

# Emma Anderson

## Our Story – Amazing Grace

Wow... finally a chance to share our story for research. We so desperately want everyone to know what we know and have been given the opportunity to understand about international adoption. With constant media reports on abuses by bad agencies and the misrepresentation that children are better left in orphanages or on the street in their home countries is just devastating to families like ours.

Our family is large. We have our daughter Grace – 20 months old (not her legal name) who joined our family through adoption on December 3<sup>rd</sup> 2009. She has two brothers aged 6 ½ and 5. Her mum & dad (us) and then 9 Aunties and Uncles, 3 god parents, 4 grandparents, 2 great grandparents and 10 first cousins. She is happy, laughs a lot (especially with her brothers), is learning to speak, throws and kicks balls, puts dolls into little bags and carries them around the house and always tries to put shoes on so that we will take her on an outing. She says up peese (up please), ball, dog, dada, mumum, eyes, her brothers names, can roar like a lion, dances like an African tribal dancer (her feet move at an incredible speed and she doesn't wave her arms like our boys did but rocks from the hips and throws her head around), presses every button she can find, hones in on the kitchen if someone is cooking, claps hands, waves at people and even throws tantrums every now and again. Her photo is on every friend and family members' fridge, wall or mantle. She is prayed for daily and people wait for updates via Email, Photo bucket or Skype calls. None of us can get enough of this precious little girl Grace.

One of the most annoying things is people commenting that "oh, she is so lucky you adopted her" or "you must be such generous people". Can't they see that we are the lucky ones? Grace is generously sharing her love and laughter with us. Complete strangers who so desperately wanted a little daughter, granddaughter, niece or cousin. I guess they can't, and they never will. Only those who have been part of an adoption and looked upon their sleeping child the first night they come to your family can really understand. Right then and there, this little child, is your precious baby to love, raise, nurture, teach, guide, play with, laugh with and at times cry with. Children are innocent and naïve about this complicated world – where some mothers have so much to raise their children with, and others have to give up due to sickness or famine. As a mother walks away with shoulders slumped, a dead stare at the ground and complete hopelessness – wondering what will happen to the child that came from her womb – I imagine there are no tears left by this point. This is when you realise that you have been given a gift, a responsibility and a miracle. That is how we felt about adopting Grace. So now our family is complete, she is a part of that and it will never change. Seven months in and I haven't once thought – what have we done. I know it is early days and there will be days and possibly years of questions, doubts and challenges as Grace works through her identity and grows from the 'all believing self-confident' child into an adult that faces the daily reality of being different in a small way. We cannot fix that for her, we cannot make it go away – no matter how much we wish we could. All we can do is teach her that she is special to us, to her extended family and to God. That who she becomes is up to her and anything she wants to know about her history from Ethiopia we will help her to find.

So that is now – June 2010. We are just about to pack up from Hong Kong and head back home to Australia after 2 years living abroad away from our extended family. That is the end of our story. Why Hong Kong, Ethiopia and adoption??? Let us go to the beginning.

## The Decision

December 2007. After having two biological sons and suffering from post natal depression after both of them, my husband and I decided we still wanted to have 3 or 4 children. We wanted more children and there were children out there that needed families so it seemed pretty simple. The altruistic view is – put them together. A very pure approach because loving a child is simple to us. We had no natural bonding moment at birth with our sons – the hormonal imbalance actually created an opposite effect. So we were not worried about that "birth bonding gap". They were children we received and placed in our care by God. I grew to love them more and more each day. Both their good side and their "not so easy to handle" side. Their laughs, tears, wondrous ability to learn and their stubborn refusal to accept things they didn't want to. Children are amazing, and when you have the desire to nurture, to love and the resources to care for them, you can help a child to grow, love, and develop confidence to be a blessing to those around them.

I am an executive manager in a bank and my husband does part time teaching whilst he is the primary care giver to our two boys (an outcome of the post natal depression). I had friends who had adopted a few years earlier and I knew that it took 2 to 3 years. But that was a few years earlier. We filled in our screening forms, attended the 3 day Intercountry adoption seminar in Sydney NSW and walked away depressed – actually I burst into tears. The reason – we wanted to adopt from Ethiopia – but the wait was between 5 and 7 years. By then our boys would be teenagers or close to it and we would be around the 40 mark. I had researched Ethiopia and could not understand how Australia could have the process so messed up. Who were we dealing with in Ethiopia that they could only do 25 or 30 adoptions a year??? It didn't make sense. These are not newborns that we were talking about either, but adoptions for 2 year olds and those with mild special needs and the like. Anyone who has ever been to Ethiopia, worked with an aid agency or orphanage linked with Ethiopia knows that no matter what the press, the government and the agency's tell you, there are tens of thousands of kids between the ages of 1 and 10 that are living in orphanages or on the street without family contact. There are 4 million orphans but that number includes children up to 18 and who still have other family contact. I don't know the exact number that have no family contact or who are under 10 but even if it was only 20% of those orphans that is 800,000 children.

We thought long and hard after the briefing about what we should do. After a few weeks we had determined that we move to one of two alternatives. 1) Adopt from Bolivia as the list was short – but we risked political turmoil stopping the process at any time. 2) Go down the path of permanent foster care. In our eyes the latter was the same as adoption. The child is a ward of the state and we are their carer until the age of 18. We worked through our concerns about how contact with the birth mother and siblings may confuse the family balance and saw this as a real alternative.

A few weeks later I travelled to Asia (Singapore and Hong Kong) for work for 5 days. A job offer within my company came up and at first I knocked it back immediately. I didn't want to leave Australia for crowded and polluted Hong Kong. Not to mention the culture of working long hours etc. Plus we were about to start adding to our family – one way or another. For some reason when I got home I mentioned it to my husband and he agreed with me. But neither of us could get the opportunity out of our heads. Then I "googled" adoption in Hong Kong. I had known a colleague who worked in Singapore for 3 years so that they could adopt 2 children from Cambodia. They had given up on the Australian process a few

years earlier. The more I researched the more hopeful I got that if we moved to Hong Kong we could adopt 2 girls from Hong Kong or mainland China without the expense and long waiting lines back in Australia. We also wouldn't be pushing people who could not have kids further down the line back in Australia. We always felt guilty about getting in line with people who couldn't have children for one reason or another – as we were fortunate to have our two happy and healthy boys. These kids that we could adopt locally would never be on the assigned list to Australia. So we packed up and took a 2 year contract with my company in Hong Kong, with a firm plan to return to Australia with two daughters to join our two sons and complete our family.

Two things happened which changed that plan. The first was we found out that the adoption in Hong Kong may not be as smooth as we originally hoped. Yes, after 12 months we could apply to adopt. Yes people had been matched within one or two months of having the application approved and finalised. BUT – it isn't a waiting list process but a matching process. Best fit between family and child each month. We already had 2 children and neither parent had a Chinese background. We were told it could be a long wait. We monitored the Asia Expat website and the trail of discussions on the adoption topic. People were waiting for 8 or 9 months for their 2<sup>nd</sup> child and still had not been matched. As the reality dawned on me that we could go home without a daughter I decided to expand our options.

- 1) Mainland China: The process was fast once your paperwork was approved. But they were 2 years behind on processing applications. That was outside our timeframe.
- 2) Cambodia: We found contacts at an orphanage and a lawyer to work with – but the government had frozen all application processes because they had to appear to be doing something about child trafficking. I agree they had to do something – but as one of the poorest countries in the world and children dying in orphanages on a daily basis, freezing the processing was hardly a way to crack down on the inconceivably evil people who take advantage of poorer workers and desperate mothers to take newborns away from their family. The time frame used to be 12 weeks. Now it is unknown and the process has been frozen for 12 months.
- 3) Singapore: No – we weren't living there.
- 4) Vietnam – We were still trying to find a contact
- 5) Ethiopia – Initially we could not find any agency's to work with us. The US ones can only work with US citizens and the Australian one could only work through the Australian government program – and besides he was 5 years behind anyway.

At this point I contacted the Intercountry Adoption staff in NSW Australia, asking if they knew of any organisations that had worked with previous expat Australian's adoption. Of course I was told that they could not help me at all as I was outside Australia.

### **Choosing Ethiopia**

During in all this time of dead ends I continued to plough through paper work at night. Getting police checks, ordering copies of documents and so on and so forth. In my usual googling madness for information I came across Australianexpat adoptions yahoo group. I joined up and found an Australian in Dubai who had adopted from Ethiopia through an independent facilitator. It was the first glimmer of hope I had had in weeks. I was ecstatic. I contacted the lady who wasn't all that keen to do another Australian (because of the complexities in our own system) but agreed to help me.

The ups and downs in paperwork were huge. Because we were not in any program or paying an agent we had to do everything ourselves. From organising a lady to fly down from Beijing to do our home study, to finding contacts in the Australian Consulate in Kenya and Hong Kong and then an Ethiopian Consulate to complete the stamps on our dossier. The Ethiopian office in Hong Kong only did visa's, the one in Beijing was months behind and were not sure if they could help. The light at the end of the tunnel was when I contacted the Ethiopian Consulate to Australia. He had never heard about Australian expats adopting and was happy to learn more and authenticated all our documents from the Ethiopian side of things. So I DHL'd our stamped, binded and authenticated documents to Melbourne Australia the day before I flew out to Ethiopia to meet with the facilitator.

So that is how we ended up with an Ethiopian adoption.

### **1 not 2**

Growing up with 2 sisters I valued the benefit of having another girl of similar age in the house. I also watched my brother struggle as the only boy in the family and he was really different to Dad. My husband didn't have a brother but he had a best friend (whose mother was his mother's best friend) and that was his substitute brother. When we considered that our daughter would be a different race as well as a different gender to the two boys, we decided that having a sister going through the same things would add a level of comfort and familiarity that I couldn't provide no matter how hard I tried.

On that basis we asked for our Home Study to assess us on the suitability of adopting two girls at the same time. They did not need to be sisters by blood – after all they don't have my blood or their brothers DNA so I didn't think it was particularly relevant for them to share DNA. They would be sharing an adoption story, a race and the difficulties of managing thick curly hair. Our Home Study lady was coming from Beijing so we were a bit concerned. China is after all the one child policy country and not exactly pro-Christian. We were trying to become a family of 6 and cannot hide (nor would we want to) our Christian faith. But providence prevailed and we got a lovely Chinese American lady who had 5 children of her own – and she was a Christian. So we were approved for 2 little girls between ages 1 and 4.

### **Doing Ethiopia on my own**

On the 25<sup>th</sup> September I went to the airport with my Ethiopia Lonely Planet Guide Book and my small Amharic phrase book. I had booked a small guest house for \$10AUD a night that a travel site had reviewed as small, clean and simple. I was headed for 14 days in Ethiopia on my own. I packed only a few pieces of clothing but I had a second suitcase packed full of donations from the office such as medical items, pens, stickers, scissors, socks, books and school bags. I was going to travel up to Bahir Dar to a charity organisation called the Grace Centre. They are Australians and do an amazing job at preventing the orphanage crisis by helping single mums keep their kids and provide western standard day care for free for over 400 children.

But my first job was to find the facilitator. I had an address emailed to me and luckily my driver was able to locate the simple two story house. I banged on the big metal gates and was taken inside. The facilitator was not there yet so I went into the ground floor area where there were 5 small rooms. 4 of them were wall to wall full of cots and old baby car seats that children and babies were lying in. There were 6 or 7 older kids having an English lesson in the courtyard as they were going to Belgium (aged 4 up to 8). These kids slept on two single beds in one of the rooms. The stench was very strong and when I rolled up my sleeves to help by changing a nappy I saw why. The 5 women were doing a good job – but they had about 40 babies/toddlers in the house. No soap, sanitiser, baby wipes or disposable nappies. The children eat a diet that has enough protein and iron, but it is spicy food and lacks fruit and vegetables. Hence the atrocious nappies. Having had 2 boys and loads of nieces and nephews, changing nappies was nothing new and I had seen some bad ones. BUT nothing can prepare you for these kids. They get changed on a rotational basis, not when they need it. A nappy change equates to a complete change of clothes. A nappy is some sheeting cloth with a torn up plastic bag cleverly tied over the outside to reduce the leakage - unsuccessfully. All of this comes off and goes into a pile on the floor next to the one change table that every child is changed on. Two poor women have the unpleasant job of occasionally removing these out to the courtyard where they hand wash the material and plastic and hang them up to dry.

Why is it so important to tell you this? By doing my adoption process and physically being in the orphanages, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Court Room, the Passport offices, the register of births and the immigration department – I know how the process works. The stories I hear that come from the Australian Agent – don't equate at all to my personal experience.

I then met the facilitator who took me upstairs to her office (there were 2 offices upstairs). I was told to take a gift of chocolates or Chinese tea or something from Hong Kong so I had brought both. She took them, gave me a stiff smile and said – do you have your paperwork? I pulled out my copy of the Dossier and told her that I was collecting the original authenticated one from DHL that afternoon as it had been couriered by the Ethiopian Consulate in Australia. I wouldn't describe the woman as warm as she flipped open her book and started scanning down names. She informed me she didn't have sisters. I said that was ok, they didn't need to be related. But that was not an option for her. Not sure why, as the American Agents do it all the time. Anyway, after a big sigh she looked up at a young lady who worked with her and spoke in Amharic. This amazing, intelligent young Ethiopian woman with perfect English then told me they had 2 malnourished girls around about 11 months and one of them came from the same region as a 20day old baby with a cleft lip (not palate). What they wanted to do was to pass the baby and the malnourished girl through the system as though they were sisters. Uncomfortable at this proposition I asked again – surely you have 2 girls down there of an older age. I was happy to take one malnourished and one of the other children – but we had specifically agreed not to adopt a new born baby. Firstly, our experience of post natal depression didn't leave fond memories of that age and secondly, the demand for them is high from couples who have not been able to have their own children. After an agonising night, praying, emailing my mother and sister, calling my husband and writing in my diary I finally decided that it didn't feel right. I had to go back the next day and explain that I would not take the 20 day old baby, but would be happy to have both the 'malnourished girls'. I asked to meet them, but one was at the hospital as she was in a bad way. I never met her.

The other little girl was Grace. She was sitting on a mat picking up crumbs from the ground next to her. This place was not an orphanage as such. It is a transition home. Grace had skin hanging off her bones, a bloated stomach and a blank stare. She had been found at a police station in Agaro (Jimma region) at 9 months, weighing only 3.5kg. By now at 11 months she weighed 6kg. They had fed her an egg every day, given her formula and some medicine with vitamins. Apparently they also wormed her, but judging by the 15cm worm that I pulled out of her mouth in December after a coughing fit-- the worming was not effective. I agreed straight away to adopt her and picked her up for a cuddle. There was another little girl that I bonded with straight away, but her photo had just been sent to an expat couple living in Dubai. Again I was handed the 20day old baby and the lady kept lifting up her lip to show me that it wasn't really very bad. I explained again, that my decision had absolutely nothing to do with her lip. It is a really simple medical procedure in the west to fix it – so that was never going to be an issue. But it was the age, and the process of presenting them together as though they were sisters when they were not. It helped that I knew the little girl would easily be adopted by someone else as she was so young and otherwise very healthy.

I went up to visit the Grace Centre in Bahi Dar, a great charity which provides child care aiming to keep mothers and their children together. It was such a positive and different experience. The children were clean and healthy and they even had their own medical clinic and nurse. Education for mothers and children was so central to what they were doing and health standards were on par with the west. The children had music corners, toy corners and general learning areas, in addition to outdoor play areas with balls and skipping ropes. This is how child care should be done. They also have a small transitional care facility for those cases where mothers' decide they do not want to keep their children even with the support of Grace Centre. These children are fed into the Australian program or adopted by other families.

I was so pleased to read the other week that Grace Centre will now be registered as an orphanage and be the sole source of children for adoption to Australia. They will be well cared for and their paper work in order. It will also free up their critical charity funding for the Grace Centre as adoption fees can cover the cost of the transitional care (short term orphanage).

I returned to Addis Ababa to finalise the paperwork. It took a lot of persistence but I did get a copy of the police report prior to signing the contract. I wanted to be sure I wasn't going to be appearing on 60minutes or one of those programs that find the unusual cases of a child that wasn't really up for adoption – not that they have one yet – they just keep alluding to it. So I left Ethiopia signing a contract for Grace.

### **Ethiopia Final Trip**

I returned home and waited. I also sent photos around to all our family. Three weeks later I received an email and phone call with our court date. It was 3 ½ weeks away. So we booked flights for my mum to come to Hong Kong and then for my husband, 2 boys and my mum to go to Ethiopia (via Dubai). We arrived in Ethiopia on December 1<sup>st</sup> in the evening. The court date was December 3<sup>rd</sup>. On December 2<sup>nd</sup> we went to Ministry Of Women's Affairs to confirm that they were presenting a letter of recommendation to the court the following day. Their computer system was down. So we came back a few hours later. They told us to go home and just find out at court the next day. We knew something was wrong. My mum stayed back at the house with our two sons whilst we sat outside MOWA on an old broken leather lounge for nearly 4 hours praying and talking. Eventually we saw the man we needed to speak to. We went inside with the helpful lady that worked for our facilitator and things did not look good. They kept saying over and over – you are Australian you need to go through the Australian Agent. I explained that we had this conversation when I first came to MOWA and it took four visits but eventually you said "ok". All I had was their word. There is no documentation process except what is required for the courts. I was told that lady had changed departments and now they were saying no. I couldn't believe it. The day before I was to take Grace home and we were being told it wasn't going to happen. We begged and pleaded, showed them the letter from the Australian Government saying we could adopt outside the Australian program and that Grace would have a visa. Then they started on with "but you have to be outside Australia for 2 years". I explained that our law is one year. You see, if I was living in Ethiopia I would have to be there 2 years before I could adopt as a local.

At this point I started crying, I had held it together for so long. I had worked so hard. My family had supported us so much and now, with my mum ready to meet her granddaughter, and my sons ready to meet their sister and my husband ready to hold his daughter we were being told no. I thought – how is this in the best interest of the child. To leave her in a place where she is malnourished, sick, unloved with no stimulation – just because the man in front of me was having a bad day. There was no legal reason, no practical reason. Every excuse he came up with was invalid and did not apply legally to us. I had been so careful, so particular, so patient, so determined and now this. When he saw my tears and my husband pleaded with him, he reached out and shook my husbands' hand and said "go tomorrow, it will be ok, but not again".

We left, not completely convinced that everything would be alright, but hopeful nonetheless. At this point I knew that we could not go through the process again as they would never approve us a second time. We then had to go and pick up Grace and take her to the doctor to get her medical done by someone recognised by the Australian Consulate in Kenya so that we could finalise her adoption visa. Blood tests and the like were done (again – she had already been cleared for Aids and other related diseases but by a different doctor) and we were prescribed some medicine for her croup. Her breathing was very laboured.

It was a restless night as we worried what would happen at court and as I accepted that this would be the only little girl I would have. There would be no second daughter.

We arrived at court all dressed up (including mum and the boys). Unfortunately they had left us off the list that day so we had to sit there for 2 ½ hours in the dust on a wooden bench in the sun waiting until the end so they could add us on. But that is all a blur, we went in and 45 seconds later we left with the stamp on the paper and the adoption was complete. We raced back to the orphanage and took Gracie back to where we were staying. She finally got good formula, rice cereal, drinking water and was allowed to crawl around and play with toys. Finally she was ours.

### **The Paperwork**

We had the weekend together with no appointments other than a French doctor as Grace was still very sick. We were prescribed a lot of things but the doctor admitted that the quality of medicine here was really poor and to get her to another doctor as soon as we got back to Hong Kong or Australia.

The court date was Thursday. On Monday we had the translated court documents and this is where I see a huge difference in our facilitator's efficiency and the Australian representative. On Monday we went to the birth registry and got our birth certificates – we just had to sit outside for 30 minutes and they prepared them on the spot. We then went and got them officiated (stamped) in another office – another 30 minutes of waiting. We then went to the Department of Immigration and applied for passports, had photos taken, left the paperwork etc. All of this took about 2 hours. We were told our passport would be ready to pick up the next day. I went back the next afternoon and collected the passport. We then had all the documents translated and sent off by courier to the Australian Embassy in Kenya. So it was only 1 week from court hearing to complete documentation.

We went up to Bahi Dar to the Grace Centre again to give more donations and to play with the children. It was also nice to get up by the lake for a few days away from Government offices. We returned on the Monday, Scott flew to Kenya on Tuesday to collect the passport with the visa. There had been a problem with delivery but they eventually sorted it out whilst my husband had a nervous wait, sure he would miss his 6pm flight home. But the lady there was brilliant and got it all done and Scott returned 10pm Tuesday night. Wednesday I went to the Beijing embassy to get a visa entry to Hong Kong. I completed the paperwork in the morning and came back at 4pm to collect it. We were on a flight at 11am the next morning.

All up – two and a half weeks. 1 week for all the Ethiopian documentation and 1 week for the Australian Visa and Hong Kong Visa. Admittedly the Australian visa application process had been started prior to the court date and the medical was done the day before. But it shows that the process should not take months.

### **Our Family**

We flew Ethiopia, Dubai, Hong Kong then Australia. Just in time for mum's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday party that night. My job had been to get mum back for her big party that my other two sisters were planning. Mum arrived tired but happy to be a grandma again – the 8<sup>th</sup> grandchild. Everyone embraced us at once. Concerned about my health (I had spent a week in hospital when I returned from Ethiopia the first time due to some parasite I picked up) and Grace's. She was a tiny bundle with heavy breathing and big eyes. A big smile came across her face regularly and we kept her cuddled up inside away from the crowds and cool breeze.

The next morning we had her at the doctors and were prescribed a strong medicine for croup. Three days later her breathing had improved so much we let her crawl around outside a lot and she just looked so much more alive. Then it was off to the paediatrician who we knew had worked with African children in Uganda so was experienced with their common health problems. He was quiet happy with her and just wanted her tested for vitamin D and Iron deficiencies. He was right, she came up low on both and so some more medicine was prescribed.

We had a baptism in our church back home with our family and friends and the minister I have known for over 15 years. It was a special day, full of tears of joy and relief. Everyone was happy, full of love and questions. We started raising funds and goods for the Grace Centre and set everybody straight on Grace's story (there were some weird versions going around).

We have settled back in Hong Kong for the last 6 months. Watching our incredible daughter grow physically, emotionally and intellectually at incredible speed. She did 18 months of development in 6 months. Amazing.

### **Conclusion and the sad truth.**

I write this as we prepare to relocate back to Australia permanently as my two year contract is up. This is our adoption story and it has a happy ending. We love our daughter and would have, no matter what problems she may have come with. We have been blessed by her good personality, good health and amazing mind. But there is a sad truth that often hits me as I watch her play. There is another little girl that sits on a mat in an orphanage picking up crumbs. Another baby that dies from croup or asthma in a transition home. A little boy who turns 5 in an orphanage and his time for international adoption considered to be over. No love, no toys, no hygiene, no education. Will she survive or develop a disability from malnutrition? Will he grow up angry or despondent not knowing his worth? Probably.

I would love to come back to Australia and adopt again from Ethiopia. But I can't. Why??? Because a process that takes the Belgium facilitators 4 months from enquiry to completion takes our lawyer a year. While my facilitators push through 300 adoptions a year, the Australian facilitator says he can only do 30. While there are over 1 million orphans under the age of 5 in Ethiopia, the Australian facilitator says orphanages want big fees.

This is wrong. I paid only \$5000 USD for the adoption process in Ethiopia including transitional care. Plus another \$500 USD in fees for passports, and translation. So how can these two women complete 10 times as many adoptions, for half the cost in Ethiopia? They know what they are doing. You ring the office and they are not there. They are out on the road. Visiting orphanages, building relationships with MOWA and the immigration offices so that there is trust and efficiency in their work.

As I said earlier, I am relieved that the Australian program has started again and is using the Grace Centre. However I do not believe there is a good reason to avoid all other orphanages and so severely restrict the number of adoptions to Australians each year. The Australian facilitator charges too much money for too little work. He needs to leverage better connections and ensure that the children are being placed into their loving homes faster so that they develop normally, instead of spending up to 9 months in transitional care after they have been matched. Adoption in Ethiopia is not simple. I know, I have sat on the leather sofa for days on end. But I was a foreigner with no experience and no connections. I worked with a young lady who does not have a law degree but has a strong work ethic. She loves the children and cares where they go and how long they have to wait. I have watched her communication style. There are no airs and graces about her. I hope this latest problem with the Australian program improves the Australian facilitator's process and rumoured attitude. If not, let us find another one.

### **Recommendations**

1. Find another facilitator (not a lawyer) who can follow the process of running around like other facilitators do. Once a child is allocated to a family, it only takes 4 to 6 weeks for a court date and then 2 weeks to finalise paperwork. It is a daily occurrence in many agencies.
2. Build a relationship with another orphanage as well as the Grace Centre. Andrew & Dee at the Grace Centre try to keep families together – which is the right thing to do. Hence they have a limited number of children available for adoption. There are many private orphanages that are nervous about whom they deal with. The Australian government, or Andrew & Dee from the Grace Centre could build this relationship with trust and authority.
3. Lift the restrictions on the health of a child. Asthma, croup, cleft palates and malnutrition are all easily managed with good medical care in Australia.
4. Second the Australian Consulate representatives to Ethiopia one week out of every two until the backlog of applications are processed. This should expedite the movement of paperwork between courts, immigration and the Australian consulate.
5. Encourage adoption of children age 2 to 5 instead of only focussing on newborns. Giving a shorter waiting time – match based on children in need. Not the waiting list.