



NEW MOM MARION plays with her daughter, Emma, in an Ethiopia orphanage. Left, Josh and Marion Peklo take their newly adopted twins, Emma and Henry, for a walk.

An Unexpected Surprise

By Marion and Josh Peklo



Even before we were married, we discussed adoption as a part of our future family. What we didn't dream of was that our first child would be adopted, nor that our first "child" would be twins. Two years into our marriage we decided to try to expand our family the old fashioned way and after too long trying to no avail, we came to the realization that starting a family should not be filled with frustration.

After briefly investigating infertility treatments, we agreed that for us, a family more than a pregnancy, was our paramount goal. The final decision to pursue adoption was less about choosing adoption as a viable path, but more about abandoning one path for another. We had been so consumed with our first approach that we wanted to separate them and

fully commit to adoption under its own merits, not as plan B.

We both thought we wanted to adopt internationally and wanted an infant as our first child. After considering programs from across the globe, including various domestic options, we independently arrived at two conclusions. We wanted to pursue an adoption from Africa and preferred to only deal with one agency. Marion grew up with African culture being present in her home as her father was in the Peace Corps during the 1960s in Malawi.

Once we selected Africa, the path narrowed and Ethiopia seemed to be our only option. From an information session, we knew Wide Horizons for Children in Waltham, Mass., had an Ethiopia program, as well as an office in our home state of Connecticut. Our final step

before moving forward was to attend an information session tailored to Ethiopia. A family who had recently returned with an infant shared their experience and watching them as a family was more than enough to convince us that Ethiopia was the right decision.

We were never so eager to complete a mountain of paperwork. An added perk to our decision to adopt from Ethiopia was the relatively short referral period, which was then three months for an infant, as well as the equal chance of being referred a boy or girl. By the time we completed the paperwork and immigration approval we were still in a fairly small window of four to six months.

That was April 2006, so by September of that year we had painted a room, purchased too much baby gear and were discussing packing our bags. We had taken the approach of keeping busy during the wait with preparations for the baby and a kitchen renovation. We knew the waiting period could be difficult and wanted our referral to be a total surprise so we had not spoken to our agency since April.

In September, we learned that the wait would be an additional four to six months. We knew

that a 12-month wait was not at all uncommon in the adoption world, but it was the doubling of the wait more than the reality of the time that caught us by surprise and initially felt devastating.

We still thought we were ready for a single baby, so we decided to find something to fur-

we could have done as it provided us with much needed relaxation, distraction and one final romantic vacation.

The morning we returned to work, Marion received a call from our social worker and with her mind still on a surfboard did not immediately dream this was the referral call.



The 16-hour flight allowed us plenty of time of time to contemplate the exciting uncertainties that lay ahead as we flew closer to where we would meet our children who were complete strangers.

ther distract ourselves. Josh came home from work two weeks later and said, "How do you feel about surfing in Costa Rica?" As our time as a couple was limited, he thought we should do something purely for us. We booked tickets for the week after Christmas, left a phone number with our agency, and headed for surfing lessons in Costa Rica. It was the best thing

After realizing it was a call from the agency, she braced for news of a further extended wait as our social worker gave her our momentous news.

Marion asked if it was a boy or a girl and that is when we learned we were no longer as ready because we had been blessed with twins, a

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CUDDLING UP for the long ride home are Henry and his new dad Josh Peklo. Below, Henry takes some tentative first steps with some assistance.



boy and a girl. Since we worked a few blocks apart, Marion ran to spread the news. Josh was also caught off guard and assumed something was wrong, perhaps a family tragedy, but in an instant and with a single photo of our two babies, the previously abstract process had become completely real. We were in love.

The next 68 days were a blur as we reorganized to fit two cribs into an already small room, researched double strollers, and prepared for our trip to Ethiopia. The 16-hour flight allowed us plenty of time to contemplate the exciting uncertainties that lay ahead as we flew closer to where we would meet our children who were complete strangers. We arrived in Addis Ababa at night and were met by a Wide Horizons for Children representative who took us to the guest house, which was located in the same compound as the children's house where our twins were.

We drove through the city, oblivious of the jet lag, taking in the sounds and smells of our children's country, hopeful but doubtful that we would be able to meet the twins that night. After a short drive, we turned down a dirt alley and an imposing, unmarked steel gate opened revealing a sanctuary of love and care for so many children including two who belonged

to us. Before we even took our bags to our room, they asked if we would like to see our children.

Emma must have somehow known we were coming as she was awake, sitting on the nanny's lap and she smiled as if on cue when we walked in. Henry was deep in sleep so content that although their nanny said we could wake him there was no need; we were with him and him with us. As we both held Emma and whispered to sleeping Henry all the uncertainties of this long awaited meeting had been unfounded.

We stayed in Ethiopia for two weeks and savored every moment. The Ethiopian people are one of the most gracious and happy people we have ever met and we were constantly amazed at how everyone seemed to smile despite the deplorable poverty that pervades so much of the country. After two days of spending time with Henry and Emma and then returning them to the nursery, we brought a crib into our room so we could all be together.

On two occasions we were able to take trips outside the city. We took a guided day trip with a group of other families to the north to see the Blue Nile Gorge and were intrigued by the

landscape which was reminiscent of the Grand Canyon. Our second excursion took us south to the Sidama region to meet Henry and Emma's birth family.

Again, we were surprised by the topography as we drove into a lush valley with palms that seemed Polynesian in comparison to our western stereotypes of Ethiopia from the famines of the 1980s. The clearing at the end of a dirt trail, which was our children's first home, even separated from our emotional connection, was truly the most physically beautiful place we had ever been.

The other certainty in the experience was that there was no way to prepare for the meeting. We asked ourselves thousands of questions: What should or can we ask without being offensive? Will they be distant or welcoming? Will we ask everything that we want to, what will Henry and Emma want to know in the future?

We knew that regardless of how events transpired, this was the first of many undertakings we would complete for Henry and Emma.

The visit was more amazing than we could have imagined. We met their aunt and uncle on their mother's side, their four siblings, and a cousin. Through a translator we were able to ask our questions and learn details that we can share with Henry and Emma. Their dad was a farmer and jokester. Henry was born first. We all shared higher education as a priority and more.

In addition to the priceless details of their heritage, it was apparent everyone in that clearing had the best interest of the twins who would always belong to all of us in mind. Although unspoken, we all felt reassured for Henry and Emma. We were probably only in their village for 20 minutes but we were so focused that it could have been hours.

As we hugged and kissed our children's extended family goodbye, we realized that unbeknownst to us, the clearing was now filled

with neighbors who had come to see us off in the best tribute to little Henry and Emma that we could have imagined. We were fortunate enough to have two social workers with us

can't remember what we did before they were in our family. From the moment we first saw their referral picture we knew they were ours but now when they instinctively shy away from

A little more than a year since we returned, Henry and Emma are now 2 years old and every day is filled with discovery, sometimes tears but always laughter and smiles, and we can't remember what we did before they were in our family. From the moment we first saw their referral picture we knew they were ours ...

who videotaped the meeting so some day we can show it to Henry and Emma and hopefully it will convey the love that allowed us to find each other.

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a stranger holding them, we know they see us as their parents just as easily.



Marion and Josh Peklo are the proud parents of 16-month-old Henry and Emma and have recently relocated to Davidson, N.C. Marion stays home with the twins and Josh works as technical director for the Davidson College Theatre Department.




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