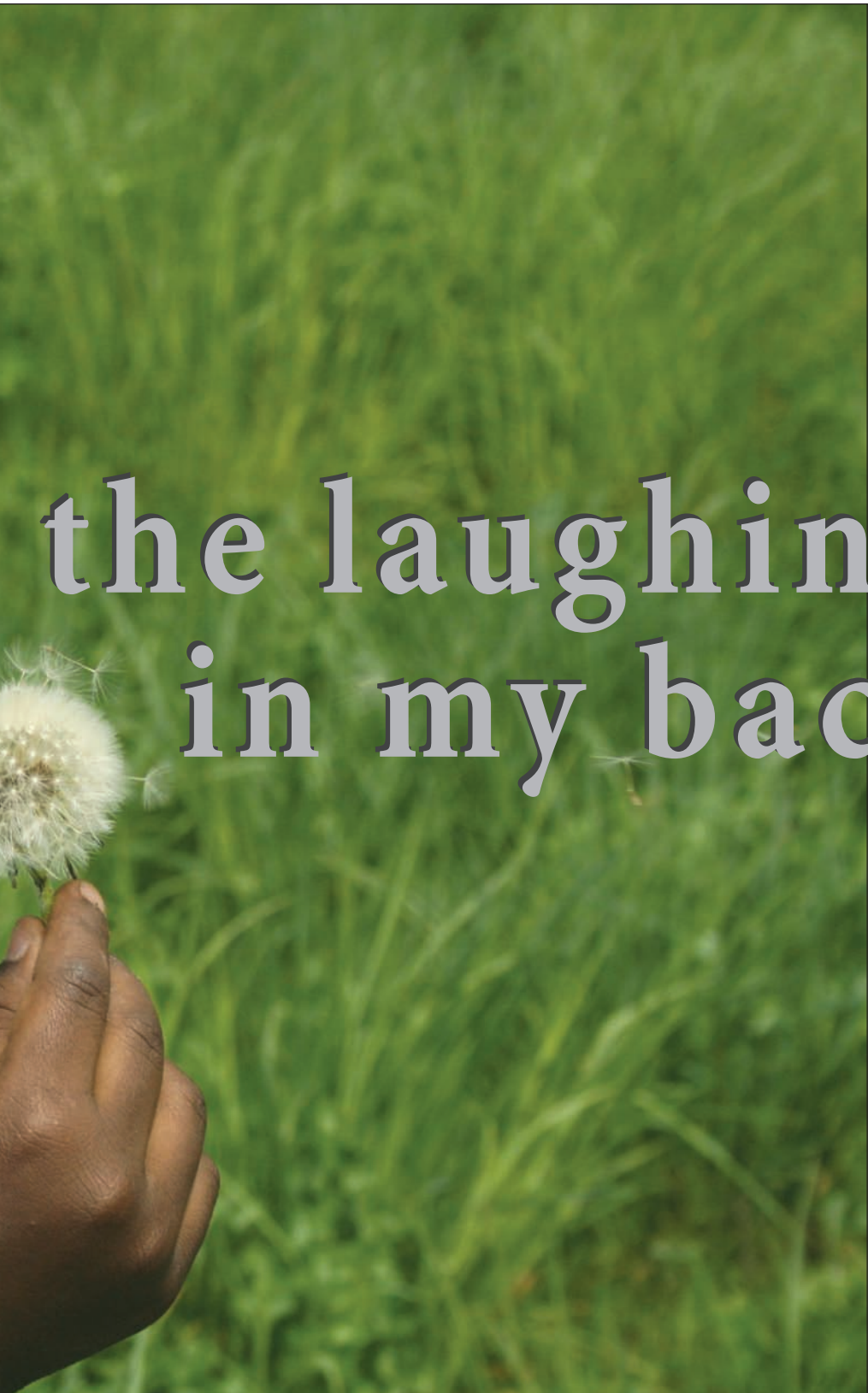




**EXPERIENCING** the joys of spring in 2007, Mikias Noyce is adjusting to life in the United States after being adopted from Ethiopia in January 2006. Left, meeting for the first time are Mikias and his new mother, Alison Noyce.



# the laughing boy in my backseat

By Alison Noyce

**E**ven as a little girl, I knew that one day I would adopt. My older brother and I were both adopted and my younger sister is my parents' biological child. Growing up in a family formed by both birth and adoption was a positive experience for me.

My husband, Kurt and I have two biological daughters, Devyn, 19, and Madison, 16. When the girls were little we felt drawn to add to our family through adoption and investigated adopting from China. At the time we were both 30 and were surprised to find out we were too young to adopt from China. Instead of pursuing adoption from another place, we prayed about it and decided it wasn't the right time for us. The years marched along and we were busy raising our daughters and didn't again feel that pull to adopt.

## ***Africa's Orphans***

An ordinary Sunday 11 years later changed everything. Missionaries who run an

orphanage in Kenya visited our church. They showed a video of the kids and talked about the joy these children had in spite of their many hardships. I was moved watching these children, most of them wearing ill fitting, mismatched ragged clothes, laughing, singing and dancing. My eyes watered, my heart beat more quickly in my chest, I turned to my husband and said, "I think we are supposed to adopt a child from Africa."

At this point we were 41 years old and our girls were teenagers. Yet, this feeling I had about adopting from Africa wouldn't go away. I dreamt about it. When driving in my car I would suddenly picture a little boy with dark brown skin laughing in my back seat. I couldn't

**Although it was trying, the hurricane phase was short. The silver lining in the difficult first weeks was that his attachment to us never wavered. If he was scared or sad, he would come right over to one of us for comfort. He learned to say 'I love you' quickly and said it often.**

shake the strong feeling that there was a specific boy waiting for us.

During the next several months, we talked, prayed and learned which African countries allowed international adoption and investigated adoption agencies. Kurt and our daughters agreed this was what we were supposed to do. The journey that would lead us to our son, Mikias, had begun.

### ***Starting the Journey***

Adopting from Ethiopia was appealing on many levels. We were saddened to learn of the hardships faced by the Ethiopian people. The number of orphans was difficult to fathom. The need was clear, but it wasn't the only thing that attracted us.

We were drawn to the culture of Ethiopia: the rich history, the beauty of the country and most of all, the people. We learned the value that Ethiopian people place on their children through reading and from the staff at Wide Horizons For Children, the adoption agency we

chose. What the children lacked in regard to their basic needs was often made up for in love. We felt a child who experienced love and was valued would make a good adjustment into a new family.

Choosing to adopt an older child was an easy decision for us. We all felt strongly that we wanted a child who was already waiting for us. On a practical note, our daughters were busy teenagers; we wanted a child who could jump right in and be a part of our lives.

The adoption process itself was a matter of climbing a mountain of paperwork, taking a required class and meeting with our social worker for our homestudy. It was exciting as

we prepared for the child we affectionately called "the new kid." Much of it was filled with waiting . . . really not too different than pregnancy.

The first time we saw our son was in a photograph sent via e-mail from our social worker. He was so handsome, 4½ years old, wearing a huge smile and a hot pink girl's track suit.

We were instantly in love. We made copies of that photograph, framed it, sent it to our relatives and carried a copy wherever we went. Everyone from the guy at the auto body shop to my dentist had a look. The response from everyone, loved ones and those we barely knew, was universally positive.

### ***Meeting Mikias***

Although the wait felt long, less than six months after starting the adoption process Kurt and I were on a plane to Ethiopia. We felt a mix of every emotion. I don't recall a time when I was more excited. We were going

to meet our son. I was also worried about everything. How would the week at home be for Devyn and Madison? What if one of them got sick or hurt? We were so far away, it was unnerving.

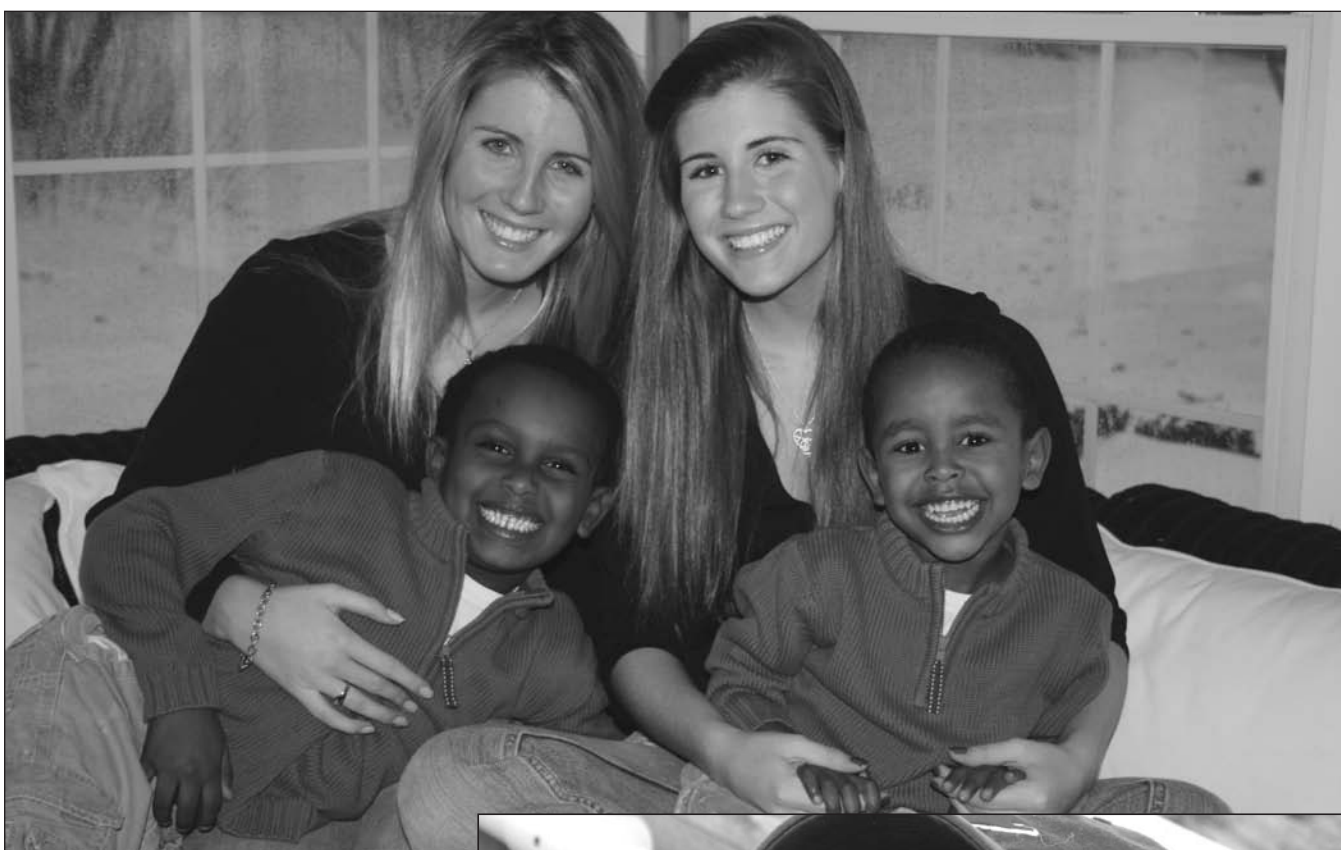
The thing that nagged at me most was fear. What if this is big mistake? What if he doesn't like me? What if he takes one look at his new mom and runs the other way? I already loved Mikias but would he love me?

After a long and sleepless night we were on our way to Horizon House to meet our son. He shyly stood in the courtyard waiting for us. He was smaller than I expected him to be. He wore a Hawaiian print shirt under an orange and blue sweat suit. His smile was more timid than the one in the picture. I crouched down to say hello and give him a hug. He softly hugged me back. He smelled so good, like baby shampoo. I took a chance and picked him up. I felt his legs go around my waist and his arms tighten around my neck. He was hugging me tightly. He wasn't running away, he was hugging me back.

It was about 10 minutes later when he finally loosened his grip to get a better look at me that I finally could look at his beautiful face again. All of my fears were gone. This boy was my son, he was the boy I pictured laughing in my back seat.

His greeting to Kurt was equally warm. They hugged and kicked a soccer ball around. After a while Mikias wandered off to play with his friends, but his gaze was never off us for long. If another child approached us he was right there, holding our hands, letting the others know we were his. Maybe he was afraid like I was, that we might run in the other direction. No way. That boy was ours.

The day after meeting Mikias, we traveled to meet his aunt. Mikias was orphaned as an infant and his young aunt cared for him until she was financially unable to. Meeting the person who loved and cared for Mikias was emotional. She embraced us warmly and without hesitation. We spoke through a translator about the boy who forever would belong to both of us. She and the neighborhood women told us about our new



**ENJOYING** the holidays together are siblings Devyn, left, and Madison with their brothers Mikias, left and Jemberu. Right, Mikias enjoys a family getaway on Cape Cod in late fall 2006.

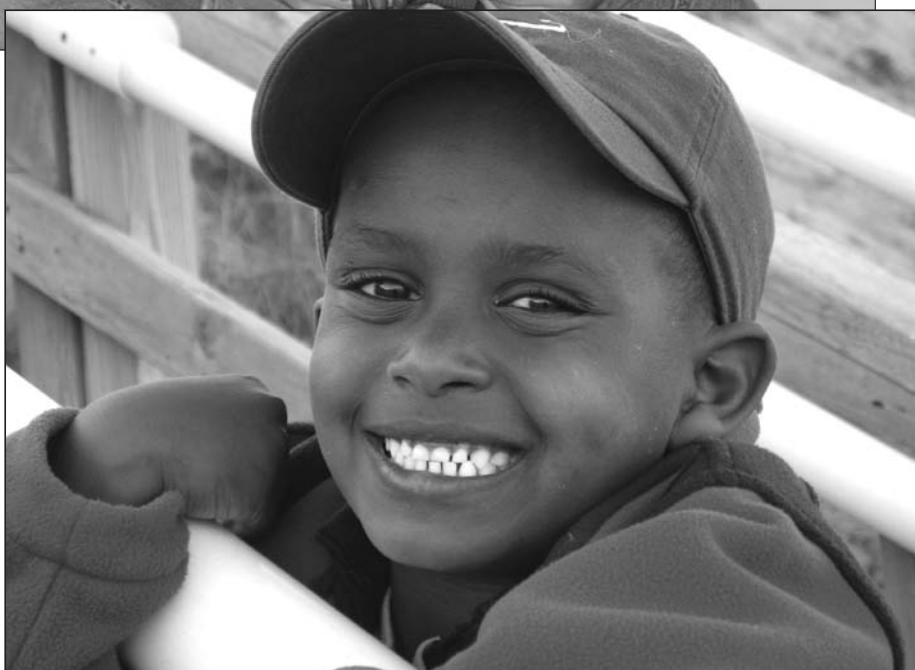
son. We promised her we would love and care for Mikias forever.

### **Coming Home**

The first weeks at home with Mikias were both happy and hard. Although many people talked about how quickly he would learn English, no one told us how hard it would be until he did.

Mikias was like a hurricane. He emptied every drawer, ate like a boy who was unsure when he'd eat again, unplugged plugs, figured out how all of our electronics worked and, thanks to the long flight home from Ethiopia, had day and night confused. He would unbuckle himself from his carseat so he could come over to kiss me as I drove on the highway. He was smart and fearless.

Although it was trying, the hurricane phase was short. The silver lining in the difficult first weeks was that his attachment to us never wavered. If he was scared or sad, he would come to one of us for comfort. He learned to say "I love you" quickly and said it often.



It has been two years since Mikias joined our family. His English is perfect. He goes to school, has a lot of friends, is adored by his sisters, swims like a fish, helps his dad in the yard and can't wait to be a big brother.

Soon after Mikias was settled in, Kurt and I started the process of adopting another child from Ethiopia. On Dec. 1, 2007, we arrived home with our precious 3-year-old son,

Jemberu. We are all completely in love with him and couldn't be happier.

*Alison Noyce is an adoptee and mom through both birth and adoption. She and her husband, Kurt, are loving parents to Devyn, 19, Madison, 16, Mikias, 6, and Jemberu, 3. Mikias and Jemberu were adopted from Ethiopia through Wide Horizons for Children. They reside in Rochester, Mass.*