

Making the Difference in a Child's Life: An Adoption Story



From time to time, I'll see a *feel good* news story on television about an exceptional person – one who performs such a selfless act of love and compassion that I can't help but think: *If we just had more people like this, the world would be a far better place.* Such people inspire us and force us to ask ourselves how we too can lead better lives. I'm

fortunate to call one of those people my friend. Let me tell you about her...

Amy Fanning lives in Greeley, Colorado, about 60 miles north of Denver. She and her husband Shane are going through a very exciting time in their lives. They are currently in the process of adopting a child from an orphanage in the African country of Ethiopia. Until court proceedings have been finalized, Amy can't publicly disclose the nine-year-old boy's name. For now, she refers to him by the first letter of his name: T.

T had been waiting for a family to step forward for over a year. Being older than many at the orphanage, he's watched younger children arrive and then leave with loving families, patiently waiting and wondering when or if his turn would come. Older children tend to have a tougher time being placed with adoptive families. A lot of aspiring parents are looking to raise children from when they are babies.

While overseas adoptions have become popular options in recent years for parents unable to conceive, this was not an obstacle for the Fannings who are fortunate enough to already have two biological sons, ages nine and seven. Their drive to adopt came from above. As Amy puts it, "God called and we answered." Devout Christians, the Fannings had felt for some time that God was calling on them to help others – in a way beyond writing checks to charities. They wanted to truly make a difference in people's lives. After hearing a sermon on *God's heart for the orphan, widow and foreigner*, the Fannings found themselves in front of an Ethiopian adoption table at their church. Amy had always had an interest in Africa, and even traveled to Kenya in 2009 on a mission trip. The stars were aligned, and the Fannings knew they were meant to take a leap of faith and adopt a child.

The adoption process is exhausting and expensive. It includes a home study with a social worker, approval from the state, compilation of a dossier stacked full of notarized and certified documents, and submission of all required paperwork to an Ethiopian court. Once everything is in order, the Fannings will travel half way around the world to Ethiopia for their court date. Once they have passed court, they'll legally become T's parents. They'll get to meet their new son, but that won't mark the beginning of T's homecoming. The Fannings will need to travel back home without him (a thought that saddens Amy) and wait for their documentation to be submitted to the U.S. embassy in Ethiopia. A few weeks later, once *that* process has been completed, they'll be given the green light to make the long trip back to Ethiopia, pick up their son, and head on back to Colorado with the newest member of their family.

If the journey sounds exhausting, it is... as the Fannings can *already* attest to. You see, T won't be the first child they've adopted from Ethiopia... He'll be the **third**.

Last year, after receiving that call from God, the Fannings

opened their home and hearts to two other boys from that very same orphanage. They had originally planned on adopting only a three-year-old named Kalid. After the paper work had been filed and the adoption process had begun, however, Amy experienced a nagging feeling that she and her husband were meant to adopt a second child. Shane wasn't so sure. The two decided that they would only adopt a second if God dropped the opportunity in their laps. Soon after, they found out that Kalid had a five-year-old brother named Abuzaid, who also resided at the orphanage. The Fannings kept them together by bringing both home that summer.



It was a whole new world for Kalid and Abuzaid who understandably experienced a huge culture shock in their new surroundings. Everything that they had known before was suddenly different. Communication was a challenge. Neither of the boys spoke English, but all members of the

family found that they could interact pretty decently through signs, pointing, and teaching each other basic words in English and Amharic. The Fanning's biological sons, Landon and Jonah, have loved having new brothers. In fact, they thought of them as family before Amy and Shane ever traveled to Ethiopia. Jonah once said that Kalid and Abuzaid have been his brothers since the day they were born, because God always knew they were going to be part of their family.

Kalid and Abuzaid have come a long way in a year and a half. Kalid is in my daughter's preschool class. I see him most weekday mornings as the students and their parents wait in line for the school day to begin. His bright smile lights up the room whenever he hears someone mention his name. It's clear he enjoys a very happy and adjusted life. His English is

as clear as any of his classmates'. One would never guess that he wasn't born in this country. Abuzaid started kindergarten after only being in America for seven weeks. It wasn't the Fanning's original plan, but he was ready. He is a fast learner and has become a great reader, catching up quickly with his peers.

Having broken down the language barrier with her boys, Amy has used the experience and the skills she learned to give back to her community. She makes time in her busy schedule to volunteer at the East African Community Center in Greeley, teaching English to Somali women who are working toward taking GED and citizenship classes.

Now, back to T. Ever since leaving Ethiopia last year, the Fannings had been praying for the other children at the orphanage. A few months ago, they read about T and his long stay there. The Fannings started to feel like they were being called on again to do something more than just pray. They presented their idea to their children who were ecstatic over the notion of another new brother joining their family. Amy jokes that she'll now have an entire basketball team of sons.



As any parent knows, having children isn't cheap. With raising four children (soon to be five), the Fannings live a very frugal lifestyle. The family functions on a single-income from Shane's job as a sales manager at the local newspaper. Amy clips coupons and shops the ads. They concentrate on making wise financial decisions, never going on vacations or driving fancy cars. They spend little money on their house.

"We figure our money going to something like adoption is a much better use of our funds, as it will benefit our children

in so many ways”, Amy told me. “God doesn’t call us to hoard our money or to spend it like crazy, but to use it for His kingdom and that’s what we feel like we’re able to do.”

With their upcoming trips back and forth to Africa, travel costs will be substantial. But the Fannings are not without support. A group of families have created a website for auctioning off donated items to offset the expenses not just of the Fannings, but also of the adoptive families of two other children at the orphanage. The auctions end on December 2nd.

I was compelled to write this article, which is a clear departure from my normal political ramblings, because I felt like someone needed to. I thoroughly admire the Fannings, and believe that their children are very blessed to have such thoughtful and loving parents. While there are several charitable organizations out there that help bring aid to children, it’s not often that you meet people who choose a lifestyle of commitment and challenge to give endless opportunities and unconditional love to the children in this world who need it the most. One only has to look at pictures of their family to see that love, and understand their contribution to this world.

If you would like to contribute to offsetting the Fanning’s expenses in bringing T home, you can do so here. Thank you.