

## Erica, Brian, Djino & Benedicte

The adoption process for Erica and Brian began in early 2005. After years of infertility treatments, they had decided to adopt from India, and were matched with a little girl, Emmalee. Shortly after bringing her home, she began displaying signs of a behavioral disorder. Brian and Erica hired numerous specialists to help her; all agreed that it was simply ADHD. They were wrong. In August 2010, Emmalee began having neurological problems. She was admitted to the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. One week later, she was diagnosed with a terminal complication from measles, which she had contracted at her orphanage in India—it had been misdiagnosed and incorrectly treated at the time. Erica and Brian refused to accept the terminal diagnosis, spending tens of thousands of dollars and countless hours with specialists from all over the country. Despite their efforts, she passed away five months later, shortly after her eighth birthday.

Despite the grief they felt at losing their daughter—the daughter they had waited so many years to bring home—they knew they still wanted to be parents, knew there were children out there who needed their love. They began the process again, and were matched with Benedicte and Djino, siblings from the Democratic Republic of Congo in September 2012. At the time, they were told that they should be “preparing to meet [their] children.” They joyfully decorated the bedrooms for their new son and daughter. Little did they know that these bedrooms would remain empty for three more years—a constant reminder that their children lived half a world away, that they could not hold them and kiss them and tell them that everything would be alright.

With less than a month left before travel, Erica and Brian were notified that the immigration department in the DRC was no longer processing exit letters for adopted children. This was initially referred to as a “temporary” suspension, and Erica and Brian chose to place their children in a private foster home while they waited for the suspension to be lifted. It would be safer, cleaner, and there would be less chance that the children would contract a preventable disease. It was an expensive decision; it cost \$800 a month, adding almost \$10,000 a year to an already expensive adoption. It was also the right decision; during the three years that the moratorium was in place, at least 13 children who had *already been adopted* by American families passed away from preventable diseases.

In November 2015, two years after the moratorium began, Djino's health took a turn for the worse, and Erica and Brian were able to procure a medical exit permit for the siblings. Immediately after the children's arrival, Djino was admitted to the Children's Hospital for treatment. Doctors told Erica and Brian that he had been only weeks away from a major crisis. Erica writes about the first time she met her children,

“I became completely unglued when I saw them come out of the gate. We had been waiting so many years, when it took over an hour for them to clear customs, I just fell apart. It was amazing. I just couldn't believe they were finally here. It was our miracle.”

