

Homeschooling: A Look at What's Going on Internationally, Abroad, and At Home

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I was asked to write the summer issue's Town Square column with a focus on what's going on around the world in homeschooling, and, while I was at it, take a peek at our family's recent adoption of a terrific little girl. Okay, so it might seem a strange mix at first glance, but I'm up to the challenge. Keeping that in mind, let's focus first on the homeschooling world at a glance and then I'll finish up with our love story of Hana Anping Allen.

As I perused the literature, I found many statistics concerning homeschooling abroad. Those statistics varied significantly from source to source, but I'm going to try to give you a broad-brush overview of what I think is an exciting trend, gleaned from those sources (see, for example, Dr. Brian Ray's work, the HSLDA website, and data provided by various countries concerning homeschooling). Also, as you read this overview, please refer to Figure 1, which is my attempt to give you a visual perspective on homeschooling worldwide. Note that the map provided is certainly not exhaustive; however, it's a good starting point to see God's work in progress throughout the world.

Taking countries in order of numbers of homeschoolers, the United States leads the way with over two million home educated. Next we find the United Kingdom (100,000) and Canada (95,000) coming on strong with Australia not far behind (55,000). As we rank order the data, we find homeschoolers in New Zealand (6,000), South Africa (5,000), and South Korea (1,000) increasing in numbers that are starting to show that homeschooling as a viable education choice is taking hold. Other countries such as Japan (800), Germany (600), France and Taiwan (both at 500), and Ireland (400) are starting to show positive trends in the increasing numbers of homeschoolers. And last, countries indicating 100 or fewer homeschoolers, each one of those significant, include the Netherlands, Brazil, Kenya, Poland, Ukraine, Switzerland, and Bulgaria.

When actually studying each of these countries, and other countries that are reporting homeschooling families (e.g., Chili, Hungary, Czech Republic, Mexico, and Romania), one finds that there are many legal restrictions and significant difficulties faced by families; however, homeschooling is starting to appear where we might least expect it and, obviously, is spreading worldwide.

Why is this happening? For many of the same reasons homeschooling is growing at such a rate in the United States: People want the freedom to guide their children's education and are seeing homeschooling as that freedom. They are also seeing homeschooling as a solution to the worldwide problem of the disintegration of the family. As in the United States, homeschooling is not a new phenomenon around the world but rather a return to the way children were educated before government schools came into vogue and requirements and standards were dictated from obscure offices far removed from the children for whom those requirements and standards were intended.

What a blessing to see homeschooling taking hold worldwide yet again! A return to what worked so well and so effectively in past generations. And what a blessing it is to be able to support these other countries in their efforts by praying for courage for individual families as they strive for this freedom and for their strength as they persevere through many hardships and confront the bureaucracies that are not willing to release the power they have amassed through the years. What an exciting time we are living in to be able to see such freedoms spreading, albeit not without the sacrifices and hardships of many people—throughout our country and the world.

Now, how does all of this discussion of worldwide homeschooling tie in with the Allen family's recent adoption of our youngest daughter, Hana Anping Allen? Well, Hana (formally known as Rao An Ping) is originally from the Shangrao Social Welfare Institute (i.e., an orphanage), in the Jiangxi Province of China. As we worked with our adoption agency, All God's Children International (AGCI, in Portland, Oregon), we spotted Hana on a special needs list and fell in love with her. "Special needs" in the case of an international adoption typically means children with medical needs. Anyway, we knew that God had clearly meant for Hana to join our family, and we asked AGCI to communicate to China that we would be coming for her.

On December 26, 2004, our family left Albuquerque for a few days of sightseeing in Beijing, followed by a flight to Nanchang, the capital of Hana's province and the location where we would receive our newest daughter. On January 3, 2005, Hana was placed into my arms by the director of her orphanage at the Civil Affairs Building in Nanchang. Steve (my husband), Ed (12), Joe (10), Emily (6), and I experienced such a range of emotions at that moment that it's not quite possible to capture in words what we felt; however, there was no question that this child was meant to be part of our family, and God's presence was palpable to all. *What an incredible moment. What an incredible blessing to our family.*

During the next few days, as we waited for Hana's passport, Steve and Joe had the privilege of visiting Hana's orphanage. They met again with the orphanage director and had a chance to see where Hana had lived. She had also been blessed to live with a foster family during some of her first 16 months of life, but we were unable to meet them. Steve and Joe met people who had obviously cared for and loved Hana; it was a special time for them and provided information they could share with Hana as she grew older.

As we met with the Civil Affairs personnel, the orphanage director, and the notary (in China, that is an attorney), we were asked about Hana's future, specifically, how we planned to educate her. On every occasion we explained that we homeschooled our children. This meant that Hana would be at home with her brothers and sister and mother. She would never be in day care. We would strive to identify her gifts and abilities, and we would provide her with the best education we could. Without exception, after explaining what homeschooling was, our plan was met with excitement. The officials representing the Chinese government were excited about the fact that Hana would be homeschooled. Is that neat or what?!

Also, on numerous occasions in Nanchang and later after we arrived in Guangzhou where the US embassy is located, we were asked by Chinese people on the street, in the hotel, in restaurants, and so on, after they counted our children, if they were all ours and why they weren't in school. Again we explained that we homeschooled and what that meant exactly. Again our explanations were met with excitement and often the comment, "Lucky children. Blessed children."

While I can't provide numbers of homeschooled children for mainland China, I can certainly say that, without exception, our manner of education was met with excitement by all. Yes, homeschooling is making its way into the hearts and minds of many throughout the world, and our prayers are needed.

As I write this column, I'm in room 215 with my husband and four children at the Ronald McDonald House of Long Island, New York. We are here, after being referred by our surgeon, Dr. William Buntain in Albuquerque, for Hana to have surgery performed by Dr. Alberto Pena at the Schneiders Children's Hospital. Our plan, if all goes according to plan, is to be here for three weeks and then return home.

God has clearly been protecting Hana. He has surrounded her with people who have cared about her, starting with her birth parents and then the orphanage personnel and foster family in China. He blessed her by providing her with Dr. Buntain, who after his first examination referred us to the surgeon who is considered the best in the world to treat her particular medical problem. He continued His protection of Hana when Dr. Pena not only accepted her as his patient, but then called to say there had been a cancellation and could we be in New York the next week. And He provided for us as a family to enable all of us to be here for her, and for the Ronald McDonald House to have a room for us to stay in. Yes, God has been with Hana from the start, and we feel He has plans for her life. Even more, and what just leaves us in awe of God's presence and provision for Hana, Dr. Buntain and then Dr. Pena have both said that Hana should not be alive, and given that she is, should not be this healthy. The surgery she is scheduled to have in three days is typically done within 48 hours of birth, not at 19 months old.

This is our love story of Hana Anping Allen and is just the beginning of the rest of our lives with this special little girl from China. What a blessing to us all and what a gift God has given our family. If you're interested in the story of our adoption with daily updates and pictures of our trip to China, and then monthly updates concerning Hana's surgery and progress, we have a website that we have been keeping up to date and will maintain until Hana's health has stabilized. It is located at www.thestoryofyou.com. Go to Extended Hosting and then click on Hana.

Please pray for homeschoolers worldwide. Pray for countries to open the door to the freedoms we are experiencing. Pray for countries that have not been ready to allow homeschooling to relax the laws prohibiting this form of education. Pray for homeschool families to witness to others as they have opportunities to visit other countries. And if you wouldn't mind, please pray that Hana will be restored to good health and that all bodily systems will work as God intended.

What a time of change we are living in. Let us all be catalysts for change. Prayer is the best catalyst there is, and the blessings that result are incredible.

Biographical Information

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Heather and her husband Steve have homeschooled their five children for the last eleven years. Heather stays busy with homeschooling, writing for TOS, and working as a human factors engineer in her home-based consulting business.