

## Ayat's Story

By Dianne and Trevor Macduff

This is Ayat's story. "Ayat" means "grandmother" in Amharic, the native language of Ethiopia. This is the story of how I became a grandmother to three Ethiopian children.

All of the travel arrangements had been made, the suitcases were packed, and the whole family was gathering for a prayer meeting. The adoption process was moving quickly from the planning stages to the implementing stages. Last summer, my son Trevor and his wife Jessica started the planning by applying to Adoption Advocates International for approval as adopting parents of a sibling group from Ethiopia. As soon as Trevor and Jessica were approved, they prayerfully chose a sibling group of three and now the rest of the paper trail was complete. It was mid-March 2006 and Trevor was leading the trip to pick up the children with Ayat as his assistant. Lots of friends and family were praying for the upcoming trip. This family gathering for a time of prayer was the last step in the preparation for the week ahead.

*March 18, 1:38, between Seattle and Chicago, only clouds below.*

*We are cruising at 31,000 feet on our way to Chicago. We spent an extra 2 hours in Pasco due to a mechanical delay but were able to make up our time with a shorter layover in Seattle. We needed to get our boarding passes in Seattle as the Horizon counter at Pasco could not access the American or British Air seating. I managed to find a jacket on clearance at the Sea-Tac shops for a very reasonable price after realizing that I had only brought one sweatshirt for all-weather protection. This is much lighter weight and fits over the sweatshirt if I need the added warmth.*

*I think that bringing jackets for the kids next Saturday will be a good plan since I do not think that we packed anything like that, but it can get colder than chilly in Tri-Cities during the evenings.*

*Currently I am still worried about our Heathrow connection, though the agent in Seattle said that it's a normal connection that people make all the time. Our itinerary shows us landing at 11 am in London with boarding to Addis at 11:15. In the world's busiest airport with what I've been told is an antiquated airline communication system, I'm still a bit nervous. The fact that the closest to the front that we could get is row 26 doesn't help. We were talking, though, to an American Air agent, and British may have better access to seats further to the front.*

*I think I am still incredulous that I am flying to Ethiopia. I just feel like the hospital where my children were born is very far away. If I had been told a year ago that I would be heading to Africa right now, I may have actually been excited about the adventure. Yes, there is adventure here, but that is not my mission, neither is it the function of the trip, thus I just have an interminably long taxi trip.*

*Mom and I have slept through most of the trip, but I suppose not sleeping well the last few nights coupled with a 4:30am airport trip could account for some of that. I sort of want to stay awake now and wear myself out in Chicago so that I might sleep better on the overnight to London.*

*We leave Chicago at 9:25 pm and arrive in London the next morning at 11 (all local times). Hopefully we will sleep most of that and it won't be too crowded. This flight to*

*Chicago is booked solid. Landing in London while it's light is very intriguing so I hope to take some pictures out the window as we land ("Look, kids, Big Ben and there's the Parliament Building...").*

*I've also noticed that the flight attendants and gate agents on the shorter hops tend to be much younger, but these longer hops have rather distinguished looking flight attendants. They sort of make me want to address them as sir or ma'am. One of them actually makes me think of Kelsie Grammar (aka Fraiser). Very interesting for someone who usually flies just little hops around Washington. It's different to see people with an actual career flying the friendly skies. It always seemed to me as a starting career for people in their early 20's.*

*I may have over packed snacks and activities, but won't really know until I get back. If we have extra from this trip over, we can use them while in Addis. If we still have some left, we can use them on the trip home. With 5 mouths at that time, we may end up finishing them up. The sandwiches that Sherrill packed were a tremendous hit. I may actually be able to bring the Tupperware back, too.*

The travel to Ethiopia felt like a dress rehearsal for the trip back to America, a test of how well we had anticipated the travel issues and packed the essentials in our carry on items. A two hour delay in Pasco reduced the lengthy layover in Seattle. The flights to Chicago and London left on time, but it was a bit uncertain if we would make the connection to Addis Ababa with only an hour layover in London. Because the airline steward heard Trevor's concerns about the short connection time, the airline expedited our transfer by escorting us to the next gate. We made our connecting flight to Addis Ababa. However, luggage was not transferred as quickly, so none of the checked bags arrived with us in Ethiopia. The expected driver from the Ritmo Guest House was nowhere in sight upon our arrival, so a taxi took us through the quiet early morning hours to our lodging place. The kids would be staying with us during the week, so there were three bedrooms assigned to our family. Despite naps en route, we had no trouble getting several hours of sleep before the day began again.

*Sunday March 19, Somewhere over Europe*

*We made our connection in London. Wow. Not without some divine intervention which included several very kind British Air employees. I do have to admit that I am surprised that they didn't tell me when I first mentioned my concerns about the connection that they could help expedite the whole thing. Instead we got to sit with some anxiety and pray. We also played the sympathy card about the adoption. I have been rather intentional about not wanting extra attention based on the adoption, but I needed whatever edge I could get to get through this connection if possible. We did find out that there would have been another airline flying to Addis through Cairo at 2:00, so it could have worked for us that way, but I really wanted to make this one so that I didn't have to change planes again.*

*We were told explicitly that the winds were against us and that we would land around 11:40. Instead we did land at 11:05. However, we had to taxi for 15 minutes to get to our gate. One of the stewards (a Scottish gentleman expecting his first child in 3 weeks) helped grab our bags and led us from the plane. He was quite content to push through*

*all people on the plane, until he came to the first class section. And I'll have to say, first class on a trans-Atlantic British Air flight is unlike anything I have ever seen. That was amazingly posh. I didn't get a chance to stare for very long, but the seats were trimmed in some exotic wood with full wrap around orthopedic backs. Each person was treated as absolute royalty, just amazing. Rob, the Scottish steward, grinned at my amazement and said that maybe someday my kids would be rich and famous and then I could fly first class, too. Wow, how the other half lives.*

*After Rob got us off the plane in tremendous fashion, we were told to just follow the signs to "Flight Connections." I took off at a run to hold the plane for mom. I ran down a long hall way, passing the others who got off first and were using the moving sidewalk. I was heading to the second sidewalk around the bend, when I realized that it was not working. A couple of bends in the hall later and I literally could not see anyone else behind me. The usual aerobic pace of my day held me in good stead and soon I was wheezing heavily and starting to limp. Several long hall ways later (most of which contained moving sidewalks that were not in service) I hadn't seen a sign in a while, nor did I have any confirmation that there were still people in the hallway behind me. Suddenly I realized that I must have missed the sign that everyone else had seen and they were all at their connections by now. No way would an airport have a runway ramp this long. I pressed forward figuring that at least I could make Cairo and glad that I had given mom her boarding pass, wherever she may be.*

*I still had about 3 hallway turns to traverse before I saw another sign indicating where the "Flight Connections" desk might be. Around the next turn, I saw people. Oh, glory be, I am at least not in the restricted area of a foreign airport. Truly I believe that it must be at least a quarter mile. Mom is sure it wasn't a half mile as she doesn't think she would be there yet. Later I was told that this is the longest ramp at Heathrow, but someone will need a lot of work to convince me that it was a well planned design.*

*A lady is standing there wearing a badge. I head straight for her, but notice a long slow-moving line at the counter marked "Flight Connections". This lady asks where I have come from. As I tell her, "Chicago" I see that she is holding a sign with my name on it. She was waiting for me. We had to wait a bit for mom to catch up, but this lady had a radio, a badge, and was in no hurry. She pushed through the long line up to the front and had us put our bags on the security counter. Yet, this would be the time to get caught up in inspections. They had to run my bag twice after unpacking much of it. They figured that my neck pillow with the massage function may have been the anomaly that they couldn't understand, but they also needed to separately x-ray my travel Yahtzee. This was the last major delay, though we did get caught behind some folks on the escalator who chose to stand instead of move.*

*Currently, my feet are essentially incapacitated. Between the run/hobble for a quarter mile and the quick pace through Heathrow's terminal 4, I have rediscovered some muscles that have long laid in lethargy. Generally speaking this does not bode well for those urgent sprints, so as my muscles re-establish authority over my body, they have taken my feet captive such that it is an extreme effort to flex my feet up or to wiggle my toes.*

*Now that I just have to sit here and wake up in Addis, I believe that I will be able to relax some more and get some sleep. It is 2:32 pm GMT and 6:32 am PST, so my body is a*

*little tired, but the sun is shining brightly. As it darkens I will lay back and try to sleep. Meanwhile, I have some Bible studies to listen to and books to read.*

It was now Monday morning and the long awaited day for picking up the kids had arrived. The plan for the week was quite simple: pick up the kids on Monday, get visas at the Embassy on Wednesday, and fill in the rest of the time with tourist activities. On the list of possible activities, meeting with the birth parents was the highest priority. The last information was that the father was quite ill and the mother was alive, even though both were HIV positive. En route to the orphanage we learned that the father's health had improved and he visited the children regularly, but the mother had left town. In order to have a chance of finding the mother, a meeting with the father was scheduled for Thursday morning at 10 a.m.

*Monday, March 20, @ Ritmo, 6:30 am*

*Mom and I got in last night. I must say that I feel like our luggage would have arrived if the travel agent had listened to my concern about the tight connection in Heathrow. She said that I would be fine with the connection, but she was the only one I met who thought that one hour was adequate. As we barely made it and were persistent, our inanimate luggage was not so persistent and did not make it. With earlier flights that we could have taken from Chicago, I am definitely disgruntled with her for not booking us on a flight with adequate connection time at Heathrow.*

*We met Jamal at the guest house. He was told that we would land at four in the morning. Thus we got to pay the "I'm too tired to negotiate ferengi price" to another taxi to get us here and wake up a very apologetic young man. I am glad that he did wake up, though, as I am not sure what we would have done otherwise. Probably gone to Yilma for the night around the corner. I have slept some and am feeling rested. Dad is calling in about an hour, so we may shower and go get breakfast before that. I hear mom up. Mostly I am ready to go get my kids. The sun is up and Layla House is just around the corner. Perhaps after breakfast and a chat with dad, we'll mosey over there to meet up with Gail. So far the communication here has been atrocious, but I am here to get my kids. Yes, we'll have to get our luggage from the airport tomorrow morning. I think I'll ask Gail to help us with that, but otherwise, it'll be just me and my kids!!!!*

My job this morning was to record Trevor's first meeting with his children on his video camera. First Addisalem, then Tsega, then Hiwot. Each eagerly hugged the Daddy they had only seen in photographs. All of their personal belongings, which consisted of the items sent to them by their adopting family, had been gathered together into a large Ziploc bag. The children were ready to leave soon after the initial greeting. Giving us a tour of the orphanage was not even a thought in their minds as they headed for the car that would take them away from their friends, knowing they finally had the family that had been promised to them.

The rest of the day was delightful – lunch, naps, and shopping for jackets. Without any luggage, it would be another day before we could give the kids their clothes and set aside the ones they were wearing to be returned to the orphanage later in the week. Lice

shampoos would also have to wait until the luggage arrived. The Guest House cook prepared injera for lunch, a favorite Ethiopian food, so we were now a bit more connected to the local culture. Our driver for the shopping trip was Selamneh, a tour guide who was recommended to us for helping us get around during the week. This initial trip with him was just the beginning of a very special relationship.

### *Monday Night.*

*My children are sleeping down the hall. My own children. My 3 children whom I love. I also have 3 children in Washington State halfway around the world. As much as I wish that I had the capacity to capture today in words, I do not. I will do my best, but you will have to create some of the pictures in your own head.*

*Gail was not expecting us to call so early as she thought that our flight arrived at 4 in the morning. Mom and I were fast asleep at 2:30. We had breakfast around the corner at Merry Fam. I even had a cup of coffee for the first time in a year. Irrelevant facts to build suspense.*

*After breakfast Gail was waiting for us at Ritmo with her parents to go to KM. They are escorting 4 non-siblings to Minneapolis for a family with many other kids. Driving in Addis during the day is not much different than at night except there are more things on the road. You still drive at breakneck speed and ignore most of the traffic signals and rules of courtesy. It's amazingly functional as everyone knows that no one is following any rules, so everyone is always extra cautious. More irrelevant facts, sorry.*

*When we got to KM, we parked out front and walked around the building past the new church they are building. As I rounded the next corner (mom was filming the whole time) I heard Gail say, "Here comes Addis." I looked and she was running down a ramp to me. I just ran to her and scooped her up. She nuzzled right into my neck. I don't know how long I held her, but eventually we got up the ramp to the main building. I asked about Hiwot and Tsega and she said, "Hiwot up" and pointed upstairs. Carrying her I ran up the stairs, opened the door she pointed to and down the hall. One of the workers asked me to wait downstairs, so we went back down. We sat down on the front steps until Gail told us we could go inside an office. It was the same office that I had seen on two previous videos. Tsega came in next. They were both wearing orphanage clothes. Tsega had his welcome bag and all the letters that we had sent to them. I still don't know if they had someone read them to them or not. They did say that they hadn't seen the video at all.*

*Suddenly mom gave a sigh only adoring grandmothers can give. Hiwot walked in, clearly dressed for the moment in an adorable little dress with lacey tights, a sunflower head band and butterfly barrettes in her hair. On her back was the baby backpack that we had sent as a welcome bag. Inside the backpack were the pictures and letters that we had sent. I simply rocked them on my lap and kissed them over and over again. I knew that I couldn't have imagined that moment. I still think it's surreal.*

*They all wanted to hold my hand and sit on my lap at the same time. They wanted to play with my camera and glasses and kept saying "Machina". Finally Gail came back from locating the kids that her parents were escorting home and told me that machina means Car. The kids really just wanted to leave. Addisalem ran back upstairs to get her welcome bag. I got the impression that when she heard we were there, she just came*

*running while Tsega ran to get his stuff and Hiwot was with her caretakers getting ready and we were earlier than expected.*

Tuesday was a day to get more connected to the children. After verifying that luggage had arrived, Selamneh and I headed for the airport while Trevor took the kids to get pictures at a different orphanage. Three out of the four bags had arrived, so all of the orphanage donations could be distributed, but the kids and I still did not have our clothes. It would be Thursday at the earliest for the next flight from London to bring us the missing suitcase. Back at the Guest House, Trevor sorted through the clothes we brought to donate to the orphanage in order to find a change of clothes for each of the kids and a clean shirt for me. Then we put every one through showers and sent the children's original outfits to the laundry.

By mid-afternoon, we had observed several health issues in the kids, so Selamneh took us to the health clinic for diagnoses. Was Hiwot's cough related to TB or just a cold? Was Tsega's recurring stomach ache a symptom of parasites or because, in his excitement, he had eaten too much? The children were apprehensive to be at the clinic because they remembered the place from prior visits. Despite the bad memories, Tsega and Addisalem were cooperative when the lab drew blood from their arms. It seemed to us that a finger prick would have been sufficient, but that was not an option. Hiwot, however, was a challenge. It took both Trevor and Selamneh to cajole and hold her down for the x-ray and blood work. Needless to say, we did not have a quiet and peaceful afternoon.

For dinner that evening, Selamneh picked a wonderful Ethiopian restaurant which served injera. The kids were right at home with the hand-eaten food. After a long day, we were all ready for a good night's sleep, especially since the next day was the big day—Embassy day.

*Hiwot seems a little overwhelmed by what all is going on, but calls me Dat or Datty and climbs into my lap. She got mad at dinner tonight when I wouldn't let her play with her fork in her water cup (she will fit in fine with my family) and I ended up taking her home from the restaurant. She stopped sobbing and sort of moaned for the next half hour. I simply held her on the couch.*

*On another note, Gail was surprised to find out that we didn't know that their parents are still alive and want to meet us this week. Dad had planned to visit the kids today, but Sister Lutgarta told him to come back another day since I was coming. Currently we have an appointment for 1-2 hours on Thursday at 10 am. Sister Lutgarta will translate for us. Very sad to say that mom is reportedly in denial and had left Addis. This is so opposite of anything I could have imagined. I thought that I would be meeting with a grateful widow and instead will be meeting for sure with Dad and maybe with a very reluctant Mom. It was this revelation that actually broke my front with my mother. I can't imagine the pain of giving up your children. The courage of my children's biological mom overwhelms me. That she is beyond consolation now at the moment of departure is understandable. My prayer is that I will be able to be of some comfort to her.*

*I saved this 'til last because I am tired and was hoping to avoid it. Please pray for Thursday's meeting. Wednesday night Pacific Time is when we will be meeting. Please pray now for their mother. Keep her and their father in your prayers. They are dying. They do not have hope of living. Pray that they know Christ, or will come to know Him, for He is the hope of the world.*

By Wednesday morning, our communication skills were improving and we had a grasp of basic words in Amharic. However, Hiwot used inappropriate behavior rather than words to express her feelings at the breakfast table. Trevor removed the screaming little one from the room and held her close. She definitely needed some time out. Selamneh was coming for the morning, so the older kids and I left with him to get them a few more clothes for the afternoon visit to the Embassy. When we returned, Hiwot's temper tantrum had subsided and all of us headed out for a fun shopping trip to get traditional Ethiopian clothes for each of the kids. Trevor wants the kids to have links to their original culture, so we bought outfits that would fit them now and some that will fit them later to give them some very special reminders of their first family.

We were to be picked up for our trip to the Embassy at 1 p.m., so we had planned with the Guest House cook to have lunch a bit early. The Embassy does not allow photography, so we had to leave our cameras behind for this special outing. Allowing for transportation and the paperwork, we expected to be back at the Guest house by 3:30 pm. At the Embassy, Trevor had all the paperwork to process, so I stayed with the kids in the play area on the other side of the waiting room. After some initial review of the documents, each of the kids joined him for a few minutes. Finally I was told that some of the paperwork was incomplete and the visas would not be available today after all. Trevor looked exhausted and indicated he would tell me the details later.

On the way back to the Guest House, Trevor and the adoption agency staff member continued to strategize about how to get the missing paperwork completed in the next day or two. The primary issue was that there was no documentation that the mother had released the children, even though her behavior indicated she had done so. Several people had already been contacted about the problem before we left the Embassy. A meeting was also scheduled for the next morning at the orphanage. The plan involved trying to prove abandonment by the mother since she had disappeared and had not seen the kids for several months. As the reality of our current situation sank in, I experienced the worst moment of the trip — the possibility that we would leave Ethiopia without these precious children.

*Wednesday night, after the embassy appointment.*

*The frustration is mounting here. At the embassy, we were told that the kids' mother never officially released them for adoption. And as she apparently has left the city in denial of her situation (and is a little crazy, according to dad), it may be harder to find her to get her to sign a release for the kids to come home. Once we have their visas, the kids are coming home. If she comes in and puts up a fuss, then we could have a real situation on our hands.*

*The other option is to prove that she has deserted the children. This has a strong case as she hasn't had contact with the kids since September, has left the area, did not come to court as requested to approve the adoption (dad was there), and hasn't left any forwarding contact information. It is very possible to move forward as an abandonment case. But, if the embassy is unable to prove that she deserted the kids, we could have a real situation on our hands.*

Despite the stress of the situation, we still had to get dinner and put the kids to bed. We decided to walk to a nearby Italian restaurant which turned out to be a lot fancier than the other restaurants where we had eaten. Fortunately, it was not very busy. The staff quickly sized up our condition and offered the kids their favorite — injera (even though it was not on the menu). Hiwot was exhausted and decided to have a meltdown soon after we got there. Holding a box of teabags calmed her down, as well as the doting waitress who hand fed her. It had been a long day, and we were all glad to get back to the Guest House for a good night's sleep.

*So let's talk about Salemneh. What an amazing human being. I do not know if he is saved, though he says he is Orthodox. We hired him as our taxi driver for a day and basically fell in love with him. He is so gentle with the kids, knows how to help us with whatever we need, and advises us when we ask so well. On Tuesday we needed to take the kids to the doctor just to check them out. Tsega's tummy was hurting twice that day and Hiwot had a bad cough. He actually got up on the exam table to show Hiwot that it was OK to lie there. He was concerned that he wasn't in the room when one of the kids had some blood drawn, and once I got myself under control, he held Hiwot's arm as I held the rest of her to have her blood drawn. Hiwot was kicking and screaming bloody murder the whole time. He was so loving. He became more than a driver to me that day. Since then, I have learned that he does get paid fairly well by Ethiopian standards, but for my extra \$5 per day, it's amazingly worth while. I cannot imagine how our trip would be with out him.*

*Today we took the kids shopping. Hiwot had a major meltdown during breakfast, so I held her screaming and sobbing on my chest for an hour until she fell asleep. I basically figured that we only have to go through that 10-15 more times to help her work through the grief of abandonment from the last two years of stunted emotional growth and attachment. Salemneh came and took mom and the other kids to get some clean clothes so that we could send their old clothes back to KM.*

*When they got back, mom wasn't allowing them to wear them until we went to the embassy at one. We had talked about going to the National Museum for the rest of the morning, but it was getting a bit late by then. I still figured we could make a quick trip of it, but Salemneh took us to a shop instead. Mom and I were both confused and I asked him. He said we could go if we wanted. Checking the time, I realized that he had made the better decision. We could purchase some priority items, get a feel for other options, and still make lunch on time. We ended up getting 2 dresses each for the girls when they grow up. One is a traditional dress that you might see in Ethiopia. One is a traditional dress, but more clearly demonstrates the African heritage. Then we got a dress that each could wear now. We got them big so that they could wear them for a while longer. Hiwot will be able to grow into Addis' dress when Addis is just about ready for the grown*

*up sized ones. We did the same with boy clothes for Tsega, except we only got one grown up set for him and we got a hat. I think that I will have to get this same set up for my other kids as well as Jessica and me. Could be fun.*

Jessica called that evening and Trevor informed her of our current circumstances. His primary request was for lots of prayer in anticipation of the meeting the next morning at the orphanage. Currently, the list of those attending the meeting included the children's father, the orphanage director, an Embassy staff member connected to the fraud division, a social services agency staff member involved with the parents, Selamneh, and all of the Macduffs. The next morning before we left for the orphanage, Bob called and we reiterated our need for prayer.

*Please pray for our visas. This is harder than I can imagine. It is all so opposite from what I thought would happen. No hallmark card reunion with lots of Kleenex as we finally locate their mother in a hospital as she gratefully accepts our adoption option then tells us where to find the grave of her husband and we leave flowers on it... Instead we have stories of a half crazed woman leaving town potentially blocking our visas. The US consuls are confident that this will get cleared up and they do put priority on adoption cases over locals wanting to vacation in the US. They also have a very successful crew of fraud investigators who can find anyone in town. Our ideal right now is for mom to sign a release form for the kids. She took them to the orphanage organization in the first place, so I hope this isn't a problem. The second option at this point is for the embassy investigators to come to dead ends when trying to locate mom so that they can approve the abandonment. Please pray. Someone today said, "Well, that can help." I immediately got sad for that person because prayer absolutely works. I may be shown how to help prayer, but prayer is not an assistance program. It is the foundational manner in which we should view the world and approach all things. No, prayer is not a "help", prayer is a part of existing.*

Despite the somber meeting that was scheduled, the trip to the orphanage had other less somber purposes. The donated clothes we had brought with us were to be delivered and the kids were happy to show off their new family to their friends.

Soon after we pulled into the orphanage and parked the car, Trevor saw a man walking in past the open gate and realized he was the children's father. Trevor greeted him with a huge hug and lots of tears. Then the father turned and pointed to a woman walking a bit more slowly, and we realized that the mother had come with him. In anticipation of the possibility of meeting the mother, Trevor was wearing Jessica's special necklace of two parents with three children. Now that Jessica had six children, she wanted the kids' mother to have it. Quickly, Trevor took it off and tenderly gave it to her as Selamneh translated. It was the best moment of the trip, recognizing that God had brought both of the parents here quite apart from anything we could have expected or planned. God was honoring our heart's desire of meeting both parents, even though it had meant creating a glitch in the paperwork to bring about this very special meeting. Later we would hear stories of the many people who had been praying for us as the prayer request went out far

and wide. While we slept the night before the meeting, those who were here in the U.S. were just starting their day. They prayed for us and forwarded the prayer request to others who prayed for us. God is so good!

*Thursday, 2:06 pm*

*We got to KM today just before nine. A man outside the gate waved at us and the kids pointed and said, "Father". When we parked, I got out to meet him. It took a moment for him to enter the gate. When he came in he kept looking back and at me. I got to him, crying. I hugged him. He looked like he wanted to kneel down and honor me, but I felt very similar toward him. After our initial hug he turned and pointed towards a woman entering slowly. For me, I couldn't tell the difference between any person on the street or a worker at the school, but as he pointed he said, "Mother".*

*This was better than I could have imagined. Salemneh translated a letter that Gail had written for the mother to release the kids. She signed it. I videoed the signing, mom took pictures. We had witnesses. The investigator from the embassy came and saw the whole thing. He wouldn't let us take his picture, though. Salemneh and I ran to the embassy to turn in the original and some copies that Sr. Lutgarta had made. Alyson was right there. I ran past the line straight to her (she had told me that I could). Within 5 minutes she had certified a copy, accepted it and stamped all the paper work that we needed. The only thing missing was the children's passports. I told Salemneh that he was so good that we beat the investigator back. The investigator still had the passports. I will head back to the embassy first thing in the morning and get the passports with the visas and we will be officially good to go.*

The rest of the morning was busy, but not nearly as tense as we had expected. The document for the mother to sign was translated into Amharic and her fingerprint signature properly witnessed. Trevor and Selamneh rushed the document to the Embassy while the rest of us waited at the orphanage, just to make sure everything was in order before the parents left. This waiting was a perfect opportunity to learn about the family's history. Initially, Trevor had planned for me to videotape him interviewing the father, but in his absence the social services agency staff member took his place. As I sat quietly holding the camera, she spoke with the parents in their native language, asking questions and encouraging them to share family stories. The father did all the talking, with the mother occasionally distracted by the kids coming into the room. After half an hour, the staff member said they were done and we wandered outside to where the kids were playing. I also had a chance to chat with the social services agency staff member and become acquainted with her role in dealing with the suffering of so many victims of the HIV crisis in Ethiopia.

When Trevor returned, he reported that the paperwork was all in order. The visas would be ready to be picked up the next morning. He knew exactly when the Embassy opened and planned to be their first customer of the day. We made a quick tour of the orphanage and headed back to the Guest House. Selamneh joined us for lunch. Afterwards, Salemneh and I made a dash to the airport to pick up the last piece of waylaid luggage. With one day left before our departure, the children and I finally had our clothes.

When I got back from the airport, Sebsibie Abebie had already arrived for our afternoon visit. His daughter Rahel lives in Richland and she had arranged for us to connect with him in Ethiopia. We had a package from Rahel for him from the just-arrived suitcase (God's timing is perfect), so I was glad we had not planned an earlier visit. He took us to an ancient church in the hills above the city for the afternoon and gave us an in depth history lesson. He has seen a lot of changes in his native Ethiopia over the years and he told us of how things used to be. After a quick stop at his house to meet Rahel's sister, we had a delightful injera dinner at a local restaurant. Because this was Lent, many Ethiopians were not eating any meat until after Easter. To accommodate his special diet, Sebsibie ordered a fasting injera while we had the non-fasting variety. Ethiopian cooks like to use more spices than I am used to, so the meats were frequently too spicy for me. The vegetarian variety was much more to my liking.

Friday was a busy day. While Trevor and Selamneh went to the Embassy, I was in charge of the lice shampoos. Two out of three felt like success to me, with the youngest excused from the ten minute wait between shampoo and rinse. By late morning we were off to do some shopping and get the results from the clinic. Except for a stop for lunch, we shopped until we dropped. By the end of the day we had baskets, wooden crosses, scarves, coffee pots, coffee, travel snacks, African maps, jewelry, and paintings to pack in the empty duffle bags. The stop at the clinic was not as much fun, but we did get the test results and prescriptions the kids needed. The expense for the medical care was very nominal, so we filled the prescriptions to have the medicine on hand once we got home.

After a quick bite to eat nearby, we said good-bye to our special friend Selamneh. He would love to visit the U.S. someday, as well as see the many adopted children he met as they were leaving Ethiopia. Our three little ones were put to bed for a short night while Trevor and I packed. By midnight, everything was packed and we were ready to head for the airport. The van was loaded with luggage and sleepy kids as we prepared for the long day ahead. We had been advised to get to the airport early to handle the exit visas and luggage before the crowd arrived for the 4 a.m. flight. Without any glitches, all seven pieces of luggage were checked through to Seattle. All we had to keep track of now were the seven pieces of carry on luggage and three little ones. Just in case, Trevor had a change of clothes for each of the kids in his carry on and I had enough snacks for the entire flight if the meals did not appeal to the kids. We were definitely ready to leave for America!

Addis and Tsega sat with me on the first flight out of Addis Ababa while Hiwot stuck with Trevor. The older kids were fascinated with everything and did not fuss too much about the seat belt requirement. Hiwot, on the other hand, did not want anything restricting her and let everyone know of her displeasure. Fortunately, she slept on the first leg of the trip and gradually accepted the seat belt requirement. Addis was disappointed that Jessica was not waiting to greet us when we landed in Alexandria, Egypt. After a couple more take offs and landings, she understood that this was going to be a very long journey. The excitement kept the older two awake until we arrived in London. Trevor and I had not taken a three hour nap before heading for the airport, so the exhaustion was beginning to set in. Trevor had had a cat nap en route to London, but

both of us needed some sleep soon. With Benadryl in hand, all of the kids were medicated as we left London en route to Seattle. It did not take long for each of them to fall asleep, and we quickly followed their example.

*March 25, over Glasgow*

*We are on our way home. Everyone is asleep except me. Mom stayed up with the kids on the last flight and zonked out before take off. We gave each kid a dose of benadryl since the big kids did not sleep at all and Addis and Hiwot were showing those overactive signs of childish exhaustion. I hope they sleep well and long. Perhaps when they awake we'll be in American air space. Yeah, that's wishful thinking...*

*After dropping the letters at the embassy on Thursday we got back to the orphanage. Mom had handed over several questions that she and I had put together and a translator spent about thirty minutes in conversation with their parents. It was all in Amharic, and all on tape. We took several pictures of the family. I never saw mom and dad smile. After the embassy, Salemeleh took me by the guest house and we got one of the original picture books that we sent in the welcome bags. Mom and dad were both quite pleased to have this. I wanted to give them the video we made, but everyone thought that would be inappropriate as they could never watch it.*

*Salemeleh took them home. And I sobbed watching them go. The kids were a little confused. Addis and Hiwot were able to comfort me, but Tsega removed himself and I think he was having a hard time processing everything. We spent a little more time touring the facility, but we had been there a long time and the kids were getting ready to go. When we stopped on Hiwot's old floor to get some pictures, she started howling hysterically. Very clearly she wanted nothing to do with that place. Sister Camilla commented that she had never seen Hiwot as happy as she was when we were together. Barring the howling on her old floor, she didn't seem terribly happy to me. I think that the pictures that we got back were actually very accurate in terms of her sadness at being there. She is very attached to me and gets upset if I have to go to the bathroom without her. She is getting better, but she is my little shadow.*

*When we left the orphanage, I hugged Sister Lutgarta more than I knew I could, but it still wasn't enough. Salemeleh took us by where their parents live. We stopped by an alley and he pointed to a sign and said that their mother was living with a family there. We did not go down the alley road. Then we went to where their father lived, which is where they grew up. As we turned into the alley, the big kids perked up. A few twists and turns later and we were as close as we could get. We walked on, this being one of Addis Ababa's many shanty towns, careful where we stepped. The road was cobbled with stones, but hardly passable for a vehicle. Squeezing between two buildings, we saw a dead end and Salemeleh pointed to a door with a lock. This was where they grew up. Through holes in the framework I took several pictures of the inside of the house. I approximate the entire house as being about 8 x 8. Sister Lutgarta had been there to pick up the kids and said that it only holds one bed, which the father occupied while he was sick. Otherwise, the kids and mom had to sleep on the floor. Hiwot was very malnourished and the kids were not being taken care of as the mother had her hands full taking care of the father. There was no other money either except to care for the father. Maybe someday I will learn from my kids what they remember about those days; if it is hunger, begging, neighbors, or just sadness at their father's illness. Tsega told his father*

*that he had a vision that instead of watching his father suffer, he would go to America. This part of his vision is hours away from fulfillment.*

*Walking through Heathrow today was so overwhelming. All of the glitz and glamour of our western existence contrasts so much with the basic standard of living in Addis, not to mention the abject poverty. I wanted to burn down all of the glamour shops, realizing that the Christian Dior display of perfume was larger than the home where my kids grew up for the first stage of their lives.*

*Since the visit to KM, Hiwot has come alive. She is no longer withdrawn and shy. Mom will spend tons of time just laughing at her antics. She was running around the guest house, hiding things and laughing when she found them. She has such a disarming manner about her, but can erupt in terror shrieks when she doesn't get her way, or wants something simple that she can't communicate.*

With plenty of time between flights, we were the last off the plane in Seattle. Tsega was a bit groggy from the Benadryl yet, so the airport medics checked him out before we headed to baggage claim. We had the use of a wheelchair for Tsega until he got his energy back. The customs process took a while, but there were no glitches. Then we gathered our checked luggage since the tickets to Pasco were separate and we had to re-check our luggage at the Horizon ticket counter.

In case of communication challenges with the kids, Trevor and I had the luxury of Amharic passengers on the flight out of Ethiopia, but we knew we were on our own once we left London. We hoped the vocabulary we had picked up in the past week and the handy Amharic dictionary would suffice. Imagine our surprise when the two airport workers at baggage claim in Seattle asked if the children were from Ethiopia. Then they began speaking to the children in Amharic. Before we had gotten to the ticket counter, another airport worker originally from Ethiopia directed us as we collected the baggage. The Lord was reminding us we weren't on our own, after all.

We had a bite to eat after our luggage had been re-checked and we were ready to find the Horizon flight that would be our final take-off and landing of the trip. It was night time again and we had been traveling for 32 hours. What excitement we felt to see the lights at the Pasco airport and the wonderful homecoming which included family and friends. The dream the Lord had planted in Trevor and Jessica's hearts just a few months before was finally coming true. Trevor and Jessica now have six kids, and Ayat is ready to love them all.