

SETTING THE STAGE.....

In December 2001, I made the first of two trips to southern Vietnam to adopt my daughter. The differences between the way things were done there and the way things are done in the United States were striking. For example, there were few traffic signs or lights, and traffic didn't stop for pedestrians. Instead, to cross a street, one needed to venture slowly and steadily into the street, into the traffic, which (in theory) would flow around the walkers. This theory actually worked, but I remember being absolutely terrified every time the other prospective parents and I needed to cross a street to shop or to go to a restaurant. Cuisine was also very different—no cheeseburgers, milkshakes, or pizza were readily available, especially when we ventured to Vinh Long, the rural province where my infant daughter resided. Instead, lots of noodle dishes, rice, fish, and other foods I was unfamiliar with dominated the menus and restaurants. Infant care practices were also very different from anything I'd previously experienced. At the center where my daughter and other infants were living, iron cribs had towels tied to bars, forming little hammocks in which the babies lay and slept. Bottles of formula were communal and shared among different infants, presumably so as not to waste resources. None of the babies was diapered (except when we visited)—instead, hammocks were replaced as needed with