



Wide Horizons  
For Children

*Winter 2009*

## Happy New Year!

Dear Friends,

Alan Greenspan coined this "the age of turbulence." Most of us are dealing with turbulence in some aspect of our lives today. Job security, investments, retirement savings, infertility, adoption, the list goes on...

As we look to the future at Wide Horizons, we are focused on fulfilling our mission regardless of what may occur. We are committed to helping children in need and we cannot and will not allow today's turbulence to dissuade us.

More children are threatened as the recession deepens around the world. As one of the world's largest adoption agencies, we are fortunate to have the resources to expand our programs in response. This newsletter highlights how Wide Horizons is not only persevering through these difficult times, but how we are continuing to expand our reach.

Our newest program, Taiwan, is off to a solid start. Recently, we re-opened our Nepal program after an absence of more than a decade. Via this newsletter, we are also announcing our intention to open pilot programs in two of the world's neediest nations, Rwanda and Burundi. But we aren't stopping there. We are working to develop additional programs and to expand the reach of several existing programs. We hope to share news of our continued progress in the months ahead.

As we expand, we approach new programs with a commitment to humanitarian aid and community development. This improves the lives of many more children than we will ever reach through adoption alone. Below, you will read an account of our first Medical Mission, which saved several lives and dramatically improved the quality of life for many others. These achievements, and others such as our support to orphanages, new healthcare clinics, and construction of schools are made possible by the generosity of our families and friends.

Thank you to those who contributed to our annual appeal. In spite of the economy, we are slightly ahead of last year's appeal, but we still need to raise more funds to meet our humanitarian commitments. We would appreciate any additional help you can provide to meet these needs through the following link: [www.whfc.org/WHFFC/appeal.htm](http://www.whfc.org/WHFFC/appeal.htm).

I would also like to thank all of our waiting families for hanging in there during these "turbulent" times. We know your family will provide a loving home for a child in desperate need. Together, we will make that miracle possible.

Thank you for your faith in Wide Horizons and your continued commitment to our mission.

With gratitude,  
Peter Leppanen  
President and CEO

## PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT — Taiwan Adoption Program



WHFC's pilot program in Taiwan opened in early 2008, after completing extensive research into Taiwan's adoption practices and child services. In deciding to open this program, it was important for us to feel confident that Taiwan's intercountry adoption laws are in agreement with U.S. immigration law, and that our mission – to find homes for children in need of permanent loving families – is shared by those in Taiwan's social welfare institutions.

As a pilot program, the actual adoption process is established as the program unfolds, requiring flexibility from all parties involved. We are happy to report that as of January 2009, there are 12 intrepid families currently going through these uncharted waters! Three of these families have been referred a child, and the first of these is expected to travel to Taiwan in March.

Children available for adoption in Taiwan range in age from 0-15 years, and may reside in either a foster home or orphanage. We are in particular need of families interested in adopting a child over the age of 5 or children of any age with special needs. More details about the Taiwan adoption

program, including eligibility criteria and fees, can be found at [www.whfc.org](http://www.whfc.org).

### WHFC Programs

[China](#) ~ [Colombia](#) ~ [Ethiopia](#) ~ [India](#) ~ [Korea](#) ~ [Nepal](#) ~ [The Philippines](#) ~ [Russia](#) ~ [Taiwan](#) ~ [United States](#)

## NEW PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT — Report From Africa

In December 2008, Wide Horizons For Children (WHFC) Program Manager Debbie Mansfield traveled to a select group of African nations to meet with country representatives and visit with children in orphanages and transition homes as part of WHFC's mission to expand its child welfare services in Africa.

WHFC's mission has always focused on the needs of the child, and nowhere is the need more starkly demonstrated than in many of the African nations. Disease, civil war, genocide, famine, and abject poverty have ravaged generations of families. As a result, WHFC set a goal to work in Africa, and opened a program in Ethiopia in 2003. "When we started in Ethiopia," Debbie explains, "we wondered whether it would even be possible to work in Africa. Would the government be receptive? Would we have families open to raising African children? Now that we've worked for six years in Ethiopia we have a great model to expand to other nations in Africa."

In 2007, Dr. Tsegaye Berhe, WHFC's founding partner and representative in Ethiopia, began exploring countries in Africa with stabilized political systems and laws that allow for international adoption as well as permanency programs. Over the past year, Dr. Tsegaye laid the groundwork with child welfare colleagues in Africa to identify new programs in other African nations. Debbie Mansfield's recent trip took her to Rwanda, Burundi and Kenya where she met with representatives, all known to Dr. Tsegaye through his child welfare work, to evaluate the feasibility of WHFC working with each nation. While in Rwanda, Debbie also met with representatives from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). She described it as "an amazing trip – the needs are so readily apparent."

In Rwanda and Burundi, Debbie visited orphanages with more than 100 children in their care, "row upon row of cribs, child after child, 40 children to a room," ranging from infancy to 3 or 4 years old. Many were significantly malnourished. As Debbie explained:

"It was clear that the homes were trying to do everything they could, but they were understaffed, under-resourced and unable to handle the magnitude of the child welfare crisis."

She learned from the caregivers, who spoke to Debbie in English, that virtually all of the children in their custody had been abandoned or found on the streets. Based on this information, many would be available for international adoption. Yet in Rwanda and Burundi adoption programs – international or domestic – are scarce, so currently there are very few opportunities for these children. "Caregivers were begging us to send families," she emphasized, "and in my experience that's almost never the case."

Debbie then paused before revealing:



"There was one baby... she was the single most malnourished child I had ever seen. Her arms and legs were the size of twigs. Her stomach was so distended and her ribs were poking through. The skin was so taut on her face that her skull was visible underneath. The caregiver turned to me and said, 'She looks good now. We found her two months ago.' They were surprised she survived."

Again, Debbie took a moment, clearly reliving the visit, before continuing:

"In the eight years that I've worked in adoption... if I could have taken her with me right then and there... then I would have. I stood at that crib and I cried."

And choking back tears even as Debbie retold this, "She wrapped her whole hand around my pinky, and held onto it... it was unbearably sad. The need to meet even the most basic goal of survival is incredible."

When Debbie Mansfield met with officials from these African nations, she presented the full spectrum of WHFC's international child welfare services. Intercountry adoption is only one component of the support and relief the agency provides to children and families. Child sponsorship, family empowerment and community development programs are other services that WHFC offers with the goal of keeping birth families together and preventing orphans. Debbie was quick to remind that working with governments around international adoption is always challenging:

"No country wants to have to send its children abroad. There are always many questions: What does it mean? How does it work? What happens to the children? We share their belief that intercountry adoption be a last resort option only for children who have no hope of growing up in a permanent family in their birth country."

WHFC has been successful in developing new partnerships with some of these African nations. The agency is officially registered now in Rwanda as a child welfare organization able to develop charitable programs, and WHFC is poised to pilot adoption programs in both Rwanda and Burundi in the next couple of months. (Burundi is Hague-accredited, and though Rwanda currently is not, there is a bill in parliament now to implement the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption.)

WHFC is still exploring options in both Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo, though there are some specific concerns. As Debbie reported, in Kenya the expected stay in-country is lengthy – six months or more – and may preclude many families from considering the program as a viable option. In the DRC right now there is considerable political unrest and therefore safety concerns for traveling staff and families. WHFC will monitor these situations and keep possibilities open should marked improvements develop within these countries.

What does this mean for families who are interested in adopting a child from one of these nations? It will be several months before the Rwanda and Burundi programs see an official launch, Debbie emphasizes. The first stage is piloting the programs with a limited number of families who have already applied to the agency and are currently "paperwork-ready" - a completed homestudy and USCIS approval. WHFC is actively preparing the necessary adoption guidelines and materials, including program fees and dossier instructions. Debbie elaborates, "As we follow the experiences of these pilot families, we will have a better understanding of how these programs work, and when to officially open them to all families for consideration."

Debbie adds, "We are still identifying who might be eligible to adopt from these countries. It seems somewhat open, but some governments have questions about single parents. From their perspective, children are often in orphanages because they had a single parent who could no longer adequately care for them so it can be difficult for them to understand that a qualified single parent in our country can successfully raise a child and meet all of his or her needs." For families at the start of their adoption journey but interested in these programs on the horizon, the next step should be to register with and/or apply to WHFC to begin the process. WHFC selects families for pilot programs from those who are already in process with their paperwork prepared.

Over the next months we expect to have more information available about the program and process in Rwanda and Burundi. Given the needs of the children in these countries, we are committed to providing services that will help improve the lives of orphaned children, and bring permanency to them. In our opinion, it is every child's birthright to have a loving and secure family.

## HUMANITARIAN AID — Medical Mission to Ethiopia



### Volunteer doctors save lives of mother and baby during first ever WHFC medical mission trip

Dr. Fletcher Wilson, a WHFC adoptive dad, anticipated hardships and limited medical supplies on his first medical mission to Ethiopia. But he had no idea that he'd save the lives of a mother and baby and do it with no electricity or water access at the hospital. Hours earlier, a truck had hit the water pipe in Adwa, causing it to burst and shutting off water to the whole city. Around the same time, a mother had gone into labor. She intended to give birth at home, but after hours of hard labor, she experienced complications making it necessary for her to walk several miles to reach the only hospital in Adwa. There she gave

birth with the assistance of a volunteer medical team from the U.S. When born, the baby was not breathing and there were several anxious minutes before the doctors were able to resuscitate him. The local doctor had no training in neonatal resuscitation and if not for the intervention of Dr. Wilson and his colleagues, the baby and possibly his mother would have died.

Wide Horizons For Children (WHFC) expanded its medical focus in Ethiopia to include physician-led medical trips to the Adwa and Sidama Zones of Ethiopia beginning in November 2008. During this first mission, the team, led by WHFC adoptive dad Dr. Fletcher Wilson and Dr. Stephan Coffman of New Hampshire, spent a week at the Adwa Hospital in Ethiopia's Tigray Region. While there, they completed 40 surgeries despite several days with no water or electricity and limited medical supplies. In addition to performing surgeries, future missions will provide training to local health professionals and traditional birth attendants, and also medical equipment and supply procurement.

These medical trips represent the latest of our medical initiatives in Ethiopia, which focus on improving the doctor-to-patient ratio, quality of care, and medical equipment and drugs available. For more details see [www.whfc.org](http://www.whfc.org). This is all part of Wide Horizons commitment to dramatically improve standards of living in the communities our children come from. Your support helps us keep that commitment. Join us, and help make the difference between life and death for thousands of mothers and babies.

## HORIZON KIDS

WHFC's Horizon Kids initiative finds parents for children who have been waiting for an adoptive family. Our waiting children are not specific to one country, instead there are waiting children in nearly every country in which we work. Many of the children have the potential for normal growth and development, and are waiting simply because they are older or part of a sibling group.

Some waiting children have mild, correctible medical needs, while others have more severe needs requiring special attention.



### Meet our Featured Waiting Child

Min-Je was born at 39 weeks gestation by normal delivery. He was born with Down Syndrome and Ventricular Septal Defect (VSD), for which he underwent a successful patch repair in November 2007. For more information about Min-Je, please contact Andrea Marshall, Horizon Kids Coordinator at 781.419.0382 or [amarshall@whfc.org](mailto:amarshall@whfc.org).

The following subsidies are available for the adoption of this child: \$4,000 program fee reduction (from Holt Children's Services).

### Get Started Now

- [Register today](#) to view profiles of waiting children and receive updates
- Learn about our new [subsidy programs](#)
- View our [online presentation](#)

## FAMILY STORIES

### The Laughing Boy Under the Table

My eight-year-old daughter, Ruby, tapped me on my shoulder and whispered. "Where's Adugna?" "What?" I said. I took a big whiff of incense and toasted coffee beans and sighed. I was sitting with our Adoption Group #51 in the lobby of the Horizon house. The little girls from the children's orphanage had just finished their traditional Ethiopian dance. Everyone's eyes glistened as, one by one, they said goodbye to the children who were leaving to live



with their new families in America.

"Where's Adugna?" Ruby asked again. "I thought he was with you," I said, getting up, accidentally stepping on her hand. "Ow!" she said. "Didn't you take him to shint bet (go to the bathroom)?"

My thirteen-year-old boy, Jimmy Ray, gave me a light sock in the thigh. "Mom, he's under there." He pointed to the wooden table in the center of the room with the platter of dabo (Ethiopian bread) on top.

Adugna, our newly adopted son, two-and-a half years old, was crouched underneath, bumping his head on the table and laughing at the clank of the bouncing knife and bread on the platter. [Read the full story at www.whfc.org](http://www.whfc.org).

I don't know how I could have missed that. I chalked it up to the fact that my toddler-radar hadn't been used in years. I looked over at Dave, my husband, who sat in the back of the room in a fluffy chair. I pointed to Adugna under the table. He thought I was pointing at Merawat, the smallest of the older girls, singing the traditional farewell song, so he smiled and nodded, touching his hand to his heart. Clearly, Dave's toddler-radar was also due for a tune-up.

I crawled in front of a row of people (I'm sure placing my rear-end square in the lens of at least three video cameras--sorry guys) and out into the center of the room. "Hey, buddy," I said. "Come here."

He gave me that rascal smile of his: eyes twinkling, head cocked to the side, half his face in an expression of full throttle joy, the other half, looking like he wondered what was so damn funny. "Hey buddy, we've got to sit over there." He had no idea what I was saying.

Nine days prior to this moment, we'd gotten off a twenty-hour flight from Los Angeles to Addis Ababa. Within the first hour of our arrival, we found ourselves standing in the hallway of the older kid orphanage. I had heard one of the sisters say Adugna's name. When I saw him running toward me, instinctively, I knelt down. I knew it was him. I'd spent the last four months of my life studying his face in the referral photo.

"Mama! Mama!" he said, throwing his arms around my neck.

I was shocked there wasn't the awkward moment I'd been preparing Ruby and Jimmy Ray for. I had told them not to expect Adugna to be thrilled to meet us, that he might even be afraid of us. I told them there was going to be a transition period, and that no matter how hard it would be for us, it was going to be particularly tough on him. But there I was, holding my new son in my arms, bonded in an instant, thinking maybe I had had it all wrong. Maybe all the adoption books I'd read didn't apply to us. Maybe our story was going to be different.

Then I saw Sister Tirhas, the woman who ran the older kid orphanage, laughing with Dave, eyebrows raised, arms folded, shaking her head. In perfect English, she said, "You're going to have your hands full with Adugna."

We subsequently learned that our guy and a couple of his buddies were responsible for the pile of toys that had been thrown up on the corrugated metal roof next door. He was famous for his ability to climb bookshelves. He leapt off of anything with some height and an edge, and did somersaults where ever possible, the closer to a brick wall, the better. That was day one.

On day two, we packed up and drove down south to Awassa for our family visit. Dave and I were apprehensive. Adugna was what they called a "half-orphan," which meant that one of his parents was alive. In his case, it was his father. He also had a brother, a sister (the same ages as Jimmy Ray and Ruby) and a baby half-brother and step-mother.

This wasn't what we'd imagined when the idea of adoption first came up at the breakfast table. We were looking at a photo spread in the Los Angeles Times of the two million orphans in Darfur.

"I want another brother or sister," Ruby said.

"No," I said. "I'm all set. Boy, girl bookends. I don't need another kid."

Jimmy Ray pointed to a photograph of a child with tears in his eyes, the shape of his bones exposed through sunken skin. "Looks like he could use a family," he said.

"That's not fair," Dave said, looking over the top of the sports section. "We can't save the world."

"But we could save him," Ruby answered.

After extensive conversations for months-- covering such topics as: biracial adoption, reactive attachment disorder (RAD), Should we reconfigure our home so the office could become a kid's bedroom? What if he hates us? What if he sets our house on fire? How are we going to come up with the money for three college tuitions? How can I be positive we're not taking some woman's child away from her? etc.-- I began to investigate our options. I'd written to a number of different agency's, all of which sent back form letters and applications. I wasn't ready for that. WHFC was the only one that had an actual human being contact me. Nicole Stenke was frank, smart and kind, gentle in her answers to my sometimes stupid questions. To this day, we have never laid eyes on her, yet she's had a profound impact on our lives. The decision to adopt and the huge love it has brought our family is not something I could ever sum up in words. At the tail end of our back-and-forth, where Nicole and I had touched on every scenario, debated it and pondered it, there was only one thing left to do. Her e-mail read, "Okay, Kath, let me know if this feels right for your family and we'll move forward." Adoption-speak for *fish or cut bait*.

We had a pow-wow in the family room and took a vote. It had to be unanimous or we weren't doing it. I'd heard too many stories about the high emotional price when even one member of a family is not onboard in the decision to bring a new child in the home. We mulled over every angle until I stuck my hand out and said, "I'm in."

Ruby and Jimmy Ray put their hands on top of mine and said, "I'm in."

It was Dave's turn. "Kath. . ." He shook his head.

"Okay, guys. It's over," I said. "We're not doing it."

"What?" Dave said. "I had something caught in my throat. Hell yeah, we're doing it. I'm in." He put his hand on the top of the stack. "Let's go to Ethiopia."

Eleven months later, I was under a table in Addis Ababa, grabbing the ankle of my new son, the light of my life, and pulling him out so he wouldn't knock the table over in the middle of the coffee ceremony. We crawled back to our spot among our new friends. I held him in my lap and we enjoyed the buna (coffee), the dabo, the laughs, the tears, the sights, the sounds, the smells, the music, and the people we had come to love in our time in Ethiopia.

In retrospect, the very thing that we had most dreaded, meeting Adugna's family and extended relatives, turned out to be the most enriching experience of our trip (outside of that initial hug, of course). The interpreter, Hagirso, was sensitive to everyone involved. He explained in detail the cultural differences and challenges that enabled Adugna's father to make the decision to give him up for adoption. We met Adugna's grandmother who had taken care of him when his mother was sick and after she had passed. We asked Hagirso to ask Adugna's father what the most important thing was for us to teach Adugna about his family in Ethiopia.

Adugna's father fought back tears as he spoke in Sidami. Hagirso listened intently. Adugna's father turned away. Hagirso folded his hands in his lap, took a deep breath and looked up at us. "He says he wants Adugna to know that he was loved, that he was always loved."

### **The Best Christmas Ever**

"This will be our last Christmas without children!" was a phrase my husband and I started saying to each other in 2003. We love the holiday season and somehow each year it came to represent another milestone in our wait to become parents. Unfortunately, we ended up saying this to each other for about five Christmas seasons before our wait finally came to a welcomed end.



My husband's extended family has been blessed many times through adoption and he always desired to have both biological and adopted children. I, too, was open to adoption but really hadn't had any experience with it. After unsuccessfully trying to conceive our first child, I started to research adoption as a family-building option. It amazed me how quickly it just felt right, and how excited I became to begin the process.

During an eight month time period, we prepared ourselves. I read and read! We attended informational meetings at a couple of adoption agencies and talked with numerous people that had experience with adoption. In July of 2005, we welcomed home our niece from China, and this experience confirmed what we already knew in our hearts. God had planned for us to adopt a baby! In August of 2005, we officially submitted our application to Wide Horizons For Children and started immediately working on all of the paperwork. We



decided to adopt from China for a few reasons, the main one being that our daughter would have a first cousin who was also Chinese with whom she could grow up. What a blessing that would be for both girls!

It took us approximately six months to complete all of the necessary paperwork and compile the required documents for the dossier. In March of 2006, our dossier was sent to China and the wait began. At that time we were hoping to be matched with a little girl in approximately eight to ten months.

We told everyone we knew about our plan and started preparing ourselves to become parents. We learned about Chinese culture, read up on traveling to China, and continued to research successful parenting strategies, specifically those associated with an adopted child. Every month that passed, the wait grew longer and longer and in turn more and more difficult. Our phrase changed a little bit during the Christmas seasons of '05 and '06 to more of a "Hopefully, this will be our last Christmas without children!"

In November of 2007, we were still waiting and were told by the agency that it would most likely be at least another year, at least one or two more holiday seasons, before we were matched with a baby. We were as ready as we could have been to parent and were devastated that the wait for our little girl continued to grow and become so unpredictable.

After a great deal of thought and discussion, my husband and I decided to pursue an interim adoption from Russia. Our strong desire to parent, coupled with our long term goal of adopting three children in all, led us to make this decision. It was difficult knowing that there was a strong possibility that the adoption of a baby girl from China might never come to fruition for us. Wide Horizons had recently changed their policy allowing concurrent adoption, but a lot of factors had to play out as far as time and ages of the children in order for both the Russian and Chinese adoptions to be successful.

In December of 2007, we started compiling the documents needed to adopt an infant boy from Russia. We chose Russia because there was a need for families and the program had recently resumed after being closed for regulations and policy changes. We welcomed Christmas of 2007 with a renewed excitement, hoping and praying that we would have a baby boy home with us by the following year. Having already completed a lot of the paperwork needed for China, it only took us about two months to put together the Russian dossier.

On February 1, 2008, our dossier was sent to Moscow. The expected time frame for a match was one to four months. Four months and one day later we got the call!! We had been matched with a baby boy in the Bryansk Region and needed to be in Russia in less than a week! The day of the call was just as wonderful and emotional as I had imagined it would be. In June of 2008, we made our first trip to Russia to meet our son! As many have said before us, from the moment we met our baby we knew that he was ours. On that first trip we petitioned the Russian courts to adopt our Nicholas!

We returned home a few days later filled with excitement. We had hoped to return to Russia for our court date within a few months and ultimately bring our Nicholas home. The wait between trips was not as hard as we thought it would be. We had pictures to look at and memories to relive from the first trip to see us through. Our family threw us a baby shower and we worked to prepare a nursery. What an exciting summer it was!

In October of 2008, we returned to Russia for our court hearing and were officially declared Nicholas' parents. We opted to go home for the mandatory ten day waiting period and then returned for the third and final trip to bring home our son! We landed back in the US on November 1st, 2008, with the most amazing twenty month old little boy who has changed our life forever! We have been so blessed and now understand that God truly had the perfect plan for our family. Christmas of 2008 was indeed the Best Christmas Ever as we celebrated both the birth of God's Son and the arrival of our own!

