter book for prospective parents who wish to adopt transracially.

Jill Allen