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# Our Adoption Story

The story of our journey to bring our daughter home from Ethiopia, as recorded in my blog



# Prelude

I have had many people ask me about our adoption story. I'll be honest. I love telling our story. Once you get me talking about it, you really can't get me to stop. There's just so much to say. There are too many emotions to try to explain. And you can't really do that in a simple email or a 15 minute conversation. For a long time, I used to direct people to the [adoption tag on my blog](#). But that didn't really do the job. That's one of the many reasons I put together this little eBook.

The stories contained in this eBook are the raw thoughts, emotions, and reflections I recorded as we began the year-long journey to bring our daughter home from Ethiopia. Each title in this document is linked to the actual blog post, in case you want to read it within the context of the other events going on in our lives at the time. If there was significant conversation in the comments section, I included a link so you could read them. You're welcome to continue the conversation by adding your comments. Just like our story is not complete, the conversation is not over, either.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for listening to our story. As you read, I hope you consider ways you can care for orphans around the world. Standing in the gap for orphans does not always mean adoption. Conveniently enough, I have written a [blog post about this very thing](#).

Early on in our dating relationship, Christy made it very clear that it was her dream to adopt a child. I kind of chalked that up there with her desire to visit Japan someday and to own a house with a wraparound porch. You know – a lot of those things that you'd say "OK" so she'll keep going out with you and eventually marry you. *Maybe someday that'll happen, but not any time in the foreseeable future*, I thought to myself.

I came to find out she was pretty serious about that. And the more I got to know her and fall in love with her, the more serious I became about it, too. Although, I wasn't quite ready to completely admit that yet. Besides, it was still many, many years down the road, in my opinion.



And so we continued on with our life together. Our family grew. And even as God blessed us with two beautiful, wonderful children, there was always this part of our hearts that knew the Todd family was incomplete. We would one day have another addition to our family, but in the meantime, there was part of us that still felt empty. It's kind of like we had an extra chair sitting at our dinner table. One day it would be filled.

And so we continued to pray for our child we'd never met. And we longed for the day when that empty chair would be filled at our dining room table.

There are different adoption advocacy groups and agencies that try to provide resources for prospective adopting parents. Some of these provide pictures of children who are waiting for someone to bring them home into their forever families. Christy would look at some of these sites over the years. Aiden and Alyson would climb into her lap and ask questions about these children. They even began to get a sense that our family was incomplete. They started to long for that empty seat to be filled with a new brother or sister. And that's where the story recorded in this eBook begins.



# SC Squared

10/8/2007

Saturday, we took the kids to Mamaw and Papaw's house. They spent the night there so Christy and I could go to a Steven Curtis Chapman concert at Anderson. We ate dinner at bd's Mongolian Barbecue, which is always an experience. I had duck for the first time. Tasted like chicken (imagine that!).

When Christy picked up the tickets a few weeks ago, she asked them if we would have an unobstructed view. See, we have a God-given gift of choosing seats that wind up having a huge speaker blocking our view of the stage. The lady promised we would have a good view. And the tickets were 5th row, which was pretty exciting.

So, we sit down and directly in front of us is a huge speaker tower blocking our view of the screen. I'm thinking the ticket office didn't realize the speakers would be so far out on stage and would block so many people. After we sat down, Christy decided to go back to the ticket office and ask if there were any other seats available. While she was out exchanging our tickets, the people in the seats next to us arrived. And they were people we knew from my youth ministry days in Indy! I wondered if we would run into anyone who had connections with that church, but I didn't expect to have tickets right beside them! We still moved to better seats (just four or five rows further back), but it was pretty cool running into them. Christy was even more excited because she found out one of the couples had recently adopted a girl from China (this was a dream they shared and talked about all the time). It was cool seeing them and catching up - even if only for a few minutes.

The concert was great. Steven's wife was in the crowd. And it was funny watching him make googly eyes at her during some of the songs. He's always kind of goofy, but he kicked it up a notch this time! I tried to catch a picture of him, doing it, but I don't have a quick enough trigger finger. In spite of that, here are some pictures that did turn out...





This picture is Christy's favorite. It's Steven sitting at the piano, singing *When Love Takes You In*, with the video of the song (featuring their adopted daughter) playing in the background.

Here's the video of the song.







# Big Day Tomorrow

November 28, 2008

As most of you know, we have formally begun the application process for adopting a child. While we're still in the early stages of the process, tomorrow is a pretty big day. We're having our in-home visit as part of the homestudy process tomorrow at 10 a.m. We've spent most of the day today preparing the house for our long-awaited visitor. **Please pray for us as we prepare for this meeting!**

I don't plan on having much time to post anything until sometime Sunday afternoon at the earliest. You see, I also decided last night that the sermon I had prepared for this Sunday would fit much better in the scheme of things if I preached it **next** Sunday and preached next Sunday's sermon **this** Sunday. Of course, this Sunday's sermon isn't fully written yet (although I **do** have an outline). So, after the meeting tomorrow, I'm going to spend a significant portion of the day prepping a sermon for Sunday morning.

While I might not be posting on here much this weekend, I'll try to put some quick updates on Twitter. Feel free to follow me there. And you never know, Christy might post something tomorrow on her blog.

# Valentine's Day

February 14, 2009



The first Valentine's Day Christy and I spent together was completely unplanned. It was 13 years ago and we hadn't started dating yet. Since Matt, my roommate, and I were both dateless, we decided to go with a couple of friends to hear the African Children's Choir at [Grace Fellowship](#).

I was pleasantly surprised to see that Christy was at the same concert with a group of her friends. "Let's go sit by them," Matt said to me. That was fine with me. Like I'd said before, I was all for any chance to get closer to her.

When we came to their row, Matt made me go first. Conveniently, Christy was sitting close to a bunch of empty seats. I still say Matt was trying to set us up. He insists he was just letting me go first (I think he was trying to sit closer a girl that was in our group...but I might be mistaken). Even though I was a little annoyed, I was thrilled to get to sit by her.

So that's how Christy and I spent our first Valentine's Day – listening to the African Children's Choir.

See? That must mean it's destiny for us to adopt from Ethiopia. Or maybe just one of those beautiful ironies. Irony can be a good thing sometimes, right?

## Long Time No See!

March 11, 2009

This has turned out to be a busy week. We had our final face-to-face meeting as part of the homestudy process last night. It's 98% complete! We're just waiting on a couple of pieces of paperwork to come in and then we'll be ready to send it in.

I'm also working on getting ahead on some sermon preparation.

I've also had to make some unexpected hospital visits (visiting others...I'm OK) this week. So things are a little busy this week.

On top of this, I've had trouble adjusting to the 'Spring-forward' time change. Unlike many people in Indiana, I grew up with the time change, so it's nothing foreign to me. But I've never had as difficult of a time adjusting as I have this year. I've just been so **sleepy** all the time this week!

Because of this, blogging has been placed on the back-burner for the week. I'll try to post something as soon as time allows. I'm still giving quick updates on twitter ([@mattdantodd](#)), but even that has waned this week.





# This week

March 16, 2009

There's too much on my plate this morning to type everything I want to type, but I hope to share my thoughts sometime today – hopefully by around 1 p.m. While you're waiting, please be praying for our family this week.

This is a pivotal week in the life of our family.

## Adoption Update

March 16, 2009



The Todd Family. Is one more in our near-future?

As mentioned in the [previous post](#), this week is a big week in our family's story.

Even before we got married, we knew that adoption would eventually be part of our family's story. We formally began the process back in November. When we started, we planned on waiting **at least** a year before everything was filed and we were matched with a child.

Everything changed on January 30.

We have been open, from the beginning, to considering a "Waiting Child" – a child with special needs. The agency we are going through has a completely different process for matching Waiting Children with families. Long story short, we came across a beautiful little girl through the waiting child program. After

some serious prayer and soul-searching, we decided to pursue this child whom we affectionately refer to as "Little Girl."

This has sped up the process immensely. Since the agency handles Waiting Child referrals differently than "regular" adoptions (is there really such a thing as "regular?") the family (or families) interested in the Waiting Child are brought before a committee. The Committee gathers information, talks with the interested families, and after gathering all pertinent data decides which family is the best match for the particular Waiting Child. We've been told that there's another family interested in Little Girl. And our interest in her goes before the Committee **this Thursday** – even though our homestudy isn't **quite** complete yet (we're 99% there...just waiting for a few more documents to come in).

So – this nearly year-long wait that we'd been expecting for a referral could very well happen **this Thursday**. We covet everyone's prayers this week as the Committee decides the future of Little Girl. Pray that they choose the right family for her – whichever family that may be. While I know we will be heartbroken if we are not chosen as the "right" fit for Little Girl, there will be a certain amount of comfort and peace knowing that she will be with a good family. Please pray that the Committee, who makes no secret about seeking God's guidance, will continue to seek His guidance in regards to Little Girl's future.

We have tried to guard our hearts while learning about, praying for, dreaming for, and looking at pictures of Little Girl, knowing that there is still a possibility that we **may not** be the family chosen for her. But in reality, it hasn't worked. We are simply captivated by her. Our hearts melt for her. Yes, we desperately hope that she will be matched with our family, but my love for her is enough to know that she needs to have the family that will best meet her needs. Even if that isn't ours.

We have a phone interview tonight with someone from the agency. Please pray for tonight's interview. Pray for us as we prepare for whatever decision the Committee makes this Thursday. Thursday is one of the most **pivotal** days in our family's story. It could very well change our lives forever.

And, most importantly, **please** continue to pray for Little Girl.



# Out of our hands now

March 16, 2009

I've been told that I'm a patient man. In dealing with particular "problem-people" over the years, others have told me that I handled said people with more patience than they thought anyone had. I may be patient. I may have more patience than the average person. But I must confess something...

I hate waiting.

Seriously. I **hate** waiting.

I especially hate waiting when things are completely out of my control. That's probably why God continues to put me in situations that are completely out of control. I may have more patience than most, but apparently, God thinks I need to be more patient.

So I'm waiting.

Again.

And I'm not happy about it one bit. If you ask me, Thursday can't come quick enough. Something tells me the next few days are going to be **tortuously** long. Because everything is now **absolutely** out of **my** control. And I'm not happy about it. Because I **hate** waiting.

But it's in times like these that I'm reminded of how little really **is** under my control. It's times like these that I think I should run around frantically like a circus sideshow performer and spin the plates, trying to make sure none of them fall off the stick, trying desperately to pretend that it's all under control and part of the act – trying to somehow maintain some impression of having it all together when everything could come crashing down at any moment because I have **absolutely** no control. It's times like these that I feel like I should be doing something. **Anything**.

Because I hate to wait.

It's also times like these that I remember that in spite of my vain efforts of trying to control every little thing, God is in control. It's times like these that a song pops into my head. And I don't think it's a coincidence.

It's **God** who is bigger than the air I breathe. It's **God** who is bigger than my worries or concerns. It's **God** who is in control – even when I pretend I'm the one who has it all together. It's **God** who has Little Girl in the palm of His hand. We have done everything within our ability to have Little Girl become



part of our family. Now it's completely out of our hands. And **God** is in control.

And I still hate waiting.

## Just one of Millions

March 17, 2009

As I was driving to a meeting today, I was smacked upside the head by this realization...

**Two** families want to adopt Little Girl and are actively pursuing her.

There are **over 143 million orphans** worldwide. And many of those children won't even have **one** family pursue them.

While praying for Little Girl to go to the right family to meet her needs, I will continue to pray for the countless children who don't even have **one** family pursuing them. And that more families will consider opening their hearts and homes to these children so that somehow this gap is closed.

## Guarding my heart

March 18, 2009

While we wait, I'm trying to guard my heart in regards to Little Girl. In the process of trying **not** to fall for her, my heart melts **even more**. So I'm trying to find things to distract me (you know, like work!?!).

It ain't happening.

The best way I've been able to describe this situation is that it's similar to the first trimester of a pregnancy. In general, the risks of losing a baby during pregnancy are higher during the first trimester. If you follow this analogy, Thursday afternoon marks the end of the first trimester.

Except, of course, this is **absolutely nothing** like that. **At all!** If the Committee should choose the other family, of course we'll be heartbroken. But it doesn't mean this child will have died. It means that she will join a family that loves her and will provide her the care and attention she needs.

And because of this, we will celebrate for her, even if it breaks our hearts.



All should be revealed to us Thursday afternoon. Pray for us. Pray for the Committee. Pray for the other family who is probably just as distracted as we are. And, of course, pray for Little Girl.

## An EXTRA 24 Hours...

March 18, 2009

God must be trying to get something through my thick skull about waiting. We have received word this afternoon that scheduling conflicts have forced the Committee to reschedule their meeting to this **Friday** afternoon.



Mrs. Haregewoin Teferra

In somewhat-related news, I was saddened to have heard today that Haregewoin Teferra died. While I never met her, I was touched by her story in *There Is No Me Without You*. Her story was so remarkable...so heartbreaking...so inspiring. But her legacy continues.

# Nerves

March 20, 2009

I've been OK the last day or so in regards to this whole 'waiting' thing. Then I looked at the clock and realized that the Committee begins meeting in **ten minutes**.

Now my stomach is tight again.

Guess that means we should be praying, huh?

# Perfect Timing

March 20, 2009

This verse is a little out of context, but the message has still been very helpful while we've been waiting for an answer...

"But these things I plan won't happen right away. Slowly, steadily, surely, the time approaches when the vision **will be fulfilled**. If it seems slow, **be patient!** For it will **surely** take place. **It will not be late by a single day.**"

Habakkuk 2:3

God's timing is perfect timing. Even though I hate waiting.

# Still waiting

March 20, 2009

Blog stats have picked up, so that might mean that you're hoping for more information about the Committee's decision.

Well, we're still waiting.

Thanks for praying!

# More waiting

March 20, 2009

Committee didn't reach a decision today. Now we get to wait the whole weekend and half the day Monday before we hear anything.

There are so many thoughts running through my head right now and I can't find the words to express them.

This has left me speechless...

# A Child of God

March 21, 2009

The first time I heard this song was when I resigned from my first ministry position in Kentucky. I was driving down the road and actually had to pull over because I couldn't see where I was going through the tears pouring down my face. It was such a timely song for what I was going through at that time.

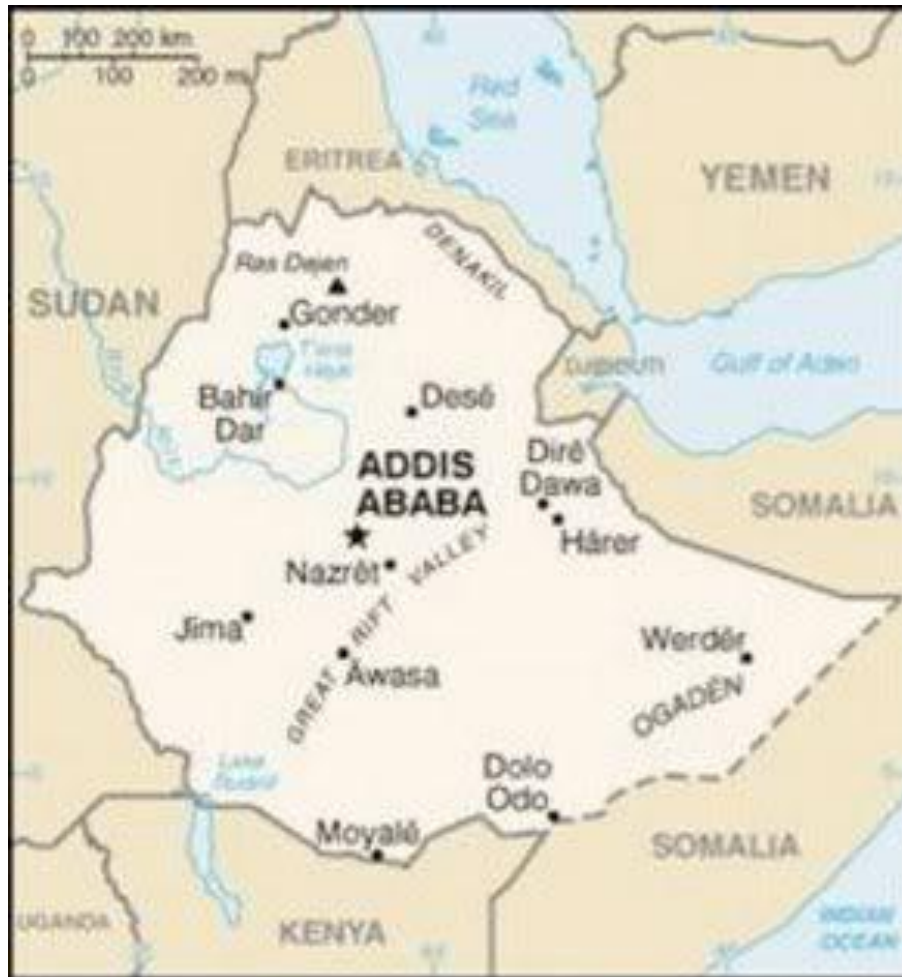
And now, when I face uncertainty about the future, this song comes to mind. I've been singing it the last two days (along with the one I shared earlier). This was the only video I could find of the song. It's a little more 'cheesy' than I prefer, but that doesn't minimize the power of the song.



# Our Heart is in Ethiopia

9 Comments

March 23, 2009



Well, we got the phone call tonight.

We were fully expecting a “No.” In fact, as we talked to the Committee representative, we **still** expected her to say no. It just sounded like it in her voice.

Until she said, “Congratulations.”

And our jaws dropped.

That’s right. Little Girl is **ours!**

We cannot post pictures or any other details about her at this point – not until the Ethiopian courts declare her to be ours. And that won’t happen for several months.

Somehow, I don’t think we’re going to get much sleep tonight.



# Thank you!

March 26, 2009



I've had it drilled into me that a good blogger is one who responds to comments on said blogger's site. I've made it my goal to type some kind of response to each comment shared on any of my posts. I like the idea of continuing conversation as we share our stories together. In all, I think I've done a pretty good job.

Until now.

After our **big announcement** Monday night, we have received tons of congratulatory comments and messages here, on [facebook](#), and via [twitter](#). It's been difficult to respond to them individually. And while

I'm overwhelmed at the amount of people who have been praying for us and who were confident that Little Girl was destined to be ours, I'm sorry to say that I have not been able to respond to each of you individually. Or, as @juliebot would say, I've been a "bad bloggy friend." I'm sure this puts me in danger of having to return my highly-coveted BLOGOTY Award.

So let me take this opportunity to say **Thank you!**

Thank you for praying for us while we waited. Of course, we ask that you continue to pray for us as we continue to wait. All of the documents from the homestudy have been turned in, so that part of the paperchase is over. Now we are waiting for the completed homestudy from our social worker, which shouldn't take much longer. The next big hurdle is going to be working with Immigration. We hope this process goes smoothly.

Thank you again for all of your prayer and support during this process. While I haven't been able to respond to each individual comment, I do want you to know that your support and encouragement has meant more to us than you can possibly know!

This amazing journey has only **just** begun. Thank you for allowing us to share it with you!

## One step closer

April 8, 2009

Our homestudy is **done!** It will soon be on its way to the agency.

Next steps include:

- \* Immigration, including **more** fingerprints (even though we've already had them done through the FBI...ain't government red-tape grand?), and Homeland Security.
- \* Original documents certified by the State. This paperchase shouldn't be as daunting as the first, since we have most of the originals now. After certification, they'll be added to our dossier, which will be sent to Ethiopia.
- \* After all of this is completed and dossier is sent overseas, we wait **again**. This time for a Court Date so they can tell us Little Girl is **ours!**

Ah, yes. The fun is just beginning!



# Ethiopian Cuisine

April 10, 2009



Yes, you get to eat with your hands. The kids loved it!

In addition to everyone having their maiden Disney experience (except me...I'd been twice before), we were also looking forward to visiting the Nile Restaurant for our first foray into Ethiopian food.

It is well-known that the kids have spent much of their lives as picky eaters (although they **have tried bugs** from time to time). They've certainly gotten better over time. But we weren't so sure about how they'd react to something that was **completely** different. I actually thought there would be some complaining about trying something so unusual.

There was none.

In fact, they **loved** it! I'm sure it didn't hurt that they got to use their hands as utensils. Alyson loved it so much that she's already asked that we fix it for dinner soon. This was a **huge** relief!

The staff was amazingly hospitable. They even brought out a sample of some of the food we **didn't** order, just so we could have a taste of it. Although I wasn't the biggest fan of the injera bread, it wasn't too bad. And the rest of the meal was absolutely **fabulous**.

Aiden's trying out the injera bread.



Here's a review of the restaurant from the local paper. I realize there's some criticism of some of the critic's choice of words and they might have a valid point. But the restaurant had this review posted in their window, so I'm guessing it might not have been as offensive as some people think it was.

Because we weren't sure how the kids would react to the food, we only ordered two servings. Although there were four of us, we left completely full and satisfied!



Of course, coffee is a big deal in Ethiopia. If you have enough people, they'll have a coffee ceremony for you. Christy's the only coffee drinker in our family, but she still couldn't pass up a cup of real-life, Ethiopian coffee! I think it lived up to the hype.





Checking out the equipment used in a Coffee Ceremony.

We're definitely going back the next time we're in Orlando! Of course, that might be five years from now. Definitely looking forward to it.

Little Girl will be with us by then! So that's a good excuse to go down there – right?

# Baby Stuff

May 21, 2009

Once we officially began the adoption process several months ago, we have been slowly gathering baby stuff. Small piles show up in one room. And then another. But the accumulation has been gradual, so it hasn't really been that noticeable.

Until this week.

There's a very conspicuous piece of equipment sitting in our Dining Room at the moment. Christy bought it at a garage sale this past Saturday for a reasonable price.

Every time I look at it, I think, "**Holy cow!** This adoption is **really, truly happening!**"



Of course, it also makes me think of sleepless nights, dirty diapers, and the smell of formula after it's been spit-up. But we'll not focus on that at the moment. 😊

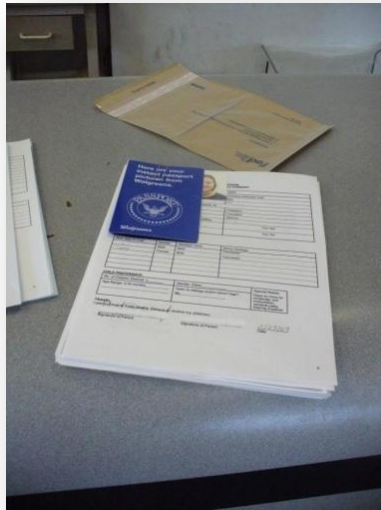
Now we just have to figure out **where**, exactly, we're going to put said crib.

Oh yeah – and how we're going to pay for this. But that's OK. We are confident that God is going to provide!

# Paperchase

5 comments

June 17, 2009

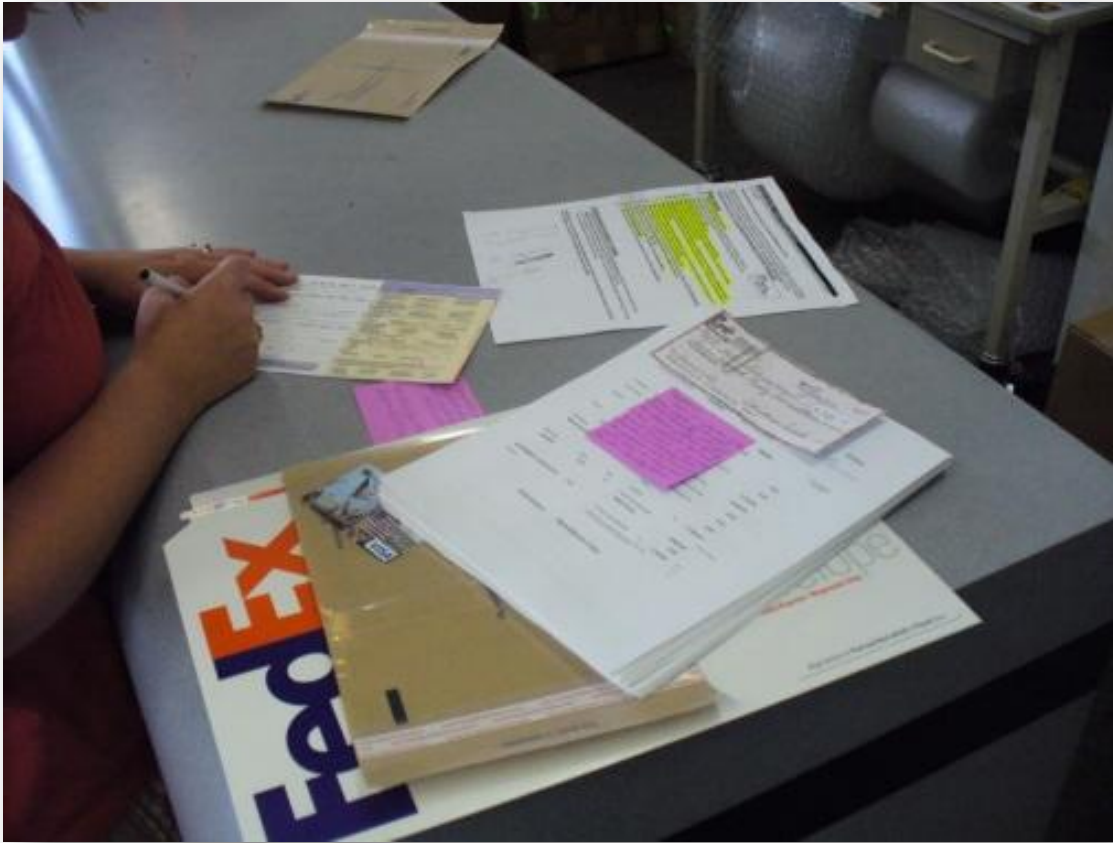


A few weeks ago, we reached a **major** milestone in the adoption process. We were finally able to gather up all of the paperwork required for the adoption paperchase! WooHoo!

As soon as we got the final document notarized, we visited the good people at Kinko's...I mean...FedEx Office to get that puppy out of our hands and on its way to Ethiopia. So now our life-story and supporting documents are in the hands of the adoption agency. After everything is double-checked and translated into Amharic, it will be shipped to Addis Ababa and the Ethiopian Courts will finally have the opportunity to tell us that yes, Little Girl is, in fact, **ours**!



In the words of a certain Dark Lord of the Sith, "This will be a day long remembered..." I didn't realize how stressful the paperchase really is until I actually started down that road. But when we left Kinko's...I mean...FedEx Office, I felt this tremendous weight lifted off my shoulders (very similar to my experience [described here](#)). The paperchase is **over!!!**



Dear FedEx: Please get this package to its destination safely. It's VERY important. Thank you. Have a nice day.

God has provided in remarkable (and unexpected) ways during this process already! But is that really a surprise? We serve a remarkable God. So why should we expect anything less from Him during all of this?

So now we wait (again). But there's still lots to do during the waiting this time. Soon, you'll have an opportunity to share in the process as we continue to prepare our home and our hearts for this beautiful girl who has already captured our affection and our imagination.



# Still Waiting...

July 12, 2009



At the end of June, we received notification that our dossier had been received in Ethiopia. This was obviously welcome news because the sooner the documents are processed in Ethiopia, the sooner we can get a court date, which is the necessary step before we can get a **travel** date (generally 6-8 weeks after court approval) and actually meet Little Girl and **bring her home**. Although probably a long-shot, our hope has been to have a court date assigned before August.

August is a key month because that's when the courts traditionally close in Addis Ababa. And for good reason – it's the rainy season. The courts usually remain closed during August and September. So, if we don't get a court date before they close up shop in August, that would mean it's a very good chance we won't get one until October. That would mean Little Girl might not even be home before Christmas.

Needless to say, that's a lot of waiting.

On Wednesday of last week, we discovered that some families whose dossiers had been received in Ethiopia just a few weeks before ours had been assigned court dates – for **next week**! This

was **very** encouraging and it was difficult not to get too excited because it was starting to look like there was a very real possibility that we were going to get a court date before the rainy season closures.

Of course, they say the adoption process is a roller coaster. And that's what we're learning from our experience. We found out on Thursday of this past week that the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) in Ethiopia was taking a two week break...effective immediately. Apparently, they're addressing staffing needs. What staffing needs? I have no idea. But here's where the MOWA closing affects us: they write letters of recommendation for the prospective adoptive families. So while MOWA isn't part of the court system, the courts cannot process adoption cases without these letters. To our understanding, this has essentially put a freeze on the scheduling of all new adoption cases.

So that's where we are. We're still waiting. We're still relying on God to continue to orchestrate all of this and weave our family together in a way that only He can.

But while we wait, we have a Garage Sale to get ready for. All of the money from the sale will go directly towards our efforts to bring Little Girl home – **whenever** that is! I'll post more information about the Garage Sale very, very soon. Stay tuned!

# Buy our Stuff!

July 14, 2009



A few posts ago, I mentioned something about you having the opportunity to share in the process and **be part of her story** as we anticipate and prepare for Little Girl's arrival.

It's no secret that the costs of adopting (both domestically or internationally) isn't cheap. Through amazing examples of God's provision, our adoption fees and country fees have been paid – which is a **HUGE** deal!

There's still, however, the travel (and other incidental) fees that we'll have – whenever travel might happen. And that adds up quickly. So here's one of the things we're doing:

Saturday, July 25, is the 4th Annual Cowan Town Rummage Sale. And we're participating this year. We've spent most of the Summer purging items from our house to sell in this year's Yard Sale. **All** of the money raised in the sale will go directly towards the costs of bringing Little Girl home.

So **PLEASE...come buy our stuff!**

We have several “big ticket” items, including three couches and my old car. We’ll also have at least two printers and **tons** of clothes – even baby clothes (I *think*...maybe you shouldn’t quote me on that).

The kids are even talking about running a lemonade stand. If they do, I think they’re planning on keeping the profits, though. 😊

And if you have any items you’d like to contribute to our Yard Sale, just leave a comment with some type of contact information and I’ll get back with you as soon as possible.

And then, once you’re done at our sale, you could mosey on over to the sale at Cowan Christian Church. *Then*, you could go over to the Cowan Lion’s Club Car Show.

Yes, Cowan is **the place** to be on July 25!

# It's a Girl!

11 Comments

July 29, 2009



"Christy, you need to come in here," I shouted from the computer room. I was trying not to sound bossy, but I knew this was something she needed to read.

"Please," I added. There was an email she absolutely **had** to read.

Earlier in the day, I had just lamented to a friend from college that it appeared that the earliest we were going to be assigned a Court Date was early October. And that was an optimistic estimate. Our hope was to have Little Girl home by Christmas, which was appearing much more unlikely.

Which made the email I was asking Christy to read all the more surprising. It said, "We have just been informed by our staff in Ethiopia that your court case has been heard and approved! Congratulations!"

We both read the email again. Speechless.

Finally, I asked, "Is this for real? Do you think they...like...sent it to the wrong family or something?" *If so*, I thought, *that would be a **horribly** cruel joke* – even though it would have obviously been an accident.



Just to ease any concerns about getting a bogus email, I called our adoption agency. They confirmed that the email was, indeed, legitimate. Apparently we were a last-minute addition today. Everything happened rather quickly and there wasn't even time to notify the home office that we were going to be included in the court hearings today. So all of us were surprised today.

I was floored.

I don't think there's ever been a time in my life that I've wanted to just run outside and shout for joy at the top of my lungs in the streets. Not even when the Colts won the Super Bowl. 😊 But I certainly felt that way today. I didn't. But I certainly could have.

So we're now a family of five! There's lots of paperwork (that we don't have to handle), but families generally travel to Ethiopia 6-8 weeks after court approval. It appears that we're going to Ethiopia sometime in **September!!**

That's a lot earlier than Christmas.

## Travel Updates

September 14, 2009

We're a little more than 38 hours from takeoff into the Great Unknown...or the Great Adventure...or the Amazing Journey...or whatever you want to call our voyage to Ethiopia to **bring Little Girl home to be with us!**

My mind is spinning with so many things to do and thoughts and emotions that I really want to share. But I don't have time right now because I have to finish sanitizing a bunch of dishes thanks to the presents left by a furry little rodent in our kitchen cabinets.

From what I've heard, we **will** have at least some access to an Internet connection while in Addis Ababa. It'll probably be dialup, so we won't be uploading images on facebook or videos on youtube (although that would be pretty cool). In addition to the slow connection, our agency has asked that we refrain from publishing pictures publicly of our beautiful daughter until she's home with us (which won't be much longer!).

In the meantime, while we are traveling, we have set up a new email account that will be **strictly** related to our journey. If you would like to receive email updates from us while we are in Ethiopia, leave a comment below. In order to protect your privacy so you won't be bombarded with spam, I'll keep your comment outside of public view.

Then, be on the lookout from an email addressed to you from an account that ends in gmail, and includes our family's last name and something about a journey and adoption. If you do not receive an email from me by Tuesday evening, post another comment and I'll get it fixed.

Is that cryptic enough?

OK, back to packing and sanitizing dishes! Woo Hoo! This thing is really happening!!

## Travel Itinerary

September 16, 2009

Well today's the day! I have so many emotions swirling around right now, but there's still much to do, so I can't spend the time to share them right now.

This afternoon, we fly from Indy to Detroit.

From there, we cross the Pond to Amsterdam.

After a very short transfer, we're in the air again, headed for Addis Ababa by way of Khartoum.

About 20 hours later, we'll be on the ground for the week.

That's all for now. I'm fairly certain we won't be able to blog anything while in Ethiopia. So, as my father-in-law likes to say, "Catch you on the rebound!"

# Leavin' on a Jet Plane

7 Comments

September 30, 2009

Well, not really "leavin'" on a jet plane. More like already left. And came back. Two weeks ago today, we were in the air with Ethiopia as our ultimate destination. It was a long flight – something like 20 hours in a plane. By the time we reached Sudan, I guess you could see the exhaustion on my face.



But before that video, I promise I was more excited, even though I wasn't exactly thrilled about the idea of flying over the ocean. Or into Sudan, for that matter.



Ready to board the flight to Detroit, our first leg of a long, long journey.



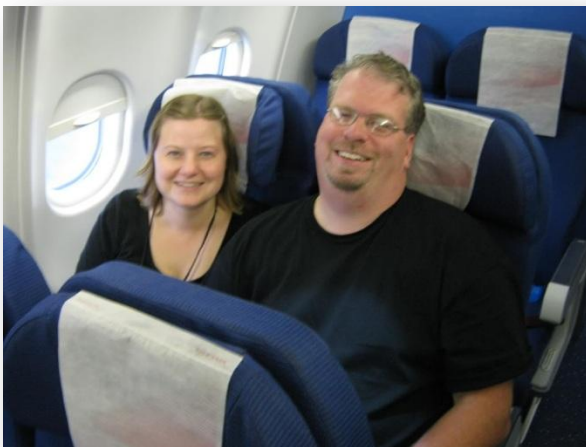
The airport in Amsterdam had a Lego mockup of their terminal. I think every airport should have a Lego display. And no, I didn't bring you back any "special" brownies from Amsterdam.



Flying over Egypt. No, you can't see any pyramids.



I'll be honest. We were a little concerned about stopping in Sudan. Everyone told us there's nothing to it. It's just dust as far as you can see. While this isn't exactly a towering skyline, does this look like dust as far as you can see to you? At least they were right saying Sudan wasn't as scary as you might think.



Ready to take off from Khartoum. So ready to be off the plane. Even more ready to finally meet our Little Girl! The picture's a little blurry. I guess the Flight Attendant who took it was also ready for the flight to be over.





The flight tracker confirmed that yes, we were in fact going to Addis Ababa.

## Our Home for the Week

October 1, 2009

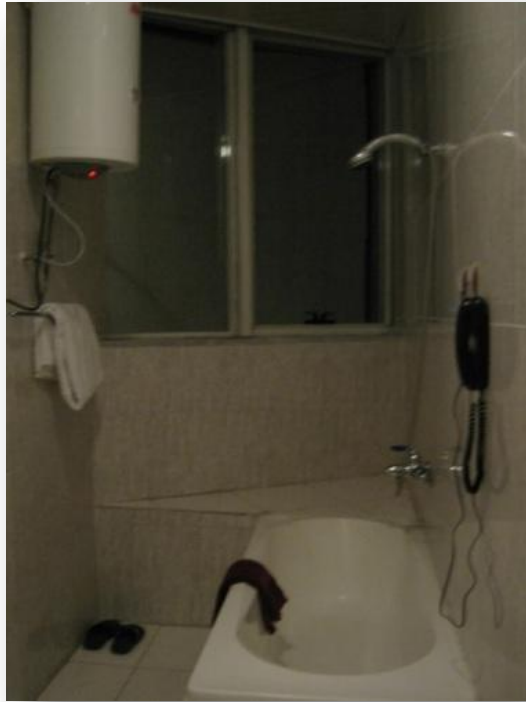


I remember attempting to stay in a hotel in Niagara Falls with my parents. After seeing the second cockroach, Mom decided it was time to leave and we found another place to stay. After hearing people's description of the hotel we where we were staying in Addis, I was anticipating said Niagara Falls hotel that we didn't stay in to be a step **up**.

It wasn't.



The Union Hotel Apartment is a very nice facility. It's no Hilton. But it doesn't pretend to be, either. It's probably on par with Motel 6. Of course, there **were** a few drawbacks. Like the bed. While **HUGE**, it was basically just the box springs. So it was rather firm. But sleeping on top of a few comforters certainly helped in the comfort department.



Our shower didn't have a curtain. So you either had to take a bath or do whatever you could to try not to get water all over the place. Fortunately, there was a drain in the middle of the bathroom floor. Water would eventually find its way down the drain. The yellow container hanging from the wall on the left-hand side of the picture is the water heater. They asked that when we weren't using the water heater that we unplug it to prevent frying the system. Unfortunately, when we unplugged it the Wednesday before we flew home, the entire outlet came out of the wall. No more hot water for us.



The room also included a spare bed. This wound up being quite useful when one of us was sick and didn't feel right sleeping close to Mihret. An added bonus to the extra bed: it **did** have a mattress and was very, very soft. It might have been too soft. Yes, we felt kinda like Goldilocks with the beds being too firm and too soft. Never really found one that was *just right* though. But that's more than fine. It's much better than sleeping on the Therm-a-Rest on a rocky ground!



Although we knew Mihret wouldn't sleep in the spare bed, we still had to decorate it for her in anticipation of her arrival. One of the first toys she really latched on to was the elephant blanket. Not for something to hug, but as a tool to play Peek-a-Boo. She **loves** Peek-a-Boo!

Oh yeah – did I mention that Addis is at an elevation of approximately 7600 feet at its **lowest** point? I didn't really notice that until I climbed the steps to our room for the first time. We were on the third floor and I could definitely tell we were at a higher elevation. All of us in our travel group could because we were sucking wind by the time we reached our rooms.



Here's the view from our third-floor hotel room/apartment...



The hotel staff was amazing! What the facility lacked in amenities, it certainly made up for it in their hospitality. They loved playing with everyone's kids and some of the ladies even gave impromptu hair-care training sessions for the moms. They also hosted a coffee ceremony for us shortly before we left for the airport – but I'm getting ahead of myself. More about the coffee ceremonies later.



# More Mihret

October 2, 2009

I know. The last post didn't have any pictures of Mihret. The next one probably won't, either.

Here's a couple to hold you over...



# Around town in Addis

10 Comments

October 6, 2009

The street outside our hotel.



People keep asking what things are like in Addis Ababa. Words cannot begin to explain it. It's an endless stream of people. It's also very, very polluted. There's some development, but right alongside it is extreme poverty. And the traffic...Oh, the traffic...

You are not allowed to take pictures of any government buildings. Even banks. I know this because Ron, a member of our travel group, inadvertently tried to bring his camera into the bank. The armed guards confiscated it. Our tour guide argued with them for a minute in Amharic. Later, he told us that he asked them why they thought we'd be interested in any of the bank's security. "Look at them," he said – referencing our white skin. "They have **dollars**. Do you think they're interested in stealing birr?" The dollar has **huge** buying power in Ethiopia. When we were there, one hundred dollars was equal to about 1,250 birr. He had a very valid point. The armed guard just smiled at him and took Ron's camera anyway. He **did** get the camera back once we left, by the way.

*It's considered bad form to take pictures of people in Ethiopia without their permission. In an attempt to honor their culture, I tried to limit my photos to buildings and scenery because of this. That's why there aren't very many people pictures. But believe me – there were tons of people in the city!*

## Markets & Shops

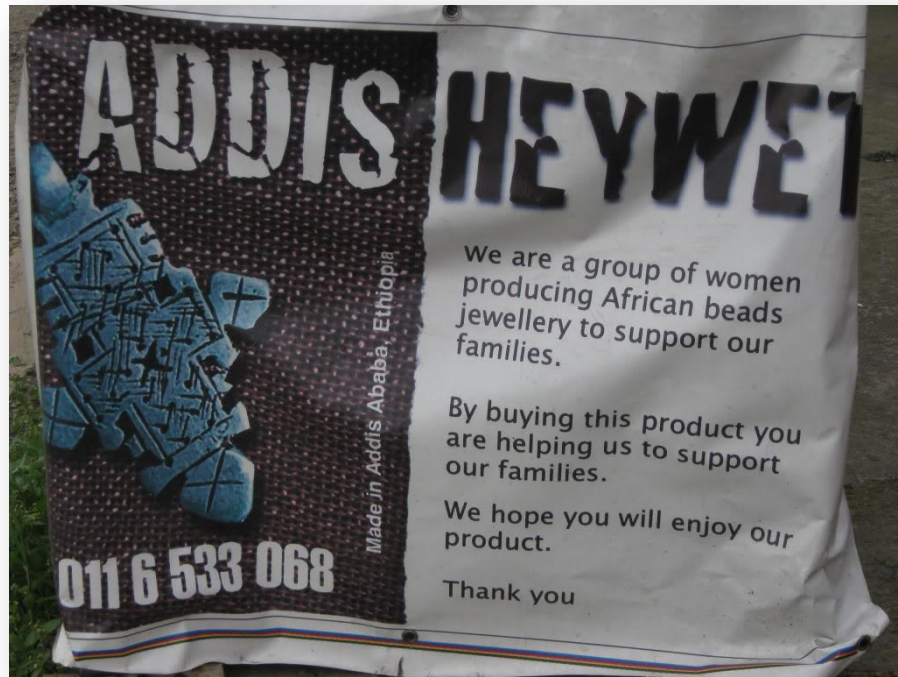


Yes, those are fresh (and not-so-fresh) bananas hanging in the storefront.



A small series of shops where I bought a basket for injera bread and a coffee pot. Anyone going to Addis MUST visit these stores! You can contact me for specific directions.





Another must-visit store was the handmade jewelry shop. Again, feel free to contact me for directions.



An open-air market. Although not pictured, there was a plethora of livestock. Especially meat-goats.

## Around the city



Most houses and buildings are surrounded with walls. If you look closely, there's broken glass embedded in the top of the wall. They take their security seriously!



Gotta include a shot of Addis Ababa Bible College!





A shot of the skyline



Normally this street was much busier.



Pepsi and Coke signs were prevalent - even in the countryside!

More pictures coming soon...

## A few more Addis pics

October 13, 2009

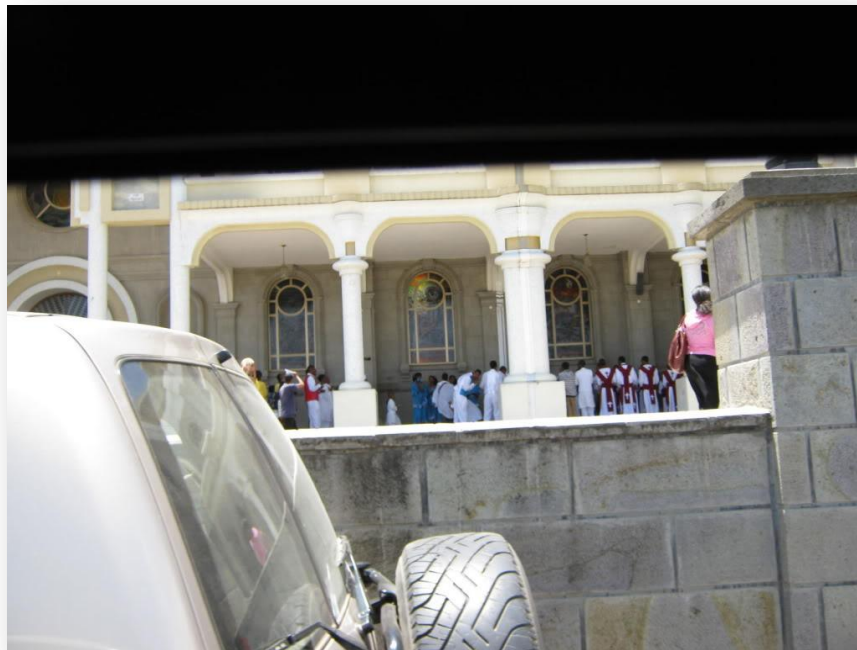
Sorry. It's taken longer to share these than I'd expected. Things have gotten rather busy. Such is life in a family of five, I guess. Anyway, here's some more pictures from Addis ([click here for the previous Addis pics](#))

### Churches

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has a very prominent position in Ethiopian culture. They also have some beautiful buildings.



This is one of the larger Orthodox church buildings in Addis.



As we drove through the church grounds, we discovered there was a wedding taking place. This was part of the wedding procession. If I could describe the ceremony in one word? Celebratory.

There's also a large Evangelical presence in some areas (much to the dismay of many Eth. Orthodox "higher-ups"). This congregation wasn't too far from our hotel. We were told that their average weekly attendance is over 5,000 people.





They seem to have caught on to the Protestant tradition of having really long church names.



# Landmarks

Ethiopia has a strong connection with the Lion of Judah. We were in traffic when we passed it, so I had to take these pictures rather quickly while the van was still moving.



The Lion of Judah - from the back.



There he is. In the lower left-hand corner.





National Museum.



The highlight of the National Museum was coming face-to-face with Lucy. Well, not really Lucy. She's on tour in the States. But a copy of Lucy was still in the museum. I'll share more from the museum in a later post.

# Traffic



No car seats for the kiddos. That's just the way it is.



A beer delivery truck. I thought some of our traveling companions might appreciate how their beverage of choice was delivered.



# Another Addis Pic

October 13, 2009

**Oops!**

I completely forgot to include the most memorable picture from the streets of Addis in my *Around Addis* posts ([here](#) & [here](#)).



# First Meeting

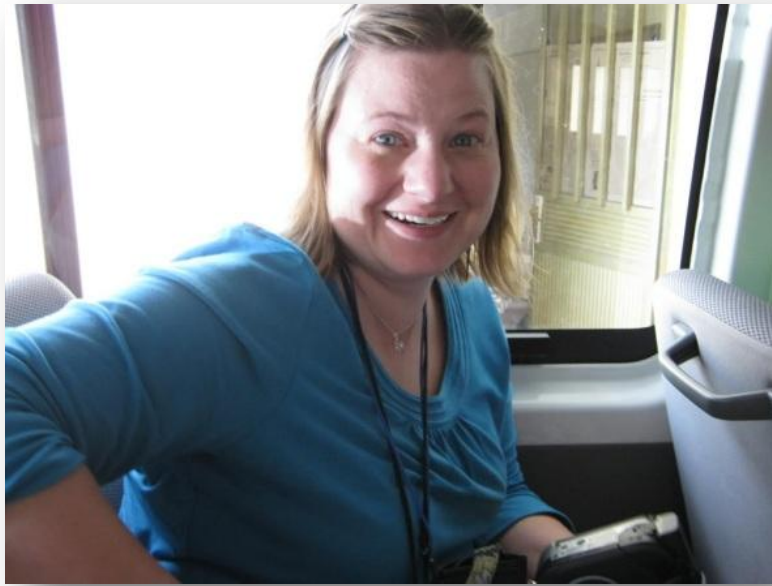
October 22, 2009



Entrance to the Care Center

Now that a lot of the basic information about our journey to Ethiopia has been shared, I want to go back and share some more details about specific days. We'll see how this goes...

Friday (9/18) morning, we visited our adoption agency's main Ethiopia office. In addition to finalizing paperwork, we also got a crash course in Amharic, the country's official language. There are over 80 different languages and dialects used in this diverse country, but Amharic is the language of choice in Addis. We learned words like "good" and "beautiful" and "thank you," although it took most of us in the travel group several days to remember how to say thank you. Fortunately, we discovered that clapping your hands together (like in prayer) and slightly bowing your head does communicate gratitude as you try to stumble through the word you just can't quite remember.



When I was about to get out of the van, I turned around and took this picture of Christy. This was when it hit us that this thing was actually REALLY happening.

We piled into the two vans and drove back to the hotel. Although, this time we didn't stop at the hotel. We went to the Care Center, which was immediately adjacent to our hotel. *This was **it***. It was the moment we'd dreamed about and prayed for since we took the first real steps of this journey almost a year ago (our hearts had been preparing for this moment for a much longer time than that). And now it was finally here. I think it all felt rather surreal – until the van stopped, the doors opened, and it was time to get out and go inside to actually **meet** our children.



For the health & safety of the children, everyone had to remove their shoes and put on slippers. That's a lot of shoes!



The Center was nothing like I'd expected. I'm not entirely sure **what** I expected, but I know it wasn't like this. I guess I envisioned a small shack-like building with maybe three rooms total. It wasn't like that at all. The Center is much larger, more colorful, and cleaner than I'd seen in my mind's eye. And I can't say enough about the staff that cares for these children. They love them. It's obvious. The **love** these children. If you want to see a few more pictures from the Center, slip on over to [Our Adoption Journey](#) and check out the Hutchison family's perspective. While we had hoped to be in the same travel group with them, we wound up missing each other by two weeks.

They gave us a quick tour of the facility and I don't really remember much. I was more concerned about meeting our Little Mihret. They told us that at the end of the tour, we'd have to figure out which one was the child we'd been waiting for over the past long, agonizing months.

She wasn't there.

We figured out later that none of the children whose parents were in our Travel Group were in their rooms. They had them hidden away somewhere (how sneaky 😊). So, we went through the rest of the tour, anxious to return to the room and **finally** meet our Little Girl!

And when we saw her for the first time, there was absolutely no doubt that this was **our** Little Girl!



Christy gave her to me and she fell asleep again. This time in my arms. It had been a long time since a baby fell asleep in my arms.

Christy got to hold her first. I shared those pictures earlier. [You can see them here.](#) Mihret was rather unresponsive, as we expected. She was pretty clueless to what was going on. She **is** only two, after all. Within ten minutes of Christy picking her up, Mihret fell asleep in her arms. While we wanted to play with her and get to know her, at least she wasn't screaming her lungs out whenever we tried to hold her. It was also touching to know she was comfortable enough with her new mom that she could fall asleep so quickly. Later on that day, we wondered how many times she'd actually fallen asleep in someone's arms in the recent past. Like I said earlier, the staff at the facility loves these children. But there's only so much one-on-one attention you can get in an institution like that – even with a fabulous group of caretakers.



Lunch time!

We arrived shortly before lunch time. While Christy was holding Mihret again, one of the nannies pulled up a chair and motioned for Christy to sit down. We tried to feed her for the first time.

Yeah.

That didn't go so well.

She fought each bite Christy tried to give her. The nanny stepped in and tried to get her to eat. No dice.

We discovered that we **might** have another strong-willed child on our hands. She's mellowed out quite a bit when it comes to food. In fact, she **loves** to eat. Most of the time. Every once in a while that temper still comes through, though.

We left the facility shortly before the kids' nap time. Although we knew we'd see her again shortly, it was still very difficult to leave. Mihret didn't help matters very much. She cried when we put her down in the crib. She didn't want us to leave. You could argue that it's comforting that she didn't want us to leave. And that's true. But we **had** to leave. And none of us wanted that to happen, to be quite honest.

But we knew that the day was coming very soon where we wouldn't **have** to leave her like that again.

## One of my Favorite Souvenirs

10 Comments

October 7, 2009

This isn't some sappy play on words where I say that Mihret is my favorite souvenir from Addis. But this **is** a love story, of sorts.

But first, some background...

Growing up, my favorite flavor of cake was orange cake. I especially liked it with either cream cheese or sour cream flavored icing.

It's the best. thing. on. Earth.

I would ask for it on any special occasion. Shoot, it was even the flavor of my Groom's Cake at our wedding.

Yes, I love Orange Cake!

Unfortunately, the cake mix is impossible to find. I've looked in Tennessee and now I've looked in Muncie. A quick glance at their websites shows that [Duncan Hines still makes the mix](#), but I can't find it anywhere on [Pillsbury's site](#). This has left me sorely disappointed.

Distraught, even.

So imagine my surprise when we went to the corner market in Addis to buy the formula Mihret was drinking (Bebelac, to be specific) and other foods when the clouds opened up and a light came down from heaven, filtering through the windows and shining directly upon the top shelf. That's when I saw it.

## Orange Cake Mix!



I had to fly thousands of miles and search to the ends of the earth to find it. Oh, Orange Cake...I've missed you so!

## The Elephant

October 24, 2009

We got to return to the Care Center after nap time on Friday afternoon/evening. Mihret was still quite groggy when we arrived, but she didn't have any problems with us picking her up and playing with her some more. On our first meeting earlier in the afternoon, we brought a tiny purple plush elephant to share with her. There was much debate amongst ourselves about whether we should take the elephant with us



when we left or leave it there with her. She didn't let go of the elephant the entire time we were with her during the first meeting. We knew she liked it. But we knew there was a very good chance she could lose the elephant and it could get claimed by someone else...which would be a very bad thing. We decided to take it with us and bring it with us every time we came to the Center.



That's the elephant in the lower section of the picture above. It used to be Aiden's. But he never really played with it as a baby. Every time we returned to the Care Center, we brought the elephant so there'd be one more thing for her to associate with us. It turned out to be a good thing. On Saturday, she gave us a little smile when she saw the elephant and reached out to it. She loved handing it to us then taking it back from us. Apparently, sharing is a game to her. That might not be a bad thing.

Not sure if we'll ever get her hair looking like this, but we'll certainly try. Well...Christy will try. I'll give moral support. Because I'm lucky to get Alyson's hair into pigtails. 😊





# Traditional Dinner

October 28, 2009



Saturday (9/19) was a busy day. We spent the morning at the National Museum (as [mentioned here earlier](#)...I'll have more from inside at a later date). Then we got to spend some time in the afternoon with our children at the Center.

That evening, we were met by some representatives from our adoption agency for a traditional Ethiopian dinner at the Abyssinian. The atmosphere was amazing! There was also a wedding reception there and we might have been a tad bit underdressed. But we got to experience (from a distance) some of the wedding celebration. Priceless!



The food was amazing. I was glad we'd [experienced Ethiopian cuisine](#) before, or I would have been completely lost. The food was served in a buffet so you could get as little or as much as you wanted. And

there was a server behind the buffet who was **very** helpful in explaining what some of the different dishes were. And he did so with such **passion**. I felt kind of bad bypassing the dish that I was pretty sure he said had cow stomach in it.

But not **that** bad.

There was also a band with dancers. We were told they generally dance until midnight or one in the morning, but since it was such a full house, it was much warmer in there and they probably wouldn't go that long into the night. We didn't stay long enough to find out. We had a very long and emotional day ahead of us. And we needed to be in the vans early in the morning. Although we wanted to stay longer, we needed to get back to the hotel to get as much rest as possible.

Videos of the dancers ([here](#) and [here](#)). Can you imagine dancing like this for 5+ hours?

By the way – I **love** the girls' big, bouncy hair! I think I secretly hope that Mihret's will be like that, too. Although we'll *still* have no idea how to care for it. 😊

## Durame

12 Comments

November 9, 2009



I have struggled with this post for a while. The journey to Durame on Sunday (9/20) was an emotional one because of the opportunity we had to meet with Mihret's birth mother. Most of what we learned from the meeting is Mihret's story to tell when she chooses to tell it. Christy and I both intend on protecting that treasure for her.

As all of the members of our Travel Group who chose to travel to Durame, we experienced the entire spectrum of emotion in anticipation of meeting our children's birth parents. It was a meeting I wouldn't miss for anything. Ever. It was one of those life-changing moments that will forever be burned into my heart. It was also one of the most difficult meetings I've ever had. If any adopting parents are reading this and have the opportunity to meet with the birth parents, **do it!!** While "fun" isn't the first (or second...or third...or any, for that matter) word I'd think of, it's a special time that I'm thankful we'll be able to share with our daughter.

I've also struggled with this post because we took so many pictures of our drive down to Durame. We have no idea if/when we'll ever be there again and we wanted to preserve as much as possible for Mihret. I think I took something like 100 pictures from the drive to and from Durame, including our stay in the village. That's a lot to go through. I think I've captured enough of the highlights to share without everyone looking at the picture and saying, "Hey – didn't I just see that a few pictures back?" WordPress.com won't let me embed the slideshow here, so I guess you're going to have to [click here to watch](#).

While in Ethiopia, I did a little journal writing. Not nearly as much as some people did, but I did record some of my thoughts – especially from the trip to Durame. Here's a bit of what I had to say while in the middle of it all. Journal entries are in italics with a few of my thoughts interjected in parenthesis...

*Today was the day most of us have been the most nervous about – the day we met the birth families.*

...

*Today is also (day of celebration of) the last day of Ramadan (called Eid)...All of us were amazed at the constant streams of people either heading into the celebration service or back home from it. We saw thousands upon thousands of people walking along the highway today. Later on in the day, most were heading to Market, but there was a vast number dedicated enough to walk for **miles** to and from a worship service. (It was quite humbling.)*

...

*The views were breathtaking! We have tried to come up with words that described what we saw and couldn't. **It's just Ethiopia!** Everyone took tons of pictures. I'm sure we'll wonder why we took so many later on, but I'd rather wonder that rather than wonder why we didn't take **more** of our daughter's home region.*

When we woke up the following morning, we looked outside our window and the mountain was hidden behind a cloud. This was not an uncommon experience while we were at Milligan. Whenever Buffalo Mountain was hidden behind a cloud, we'd look at it and say, "Look! God moved a mountain!" reminding

each other that God **can** and **does** move mountains. That reminder became even more powerful as we were in the midst of our newly adopted daughter's home region. God certainly moved a mountain.

We experienced so much during those two days and I'm **still** processing everything. I'm not sure if I'll ever be able to wrap my mind around everything we encountered.

With all of the pictures that are shared in the slideshow, I feel like I should make sure to invite you to share any questions you may have about the pictures. Feel free to do so in the comments section below and the conversation can continue that way.

## Taking Custody

November 18, 2009



Moments after taking custody of our Little Girl

Monday (9/21)

The drive back to Addis from Durame lasted entirely too long.



We toured a medical facility that is supported by our agency. We also had the opportunity to stop and take pictures of Mihret's actual birth-village.

But the drive back to Addis from Durame still lasted entirely too long.

Because we knew that when we returned to Addis, we'd take custody of our children. The long-awaited moment was **finally** at hand. We just had to wait through the drive back to the city.

When we finally got back to our hotel, we went over to the Care Center. The children were having their baths and the nannies had redone Mihret's hair. We watched as they bathed and dried her one last time. She had been at the Center for a long time and it was obvious that the nannies loved her. We brought some pajamas for her to wear to the hotel. The nannies gladly dressed her in her new outfit.

It was tough watching them say goodbye to our Little Girl. They'd loved her for so long. I'm sure they were happy that she has a forever family, but it was also difficult for them to let her go. One of the nannies held her one last time and she was fighting back tears.

"*Chaio*," she finally managed to say.

And she handed Mihret back to us for the final time. We did our best to express our heartfelt gratitude to the nannies who cared so much for our daughter. I hope they understood – even with the language barrier. And we walked out the room and closed the door.

She was finally **ours!**





# Embassy Day

December 3, 2009



I know I've shown this picture before, but it was taken in the van on our way to the Embassy appointment. It's one of my favorites. I promise - it wasn't staged!

Tuesday (9/22)

*Embassy Day!*

We drove to the U.S. Embassy for our interviews with the U.S. government and for our final hurdle before taking Mihret home with us. There was some drama in the moments leading up to our appointment because one of the families had been informed that the Embassy did not have all of their paperwork. Without the paperwork, no visa approval. Without the visa approval, no flight home with their daughter. Not good.

We arrived at the Embassy and were told very explicitly, "No pictures." This is true with all government buildings in Ethiopia, but they were especially serious when it came to the Embassy. No cameras. No cell phones. No potential weapons of any kind.

We entered a small holding area where we went through security one by one. This included putting any large items like diaper bags and purses through an x-ray machine. Without thought, I put the diaper bag onto the conveyor belt. A few seconds later, the security guard asked, "Sir – do you have any cameras or cell phones in your bag?"

"No," I replied.

"Are you sure?" She asked. "I saw a cell phone in your bag."

So I stood there and emptied the diaper bag, looking for the elusive cell phone. I couldn't find it. After what was probably just a minute or two (although it felt like decades), I finally looked in a hidden pocket in the diaper bag and found it under a bib, some tissues, and a packet of formula mix. Christy and I had completely forgotten about her phone. I'm glad they were understanding and didn't send the guys carrying the big guns after me.

With the cell phone safely placed in their care, I quickly threw the stuff back into the diaper bag and entered the Embassy. As I was walking out of the security area, I heard the guard ask another member of our travel group if he'd left a cell phone in his bag. He was just as flustered as I was when they asked me.

"Just say yes," I said with a smile. "Because she knows you forgot about it."

The waiting area was similar to a visit to any Bureau (or Department) of Motor Vehicles. A bunch of stiff chairs with drab walls and an intercom that was so muffled you could only understand every-other word. But at least there was a play area for the kids.

Mihret sat with me and I discovered all of her tickle spots and played peek-a-boo with her. She also pulled up on my arms and stood on my lap. I was almost in tears when she did this because doctors had warned that she might not ever have the strength to even consider standing and walking.

As we waited for our turn with the representative from the Embassy, many of us gathered with the family that was having visa issues and prayed that the bureaucratic mess would be resolved. While we were praying with them, our name was called and we went in for our interview.

The interview probably lasted 5-10 minutes. And that was it. We were approved. We went back into the waiting area and the rest of the families applauded. We did that for every family as they came back in. We had jumped through every hoop that was before us and now we were on the brink of bringing our children **home with us!** There was definite cause for celebration.

At the last minute, the family's visa problems were resolved. Yet another confirmation that God was at work through this process!

After the Embassy appointments, we stayed in the hotel for the rest of the evening; eating dinner with some of the other families and beginning to prepare for the long flight home.

# Introducing...

8 Comments

September 27, 2009

## Elayna Mihret Abaynesh Todd



We are blessed beyond words that Mihret is now **home** with us and forever part of our family!

## Welcome home, Little Girl!

# Welcome Home, Mihret!

4 Comments

September 29, 2009



I have no idea how I'll be able to put our journey to Ethiopia into words. But I'm sure gonna try over the next few weeks. As I shared with our congregation Sunday morning, it was joyful, heartbreaking, humbling, and just about every other feeling along the emotional spectrum.

In the meantime, I figure I should share some pictures while I try to find the words that sum up our experience.

## Final Picture of the Todds as a Family of Four





## First Meeting



# Did I ever share this?

March 17, 2010



Probably not. I fully intended to. But the whole recounting our Ethiopia experience kinda got out of hand and spiraled out of control. I think I have one more day to share before discussing our return home. But honestly, I've lost track.

I'm sorry I didn't share this earlier. [It's the story of our adoption as told through our friend, Cindy.](#) You really should read it. And then read the rest of her posts!

# Happy Birthday!

October 5, 2009

Sunday was Mihret's birthday! We are so blessed to have been able to celebrate it with her **at home!**

## Happy Birthday, Little Girl!



Mihret is no stranger to cake. She had it several times in the Care Center in Addis. As you can see, she knew EXACTLY what to do and absolutely DESTROYED her cupcake!



# New Requirement for Families Adopting from Ethiopia

March 16, 2010



Remember the Paper Chase? Now there's another step in the process.

It began as a rumor a week ago, but agencies have now confirmed a new requirement in the adoption process in Ethiopia. Effective soon (possibly as early as April 9), both parents are now required to be present at the court hearing of their prospective children.

This, of course, adds another large expense to prospective adoptive parents because it will require one parent to fly to Ethiopia twice. Trust me – plane tickets to Ethiopia are far from cheap. Looking back, this additional requirement might have led us to rule out Ethiopia when we began our adoption journey. That's heartbreaking because I cannot imagine life without our Little Girl.

Why have they added this new requirement? Because there was a concerning trend of families arriving in Ethiopia, only to refuse to follow-through with the adoption. Bethany Christian Services has more information about this trend on their blog.

I know. It's easy to read that and say, "**50+** families! Really?"



Although we didn't realize it at the time, we were given a hint of this disturbing trend during our appointment with the U.S. Embassy (yes, the day of the phantom cell phone).

During our interview, the official asked us, "Do you know that this child has a special need?"

In my mind, I thought, "Well...of course we know that. We've known that all along. Don't you know the process we've had to go through to be approved for her because of her special need? We've been praying for her since the moment we found out about her nine months ago! That's a really silly question, lady. " And my initial thought was to say something silly like, "*What?!? What do you mean a 'special need'? That's an outrage! Well – give her back.*" Of course, my cooler head prevailed for once and I didn't say anything like that. I had visions of Christy punching me in the gut or the Embassy official actually taking me seriously and not approving the visa or something like that.

It's a good thing I didn't say that because the next thing she said absolutely shocked us. "We ask that because you'd be surprised at how many people get back home and then say they didn't know about a particular special need their child has and try to nullify the adoption. Of course, by then it's too late."

There was part of me that wanted to ask her who these people were so our Travel Group could find them and learn them a thing or two (if you catch my meaning). I didn't ask, though.

After going through the entire process of hoop-jumping, paper-chasing, home-preparing, and all of the other steps and expenses that come with the emotional roller coaster of an adoption, it's hard for me to imagine ever choosing to back out of the process after finally looking into the child's eyes. But...it has been known to happen.

So I understand why Ethiopia is doing this. I wish there was a better way. I'm sure there is. But in the meantime, this should serve as a stop-gap in the process. Please join me in praying for those who are caught up in this transition – especially those who face an added hoop to jump through and an additional large expense that was completely unexpected.

But more importantly, let's continue to pray that the 5 million (yes, **million**) orphans in Ethiopia become part of loving families.

# Mihret Video

6 Comments

October 15, 2009

This was my dream...

to post all of my thoughts and pictures regarding our journey to Ethiopia to bring Mihret home and then conclude the series with this video. At the rate I'm going, it'll be 2010 (or later) before that happens. So, I've decided to go ahead and share this video with you.

I realize for many families that have been touched by adoption, this song is sort of a "default." And it might even be over-used in some circles. But I still used it because, by golly, I *still* cry when I hear it. And I guess I want you to as well. 😊



# Show Hope

13 Comments

November 15, 2010



As part of Mihret's third birthday celebration last month, we had the opportunity to volunteer at a ShowHope booth for A Night with the Chapmans. Both ShowHope and the Chapmans have a very special part in our adoption journey to bring Mihret home.

Last Summer, we received the unexpected news that we would be bringing Mihret home much sooner than we'd initially thought. At the same time, The fees and travel expenses we knew were eventually coming were needed much, much sooner than we'd planned.

And we didn't have the money. At all.

When we came to this realization, we were crushed. How were we ever going to be able to make this work? I must confess, I began to panic just a bit. I didn't have any answers.

A few days later, we received a letter from ShowHope, informing us that we had received an adoption grant from them. And it covered the rest of the fees and the plane tickets. The date on the letter? The same date that we found out we had passed court in Ethiopia!

I've heard all kinds of adoption stories about how God provides. I half-heartedly wrote them off by saying to myself, "Yeah, yeah. I know God provides. And that's what you're **supposed** to say in this situation." To me, it had become the expected Sunday School answer, just like how "Moses" or "Elijah" are always the answers to Old Testament questions and "Jesus" or "Paul" are the go-to answers for New Testament questions. But this was no fluke. This was no Sunday School answer that everyone expects to hear. I am **convinced** that God moved this mountain before we even knew it was in our way. And our family is grateful to the people who work with and support ShowHope for allowing God use them as an instrument of His grace, love, and provision.

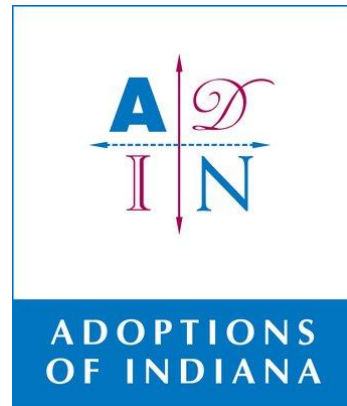
So we were excited to be able to spend the evening helping at the ShowHope booth at the Capmans' concert. It was just a small, tiny-tiny way we could help give back to them. And the Chapmans' passion for orphan care and adoption is contagious. I remember thinking that the last time we saw them live at Anderson University. In early October, 2007. That's three years ago, in case you're having trouble with the math. You do remember who celebrated her third birthday in early October – right?

Who would've known that while we were listening to Steven Curtis Chapman sing *When Love Takes You In* that our Little Girl had just been born half a world away?



# Postlude

This story could not be told without the love and generosity of friends and family. It also could not be told without the help of these organizations that are dedicated to orphan care and the connecting of children with forever-families. God used these organizations in ways we couldn't possibly imagine. It's amazing how God took people from around the world and wove them into our family's story. We will be forever grateful for the impact these organizations have had on our life.



**Kingdom Kids  
Adoption  
ministries**

In addition, these organizations are doing amazing work in Ethiopia and surrounding areas...

