

"Adopted" Country Leads to Adopted Son

By Karen Campbell

In 1999 Houston sent a team to Ethiopia to look into a mission partnership between Union Baptist Association and believers there. In 2007 "partnership" took on a whole new meaning as Ethiopia came to Houston.



Guy and Kelli Caskey were on UBA's first team to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, helping to determine if a longterm partnership between mission work there and churches here was possible and God-directed. The team agreed that plenty of connections existed. The Caskeys agreed that the trip changed their lives.

Initially, they were ready to return as fulltime ministers on site. But after prayer and seeking God's guidance, they realized that their efforts could be multiplied if they encouraged Crossroads Community, the church they lead, to become active participants in the English as a Second Language, AIDS education, microbusiness and church planter training that was being established.

Since the beginning of the partnership more than 80 volunteers from Crossroads have traveled the 16,000+ miles round trip and paid out more than \$2500 per trip to become not just participants but now leaders in the ministries there.

Eventually, Kelli took on the role of the volunteer coordinator for the partnership and arranged flights, conducted training, and ensured that every individual going from the various churches in Houston knew that this mission trip was about crossing cultures and investing in lives, not simply a tourist stop.

Guy took the lead in the church planting efforts and with indigenous leaders there they have seen more than 300 churches begin.

But 8 years ago, God was also setting another story in motion.

Besufekad was born. His parents were poor and during his infancy they both died due to illnesses they contracted in the harsh environment. While Besufekad's family wanted to take care of him, they realized their limitations and gave him over to an orphanage. They kept contact, but there was never the possibility that his uncles' or aunt's lives would improve to the point they could take on the responsibility of another child.

Besufekad was well cared for in the simple facility.

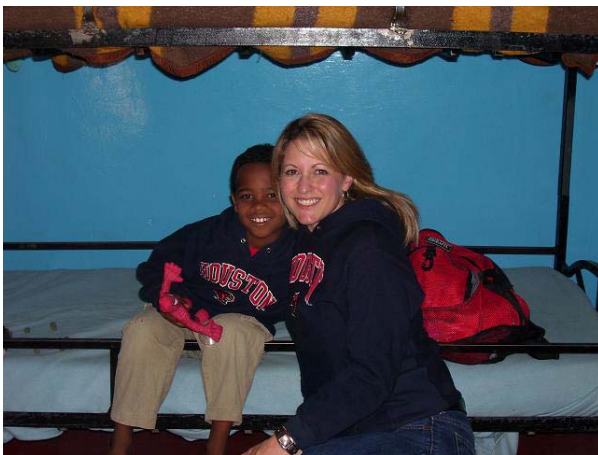
Meanwhile, the Caskeys were praying for direction. Guy's mother Diana Caskey had already made their family connections to Ethiopia stronger by committing to serve as a volunteer missionary there. But the couple was struggling with whether or not they too should invest even greater in their adopted country. They wondered if their adopted country could see fit to share an adopted son.

They spoke with missionaries there who had also adopted. They researched options on the web. Soon they were led to Adoption Advocates International who had set up the orphanage where Besufekad now lived. Kelli liked them because when she requested references from other parents the organization posted an open invite for input and because they don't provide a tour guide of the country for adopting parents (something the Caskeys did not need).

Finances had to be considered as well as legal concerns. The task seemed long and arduous but for this family of four – Guy, Kelli, Rachel and Candace – prayer and seeking God's direction were nothing new. They researched, they waited and they were rewarded finally with the news that Besufekad was waiting as well for them.

Since Diana was in the country, she began visiting. Letters and photos were exchanged. The church even sponsored an "adoption shower" with a cake that included a superimposed son photographically included in the family as part of the decorations.

Then came the day that Kelli would travel to Ethiopia to bring him home.



She wrote the following upon her arrival:

I arrived in Ethiopia late Sunday night with all suitcases in tow...thankfully. Nanny and I went to the orphanage the next morning for our scheduled appointment with the director and social worker. Both were not present. They had other meetings. Needless to say this made our meeting Besufekad a little different than planned but since Nanny has been with Besu every weekend it helped. Besu knew we were coming and he saw us at the gate to the orphanage. He ran to get his University of Houston t-shirt on that we had sent him in his

"Welcome Packet".

As we entered the orphanage I saw him for the first time face to face. He seemed so little to me but still had the greatest SMILE. He ran straight to me and gave me a hug. To break the nervousness for both of us I gave him a U of H sweat shirt that matched the one I was wearing and a Spider man toy. It was a hit. All of the other kids gathered around and wanted to touch it and play with it. They had fun. He took me to his room and to show me around the orphanage. It is a bleak place. Nothing to play with except a basketball, soccer ball and some playground equipment. When it rains they all gather in one room to watch TV. Despite this, the children seem well

cared for, loved and in good condition. The best you could expect.

Besufekad was amazing the whole time we were together. We had a few episodes of depression or withdrawal but over all he was affectionate, loving and a very caring child. We had a great time discovering things together. Nanny and I were able to take Besu and 10 other boys from his class swimming at the Hilton Hotel. It was worth every penny it cost to see them have so much fun, to see them outside of the orphanage and the dirt. They had a great time.

We had many highlights. Getting acquainted with Nanny's dog "Heffy" (Ethiopians typically don't like dogs), going shopping for the first time in his life, wrestling on green grass, playing with sidewalk chalk, coloring, sending emails to his dad and sisters waiting back home. Oh and did I mention he took over my camera and MP3 Player?

The difficult day was a farewell gathering with his two uncles. I really dreaded the possible emotional outcome for Besufekad but I knew it was worth it. I think it gave Besu closure and helps him know that they blessed him and his new family. They were very gracious and simply too poor to care for him. They were both single and single men in Ethiopia are unable to care for a child. They were able to provide Besu with 3 simple pictures of his family to bring back to America. He asked to see them last night and handled his pain so beautifully.

Since we have been home he has been amazing. He has slept in his own bed every night without getting up or without fear, he has been easy to feed. Thankfully he likes really healthy things which makes it easy. He loves peanut butter which his dad is glad about. He continues to be affectionate and SMILEY. I had a lady stop me in SAMS and tell me what a beautiful smile he has. He went to church the very next day and they had a party for him. They had many "sweets" which is his one major weakness. He felt very welcomed. Candace and I went to his class at church with him the first week and he went on his own this week. He has already made friends at church. He has been to Wal-mart, Target, SAMS, to watch Candace play softball and to her swim party. He got in the pool over his head and I had to jump in with clothes and all to get him out. He is NOT afraid of the water. Not sure that is a good thing but on the other hand it is.

He can't wait to play soccer. We will sign him up this weekend. His English is SO MUCH BETTER than I ever imagined. He says that Guy is an "A" student in Amharic and I am a "B" student. I am not good at remembering words but I am trying. He is an "A plus" student in learning English.

We are giving him some home schooling packets each day and we have hired a tutor that will start coming to the house this week to help him with reading comprehension.

We know that we have our work cut out for us. The boy has tons of energy. He loves his sisters and they love him. He is enjoying learning how to ride his bike and scooter. He loves to swim, jump on the trampoline, water guns and watching movies.

He is an amazing boy. We KNOW that God has made this possible. We prayed each step of the way and are continuing to pray for Besufekad's adjustment, grief and

transition. He has a lot of things to still face and deal with in his life time. We are trusting God with all of the details as he is Faithful.

Three months after this initial report was drafted by Kelli, Besufekad was being tutored in math and English and learning about time and money. In an informal interview at Chic-fil-A, he offered the following assessment of his new homeland, "I like my family, food, toys, clothes ... EVERYTHING."

During the lunchtime prayer, Kelli and her now three children asked God to help Besufekad's uncles, grandfather and cousins.

The incredibly active young boy exited the table early to burn some energy on the playground while his sisters offered observations on the changes within the family system.

Candace, who is now the middle child instead of the youngest, acknowledged that it was "sort of weird -- annoying even, having a little brother in the house." Since the lunchtime meeting, she's come to terms with her new brother's tendency to stomp rather than walk down the stairs at home and even engages him in play when she initially would have opted to read in her room.

Fourteen-year-old Rachel has taken over some of the caretaking role with her siblings and finds splitting up disagreements one of her duties. But she's incredibly supportive and strongly defends the adoption. "It gives people a chance that other people don't have -- to have a family that he didn't have," she noted when asked about her feelings on adoption across cultural lines.

Kelli readily accepts that problems could arise in the future given that Besufekad has left behind family and culture but she's ready to face them -- when they arise.

"I read so many stories on a Yahoo support group I am a part of that I was terrified. I thought, 'What have I done? Can I love him? Can I give him the love he needs?' I read stuff about attachment disorders and worried and then I just stopped. I realized I'd read about it if he does but otherwise, I didn't need to focus on that."

As for concerns that he might lose his culture entirely, Kelli almost had to laugh, "We don't have to do anything extra. His culture is part of who we are. We go to Ethiopia. We pray for Ethiopia. Our house has things from Ethiopia all around. We eat the food. We practice the language. He can't get away from Ethiopia because we aren't giving it up. It's part of our culture."

Currently, Guy speaks Amharic, the language of Ethiopia to Besufekad and he responds in English.

As for balancing the attention among the three children, Kelli has a balanced perspective. "There are seasons of life in all families. For a time it might be all about Rachel, then all about Candace and now it's about Besufekad. We actually have more of an issue with other people making it all about him."

Guy offers that this adoption, while exciting for him as a father, is also a matter of obedience.

"It's got to be more than 'they will know we are Christians by our shirts,'" said the outspoken minister who often challenges the Crossroad congregations with his Caskey-isms. "This is another aspect of our lives, to put up or shut up. We are doing our parts in having big enough vision to think small by caring for the widows and orphans."

The Caskey household has often included young adults who are under the discipling tutelage of Guy and Kelli. They even purchased a larger home to house these church planters and missionaries-in-the-making.

Guy delights in the idea that one of spiritual sons will now also be his own adopted son, "It's a lot of fun," he said laughing. "Besufekad has been a joy and just another opportunity to pour my life into a young man. I know he will be a man of courage, initiative and passion. To have my own son to invest in is truly a joy."

For a more in-depth look at Crossroads or other UBA churches [click here](#) for background papers describing various ministries.