

# Strong Shoulders

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This book contains the stories of eight children whom I have encountered in my last 12 years of work with vulnerable children and children orphaned by AIDS. The “Strong Shoulders” referred to in the title are the shoulders of children who are infected and/or affected by HIV. They carry the burdens of hunger, loneliness, grief, and ailing health. Having witnessed their loved ones suffer terrible sickness and death, children must have strong shoulders to survive in an atmosphere of continued stigma, misconceptions, and discrimination.

These stories will give people the opportunity to see how children orphaned by AIDS are stigmatized by the very people who should protect them. We see children in the book that are forbidden to exercise their childhood and to play with their peer groups. Some are left locked alone in a room crying. What hurts my heart most is to see families torn apart – both emotionally and physically - when a parent is lost to AIDS.

Communities need to understand that these children are our responsibility. We must come together to protect the rights of children and to dispel the many myths that surround HIV/AIDS. Working with these children, I have seen the best and the worst in humanity. I tell the stories not to dwell on negative events, but because people need to know how cruelly some of these children are treated.

Like the first flowers in spring, children renew the world. They are the reflection of innocence and have the power to bring smiles to our faces. Children pull our hearts towards kindness. It is preserve own humanity that we need to protect all rights of children: the right to shelter, the right to identity, the right to adoption, the right to play, the right to be informed about their family situation, and the right to access health and education, and protection.

If we unite our efforts to help these children take one step forward, we can bring the whole world one step closer to peace and justice.

## JERUSALEM

A woman came to Hope for Children. She was a very thin woman and her clothes were dirty and had many holes. Her face was so desperate – she looked to me like she didn't even want to live anymore. She told me that her husband died in a car accident, leaving her with three children. She couldn't afford her rent or feed her children, couldn't send them to school. She had decided to be a prostitute so she could help her children, and had begun going out with men to get money. She took a second husband, one of her clients when she was a prostitute, because she had become pregnant by him and was fed up with being a prostitute. This man was a day laborer and he agreed to marry her but he didn't want her children. She decided to marry this man and give up her children. I asked her how she could do this and she said, "What kind of mother am I? I can't provide food, clothes, school, I can't help them when they are sick, they are roaming around to beg for food in the community. I decided to give them up to someone who could care for them." She gave her children to three different people in the Western part of Ethiopia while she lived in Addis. I wondered if these kids would come together again. Are they ever going to now each other? The youngest one was only two, will he even imagine that he has any siblings to lean on in this world?

The woman's second husband died from TB just after she gave birth to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is blind, deaf, paralyzed in her arms and legs, and cannot eat because her throat is too narrow. When I met, she was 2 ½ years old and bone thin. Her mother said, "I hate this child, even God hates her. He doesn't even want to take her to His heaven or even his hell." The mother told me that seven times she had tried to give the child to hyenas. Each time, the hyenas chased the woman off before she could drop off the child.

For four years, Jerusalem lived only on her mother's breast milk. The mother carried her everyday everywhere. After the second husband died, the woman washed clothes in the community and kept Jerusalem at her feet. The girl was very unhappy and cried often, screaming loudly in a high pitch. She was in constant pain from meningitis. She never stopped screaming unless she was asleep. The neighbors could not accept this screaming, and first the woman lost clients then her neighbors pushed her out of the community because the girl was so loud. They would not allow her to put her clothes on the community drying line. She made her own drying line but because she had no pines, the clothes were always falling off the drying line. When this happened, her neighbors would pick them up with a stick because they knew this woman had "the virus" because she was so thin and her baby was so sick.

When she told me about this, I was very sad. I cried. I noticed that as the mother talked, the girl stroked her mother's face. "Please," I said, this child knows you. You are the only person in the world for her. If you give her to a hyena, what kind of live will you live? What kind of sleep will you have?" At the same time, I did not blame the mother; I knew how desperate she was. "What can I do?" she replied. "Please don't blame me. I can't get work because of her." The tie between mother and child is the greatest human bond, but even AIDS can cut this bond.

We didn't have money to give her to feed herself and the baby, or to cover rent. I went to Fasika Pastry which was located near our office. I knew the owners to be very kind. I told

the story to Wizero Fasika and her husband, and they immediately agreed to help. They asked that I bring them to the women that night. We took food with us. When we arrived, we saw that she was asleep next to the latrine, the only place where she was allowed to rent space. The latrine had the worst kind of smell and the mother and child had no mattresses to sleep on. Jerusalem slept on a carton. There was no electricity and the room was only 2 meters by 2 meters in size. Fasika had also brought some clothes for the mother. She promised to help the mother take care of Jerusalem until either of them died. The mother was very happy and she immediately started eating the food we had brought.

The next day she came to Hope for Children in her new clothes. Here she knew she would be accepted and could make friends. Jerusalem made played with the other children. Eventually, the community built her a small hut in the bush for herself and her daughter. The woman was growing weaker while Jerusalem was going stronger. She could no longer carry her daughter on her back. She had to leave Jerusalem alone in the hut for 12 hours every day by herself so she could work. Sometimes Jerusalem fell off the bed, which was .5 meters high, and she would become bruised. She could not lift herself and would lie on the floor until her mother returned home.

One day I visited them with a friend and found they were both sick. The mother could not lift herself up from her bed. She had a bottle of water and chick pea powder by her and when she felt hungry she mixed the two and that was what she and Jerusalem ate. They were thinner than I had ever seen them. The mother and I cried together. They couldn't help each other and they couldn't help themselves. I said to the mother, "You cannot take care of the child and you cannot take care of yourself, isn't it better if we take you to Mother Teresa Home?" She said "Ok, that's fine." So we took her, but mother and Jerusalem were not allowed to stay in the same room. Children were housed in the kids quarter and the mother had to go into hospital area. This same mother who had once wanted to give Jerusalem to the hyenas cried when she was separated from her daughter. She asked me, "Who do you think will die first, me or my child?"

When I visited Jerusalem, the MT Sister told me that she missed her mother very much. She was touching everyone's face trying to find her mother's face. She touched every new person's face, crying. She died crying, looking for her mom. The mother had died 15 days before that.

In my heart I know that Jerusalem and her mother suffered so much more because of the stigma in our society. Jerusalem died searching for her mother's face, and the mother died cursing herself. The community that used to take coffee with her and share festivals with her had pushed her aside. I know the emotional suffering caused by stigma is worse than the physical suffering caused by AIDS. For the physical suffering there are doctors and periods of relief, but the emotional suffering that stigma brings is relentless.

## Tariku Fisseha

Ethiopia expelled 77,000 Eritreans in 1998. Tariku is a 1.5 year old child. His mother is a university grad and is working at Tikur Abay company. She got sick and started living with her granny. The granny came to me and told me that her daughter is very sick. Before I came to visit her, she came to tell me that her daughter is dead. I went to see the condition of her home. There was a malnourished 1.5 yearold that was there, he must have cried for a long time. He was sobbing, his legs and arms were thin and his belly is big. He was too heavy though for her to carry.

When we went to the house, as she unlocked the door, she called out to him, "My lion boy! We are here. Yewoinshet is with me."

"Until he dies, and God knows who will die first, I will keep him in my arms.

(She was going to be expelled) I can't be ready to leave Ethiopia until"

Doesn't the boy have a father?

"No, because he has an Eritrean father."

....

His grandmother swore that she is a member of her own family because he is a miniature version of his father. There is no way to deny this is his child. It is only

\*\*She is switching voices back and forth here.\*\*

I went to kebele and reported that

I went back to the office and wanted to adopt the child. When other people saw this child, saw the emaciated body, they said, "no, you don't want to have this child. Maybe he has AIDS." I wanted to have the baby's blood tested. At that time, it is very difficult to have children tested because he is illegal.

Now I was sure that I could get the papers from the kebele office. I was paying contract taxi all the time because it always needed immediate attention. I didn't want the grandmother to leave the child in there. I didn't want people to be confused. I didn't want people to...

I just imagined the boy in the first position I saw him. I had to pay anything for that. So, when I went to the area administration office, I told them, "what kind of woman are you? We can't give a paper for Eritrean boy. You better go quietly out otherwise something bad might happen to you."

He is coming from my only child.

The kebele didn't respond to her. "Mama, please leave. We know you are in trouble." The man felt pity for her but he couldn't do anything. I was carrying the child in case they were compelled to write the paper for him on the site. As we were walking, he was looking back and forth at me, then at his granny, then at me.

The lady was so clever. She took the child around Golan Mikael, at the church road. She brought him to Cathedral church, bought him some lollies, made him sit at one of the corners, and then she just went off. A woman from the Catholic church secretarial office saw him crying high. She took his hand to her office. She called the police and told them the story of finding him. "Can I get them into an orphanage?" She got him into another woman's orphanage.

The grandmother called me a little bit after midnight. "I lost my daughter, I lost my dignity. I have nothing left. I left my grandson in the open air, to be affected by the rain or the sun or an oncoming car. It is an inhuman thing that I have done. I don't think I will ever meet you again. My insides are dead. I am the walking dead. I just want to tell you that I am moving into the past."

When I heard from Sister agathe, the boy had already been adopted into France.

## Biniyam

It was reported from the Ministry of Housing that two children were abandoned in their home. My boss told me to visit the house. He told me that the mother, who had just died, had been an engineer who studied in Havana, Cuba. Their father had been a head nurse, but he had died two years before. They lived with their grandmother who was a little woman, very kind, but tiny and debilitated. She could not take care of her only daughter's children.

When I arrived at their home I saw that there were two rooms and only one bed. Household materials were scattered on the ground between the rooms. Hana was sitting on the corner of the bed weeping while Biniyam was playing in the yard. She had very short hair and was wearing a bright red sweater. She had beautiful big eyes. At first, I didn't even see the grandmother who was sleeping in a back room. Hana didn't say anything; even now as an adult, she doesn't say what is in her head. At that time, she was only 10 years old. Just from the way she was sitting and crying, I started to cry. I felt very guilty because I should not cry in front of the children.

I needed to regain control of myself; I asked where her brother was. She said, "He is playing outside, he never stays home. The other children beat him, but still he stays there with them all the time." I made her call him. He was so fidgety, he could not stay in the same place, could not sit still, could never stand still. His eyes darted around the room. I had heard about him. The other children beat him and he kept running back to them. I said to him, "You will be an important person one day. What do you want to be?" He said, "I don't know." Hana smiled through her tears and I saw that she had dimples.

While I was there, a friend of their mother's came by. She told me that there was a blueprint of a plot of land that belonged to mother where she had been building a house. She showed me where the blueprint was hidden, and she asked me to keep it safe. She told me there were other people claiming to be relatives who were not who wanted to steal their land. Hana nodded that this was true.

After I had seen their situation, I went back to the office. I took the blueprint of the land their parents left them as inheritance. Hana trusted me with it. I decided the children should be moved from their home and into a sewing training center for girls that my boss managed. There was only one guard living in the compound. I moved them both there; Hana had to prepare their food when she was only ten. Biniyam would always go out to play. He complained about her food and made her cry. "No no," he said, "I don't want to eat this." And she would cry. Mostly she prepared porridge from Canada - Famex or something like that. She tried to assemble a household with some materials we provided for her, but she couldn't. She was always crying.

I decided to find a foster mother for them. "Mama," as we called her, had her own villa and her own car. Mama was retired and lived alone, her children all grown. She said, "The only thing I want is someone to talk to me. Children are very good and I love them. They will fill my house with good spirits. They will bring me closer to God." In the end, though, she brought out her knife.

I moved the kids into Mama's house, a nice two bedroom with two beds in one of the rooms. They were so happy when they saw their new house because it reminded them of the life they used to have before their father died. Mama welcomed them with a smile and told them to feel free in their new home.

After some time, she came to see me at work to report on the children. She was not happy. "Woinshet," she exclaimed, "you have never seen these kind of children. Hana talks to the neighbor through the fence. It is rude. Biniyam is going into my bedroom when I am not home and moving around all my things. When I ask him about it, he lies. Of all the worst things that he did, he picked up a hand-held sewing machine my son sent me from Norway. Biniyam just walked into the bedroom, picked it up and broke it. That was the day I sent them to the back-house. I told them not to go into my bedroom and to mind themselves. They are violating my rules. I think they are possessed by bad spirits."

In that big and respected house, Mama expected Biniyam to have a tie on with a coat and shiny shoes. But Biniyam was like a wasp, touching, investigating, enjoying everything. If you don't talk to children in the right way, if you don't answer their questions appropriately, they will try to find out for themselves. Mama was traditional, she thought it was rude for children to interact with adults. This is the kind of thing which happens with children orphaned by AIDS. They end up living with their grandmothers and there is a generation gap. It is not easy to understand each other. Your parents enjoy whatever you do as naughty boy, but your grandparents want to see you as a grown-up boy. When you pour Ethiopian coffee, you want to distill it, allow the residue to settle. We say that is *sacana*. That is what grandparents expect: the settled person, the adjusted person, without agitation.

The last days Biniyam had seen were with his mom. He had never seen what being with another family meant. He didn't know that if he misbehaved, he would be thrown into the back-house – a place used for storage and where Ethiopians cook on an open fire. He thought that Mama would be like his mother, and that he would be free to act however he wanted without being thrown out. These were children who had been walked to school by their father, and afterward, to the bakery or a café to have cake and ice cream. They used to go on picnics with their mother, to parties with their mom's friends, and celebrated their birthdays. Biniyam was the mascot of filial pride for his mother. And now, they were taken to be the devils. Why wouldn't he be angry? The life he went away when his mother died. But maybe his life would come back, who knows?

I had to talk to both of them and I had to beg Mama to keep the children until I found another person to care for them. I told Biniyam, "Where do you think you could go if you don't act like she wants you to act? Remember what it is like." The woman took the kids back home. I did not hear any reports, which I took to be good news. But the silence was because Mama had decided to take her own measures. One day she came to see me. "These children are evil. Screaming in the night. I took them to holy water for 14 days. After the first week, there was no change. After the second week, it was even worse, especially with the boy. I put them in the back-house, I don't want to talk to them or see them. Especially the boy."

Holy water is a spring where people possessed by evil spirits are taken to be healed. The process takes from seven to twenty-one days. A priest prays for the person and pours water

from the spring over their naked body. Almost all children face this; almost all children have gone to holy water because of behavior change or sickness, and because at holy water the children are silent. That is the trick that we Ethiopians do. Maybe the silence is another reason for the prescription of holy water: when children grieve, they are either overactive or completely silent. Biniyam was one of the hyperactive kids. So that is why she took him to holy water.

I had to go back to Mama's house to see the children. As soon as they saw me, they started crying. Hana often cried, but I had never seen Biniyam cry. "What happened?" I asked. Hana was gasping, as tears rained down her face. She said, "She is scaring us with the knife, the axe. She makes us read a book in the middle of the night, just a little bit after midnight."

"Why?"

"Because she can't read, her eyes are weak."

"What is that that you are reading?"

"It's her prayer book. It's a big one. When we finish, it is already dawn and she takes us to holy water and we haven't been to school for two weeks..."

After listening to everything they told me, I decided on the spot to take the children. I called my friend Ananya and told him I needed a car *now*. He came with the pick-up and we collected the children. We took them to my house. I didn't even ask my husband Eshete's permission.

In the house, the first challenge was the girl that worked for me as a maid. She was not happy about having the children, maybe because it would be extra work for her to have two more in the house. As a result, perhaps, of Biniyam detecting this, or maybe because she did not like his overactivity, they were always fighting. She would report to me: he did that, he did this, he was jumping on the sofa, jumping on the bed I made, fighting with his sister. Then one day, he broke the handles on all my doors. I asked him why he did it. He sat quiet.

"Do you think it was wrong?" I asked him. "Yes," he replied. "Why do you do this? Am I not kind to you?" I asked. "You are kind to me," he said. He knew the maid was treating them different than my own children, and he was angry. I didn't know this at the time, but one day I came home in the middle of the day and found that the maid was feeding Hana and Biniyam different food than she prepared for my children. They had never told me, and I knew that meant they felt like outsiders. I felt very bad, and I realized I needed to find them their own house, where nobody bothers them and they are respected. I knew a kind woman named Hirut who could take care of them, but I didn't know her house. I tried very hard to find her. I found her the same week. She was very positive about taking care of them and was even happy to do so. She was a religious woman. She said, "This is a double advantage. One thing is that I can't have my own children. Now, I will have children on earth and up in heaven. Plus, God will see kindly things in me and reward me." So this was her motivation to be very kind for them. She agreed to take in three other children orphaned by AIDS at the same time.

The next challenge I faced was finding a house to rent. No one wanted to rent a house to them because of the fear of HIV. As I walking around the community looking for a house, I found an old woman and old man by chance. They were in their 60's or 70's. I asked them if they had a house to rent. The old man saw my visit as a spiritual challenge. "Look my daughter, if I bring these children in, they will make me angry, they will destroy my garden. If I say yes to you, they will ruin our house. But if I say no, it is again against us. We are stuck. We are old people and we are going to see God soon. He would certainly punish us if I said no. What am I to do?" So he said yes. I paid him a whole year's rent so he wouldn't change his mind. I brought the kids right away.

The five children fought all the time. They were all grieving and angry, and didn't know another way to express these feelings. The community grew tired of them and called me to come see them. They asked me to take the children out of their community. This happened several times. I tried to explain to the community that they were not just my responsibility, but all of ours. They had lost their parents, and we needed to take care of them. I told them that children try to make security for themselves when they have lost their parents, that is why they become fighters. They want to show people that they are strong enough to do something else, like breaking things. Usually when children fight, they go to their parents to work out the justice in the situation, who is right and who is wrong. But these kids do not have these judges. They show each other that they are strong by picking up stones. And the rest of us have to deal with this.

We tried our best to solve problems in the house and to integrate the kids into the neighbors and community. I visited the old landlady's house and told her that God loves what she is doing, and to express my thanks. She had a little girl who made coffee for me. We still visit each other, the old couple's family. Their daughter still calls me if there is a problem to talk about, even though they have both died. The oldest son, a big mechanic and strong man, died of AIDS in their own house. It was the children who were around him always. All of this made these kids more welcome in their house.

Biniyam was still fighting with the girls, his new "mom", the neighborhood kids. One day, when I came back from an extension class, Hirut had left a message with my husband, "Yewoinshet, I am leaving tomorrow. It is not that I am not a good caretaker. It is that the children hate me." We could not pay her more than 100 Birr per month, and finding someone on short notice was a big challenge. It was quarter to nine in the evening and my husband and I ran to the house.

When I got there, I asked "What happened?" Hirut replied, "I was sitting outside in the compound, filtering out the stones from the lentils. Biniyam had been playing in that area. He came and sat and watched me separate the lentils. I left for a minute when I was finished and when I came back, all of the lentils were poured out into the sand. That is why I came to find you." I asked, "Biniyam, could you pack up your things right now and leave this home?" He stood completely still with his mouth open. I asked Hana, about to cry, whether she wanted to go with Biniyam or stay. She hesitated, and timidly shook her head. I know she was sad and confused. Where would he go? I took Hirut outside and told her that I did not intend for him to leave, that I knew he had nowhere to go, but that I was trying to scare him. "After I leave, you can tell him that you will let him in but that you will not let us

know.” Inside, I was fighting with myself. Would this work or would it hurt Biniyam further?

So every Tuesday and Thursday when I came to visit, Biniyam hid at the back of the house. Hirut told me that Biniyam wanted to ask forgiveness. I kept saying, "No, he cannot be forgiven. No excuse." But finally I let him in. He came into the office and that was the day that I saw his tears for the second time. I told him I would forgive him but, only if he would promise to work hard.

From that time on, he tried to be helpful to everyone. A few years later, when Hirut died, he started to look at himself as a father of the house, as a leader. That is how he was thinking. He started to sign the report cards that the children brought home from school. The children felt like he was their elder brother. If he said something, they obeyed him. If, during exam time, he said, "don't watch TV this week," they wouldn't.

Biniyam helped me to start Hope for Children in 2001, and now serves as a board member. He helped me to arrange for an office and volunteered with us on Saturdays supervising children. Biniyam graduated from Addis Ababa University in 2004. In his final year there, he organized a major conference to talk about the psychosocial needs of children orphaned by AIDS. On his graduation day from University he visited Hope for Children in his graduation gown and gave a speech. He told the children, “You need to be strong and listen.” He showed me the program booklet from his graduation. Under his picture were the words, “You helped me make it Mom.” It was the first time he had called me Mom.

Every year on New Year's Day I have a party for all the children in group homes. This year, Biniyam did not show up and I was very disappointed. He finally arrived three hours late. He had been shopping to buy me a beautiful gold necklace with a mother and child pendant.

## **Kaleb**

When I worked at Medical Missionaries of Mary Counseling and Social Services Center (MMM), the Counseling Program Coordinator brought a three-year-old child to me named Kaleb. She told me that his mother was very sick and she could not take care of herself or take care of him. She wanted me to find some way of helping these people. She told me that that this three-year old child was taking care of himself and his mother by going out and begging for some coins, buying sugar with the money, and then feeding himself and his mom with the sugar. I could not believe it, I wanted to visit the home.

When I visited the house, I also found out he could make tea! In Ethiopia, where men don't work in the kitchen, this three-year-old could perfectly make tea! I wondered who would believe this if I told it to the world. Then the next day I asked my American friend Sara Jewett if she could find a video camera to capture the situation. Kaleb was very careful in what he was doing. The way he lit the matches and tended the fire to make tea, the way cleaned the floor. He had holes in the bottom of his pants and broken skin. His hair was shabby; he had no comb. But he was a beautiful boy. He knew how many cups of water he should boil for the amount of sugar he had. It was amazing to see him boiling and serving tea for us.

I felt full of sadness. It was because of the stigma against this family that this child was forced to do what he was doing. I thought if this child could be supported in other ways he would be a great person in the future. Sara and I thought that the best way to help was to send some caregivers to the house and to bring Kaleb to our informal classes two days a week. The classes were for children with AIDS, but we could see that Kaleb also needed to be around other people. Kaleb had a problem in his neighborhood. He could not play with the other kids, couldn't even watch TV with them, because of the stigma.

The group was formed because there were seven children in the community who were very sick with AIDS and not allowed to leave their rooms because of stigma. To respond to their needs, we started informal education classes twice a week. We asked foreigners visiting Ethiopia to help with toys, colors, papers to draw on, books for children. They responded immediately. Even when they were sick, the children asked to be brought on their caregivers back. Even one, an hour before he died, asked to come visit.

The children liked to sing a song "The more we come together, the happier we will be." It was the motto of the group. We asked the children to give their group a name. They called themselves Birth of Hope. As time went by, some of the children died. But Kaleb's mother got better and better. She was happy that her child was cared for. Her strength and health returned as she watched him grow in happiness. He liked to be with the other children at those classes, dancing, playing with toys, talking to others whose parents were sick or died. He prayed for them, in the Protestant way. He wanted to visit each child in their home and pray for them when they were sick. Among this group of eight, five are now dead. When they died, he wrote them poems.

When Sara returned to America, she brought back the film of Kaleb and showed it to her uncle. He was very surprised by what the child was doing, and felt compelled to help the child forever. Sara's uncle, Charles Jewett, sponsored both Kaleb and his mother. "Chuck"

wanted to send Kaleb to one of the best schools in Ethiopia, so we went to register him.

Kaleb had no birth certificate. To go to the school, he had to have one. But to get a birth certificate, you had to be born in a hospital or bring three witnesses to the municipality and pay money to get one. Kaleb wasn't lucky enough to have a certificate either way. The only other way was to christen himself as an Orthodox Christian when he was a Protestant. His Protestant mom was very sad when she had to take him to be baptized, but he got a Christian name and birth certificate that could be used to enroll him in school.

After his baptism, Kaleb enrolled in a Catholic school called Kidemharit School. Holy Divinity School. His relationship with his sponsor continued. They exchanged letters. HFC helped with translation. There came a time when his sponsor came to Ethiopia and visited Kaleb and his mother. Chuck brought lot of toys, books, and clothes to wear in the special school he attended. His mother met Chuck and invited him for lunch. She thanked God and this person who came into her life.

The more Chuck observed Kaleb, the more he thought Kaleb could be a leader in his country. He hired an English tutor for him. He took him to different cultural places to visit, and they had a wonderful time together in Ethiopia. He encouraged the child and even bought him a cell phone so that they could communicate. He bought Kaleb a computer so he could practice English. Chuck took him to museum so he could see the history of his country. Kaleb observed everything and learned all about Ethiopia. A student tour was coming through and Kaleb asked the leader of the tour for his pointing stick. Kaleb took the stick and led the tour perfectly, telling all the stories. He was just seven years old. It was amazing.

Kaleb became more and more clever and hardworking. He joined computer school and had a tutor to help him with his schoolwork. His mother became stronger and more hopeful. Chuck visited Kaleb's school and talked to his teachers. Kaleb visited the airport for the first time when he saw Chuck off.

After a while, Kaleb's mother contracted TB. She was critically ill. We emailed Chuck that she was dying, and he came to visit that same week. Her face was covered by sores and her body was emaciated. Chuck was saddened by the situation and he decided to hire a lawyer to help the mother write a will so that Kaleb would be cared for. Because he was afraid that the TB could be transmitted to child, he paid for Kaleb to stay with another family and also hired a caregiver for the mother. He paid for her treatment and medication as well.

Kaleb knew his mother was going to die, but she refused to believe it. Even though I counseled her that she should talk to him about it, she would not. The mother's illness hurt Kaleb a lot. He kept thinking about her instead of his school studies. Moreover, his separation from his mother hurt him. He started running away from the school. The school and his caregiver didn't want him to visit his mother. They were afraid he would contract the warts, TB and the virus. The caregiver and teachers beat him. But he wouldn't stop sneaking out to see his mother.

The caregiver emailed Chuck and to say that Kaleb was breaking the rules of the house and they could not tolerate his behavior. Chuck emailed me and I told him that Kaleb had a

right to visit his mother and it's useful for him to grieve properly as she dies. Chuck understood, and he left it to me to decide what was best for Kaleb.

In the middle of this, his mother got even sicker. Fearing that she was about to die, she asked someone to call me. When I got to her, there was a person sitting on a chair beside her bed. She told me he was from the area where she lived as a girl. He was also the pastor of her church. He had had a spiritual vision that the virus turned into an eagle and left her body. He believed the vision came from God and was telling him to take her into his house. I asked the man if he was willing to take her. He said, "Yes, this is the will of God that she should go to my house. I cannot refuse. I cannot visit her often because I have church duties, so she must come to my house." I asked him if he was afraid of the virus and if he had consulted his wife. I wanted to be sure that he knew her condition and would not stigmatize her. He told me his wife had been friends with Kaleb's mother for a long time, and that she was willing to help. "We are a family of God, we are not afraid of anything," he said. I agreed and asked that he let me know where she was so that I could visit her, and bring Kaleb to visit her.

That evening, he took all of her goods and household materials to his house.. After a week, the pastor called me to show me where the house was. The wife made coffee and invited me over. While I was talking to Kaleb's mother about how she is feeling, the pastor called me out of the house. He showed me a house with many holes, very small (2 meters by 2 meters) that was falling apart. "Look, Woinshet," he said, "the virus is very dangerous to my children. I have decided to move her to this place. I want you to give me some money to repair this house." I was deeply saddened and very angry. I reminded him of our discussion the day that he moved her – his promise that he and his wife were not afraid of the virus. "Now, after separating her from her nice home and neighbors, you want her to move to this shabby house?" I asked. Chuck had given me money only for her food and her child's expenses, not to build a house.

From that day on, the pastor had Kaleb's mother call me everyday on her mobile phone. She told me, "Please help me, he is nagging me a lot I can't sleep in my bed. I am caught between. I am tired. He wants money." She said the pastor took all of the money that Chuck left for her to go to hospital. "If you want me to rest and die in peace, please take out all the money I have and give it to this man," she begged, I said ok. The pastor immediately fixed the tiny house and moved her into it. Kaleb's mother couldn't eat or drink anything then because she had given up all of her money.

From that day on, when I visited her, she was alone in the tiny house. The pastor would accompany me and stand with his arms folded as we talked. The neighbors, no one, came near her. The pastor had told them not to give her any food because she might have to go to the bathroom and no one would be there. Because he worked in the administration office, the neighbors listened. But the neighbors were upset by the situation and they came to my office. "What are you doing with this woman?" they asked me. "She gets no food, and no one except her son visits her. He just cries when he comes and then goes away." I did not know that the pastor had been denying her food. Her body was totally emaciated. She was only skin and bones. I put some money under her pillow. I convinced the neighbors to visit her. With the money, she can ask them to buy things for her that she needs. I took the phone number of one of the neighbors. I had many responsibilities, and

no car, so I could not visit her every day.

Two days later I got a call from the neighbor who said that she had asked for *shiro wat* with Ethiopian cheese. They bought some for her from a nice hotel nearby. Kaleb visited her that morning. In the middle of that week, I got a phone call that she had died. I told my friends to be ready to attend the funeral. The pastor came to my office with his brother before I had a chance to leave. Kaleb's mother had told me that she wanted her body to go to her birthplace. She had left the money with me. But the pastor forbid me to take her. In fact, he wanted more money to cover the expense of a local burial. I told him she had *edir* (similar to funeral insurance) and I didn't give him anything. He turned to his brother and said "Goddamn her. See how rude she is? She won't give me the money, even though I have asked her many times for it. Now what am I going to do?" I don't know how to explain my feelings. Kaleb was there. He was crying, hearing the words that came from the pastor. He was unkind to Kaleb, had disrespected the mother, and kept every household item this woman used to have. This included a gold necklace Chuck had given her, a desk and chair, a bed, an injera maker - everything. Now he was insulting her just a few hours after she died in front of her son and all of her friends at Hope for Children. We told him her only mistake was trusting him.

I was so sad for Kaleb. I gave him a hug and a kiss and I promised to follow him to the funeral and that he could come to HFC any time that he wanted. Any problem that he faces, we will help him. The pastor prevented us from attending the funeral. Kaleb said, "Woinshet, don't cry. I will not cry anymore. It's good for my mother to die. For me there is you and God. I will not cry."

After that the pastor said he had promised the mother he would take care of Kaleb, and he took the mobile phone Chuck had bought for Kaleb. Every time we called, the pastor said Kaleb was out. The neighbors told us the child was in trouble, he was being beaten every day. They begged us to rescue him. We tried to call. We visited. But there was no sign of Kaleb anywhere. We could not find him. We talked to the neighbors trying to find some way to have them bring the child to us.

Kaleb tried to run away and come to Hope for Children. But the pastor and his wife saw him on his way and asked him where he was going. He said he had been playing in a field. They said, "You were playing in a field but your shoes are white. You are a liar." They kicked him in his private parts, and he had to go to the doctor because he was in so much pain. When I heard about this, I called Kaleb's legal caregivers and told them that they needed to be involved. They said they couldn't help because they couldn't find Kaleb - not by phone or at the pastor's house. I emailed Chuck and he was very upset. He couldn't reach Kaleb on the mobile. Then Chuck came to Ethiopia.

The pastor pretended that he was the Spirit of God talking to Kaleb. He told Kaleb that if he moved from the pastor's house, one inch, he would die. Kaleb didn't want to live there, but he was afraid of God's wrath. The pastor said that if he went with Chuck, the worst of all hells would befall him. When Chuck arrived, he went straight to see the pastor. He asked for the mobile back, all of Kaleb's mother's possessions, and of course, Kaleb. The pastor refused and he punched Chuck's translator in the nose! He turned into an animal. Then they had to go to the police station. Chuck called me from there to say there was

trouble. I went right away when Chuck called and explained the situation. The police refused to hold the pastor, but we eventually we got Kaleb back.

We learned that the pastor not really a pastor. His plan had been to keep Kaleb and extort money from Chuck. We moved Kaleb to a new school and though we registered him with his real name, we told the children that his name was Joseph. We wanted him to remain anonymous in case the pastor came to look for him.

We continued to work with a lawyer to get back the property that belonged to Kaleb's mother. Eventually Kaleb came to stay in one of HFC's group homes. Now, he writes to Chuck telling him, "I am the happiest child. I live at HFC. It is big now. It's different. It is the happiest place." Thanks to Chuck, Kaleb can speak fluent English. He is able to translate the other children's words when visitors come to Hope for Children and has become our ambassador. Chuck's support and commitment gave Kaleb confidence in himself. He is the energy and strength of Hope for Children.

## Elsa

A woman came into Medical Missionaries of Mary (MMM) holding the hand of a ten-year old girl. The woman went from room to room, not knowing where to go, who she should contact. Through my window, I could see someone pointing her towards my room. She came in.

I asked, “How can I help you?”

“This is my granddaughter. Her father died. A year after her father died, her mom died.”

“What was the cause of the death of her mom?”

“TB. After she died, the community brought this little girl to me. I brought her to the hospital and they found out she has TB.” When she told me this she was very nervous. She told me, “I am an old woman, what if I get TB?”

The grandmother then handed me a white sealed envelope which the girl’s doctor had sent to us. I opened the envelope. The girl’s name was Elsa. She was HIV positive. The grandmother had not been informed. I didn’t know what to do. It is my duty to pass the information to the grandmother, but I feared the she would not want to take care of the girl. But I had no choice, so I began the counseling process.

Children become victims of transmittable diseases when they lose their parents. Before I broke the news, I asked the woman where the child lived and how she came to bring the child to us. She told me how sick her daughter had been before she died – just skin and bone. Finally, I told her that Elsa was HIV positive. She was shocked and scared. “What am I going to do? Do you think I have the disease?” I told her we could send her to the testing center if she was worried. I asked her, “How do you think she got the virus?” At this point, she took the hand of the child and ran out. She came back in the afternoon and brought a paper saying that the child was negative. The test was a year old. The grandmother reasoned if she was not born with it, how could she get the disease? We retested her and it was confirmed.

I too wondered how she could have become HIV positive in the past year. She was only ten years old. I asked the girl if she was ever sick. She said “Yes, I had TB.”

“Did you get treatment?”

“Of course, my mother and I took injections.”

“Did you use different needles?”

“We always brought a new needle. My mother always said to the man who injected us, if I am injected first, then use the needle for my daughter. If she is injected first, then use the needle for me. We would only share with each other because we could only afford one needle.”

The grandmother confirmed this. "I went to the clinic with them. I was helping them."

"What happened? Didn't you know that the syringes were supposed to be clean?" I asked.

"Yes, we know. They warned us that that we should not share needles with other people. That is why we bought a new one every time."

But the mother and daughter were sharing.

I was reminded of a woman who was eating sugar cane in our office. She was holding her daughter on her lap. She ate the sugar cane for herself and she shared it with her child. Her lips were bleeding. She was feeding the child sugar cane. I knew she was here for counseling and I didn't know if she knew why she came to us. I went over to speak with her, She said "I am from Gonder province and I have been sent to Tikur Anbessa Hospital. They told me that I am HIV positive." "If you are positive, then why are you feeding your baby with bloody sugar cane," I asked. She laughed at me, "Well, she is my daughter, she is not someone else's daughter."

Elsa's grandmother told me that the man who had injected them was a "village doctor." In rural parts of Ethiopia there are people who give injections and medicines who are not trained doctors. This is their way of making money, and because there are no trained doctors close by, people accept the village doctors. I was angry. Should I take this man to court? He should know that even a mother and daughter cannot share needles. I want him to understand how he has affected this child's life.

These village doctors are very common. Who knows how many people they have infected in this manner?



## Seble

She came to Hope for Children. She was 16 years old, very beautiful. She told me she was an AIDS orphan and her family needed help. She told me her story. She began by saying that her father died three years ago. Her mother used to support them by selling nufro, cooked seeds, which are very cheap and often sold to day laborers, but now she was sick and couldn't work. She continued, "That money was not enough to send all of us to school. I think my mom became involved with a man to support us after my father died. She got AIDS, and now she is very sick. I am sad because I know it's because of us that she involved another person in her life. If she could have earned enough money, she wouldn't have done that. She felt guilty that she could not support us. Then this man in her life died. When he died, the whole community diagnosed her with AIDS since she had two husbands who died."

The neighbors thought the mother was bad luck. She had nobody to talk to and she was ashamed of her situation. The daughter was sad about this. I visited Selbe's home as is HFC's practice, and saw that Seble's mother was indeed very sick and the situation was quite desperate. The house was tilted as though it were about to fall over. There were blankets hanging over the walls to cover all the holes. There was only one bed for all of them, and they told me that some of them were sleeping on the floor.

Selbe had three brothers. HFC counseled all four children and sent them to school. HFC counseled the mother too, and the family started to get better. Just before the end of the school year, the mother became very sick. She could not even move her body anymore. As the eldest daughter, Sebla had to quit 9th grade with just one month left to take care of her siblings and her mother. The next year, she would have to retake the whole year because she didn't finish.

She started selling nufro, like her mother had. Now she was exposed to the streets. She met a young man in his late twenties, a businessman who was a wholesaler of seeds, near her house. He started talking to Seble because she was so beautiful – slim with long hair and big, wide eyes. The man asked her why she doesn't go to school instead of selling nufro? She explained, and he offered to send her to school and to help her mother and brothers. She said, "Yes, ok, thank you."

Since the school year hadn't started yet, he promised to get her a better place to have a business where she could sell tea and bread. She got a lot of profit out of it because it was in a commercial area. This man paid for school fees for her brothers and medication for her mother. He gave her 300 birr per month. Seble came and told me everything that was going on with this man, and we counseled her about HIV. She was a serious girl. He didn't ask her to go out for sex with him. He wanted her to be his fiancé and to help her. She said, "Yes, we can do that now until I am 18 when we can marry." He started supporting them nicely. Their relationship went smoothly. She started getting enough money to fix up the house where she lived with her family. Again, her mom became very sick when the girl went back to school. Again, the same thing happened. She could not continue with school because she had to care for her family.

She didn't want her fiance to know that her mother was HIV positive, so she asked for

HFC's help. I said, "It's ok. Nobody will tell him about the HIV." The HFC staff agreed, "Let's do what we can to help her." HFC brought in a caregiver during the day for the mother so Seble could attend school. Finally, when the mother was deathly ill, Seble had to quit school again because no one would care for her in that state. The man agreed she should leave school and care for her mother.

As the mother got increasingly weak, and Seble could no longer help her, we advised her to take her mother to Mother Theresa AIDS Home. HFC facilitated the mother's move. The children visited their mother every Sunday. The man didn't know she was at Mother Theresa AIDS Home because Seble didn't want him to know. He just knew she was in the hospital. In Ethiopia, the man could not visit the mother because you are not supposed to talk to your fiance's family until you are married or are officially welcomed into the family. One day, the mother died. Someone from Mother Theresa AIDS Home called Seble to inform her. The children all cried out. The community came in and cried with them. The man came quickly to the house. He offered his car to go bring the body for the customary mourning rites. The man went to the funeral. On the way to the funeral, the chauffeur told the man that he had picked up the body at the MT AIDS Home. And then the man just left.

Seble was so sad. She lost her job, her fiance. He was her great support and hope. Seble saw him one day in the market and he asked her, "Why didn't you tell me that your mother had AIDS?" Seble cried, but he continued, "I am sorry that I got involved in such a family. It is an insult for me to be involved in this family, I have degraded myself."

Seble came to tell us the story, and we told her he didn't understand the nature of HIV. Unfortunately, there are many people like him in Ethiopia. We counseled her to start her business elsewhere, and she did. The same clients started coming to her new shop and she was again making a profit. Eventually, the neighbors started complaining because they didn't allow Seble's brothers to play with their children. She asked them why her siblings were not allowed to play with the other kids. "We know your mother died of AIDS," they said. They told her that she should move the door of her house so it was on the side where the community threw their trash.

I was mad at this point, and decided to go immediately to the kebele (the area administration office) about it. I explained that the children were orphans and deserved the same rights as other people. "You need to protect their rights," I said. They can't change their door because it would be unhealthy. The kebele talked to the neighbors. But the community asked her not to use the communal kitchen or the washing area because they were afraid of being infected.

One day someone called our office and told us that Seble had taken her clothes off and run naked around the neighborhood. I went with my American friend Sara Jewett (who helped found HFC) to find out what had happened. They told me that two days ago Seble had gone crazy and run away. Her brothers had followed her and the door to the house was left open for 48 hours. None of their things had been touched though, because no one wanted to go in there. We wondered where she could have gone. The neighbors said she had an aunt, so we went to find that place. The house was maximum 2.5 meters by 2.5 meters. Just one small bed and very little space.

The children were sitting with their sister on the floor. When we came into the house she started laughing hard. "Did you tell the kebele people to keep those people away," she asked? They are brandishing their knives and following me wherever I go. They are chasing me and my brothers." She continued laughing and I knew that all the fear and the stigma had effected her. The aunt and the kids were crying. We started talking to her aunt. "How do you live here?" Sara asked. She replied, "I am renting this bed for prostitutes." She told us that she rented her bed, the only property she had, for 2 birr during the day or 2 birr during the night. She spent all day and all night in front of the door, living on the four birr she made each day, only sleeping in the bed when it was free.

With the children in her house, so she could no longer rent the bed. She faced only trouble and sadness. These were the children of her only sister, yet she could not support them. Seble seemed mad, crazy. She kept repeating that she wanted us to keep the neighbors away from her.

I learned that after Seble had been told to change the door, the community would not leave her alone. They kept nagging and nagging her to move the door. Seble became mad, and she broke the tooth of a neighbor in a fight. She was convicted and the court said she had to buy the neighbor an artificial tooth, which was far too expensive for her to afford in her lifetime. She simply couldn't do it. The neighbors had been threatening her with knives and threatening her and her siblings. The burden of work, school, siblings, losing her fiance, the stigma was too much. So she ran away.

Three months later I went back to visit Seble and her brothers. The auntie's home had been demolished and the government had moved their family to another area. I have not been able to find her again, but I know if she comes back to herself, she will also come back to HFC.

## Yabsira

One bright morning, an HFC volunteer, Atsede, passed by an adorable, beautiful, little baby girl, shining in the arms of a blind woman who was sitting by the roadside and begging. The child was groaning softly in pain. Atsede noticed that the old woman had very dark skin but the baby had a very fair complexion. The third time Atsede passed by the old woman, she grew suspicious. She asked the old woman, “What happened to the child?” The woman replied, “She is sick.” Atsede asked, “Have you taken her to the doctor?” The woman said, “No, I don’t have any money.” Atsede told the woman to come with her; they would take the baby to Hope for Children’s small clinic.

I was standing among my colleagues talking about our routine work. Suddenly I sensed a strange smell which took everybody’s attention. Then we saw a glimpse of my Australian friend Jacqui Gilmore running into the other room holding something in her hands. My eyes couldn’t help me find the source of the smell. I looked at the community people around the room they looked very wretched and astonished about something. Some of them were holding their jaws and some their mouths, which is an Ethiopian way of expression when sad thing happens.

What is happening? I asked. One of them replied, “Atsede brought a child who is very sick. It doesn’t seem that she will survive.”

“Where is the child?” I asked. “Jacqui just took her.” Forgetting about the smell, I went out to see the child. Jacqui had already given her a bath under the tap water and had wrapped her with a towel.

I looked at the baby lying on plain examining couch. She was releasing a sound of exhaustion as she were wrinkled face. Her stomach and her head looked too big for her body and she was struggling to breathe. I looked in to her exhausted eyes. Around her snow-white eyeballs were amazing long, black eyelashes. Her hair was black and very soft and thin. I forget all about my meeting with my staff for sometime. I didn’t talk to any one. As every Ethiopian does, I hold her bony hands, lowered my head, and kissed those extremely beautiful, tiny, long fingers. Her hands told me that she was in trouble because they were so hot. It was very hard to stretch her fingers apart from her palms. Her tiny legs were shrunken upward tightly and it was hard to get them straightened. I felt my heart sink down somewhere for her. We thought she was paralyzed. Her eyes were very still and she did not blink.

I remembered that we had a baby cradle, which we got from a woman who worked in the American Embassy in Ethiopia. We made her a better bed and put her in to the cradle. Six children (age 4-10) who live in our group home sat around and started talking to her. One of our group home kids, Sintayehu, gave the child the name ‘Yabsira’ which means “The work of God.” Jacqui came back with some new clothes and wrapped her up. She rushed out to take a taxi to get the child to hospital as soon as possible.

After they left, I asked the volunteer caregivers “What was that smell?” One replied, “It was a goat skin which she was wrapped with?” “Where is it?” I said. The told me the old woman had taken it. I was also suspicious of the woman. I wanted to photograph the goat

skin to document the baby's story.

An American woman was working at Hope For Children. In fact, she and her husband Eric had come for their honeymoon. Her name was Sarah Green. Sarah and I went talk to the blind woman to fill out the registration format for a new child. I gathered from the woman, who claimed to be her grandmother that the child had no name, but she called her "Atkilt" which means vegetable. The woman told me that the baby had lost her dad 5 month ago and her mother followed him two and half month later. Since her mom died, the old woman fed the child only water mixed with some sugar. I asked the woman where the baby had lived when her parents were alive. She did not know. It was becoming clear to me that the old woman was not her real grandmother. I suspected she was using the baby for begging. This is very common in Ethiopia. People will use children to get sympathy.

The caregivers, HFC staff members and I wondered if the baby could OK with this woman. The child needs close supervision. She had bruises on her body and we did not know why. Most of all, if a doctor prescribes medicine, she will need someone who can give her medication accurately and on time.

I asked the woman if she could leave the baby with us so we could take care of her. She said "Impossible." I felt like my heart was being squeezed. I was very angry. I asked the woman, "Can you take care of the baby with out our financial support? Is there any one who can help you to give her medication?" She told me she couldn't. "Then you should live the child with us at least until she recovers. If not, we will have to report to police that the baby is in trouble."

After some long negotiation she agreed to leave the child with us. I was convinced the baby was not related to this woman. She had not taken her to the clinic when she was terribly sick. She didn't know her name and she didn't know her age. She told us that the child was 6 month old, but I thought she was a newborn. She appeared to have been covered in dried amniotic fluid and her stool was like that of a newborn.

Jacqui returned from the clinic. She told us she registered the baby as Yabsira Gilmour. The hospital had asked for her second name which none of us knew, so Jacqui had given her own second name. The child had a temp of 40. The doctor had told Jacqui to just leave the child. He said she was going to fit (have a seizure) very soon and she would die. "Whatever you do, don't take her home." He then went on his rounds. Jacqui gave Yabsira some panadol to help with her fever. When the doctor returned he was surprised to find that Jacqui had not left. He finally agreed to treat her with a strong antibiotic called rotherfine. She has sepsis all thru the body and she was in terrible condition. She was very under weight and weighed only three pounds.

That night, Jacqui and I took Yabsira to my house. On the way home we bought her nappies and powdered milk and a bottle. Jacqui wanted to take care of her. She told me not to visit them during the night, as she did want not to bother my husband. The next day, the child had responded a little to the medication. Jacqui was holding Yabsira and speaking to her sweetly. The next night Jacqui and Yabsira spent the night with our American friends Eric Gottesman and Sara Green. She had diarrhea, vomiting, and a high temperature. She had to

visit the clinic twice a day for the first week. Jacque and I took care of her for some 10 days in my house.

On the third day, Yabsira started smiling. On the tenth day she began to move her arms and legs. Every day was like a miracle as her condition improved. One day, Jacqui asked me, "Do you think she has HIV?" I refused to agree. Even though my heart told me she might, I preferred to deny it. This sweet thing has suffered enough. I wanted her to get well. I wanted her to live and be somebody. The only person I talked to openly about her in relation to HIV was her caregiver that we just hired. I warned her to take care of herself. We provided her with gloves and detergent and bleach. We also wanted her caregiver to protect her from other children who had flues and common colds.

As there were many other homeless children with us that time, Sara Green sent a letter to let her family to let them know the situation of these children and to find out whether they could help these kids. Her church community responded within a week. They sent over \$5000 and Sara and Eric set up HFC's first group home. Yabsira became part of it.

We hired a caregiver, Natsanet to be the house mother for two babies – Yabsira and Moses. Moses was a six-month-old boy whose could not take care of him. Yabsira and Moses shared a room and ate together. Moses was very energetic and very healthy. Yabsira and Moses became best friends. Moses would driver her around on the back of his tricycle.

However, Yabsira continued to be sick and eventually we tested her for HIV. She was positive. But the counselor told us that most babies born to mothers with HIV carry antibodies and test positive. We would need to retest her at 18 months to see if she still tested positive. I sent emails to all Christian and Muslim people I knew to pray for her. The group home kids prayed for her, Naqura from Sweden came to visit Ethiopia via Israel and brought her holy water, holy powder, and oil. Somebody brought her a big picture of St. Gabriel and we put it above her bed. Jacqui decided to sponsor Yabsira and provide for all her needs.

Since we did not know Yabsira's birthday, we decided to make it the same day as Moses'. I wondered if this would be her last birthday. We needed to celebrate it nicely. The whole HFC staff agreed to make it the best. We stayed for a long time with her. She and her brother Moses looked live angels. We were blessed with their unforgettable smiles and giggles. We forgot about HIV.

A girl from the Sheraton Hotel, Selamawit, visited our group home and fall in love with Yabsira. She wanted to be her Christian mother. She bought her a silver bracelet and all kinds of beautiful things. People who came to visit HFC brought her all kinds of toys. No one can resist her smile. Everyone cuddles her - UN officials, her doctor, everyone. I felt like I had done everything I could for her. "Thank you God," I thought, "now she can die. At least she has such a wonderful time with her sisters and brothers. With people from all over the world." But then I say NO NO.NO. I don't want her to die. I bring her close to my heart and she puts her head under my chin. Then tears start falling. God I don't want her to die.

One day I went visit the group home and Yabsira's nanny Natsanet was washing a wound

under her Yabsira's neck barehanded. I was very shocked and asked her why she was not using gloves. She said, "It is OK. I want to die with her." But Yabsira continued to improve, and at 18 months we had her tested her again for HIV. At that time I was visiting Washington, DC with Eric. My husband called Eric to say that she tested negative. Eric gave me the news and I cried. I couldn't speak. I went into another room to be by myself and I thanked God. I called Natsanet and we celebrated.

When I returned to Ethiopia two weeks later, I went to see Yabsira first thing. I had missed her terribly. I hugged her close, and I thought of how lucky she was. How lucky I was. Everytime I see her, I think about the power of love and the kindness of human beings that pulled Yabsira through. There is always hope for children.

## ABOUT HOPE FOR CHILDREN