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A
LION
INSIDE

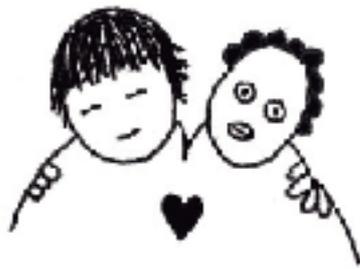
MY TRAVEL JOURNAL – THE STORY OF AN ADOPTION FROM ETHIOPIA

Written and illustrated by
LISI LLUCH HERBERT

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Dedicated to my sons, Simón and León
(Lion), to whom I wish to give roots and
wings.

Introduction

I decided to write this journal to make sure that we would never forget the unforgettable journey we went on from the 27th of June to the 15th of July 2013, our journey to Ethiopia to meet our son Léon for the first time. In many respects, this was as much an inner journey as it was an outer one. Throughout this heart-warming journey, we discovered so many beautiful things about how to build a family, in our case with a child born from the heart.

The waiting process was not an easy one, and it certainly had its ups and downs, but we knew that one day or another, sooner or later, we would be assigned our son or daughter and that until that day we would just have to be patient. After what seemed like an eternity, that long-awaited day finally arrived, one Saturday in April 2013, the phone rang. It was a boy. He was our boy.

That day changed everything. That one thing that we had been dreaming of for so long was here, and after all of the uncertainties involved in this whole process, it seemed that we were finally going to adopt a child. The waiting period is in many respects one of the hardest parts of the adoption process, and it is one that can cause considerable anxiety, but despite this, we learnt so much from this experience, and as time went on, our desire to adopt a child only grew stronger. The time had come for us to be adoptive parents. We were going to adopt a child. We were going to be parents again.

We understood that this was our destiny and that all of the obstacles and challenges that we had overcome formed part of this destiny and that all of this moulded us into the people and parents that we are today.



Tuesday 12th March

Destiny

Everything is written in life.

Ever since I was a child, I have always loved Africa. I dreamt of becoming a reporter for the National Geographic Magazine, going on adventures through the African Savannah and photographing animals in the wild. I wanted to be an adventurer. I wanted to be at one with nature, to be at one with life. I never lost this spirit of adventure, and I continued to dream about Africa. Peter Beard's work fascinated me, and I hung his photos on my walls, read his books and journals and completely absorbed myself in his work. I felt a real connection to him, and he inspired me.

In 2001, I left behind a settled life in Manhattan. I was finally going to live my African adventure. I started in Sao Tomé Principe where I was involved in a humanitarian project. My initial plan was that I was going to travel around the whole continent once the project was over, but unfortunately, it wasn't to be, and in the end, the trip started and finished in the same place. I must admit I was disappointed, but I still don't regret going on the trip, as although it didn't go exactly to plan, I still learnt so many things. Most importantly, what you don't need to be happy. I learnt that the happiest person isn't the one who has the most, but the one who needs the least. The people made me smile, and I fully understood that they had so much more to offer me than I could give them.

It was also the first time that I understood what it felt like to be the racial minority. There was no tourism in this area and I could count on one hand the number of white people that there were. Whenever I walked through the streets, they called me "the white girl", but I knew they weren't being racist, it was the logical way to call me. After this trip, I felt fully aware that the way I perceived things had changed forever.

I had changed.

Many years later I met Alex, and it was during one of those heart-to-heart conversations, in which you both lay your cards out on the table, that we discovered that we both shared a common desire: to adopt a child. And that's what we did. We adopted our child from Africa, and in doing so, we created a permanent connection between us and this marvellous continent that we both loved so much.

Every word that you read on these pages has been written out of love for my children. I hope that someday they will truly understand how important this journey was for us all. How important it was that we found Lion, and likewise, how important it was that Lion found us.

Having a son, brother, nephew, grandson, cousin, godson, friend, neighbour, classmate, partner... from Ethiopia can change the way we perceive and feel things. It breaks down barriers and opens up our minds. In our case, things feel different; we are made of a different skin. Something inside us has changed, and it will never go back to the way it was before. Adopting was an act of love, and it was one that has made us more connected to life and has brought us closer to other people.



Friday 29th March

Some facts about poverty in Ethiopia

I

In the mid-80s, Ethiopia was hit by a severe drought. When I was around 10 years old, I remember seeing images of children dying of hunger, skeletal children with really bloated stomachs. Some of them were so weak that they couldn't even support the weight of their head.

Things haven't changed much since then. Ethiopia is still one of the poorest countries in the world. Ethiopian families don't earn more than 450 dollars per year, and 1 in 10 children die before their first birthday, and 1 in every 6 children die before they are 6 years old and 44% of Ethiopia's population are under 15 years old. 60% of children suffer from serious malnutrition, and the average life expectancy is 62 years old. 1.5 million people are infected with AIDS (the 6th country most affected by AIDS in the world), and 720,000 children are orphans because of AIDS. Ethiopia has an estimated population of around 91 million inhabitants.

Ethiopia receives less aid per capita than any other country in Africa. In the 90s the country's population grew by 3%, this was faster than the 2.2% growth in food. The country was hit hard by the drought: the first year there was no harvest, the second year there were no seeds and the third there were no animals. Half of the children will never go to school. 88% will never go to secondary school. The price of coffee, which is the country's most important export, fell by 50% from 1998 to 2002. In Ethiopia, there is 1 doctor for every 24,000 children. In 1993, after 30 years of war, Eritrea became independent from Ethiopia; this left the nation landlocked without an outgoing seaport.

These days, Ethiopia is second only to China in terms of the number of children who are put up for adoption. The country with the highest number of couples looking to adopt a child from Ethiopia is the USA with Spain in second place. And despite Ethiopia's current situation, I will never be able to guarantee that my son will have a better life in Spain than he would have had in Africa. In fact, I often wonder whether we are doing the right thing. Making the choice to adopt a child from another country isn't a decision that you take lightly, as not only will they be leaving their country behind, but also their context, history, culture and the people from their ethnic group and race.

During the long waiting period, there's a lot of time for reflecting on things. You find that you spend a lot of time listening to your inner voice, and gradually you begin to discover exactly why you feel that this is the right decision. There are times when people have said to me, "I admire you, this is a good thing that you are doing", and I find myself smiling somewhat incredulously, but inside I am still filled with doubt. No. It isn't a good deed. We have simply decided to follow our hearts and fulfil our desire to build our family.

Anytime I feel unsure about the decision we have made to take a young child from their home country, all I have to do is look at my son Simón, and I instantly recall the thousands of times that I hug or kiss him every day, that knowing look that he gives me and the special sense of humour that we share. I know that no matter where I am, he feels that I am with him and that I hold a special place in his heart. I can't imagine what life would be like for a child who did know their mother's love, as this is the most intense, universal and unconditional love of all.

The waiting process can only be described as an emotional rollercoaster. The process is so specific but yet so abstract that it is often hard to assimilate, and the uncertainty of the whole process can drive you crazy. You can even find yourself falling in love with an idea. There are other times however when things seem clearer, and you would be prepared to break down any wall just to attain your goal. It is all part of the process, and it's completely natural, sometimes you will find that you are being guided by your head and other times by your heart. But the decision you have made is one that you are bound to forever. There is a point in the process where there is no going back. You are going to be an adoptive mother, and this means that you must assume all of the risks that are involved, fight on all fronts and most importantly love with all your heart, no matter how long you have had to wait.



Monday 8th April

Our son Simón, the future big brother

On the 1st of June 2009, Simón came into our lives.

Simón is an affectionate boy. He is receptive, cheerful, curious and sociable, he loves exploring, and most important of all, he is happy. His smile and twinkling eyes light up the rest of his face and for a long time he has been our only treasure, the most important thing in our lives, and he has made us, and continues to make us very happy.

We love him so much, and that's why we have decided that we would like our family and all the love that we all have within ourselves to grow. Simón's family will be different, he will have to share his life with a child from another country, a child who is from another racial and ethnic group and culture, and while obviously they will have different skin colours, it is like what St. Exupery said in *The Little Prince* "what is essential is invisible to the eye".

This is not a decision that we have taken lightly, but what we want more than everything is for Simón to continue being happy, we hope that he will not only accept the future member of the family but that he will make them feel welcome, showing them the same love that he does to us every day. This is a journey that we are going on together, and we will hold each other's hands while we overcome any obstacles that might stand in our way.

And although we know that this path might not always be easy, this is the path that we have chosen.



Monday 29th April

The assignment

On Saturday night, we received a call from the International Adoption Collaborating Entity (the ECAI), asking if it would suit us to go on Monday morning to find out which child we had been assigned. When Alex picked up the phone, he was sitting on the edge of the bed, and I remember jumping about around him ecstatically while he calmly nodded. The only thing I heard was Alex repeating the name “Lencho” over and over again. I remember thinking that it sounded so strange. When he hung up, we looked at each other, and burst out laughing and started like hyperactive children on top of the bed. I immediately started asking him hundreds of questions that he obviously didn’t have an answer for, as they had only called us to organise an appointment for us to come in and receive the file about the child we had been assigned.

The only information they had given Alex was that Lencho was a baby, less than one year old; in fact, he was about 6 months old. They also said that he was a lovely baby. This broke my heart. No matter how long you have been mentally preparing yourself for this moment, it’s still so hard to accept that your future child had ended up in an orphanage because his parents had given him up. The reality of this hit me hard. Over time, this sensation became somewhat of a strange feeling of unreality.

On Monday morning, we arrived at the ECAI where they made us wait in the entrance hall for what seemed like forever. I felt very impatient, but at the same time, I felt scared. In just a few minutes, I was going to see my son’s face for the first time. I didn’t know if I was ready for this.

Finally, they came out to get us and we went into the same office where we had sat so many times before. I went to hang up my bag and jacket, and just when I was pulling out my chair to sit down, Merche placed the photo of our son on the table in front of us.

“Wait”, I wanted this moment to be perfect. I wanted to be sitting down and have had time to take in a deep breath before seeing his tiny face. But as is to be expected, I couldn’t wait. I immediately picked up the photo, and looked at it closely for a few seconds, overcome by a mixture of emotions: elation and curiosity. In fact, it’s hard to put into words how I felt. I looked at Alex, and then we both looked at Merche in disbelief, both feeling completely overwhelmed. I handed the photo to Alex and we continued to look at it. We looked at each other, we laughed. We knew straight away that we loved him.

He was our son. He was really ours. And he was so beautiful. This moment seemed so real but somewhat strange at the same time.

He seemed so small, so defenceless, so calm. I just wanted to be able to hug him. He was wearing a knitted orange and pink jumper because it gets cold in Addis Ababa, which is 2300 metres above sea level. In the photo, he was looking to one side and one of his hands was close to his mouth.

The longer we looked at the photo, the more our faces lit up. After a few minutes, we were given his medical report, and although it mentioned that he was slightly anaemic, he was healthy. He was 65cm long and he weighed 7.2kgs. At one point, I realised that I had to fight back my tears. I have cried a lot during the whole adoption process, and now I found myself struggling to come to terms with his life story.

We knew that he had been found by a policeman in front of Hotel Apolo in Dukem, a town which is located just 30 kilometres from the capital city and that he was handed over to the NACID orphanage and he was looked after there. Once there, one of the nurses gave him the name 'Lencho'.

I knew that I had to accept that my son had a life without us for 8 months before we collected him, but even from the start, I found myself wanting to know more. When I got home, I searched tirelessly trying to find out what his name meant, but despite my efforts I had no luck and I didn't find it. I continued looking until I finally decided to ask our friend Abraham who lives in Addis Ababa, to see if he could find out more about the origin of his name.

The next day I asked Merche if it would be possible to find out why the nurse had given him this name. She told us the following week that Hawi, one of the nurses at the orphanage, had given him this name because she said that he was a survivor. He was a "Brave Lion" as he had overcome so many adversities and he had come out of it all, not just unscathed, but safe and sound. From that moment, we knew that his name could be none other than lion.

We called him Lencho, which has a beautiful meaning because he is strong and beautiful like a lion. By giving him this name, it provides him with a permanent connection to his past and his origins. The lion is a typical African animal, as well as being the most symbolic animal in Ethiopia. The Lion of Judah features on the country's flag and on the back of its coins. We are delighted that he is called Lencho, and we feel lucky that he was given a name with so much significance in Ethiopia. It seems incredible to think about it now, but when Simón was born, we considered calling him Lion.



We are sure that his biological parents felt that they weren't able to give him the life that he deserved and that they wanted him to have a life full of opportunities. We know that they must have loved Lencho so much and that's why they did all that they could to ensure that he would have a better life than the one they were able to give him. The decision to give a child up for adoption is not one that is taken lightly by the child's biological parents, and the choice that they have made is as commendable as the one made by the adoptive parents.

We have taken on the responsibility to provide him with the care that he needs for the rest of his life. But what we want more than anything is for him to be happy, and I am convinced that this is also what his biological parents wanted for him.

This is a beautiful feeling, one that is so overwhelming that I struggle to put it into words.

Once again, destiny.





Sunday 26th May

The One Hundred Good Wishes Quilt

We had to wait for two months from that wonderful day when we were first given Lencho Dukem's file and we saw his beautiful photo, until the day when we were finally going to meet our son. This waiting period can be quite an uphill struggle, you know that you have a new son, but he's still not with you. At times, this can be painful, but you just have to be patient. You would give everything to be with him now, and you know that he is yours, but you have to accept that he is thousands of kilometres away from you, in a different continent with mothers (carers) who are taking care of him throughout this process.

From that unforgettable day at the end of April when we finally found out which child had been assigned to us, everything changed around us. People kept telling us how lucky Lencho was that he was going to join a family like ours. But we felt like we were the lucky ones. Despite the distance, I feel a close connection to him. When I look at the face in his photo, his enormous eyes transmit a sense of understanding, serenity and acceptance, it is as if he knows that everything is going to be ok now and that he just has to wait patiently for us to come and collect him.

Everybody that we have shown his photo to always says that he has very characteristic facial features. He has beautiful eyes. As the weeks go on, no matter where we go, his photo comes with us. We had it enlarged and framed it, and it is now hanging on the wall at home. Looking at it makes us feel at ease. We have given copies of the photo to our family members, and we carry it with us everywhere in our wallets and saved on our mobile phones. Every time we think about him, we just have to take out our mobile phones and we can zoom in on his photo, memorising each of his tiny little features.

One night I even went out for a meal with his four future godmothers, Chabela, Bárbara, Charlie and Vane and we ate dinner with his framed photo on the table in front of us.

We knew very well that Ethiopians are characterised by their beauty. Their features differ from those of the rest of Africa because they are a pure race, in fact, they are one of the few countries in Africa never to be colonised, and they are proud of this fact. The children are healthy and happy and belong to an ethnic group, which is bursting with history. Ethiopians are the cradle of human kind. And so, although he was going to spend the first few months of his life far away from us, nonetheless we knew that he would be well looked after in an Ethiopian orphanage. We knew that they would take care of him, give him cuddles and kisses, whisper and sing to him, giving him all of the care and security that a baby needs.

While we were patiently awaiting Lencho's arrival, I learned about a beautiful Chinese tradition called "The One Hundred Good Wishes Quilt. The story is as follows: In China, when a woman became pregnant, she would receive a piece of fabric from all of her loved ones and family members alongside a note from each of them on which they had written down their best wishes for this future child. These pieces of fabric were used by the mother to make a patchwork quilt. In the future, the baby would be able to find out who had given them each of the pieces of fabric and would be able to read the notes that they had received. I thought that it sounded like a beautiful tradition, and I love making things by hand, and although I had no experience in this specific type of craft, I set about to make my own "Hundred Good Wishes Quilt". I bought some gorgeous pieces of material, putting it all together in the most beautiful possible way so that this lovely quilt would be there waiting for little Lion when he arrived at his new home.





Saturday 20th June

The date is set for the trip

Throughout the long waiting period, we have had to learn to cope with uncertainty, and this is something that I have really struggled with and which has caused me great anxiety. Luckily, the last couple of months have been somewhat easier as we now had a rough idea as to when we would be travelling over. How long we would end up having to wait depended on how long it took the Addis Ababa court and the MOWA, (the Ministry of Women's Affairs) to get all of Lencho's documents in order so that a date could be set for the first court hearing.

We would not be present for the first court hearing. In this hearing, the child's biological parents would appear before the Ethiopian authorities to affirm their decision to give up their child. In our case, given that the whereabouts of Lencho's biological parents is unknown, it was pretty much assumed that the result of the court hearing would be favourable, as he had been living in the orphanage for 6 months and nobody had come to "claim" him. If the result of the court hearing is not favourable, the adoption will not go ahead. But if it is favourable, the date for the second court hearing will be set immediately, and this could take place just one week after the first hearing.

This last month we were both a nervous wreck because one of the documents was missing, which meant that the first court hearing had to be put back by two weeks. These two weeks seemed like an eternity to us. There were times that due to the distance and communication issues, we had to resign ourselves to the fact that we were never going to fully understand what was going on throughout this whole ordeal.

But today we finally received a call from the ECAI, who phoned to tell us that the result of the first court hearing had been favourable and so we would have to be ready to travel to Addis Ababa in less than a week.

It's all hustle and bustle here now, we can't contain our excitement.

The period of uncertainty is over. It's all out of our control now. In just a blink of an eye, we will be with our little lion cub. We book our flights so that we will be able to spend a few days with Lencho in the transitional home before the court hearing. Hopefully, this will give us time to get to know him gradually and so the whole experience will be less traumatic for him when we finally come to collect him. In any case, we won't be able to bring him back to the hotel with us until we have received the final ruling, which will be issued a few days after the court hearing, but in the meantime, we will be able to get to know him and build our relationship with him in the transitional home.

There is no rush now.





Wednesday 26th June

The preparations

We didn't have long to prepare everything, but we tried to do it all as best as we could - buy plane tickets, book our hotel room, collect documentation to present to the Spanish Consulate in Addis, get Simón vaccinated, pack our bags, organise ourselves at work, sort out someone to look after our home, dog and plants, collect clothes for the children, go to the Barcelona Football Club Store to buy pencils and note books for the orphanage, prepare the first aid kit, making sure that we didn't forget the camera, Simón's favourite biscuits and his 15 favourite toy cars and books so he won't feel homesick, our backpacks, raincoats... and the most exciting thing of all: Lencho's suitcase.

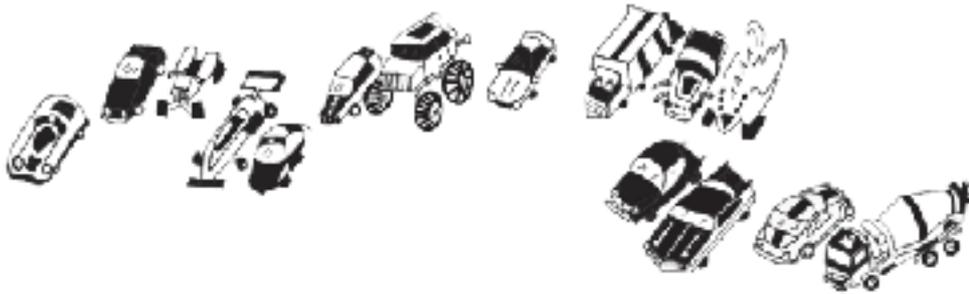
In his suitcase, we put baby clothes, for ages 6 to 18 months; we weren't really sure what size he was going to be. We also packed some nappies - as we know that the ones in Addis Ababa aren't the best quality, spoons for him to eat his baby food, a dummy, a bottle with pictures of birds on it, spare teats, a rattle.... and a really soft cuddly toy dog that we named Wusha, which means dog in Amharic. I had read that it is fundamental that the child can associate us with an object that provides him with comfort, creating a connection with him those first few days when we are visiting him at the transitional home.

Despite having been through this all with our son Simón, I have to admit that I found it difficult to really remember exactly what a 10-month-old baby needs. I felt lost, and I realised that as Simón grew, I had been able to gradually adapt to his needs and I can't recall it ever seeming that complicated. But with Lencho it was going to be different, there would be no time for us to gradually adapt to his needs as he was arriving just like that. His suitcase seemed to weigh a tonne -we brought a little bit of everything just in case.

As well as bringing a suitcase for each member of the family, we also brought a fifth one, and this was by far the biggest. It was full of unused clothes and toys that we were going to give to the children in the orphanage. Nicole, the owner of the shop, Petit Oh, had given us two enormous boxes full of baby-grows, t-shirts, trousers, hats, jumpers... all made from the best ecological Peruvian cotton. All of the items that she gave us were padded, meaning they would be perfect for the low temperatures in Addis, which is the highest capital city in the whole of Africa. All of these clothes are being given as a donation to the NACID orphanages.

We also decided to bring Simón's old buggy so we can push our Lion around Addis, but we have added a buggy board so his big brother can stand. I have heard that walking along the pavements in Addis can be somewhat of a suicide mission as there are so many big potholes and massive rocks... but even if we don't venture out into the city, we can at least use the buggy if we want to go for a stroll around the hotel and the surrounding areas or to transport him if he falls asleep.

My friend Chrissy, who is the adoptive mother of two beautiful Ethiopian children, Yedne and Dela, came to our house last night and gave us envelopes filled with money to give to Freiwort. Freiwort was Dela's carer, and Chrissy is helping her get through her nursing degree. Chrissy also brought us a football and some Barcelona football shirts for Abezener, a young boy who will never have the chance to be adopted because his younger brother has AIDS. Unfortunately, the Ethiopian police will not allow children who are infected with AIDS to be adopted, nor will they allow for siblings to be separated. We have arranged to meet Freiwort in Addis Ababa - she is planning to come and meet us at the hotel so we can give her all of the gifts.





Thursday 27th June

The trip

After a whole day travelling, we finally arrived at Addis Ababa Airport. We left home at 9.30 am, and we finally arrived at our destination after midnight on the same day. When we arrived at the airport, there were queues for everything - to sort out our visas, to collect our luggage, to go through a second security control. Finally, we got to the exit. After a long difficult journey full of obstacles, we had finally arrived at our long-awaited destination. It was an amazing feeling.

When we checked in at the Hilton, it was already 2.00 am. We were exhausted, but we were also so excited. While we were at the reception the power went out in the whole hotel. This gave us a bit of an idea as to what the rest of our stay in Addis was going to be like - nothing is predictable in Africa, and you have to be prepared for this.

We are staying in an apartment with two adjoining rooms, a mini kitchen, a bathroom and a terrace that looks out over the hotel's gardens. The room hasn't been refurbished since the 1970s, but it is a decent size and is comfortable. We chose this hotel because of the garden, which has loads of plants which surround an enormous swimming pool with thermal water in the shape of Saint George's cross. This is a fabulous church constructed in Lalibela, below ground level, and carved out of volcanic rock.

Unfortunately, the swimming pool is empty; we can't believe it. Apparently, they have been fixing it over the last few days, and they don't know when it will be ready. This worries us, as we want to make sure that Simón, who will probably struggle to deal with the arrival of his new little brother, is as happy as possible during our stay.

It's already 3.00 am. It's time to go to sleep. Tomorrow Endalnew is going to come and collect us at 9.00 am to take us to the transitional home where we are going to meet our son for the first time. It's an incredible feeling, and even when we have switched off the light I still can't stop thinking about it, but I have to go to sleep if I want to be fresh and ready to meet my son tomorrow. I know that even if we go to sleep now we will still be tired tomorrow, but that doesn't matter now, none of this matters anymore. At some point, our exhaustion finally gets the better of us, and we manage to fall asleep.





Friday 28th June

The day we met our son

That first night we only managed to sleep 4 hours. We woke up completely exhausted, but we understood that this wasn't just down to the lack of sleep and the tiring journey, but it was normal for us to feel more worn out because of the atmospheric pressure caused by the high altitude. But we would summon up the energy we needed by any means possible as we were finally going to meet our little Lion.

We got in Endalnew's car. He spoke perfect Spanish because interestingly enough he had spent some time living in Valladolid, but to be honest, I didn't really feel like talking - this was going to be such a special moment, and I wanted to make sure that I didn't forget anything. The journey from the hotel to the transitional home seemed to take forever. The streets are full of potholes and the footpaths with diggers and people and animals walking in all directions. The traffic in the capital is chaotic and unpredictable. Nearly all of the buildings are undergoing construction work - they are covered in scaffolding made from sturdy eucalyptus tree trunks. As you drive through Addis Ababa, there is always some work going on, and it is hard to know if the buildings are abandoned or whether they are just under construction.

Finally, after driving across a three-lane avenue in the wrong direction, and heading down a side street where there were loads of signs advertising the local businesses, we finally found our ECAI. We turned right and went slowly down a small street before arriving at an enormous iron door, which had white circles painted on it. Endalnew honked his horn and the big door opened slowly. There was a young man with a massive grin on his face who let us drive through. We parked in the yard in front of the house, and as soon as we unbuckled our seat belts, I immediately felt my heart jump.

We were received by Selam, a young, attractive, and well-dressed girl who is the daughter of Gidey and Haile Kassaye and who is in charge of the transitional home. She said some words of welcome in the house's small courtyard and straight away, she told one of the carers to take us to Lencho. As they were talking in Amharic, we didn't understand anything they were saying, but we knew that they were welcoming us. We went into the house and we followed the carer slowly up the stairs.

We wanted Simón to see him first, but as soon as we got to the bedroom and he saw the red cot with a canopy draped over it and with an enormous bow in the middle, Simón stopped dead in his tracks, it was as if he didn't understand why we were here. I couldn't help but overtake him on instinct. I approached the cot slowly and cautiously, and peeped my head in. Simón followed closely behind me, and Alex filmed this magical moment. I cried with emotion.

At last, those big eyes looked at me, and they told me everything. He was frightened. I may well have been the first white person he had ever seen. I'll never know. I picked him up in my arms very carefully, and I noticed that he was breathing very deeply - he was scared. He didn't know me. The carers spoke to him, they said loving words that we didn't understand, but they seemed to calm him because he looked at them and then at me. These women were good carers, I knew it as soon as I saw them, and I was sure that he had been in good hands this whole time.

I didn't cuddle him tightly, we had to get to know each other gradually, and there was no need to rush something that was that important. He did look at us for a good few seconds though. Lencho seems to be very observant, and he has the most expressive eyes that I have ever seen; they are big and transparent. We went down to the "toy room", and I laid him down on the floor, following Selam and Endalnew's instructions as they had stayed to observe this first meeting. I didn't really know what to do with him, he didn't know me, and I felt like he was watching me. I also didn't know if he was able to crawl or sit by himself. Everything seemed very silent, although maybe that is just how I remember it - perhaps it wasn't like that.



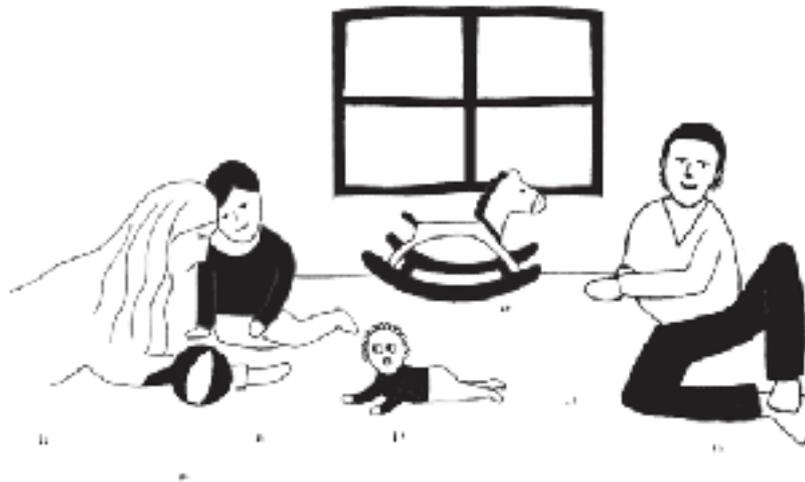
Alex took over - he is great with children. In just a few minutes, he had managed to get a smile out of him. It seemed like Lencho was getting used to us. Inside the room, there was a small plastic play set with a small slide and a swing, which Simón went over to. There was also a set of bookshelves where I found some more toys and a bucket. I picked up the bucket and tipped the contents on the rug and to my surprise, I found some “toys”- an iron pipe, some random pieces of Lego from different sets, some rubber skittles with the tops cut off and a couple of screws.

Right now, there were three babies in the transitional home. Lencho, another one-and-a-half-year-old baby called Chala who was full of smiles and Endalnew, a baby with Downs Syndrome, who was just a few months old. Another very shy girl called Yame approached us; she was around 5 years old and had some sort of intellectual disability, which meant that she could not look straight at us. At first, she was quite scared of us, but over time, she seemed to feel more comfortable with us, and in fact, every day that we came back to the transitional home over the next few days she never left our side.

The first two hours that we spent with Lencho flew by. It was a very emotional experience, but we made sure to maintain certain distance, or at least I did, because I didn’t want to overwhelm him. I wanted us to get to know each other at a pace that suited him.

When we went back to the hotel, both Alex and I were exhausted although we were on cloud nine. We talked about everything, the way he looked at us, how we had felt throughout the first meeting. Lencho might have looked beautiful in the photo, but in real life, he was even more beautiful than we could have possibly imagined.

It was a beautiful day.





Saturday 29th June

The second day with our son

We went to bed early again last night, but nonetheless, we woke up feeling like we had been run over by a steamroller. The reason we are feeling so worn out is due to altitude sickness, and we read that it takes your body about a week to get used to the altitude and for this sensation to disappear. We will have to put up with this for a while longer.

Today, we went back to the transitional home, and we were even more excited about seeing Lencho than we had been the day before. Today he was dressed in red from head to toe, just like Man Ray always did. He looked so handsome. Today Lencho didn't frown when he saw us; in fact, we managed to make him smile several times. Alex, who has a natural gift for these things even made him laugh aloud.

Today was another special day: we met two other sets of adoptive parents, one couple from Barcelona and the other from Tarragona. This was a complete surprise as we didn't realise they were coming. We were there for the moment when they first met their future children. I was in the "toy room", which has massive windows which look out on to the courtyard, and a van arrived, and two couples got out of it. Holding Lencho in my arms, I watched as a group of children aged between 5 and 8 years old, who I hadn't seen yet because they are in a different room, approached them.

Two of the children stepped forward cautiously and timidly to greet their new parents. I felt tears run down my face. I had seen an emotional encounter like this before in an 8-episode documentary series broadcast by TVE called "Children of the Heart". In this series, families who had been through the international adoption process explained different parts of the process, giving first-hand accounts of their experiences. This series helped me a lot over the long waiting period, and it gave a real understanding of how emotional it must be for both the parents and the children when they first meet each other, especially in the case of older children who are much more aware of all that they have gone through.



In the series, I saw how the carers from the orphanage talked to some 6-year-old Ethiopian brothers, and explained to them that they would soon be going to live in Spain with a new family who were going to love them very much. While they were talking, they looked through the photo album that the family had sent them so that they could familiarise themselves with them. These brothers were lucky, they had each other, but I can only imagine how frightened a child who is on their own must feel when they meet their parents for the first time.

The hugs that I saw them giving each other, while I watched from inside the transitional home seemed to be so full of affection. It was such a beautiful moment, and I hope I will never forget it. The two children, Hailu and Kway, hugged their respective parents, and little by little, Tadele, Mengistu, Hassan, Mohamed, Tsegaye, Birhanu and Almedi's curiosity got the better of them, and they came closer to see what was going on.

All of the children had big smiles on their faces - they seemed so full of life. They all have each other - they are each other's family. They laugh and play together, they eat, sleep and go to school together. They might not have parents, but they have carers, and they have many siblings. They seem to have such a good time together, providing each other with much-needed company, and I can only imagine how much they will miss each other when each of them goes with their respective adoptive families.

The couples brought coloured balloons for everyone, and Simón who seemed quite shy at first started to play amongst the Ethiopian children. The courtyard was filled with colour and life, and I enjoyed watching this special moment, holding Lencho in my arms, we were still getting used to each other, talking through our facial expressions.

Alex took photos and videos of the whole thing. I passed Lencho into Simón's arms, he was so excited to hold him, and he smothered him with kisses, but he could hardly support his weight. Alex, who always seemed to be surrounded by children who wanted to play with him, especially Yame, the only girl, took Lencho in his arms. I was now able to record these beautiful moments, play with the older children and chat to the other couples, although I made sure not to take away too much of their precious time with their future children.





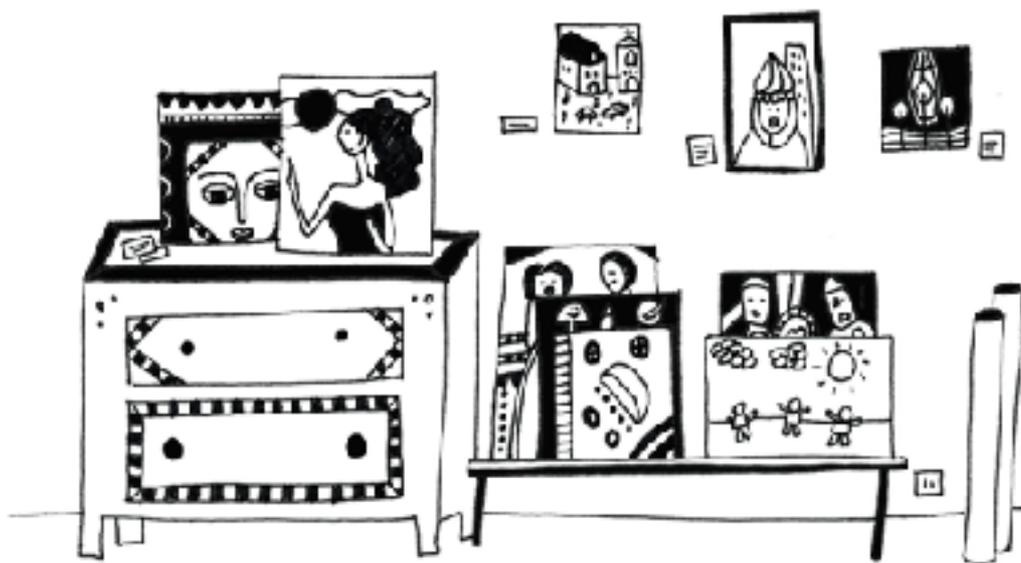
I said goodbye to him by giving him 3 huge kisses: one on his neck, one on his cheek and the last one on his forehead. While I gave him the kisses, he didn't once look away from me. Today his facial expressions were more of amazement than of fear. We left there with a real sense of serenity. This was because I was now fully aware of how well our son had been looked after over the past few months. His carers seem to be extraordinary people, and every time they walked passed me, they said something, and while I was unable to understand what they were saying, that didn't matter as their tone of voice was so full of tenderness. Every time one of them walked past me, they blew a big kiss to Lencho.

There was even a carer who took him from me every time she walked passed me, and I didn't know how to react. The whole reason we were at the transitional home was to spend time with him and so someone coming along and taking him from me was quite disconcerting. I started to think that perhaps that particular carer didn't agree with international adoptions, and at times, I felt uncomfortable when I went to take him back from her. But I know that they loved Lencho very much, and that is the most important thing.

After spending the morning at the transitional home, we went to have lunch at Makush with the other Spaniards. This was a restaurant that Chrissy had recommended to me, and it was located on the second floor of what seemed like any old building in the city, but inside it was quite extraordinary. Makush is an international restaurant located inside an art gallery where 40 budding artists, all former Fine Arts students at the Addis Ababa University, exhibited their work.

We ate surrounded by massive colourful pieces of art. While we were waiting for the food to arrive, I went for a walk around the gallery, passing by all of the pieces that were hanging on the walls, and, without even meaning too, I ended up in the owner's office, and we started to talk. Nati was organising an exhibition in Madrid on the 22nd of September, and she mentioned that she wanted to set up something similar in Barcelona. When I offered to help her, her eyes lit up, and she kept repeating, "it's my lucky day", I told her that it was mine too, as being able to organise an exhibition of Ethiopian art in Barcelona would be such an honour for me.

Makush





Sunday 30th June

They open the transitional home for us

Today is Sunday, and it is also a day of rest here, but given that all three of the adopting families in Addis are dying to spend time with our little ones we managed to convince them to open the transitional house for us. We are very grateful.

Every time we see Lencho, the whole thing is a little bit less strange. This time he held on to me, bending his little arm over my shoulder. It's a wonderful feeling. He started to play with me, trying to grab hold of my nose with his other hand. One of the carers came over to me, and I wasn't sure what she wanted, but then she handed over a bottle so that I could give it to my future son. I gave it to him sitting on a cushion on the floor in the corner of the "toy room". It was very hot outside so I decided that we would be more comfortable inside, plus it was a lot more intimate like that. This was the first time we had been alone together, and I cherished this moment. He held on to the bottle with both of his hands, and he looked at me curiously. He observed me. I looked at him, and I stroked his curly head of hair. His hair was soft - it wasn't how I had imagined it was going to be. I ran my index finger along his nose, and he closed his eyes when it went close to them. After a few minutes, he now looked at me with such sweetness, appearing much more receptive. I felt warm and fulfilled. Once again, my eyes had filled with tears, like they had so many times over the past few intense days.

Once he had finished his bottle, I got up and went for a walk carrying him in my arms through the backyard where dozens of tiny items of clothing, in a whole variety of colours, were hanging on the clothesline. I walked curiously towards the kitchen, and I passed a closed room that was full of school supplies and plenty of clothes. I also saw the bedroom where the older children slept: there was several bunk beds and a wardrobe inside. I also discovered where they had their classes as well as the room where they watched the television. A lot of the time I didn't even feel like I was carrying Lencho in my arms, I was starting to feel like we were one.



When I got to the television room, I found myself surrounded by all of the older children. When I entered, they all greeted me enthusiastically. Just then, Alex and I remembered the bag of Barcelona Football Club souvenirs that we had brought with us. We brought it out to the yard, the children came out, and we gave them all pens, stickers, notebooks, balls and T-shirts. Their faces lit up, and it was a moment I will never forget. Simón played amongst them, and they hugged him and laughed with him. But suddenly we heard someone honking the car horn and then the enormous gate opened. Simón stopped playing immediately, seeing that something even better had arrived. It was Abraham.

My friend Sam had spent time in Ethiopia a couple of times, and she had completely fallen in love with the country. While she was there, she contacted Abraham at Anytime, Anywhere Tours and arranged for him to bring her on a tour around the south of the country. A few months before we were going to set off on our journey, she told us that if we were going to Addis, we had to contact Abraham. And we were very fortunate that a few months before our trip Abraham happened to be over visiting Barcelona and we invited him for lunch at our house together with his girlfriend Olga, and Sam and Jesús. The whole meal revolved around Ethiopia. Sam showed us her beautiful photographic report, and they all told us anecdotes about Ethiopia.

Abraham spent most of the time playing with Simón given that he didn't know much Spanish and I guess he felt more at ease playing than trying to keep up with a conversation. When he left, Simón repeated over and over again that he wanted to see Abraham again, we assured him that he would see him really soon, but that this time it would be at Abraham's home in Addis Ababa.

As soon as Abraham's car drove through the gate and into the yard of the transitional home, Simon ran out to say hello to him. By the time we got there, Simón was already sitting inside the jeep while Abraham was explaining who knows what about the buttons on the dashboard. But the thing that Simón liked most about the jeep was the rope on the front part that was used to help other cars if they broke down. Simón was fascinated by his friend Abraham. This relationship between a 4-year-old boy and a 40-year-old man might seem quite odd, but I guess age doesn't matter when it comes to friendship, and I'm happy that it is like that.

Before leaving for Addis Ababa, the ECAI asked me to take photos of all of the children that were in the transitional home. I was thrilled when they asked me, as I knew that these photos would be sent to the families who had already found out which child they had been assigned. I know from my own experience that any extra information that you receive while you are waiting is greatly appreciated. When they sent me a second photo of Lencho, it was totally unexpected, and I was so grateful.



I brought a list with the names of all of the children, and so I called them out one by one and got them to stand in front of a white wall in the yard where I took individual photos of each child, trying to make sure that the photos reflected their best qualities. We had to change location after a while because we discovered that there were thousands of biting ants on the ground and we didn't want them climbing all over their bare legs.

Despite having the list of names in front of me, organising them all to take their photos wasn't an easy task as my attempt at pronouncing the names that were written on the piece of paper didn't always match the real pronunciation. Another problem was that some of the children on the list were actually at the orphanage in Awasa and there were other children who were in the transitional home who didn't appear on my list - the communication between Spain and Ethiopia isn't always up to date.

Each of them posed for me, and most of them were very receptive, but others like Yame, who is the only girl, didn't want to have her photo taken, and poor Birhanu, who had a burnt arm, wouldn't even look at the camera because he was too shy, or too scared, or maybe a bit of both. I tried to encourage them; taking them by the hand, hugging them or trying to make them laugh. In the end, I managed to get a photo of each of them: Yared, Tsesgye, Tadele, Mohamed, Mengistu, Birhanu, Almedi, Hassan, Yame, Hailu, Kway, Muluken, Endalnew and Chala.





As I still didn't know them very well, I had to jot down on a piece of paper the clothes that they were wearing on the day that I took their photographs to avoid any possible confusion. I have heard of a case where the parents were sent the wrong photos, and it was a horrible experience for them as they had spent so much time getting to know the face that appeared on the photo that they had been sent. Therefore, I took great care when taking the photos, pouring my heart into the task that I had been given, knowing exactly how important these photographs would be for the families. When we got back to the hotel, I chose the best photos of each child, the ones where they looked most natural, so that I could send them to the ECAI and they could then send them out to the families as soon as possible.

It was time to leave the transitional home. We said goodbye to our little Lion, fully aware that our love for him was growing every day. We went to the Lime Tree for lunch, a comfortable restaurant with a Wi-Fi connection (which like everything here, works when it works). Simón sat beside Abraham, continuing to develop their beautiful but quite peculiar relationship.

After lunch, we went to Mount Entoto. While we were driving up the mountain in Abraham's jeep, the rain changed to heavy hailstones. Ethiopia's rainy season is between May and September, and the temperature is pretty consistent, with highest daytime temperatures of around 24°C, going down to about 11°C at night.



As it is almost July, the temperature is quite cool, and we have to make sure that we are always prepared for any unexpected changes to the weather. We make sure to always bring warm clothes in case we need more layers as the day goes on.

We eventually got to the top of Entoto, having passed by hundreds of huts, people and all types of animals (donkeys, horses, chickens, dogs...) on our way up. There were people walking in all directions, up, down... We visited a small museum next to the Church of Saint George, and we were able to look out on to the city visible under the cloudy sky. We had been told that you have to visit this place if you want to get a real sense of how big the city is, but honestly, we could hardly see anything as the city is far away and I could make out very little through the treetops. In any case, it wasn't the best day for it, we were soaking wet and just wanted to go back to the hotel to dry ourselves off.

We arrived back at our apartment knowing that we didn't have anything else to do for the rest of the afternoon, so we were able to shelter from the rain for a couple of hours. I enjoyed a long relaxing bath for nearly an hour while I read the Lonely Planet guide and the story of how Ethiopia got to be known as the cradle of humanity. I learnt about Ethiopia's relationship with Eritrea, Djibouti and Somaliland. While I bathed, I could hear the voice of a CNN reporter coming out of the television mixed with the sounds of an iPad game for children. We were all doing what we felt like doing, relaxed.

Like every night, we went for dinner at the hotel restaurant. On the way to the dining room, we greeted other guests and employees, and we walked past the work-centre and the Cigar bar where there were dozens of Africans who were also staying at the hotel, predominantly for work purposes. I think we stand out a bit given that we are one of the only families to walk around the Hilton at this time. We said hello to the head waiters and to Mesías who is in charge of the room, and we were taken to the same table where we sit every day, right next to the buffet table and with a perfect view of the garden. At the table next to us, there were several Portuguese bodyguards who were escorting Lula, the ex-president of Brazil who was sitting behind us.

Once we had finished dinner, we went for a walk through the lobby, following the sound of live music. I peeped into the room and discovered that an Ethiopian wedding was being held there. My curiosity got the better of me, and I couldn't help but look in - they were all singing and dancing in a small circle around the bride and groom. The music was blaring. We continued to the bar where we bought an internet card so we could send the first photos that we have taken of Lencho to our family and friends. We have already been here for several days, so I can only imagine that they are all impatiently waiting to hear from us, and to be honest we can't wait to be able to share parts of this trip with the people that we love most. But we are in Addis Ababa, and the internet comes and goes, and so it hasn't been possible to do it until today.

In Ethiopia, you have to be prepared for the unpredictable and learn to be flexible because if not you will get frustrated very quickly. After the internet cut out a few times in the business centre, we finally managed to send some photos, and we immediately received some beautiful messages in reply. No matter how happy you might be, until you can share your happiness with the people that you love most, you will never be fully happy.

I can't wait for Lencho to come home with us. I want to bath him, see him naked, rub almond oil over his body and massage him gently while I talk to him. I want to recognise the scent of his clean skin. I want to cuddle him softly but tightly and know that from this point on he will be with us forever.



Monday 1st July

Day of the second court hearing

We had arranged to meet Abraham at 10.00 am in the Hilton dining room. He always comes a bit earlier so we have time to have a coffee with him and have a chat about everything. We love talking about Ethiopia, and he loves talking about Spain. Today he told us that unfortunately, he hasn't found any place in Addis where he can get good bread like the one he tried in Barcelona. In fact, he spent this past summer in Vic with a master baker who taught him how to bake bread so that one day in the future he will be able to open a bakery in Ethiopia's capital city.

Abraham is a restless, analytical and enterprising person and it is always a joy to chat with him. We have learnt so much about the country thanks to him. He also told us that he and his girlfriend Olga, who lives in Barcelona, have bought a farm 700 km to the northeast of Addis where they currently grow tomatoes and onions. They plan to retire there. It must be a beautiful corner of the world.

We called Endalnew to discuss our idea to go and buy toys for the children in the transitional home for our farewell party, but he told us that wouldn't be necessary as they already have loads of toys. That surprised me because we haven't seen that many, but he explained that they are kept in a cupboard and are taken out gradually. Therefore, our plan to spend the morning looking around the toyshop has changed to a fascinating drive through the Mercato with Abraham. The Mercato is the largest covered market in the African continent, and it is without a doubt the biggest recycling centre I have ever seen. You can find absolutely everything here, and by everything, I mean everything. In fact, it is so big that you can drive around it, venturing along the streets and tributaries.

We saw so many interesting things: plastic bottles for sale, plastic bottle caps for sale, leashes for dogs and horses, shoes made of any material you could possibly imagine, tyre stands for all kinds of vehicles, spices... Abraham drove slowly through the hustle and bustle, and we could hear lively, traditional Ethiopian music playing. We wound down the car windows so we could see everything that was happening. We thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience, and although we were mere spectators, nonetheless, we felt like we had finally been in the heart of Addis.

Many market sellers and people who walked alongside our vehicle leaned through the window and said something friendly to us although we obviously didn't understand what they were saying. Sometimes Abraham laughed and spoke to them in Amharic, I think he was saying something like "leave the whites alone, they are with me", but he said it in a friendly manner. The whole experience was fascinating. I would love to be able to stroll through the streets of this intriguing place, I wonder if we'll get the chance.

Afterwards we went for a coffee to try to get some energy for the court hearing, as we are still feeling pretty sluggish. Abraham took us to a very authentic place, and we sat on some buckets on the terrace. There were several businessmen, and I imagine that they must work in the zone. The café was close to the Addis court, which apparently is one of the most important places in the city. Even so, the contrasts never fail to amaze me, and despite it being the economic centre, there are still dirt pavements with massive potholes and the majority of the houses in the surrounding areas are half built.



We had arranged to meet Endalnew and the other two Catalan couples, Jordi and Rosana, and Juan and Cristina at 13.30 at the main door. We were all quite nervous.

The Addis Ababa court building is not impressive, quite the opposite in fact. It is a modern salmon coloured building with no charm whatsoever. In front of the building, we found a small blue sign with white writing which read: Federal High Court Bole Branch, under which there was some Amharic script. We entered and went up a few floors where we found some Ethiopians waiting their turn and then we saw a Din-A4 hanging on the wall with sell tape on each of the four corners that read "Adoptions" with an arrow pointing to the end of the corridor. We walked along the corridor and passed one of the offices, the door was open, and there were thousands of folders piled up on top of various pieces of furniture. I'm guessing these must be the records of all of the families who have adopted children from this country. They obviously don't have computers, but even so, I was still quite shocked to find that this information that was so valuable to us, was being stored in such a way.

In Barcelona, they had told us that during the court hearing we would be asked questions about the country and that we should make sure that we were informed, so I had read up quite a lot about the country's socio-political history just in case. We had immersed ourselves in books, discussions, blogs, documentaries, etc., anything that we came across on the topic. And being well informed made us a lot calmer throughout the whole process, as well as feeling a real connection to the country. And to be honest, in a way, I feel that the fact that we were so keen to learn so much about Ethiopia's history shows how much respect and love we already had for our future child.



Alex was dressed very smartly for the occasion: he had chosen to follow the advice that Diego, the adoptive father of a beautiful Ethiopian girl called Catalina, had given to him. To demonstrate how important this moment was for him, he had decided to wear a jacket, belt and shoes, none of which he was planning to wear for the rest of the trip.

We realised that we hadn't actually been told what time the court hearing would be held. A woman kept coming out of the office to announce the name of the orphanage where the children were from. At last, it was our turn, and to our surprise, all three couples went in together, alongside Endalnew who acted as our interpreter. The judge, who was a very elegant and educated woman, gave us a warm welcome and then went on to ask us some questions in Amharic which Endalnew interpreted almost simultaneously - it was as if he knew it off by heart. These were the type of questions that we were asked: Are you familiar with the Ethiopian culture and do you promise to transmit the values of this culture to your children? Did you have to take a preparation course for international adoption in your country? Do you all promise to look after your child forever? We all nodded in unison after each question.

Suddenly she turned to Simón and asked him in English if he knew why he had come to Ethiopia: "Yes, I am coming for Lencho, my little brother" he answered in a sweet but firm tone, with his hands crossed over his little legs. We all smiled, and luckily, his answer seemed to have broken the ice, as we were all still a bit tense.

After waiting for what seemed like a lifetime, the judge finally said to us: "I hope that you understand that the decision to adopt is an irrevocable one and from now on, that you are, and always will be, the parents of Lencho, Hailu and Kway. There is no turning back now". We all nodded, and the reports were drawn up. We stood up and went to collect our bags and jackets, and we all looked at each other, each of us with tears in our eyes.

As we went down the three flights of stairs to the street, I cried with emotion. I think this has been the most emotional part of the trip. This may seem surprising because it is the most bureaucratic process, but from that moment, and only that moment we were now his true parents. We are a beta sab, a family. Until the second court hearing has been held, nothing is 100% guaranteed, in particular in countries like Ethiopia where everything can change in the blink of an eye. Now we are his parents, his ennat (mother) and his abbat (father) and we will be forever. We took a photo of the three couples in front of the court, together with Simón, his future big *wondim*.



Our children were waiting for us at the transitional home, and we couldn't wait to see them, but first we went for lunch at the Zebra Grill with Abraham to celebrate this special day and to let this important moment of the trip sink in.

When we arrived at the transitional home Berta and Iván were there, they are a young couple who arrived a few days after us and they are going to be the future parents of Muluken, a one-and-a-half-year-old child. Their second court hearing was going to be held a few days after ours. We all played with the children but this time it felt different, as we are officially their parents.

We played with balloons, filling them up with wuha (water), we sang the alphabet in English, did some crafts activities with them and let them play with our mobile phones... and after what had been an emotionally tiring day we said goodbye to Lencho gently. He was calm, but even still, I felt a pang of sadness. I wish we were able to take him with us today, but we have to wait until the judge has handed over the final court ruling. We have to be patient for a little bit longer, but at least we know that he is finally ours.

I left in Endalnew's van feeling serene. All the struggles, resistance, anxiety, uncertainty and resignation is over. We are starting a new phase of our lives. We have done it. We are his parents. It's nice to look at the faces of the other couples who have all been through the same thing and see my face reflected in theirs. We don't know each other very well, but I feel that there is a real bond between us.

Tonight, Haile, Gidey and Selam took us to dinner at a restaurant that served traditional Ethiopian food, and we ate while watching a traditional dance show. We saw dancers from all of the different ethnic groups in the country, all accompanied by their native instruments. It was quite a performance. Meanwhile, Simón stayed happily at the hotel with his "uncle" Abraham. They were planning to get room service before going to explore the hotel gardens.



The restaurant was called Yod Abyssinia. In the language of the Gurage ethnic group, the word Yod means to express yourself. We sat on low chairs around a low table where they served us the injera. Injera is one of the most typical dishes in Ethiopia. It is basically a huge crepe made with fermented teff cereal flour which has a bitter taste, and which is cooked on a ceramic griddle. Different accompaniments such as doro wat (chicken with sauce), misr wat (a thick lentil puree) or shiro wat (a thick chickpea puree) are piled onto the surface of the injera. Haile taught us how to eat it. The injera tray is placed in the centre of the table and everyone sits around it and eats with their hands, breaking off a piece and using it as a spoon to pick up the rest of the accompaniments. Ethiopian food is quite spicy and it is common to end up having to take Loperamide. And it turns out that no one else except me seems to like it, but I just happen to love practically all of the food in the world.

Years ago, Haile Kassaye founded an orphanage, and he now runs eleven across the country. He told us that he had a job but when he was around 30, he happened to come across some minors who didn't have a place to stay and he felt compelled to set up his first foster home. That was when he realised that the thing he was truly passionate about was helping others.

He told us that it made him so happy, that he couldn't stop helping the homeless. He has now been doing this for more than 20 years, and he is an intelligent, wise, calm, close, caring and very sensitive man.

One of the conversations that we had with him surprised me greatly. He told us a curious comparative story. He said that the love that we adoptive parents give to our adoptive children is much greater than the love that is given by the Ethiopian parents. He noticed that we were surprised by what he had said, and he went on to explain that he had been observing this for years, and that he admired us for our altruistic spirit. He even mentioned that he was carrying out research to find out whether or not this was a matter of genetics. He is so convinced by this theory that he mentioned that once he has finished Master's Degree in Environmental Studies, (somewhat surprising given that he is nearly 70 years old), he wants to write a book about the way that we love our adoptive children. I was quite taken aback by what he said, although to a certain extent I understood what he was saying. If a couple make the decision to have a child, they do so because they are planning to give that child all the love that it needs. People don't decide to adopt a child unless they are completely sure that this is really what they want. It's a powerful thing, and although it may be difficult at first to form a bond with your new child, you are giving them the greatest treasure of all - a family.

Between the performances at Yod Abyssinia, we chatted and laughed at the jokes that Haile played on his wife. We were amazed at the way the dancers were able to move their bodies. It was as if they had been electrocuted, not one of their muscles remained still. It seemed like we were watching the dance on fast-forward. I found myself questioning whether my son would be able to dance like that one day.

We paid particular attention during the dances and songs performed by the Oromos, as this is the ethnic group that our son Lencho belongs to. Haile repeated over and over again that in the future we will be able to see just how noble he has become, given that the Oromos are traditionally tolerant, participative and good-natured people.

The Oroma ethnic group is found in the north of Kenya, in parts of Somalia and in the southern-central part of Ethiopia. 34% of the population belongs to this ethnic group and it is the largest in the country. Afterwards, Haile told us the story of the nurse who decided to call our son Lencho. He knew that we had heard this story before, but nonetheless, he thought it was important that we knew just how brave and strong our son had been when he was found fighting for his life in front of Hotel Apolo in Dukem when he was just a few weeks old. He told us that Lencho was as brave as an Anbasa, which means lion in Amharic.

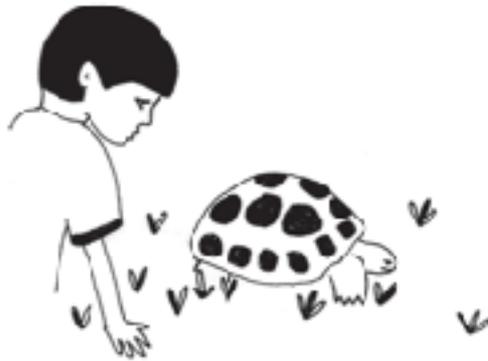
The Oromo ethnic group is the largest in Ethiopia and the other main groups which are present throughout the country are the Amhara, Tigray, Sidama, Hadiya, Somali, Afar, Gurage, Gamo, Welaita, Argobba and Rastafari. In addition to these, there are also some other minority groups, which include the Surma, Mursi and Hamar. Many of these groups are found in southern Ethiopia in the Omo Valley where the majority of the country's ethnic diversity is located.

It was a very emotional night for us. Haile, Gidey and Salem acted as great ambassadors for their country. They taught us so much about the different Ethiopian ethnic groups and tradi-

tions. Haile drove us home, and you could tell that he had really enjoyed spending the evening chatting to us. He told us how happy he was to know that Lencho was going to live in a home that was filled with so much love. He invited us to spend the following Saturday with him. This is the only day that he doesn't have any classes and he wants to take us to Dukem - the town where Lencho spent the first few months of his life in the orphanage.

Today was filled with emotions. Very beautiful ones.



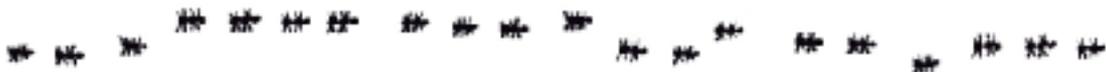


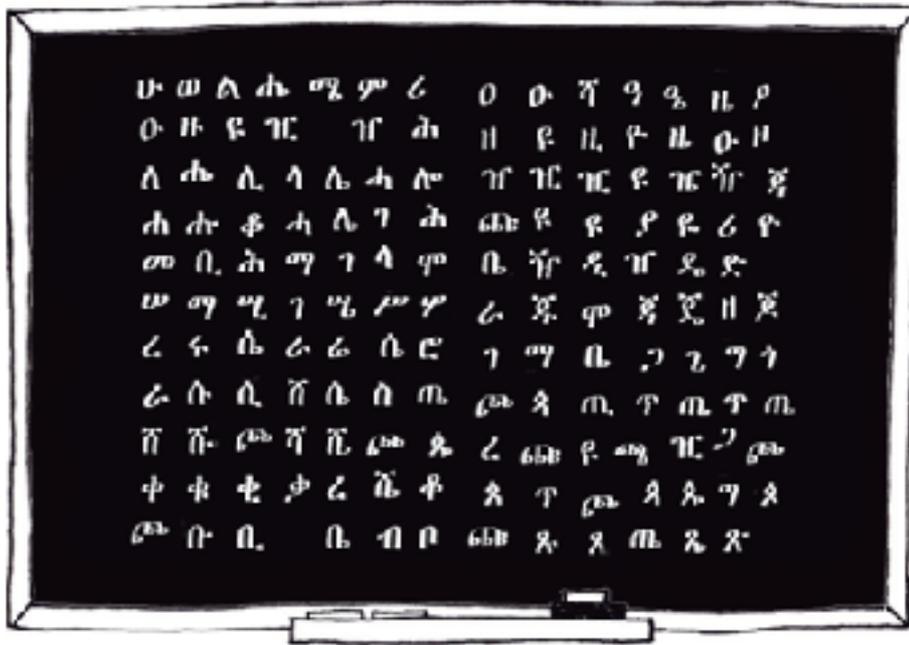
Tuesday 2nd July

I love Lucy

This morning, Endalnew arrived early to pick us up. We went to the Yedesta Guest House to collect the three Catalan couples, and then we all made our way to the transitional home. When we arrived, Lencho was lying on the floor of the toy room. I could tell that he really wanted to play. He is a very alert child, and although I don't know how much stimulation he has really had, he is certainly very receptive. He is very curious about Simón - he is always looking for him. As soon as he finds him, he just stares at him. Even when Simón goes to play with the older children, Lion keeps himself entertained by watching his older brother.

Berta and Iván, had their court hearing today, and, to celebrate that they are officially going to be Muluken's parents, they brought bottles of soap for the children to blow bubbles. It was great to watch - the children seemed to really enjoy it. Simón, who has always loved exploring, decided that he wanted to follow a line of ants to see where they were going. A short while later, he started crying inconsolably. There were hundreds of ants crawling all over him and they had bitten him. We had to strip him down completely so we could shake off all of the ants. He didn't stop crying through the whole ordeal, and when we had to take off his boxer shorts, he modestly covered himself. Everyone, including the children, watched him with empathy. African ants are big and they bite. Simón learnt an important lesson today - he won't be going near the ants again.





I went for a walk with Lencho in my arms and with Simón strolling along beside us. We stopped at the kitchen, which is located at the back of the yard, and the cooks gave Simón a piece of injera. They seem very friendly - always laughing and chatting amongst themselves. Simón didn't seem to be very convinced by this treat that he had been given; in fact, he gave it to me, trying his best to be discrete. The injera on its own is very bitter.

We went into the classroom where we listened to the children reciting the Amharic or ancient Abyssinian alphabet. The main thing that makes this alphabet different to ours is that every letter has a consonant and a vowel sound - it is a syllabic dictionary. There also aren't any capital or lower-case letters, and originally it was read from left to right (although this has changed thanks to the Greek influences). This alphabet dates back to 350 A.D and it originally came from the Ge'ez language, which was the language that was traditionally learnt. The origins of this alphabet can be found in the Semitic languages of the Arabic and Western Asian peninsula. A peculiar aspect of this language is that each of the 7 vowels alters the form of the consonant, meaning that their alphabet takes much longer to recite than ours does.

Later on, we went up to the babies' room to give Lencho his bottle. We were alone, so it was a very intimate and beautiful moment. There are five cots in his bedroom, but only three are being used at the moment. There is also a single bed, where I imagine that one of the carers sleeps. At the back of the room, an enormous window lets in a lot of light and a big tree below the window. In the distance, we could hear the older children playing. These moments give us a real sense of what it is going to be like in a few days when we have him home with us. These are such beautiful moments, and I hope I will never forget them.

Endalnew arrived in the van with Salemo, who was going to drive us all to the Lucy Museum. This is the common name for the AL-2881 - hundreds of pieces of bones which were discovered in 1974 in Harar and which represent 40% of the skeleton of a specimen of an *Australopithecus afarensis*. Lucy was one of humankind's earliest ancestors and she lived in Africa

3.2 million years ago. The anthropologist that found her decided to call her Lucy because of the legendary Beatles' song "Lucy in the sky with diamonds".

After seeing millions of bones in cabinets - something that I imagine that I might have appreciated much more had I been a palaeontologist, we ate in the Gazebo restaurant which is next to the museum. It was absolutely pouring down, but nonetheless it was a pleasant experience as the dining room was partially open, which meant that we were able to watch the spectacular rain shower, but without getting wet. When we were on our way to the restaurant, we walked past a fenced garden where there were four huge land turtles on the grass. We were told that one of them was 87 years old - Simón couldn't believe it. He went into the garden and sat down on the grass so he could observe them.



After lunch, we went to a shopping centre that had a stationary shop. We are organising a farewell party for all of the children next week, and we wanted to buy pencils and notebooks to fill the piñata. They don't sell piñatas in Ethiopia, so we bought a strong paper bag to use as the container. We can't wait to see how much enjoyment they get out of the game - we don't think they will have seen anything like it before.

It was getting late so we went back to the hotel. We ordered room service for dinner, had a bath and then went straight to sleep. We really miss Abraham at the moment. He is working as a tour-guide for a group of tourists in the south of Ethiopia for 9 days, but he promised us that he will be back on the 10th of July and he is looking forward to spending time with us. I feel like he is another member of our family – we have such a special relationship with him, and I hope he feels the same way. When he said goodbye to us, he told us that Lencho is a very beautiful child and that he is so lucky that he is going to form part of our family. I told him that we are the lucky ones, unable to get rid of the massive smile on my face.



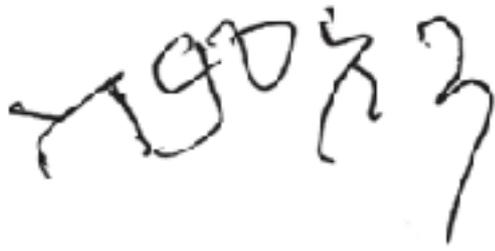
Wednesday 3rd July

Now we are four

We woke up early this morning - just like we have every other day. We are still feeling completely worn out – the altitude is really affecting us. I think it's such a shame that we are spending so much of this trip feeling so rough. We went down for breakfast and we talked about how great it would be if Lencho was able to come home with us today. Saying that, we are still a bit worried - we don't have very much energy and we can only imagine how tough the first day will be. It will definitely require a greater effort and a lot of willpower.

The manager of the hotel's dining room is called Mesías. He is an older man, and although he might seem quite serious at first, he is very kind and caring. We see him every day and we always stop to chat to him. This morning he gave Simón a present – a small piece of paper with the second portrait that he has drawn of him. Little details like these might seem small and insignificant, but to us, they mean so much more. Simón has completely won over all of the staff that work here. He is a friendly little chap, and he is happy to talk to everybody. He is very sociable and he doesn't mind talking to adults. The fact that he speaks English has certainly helped.

This morning while we were having breakfast, a Portuguese man tapped on the dining room window – he wanted to show Simón a little bird that he was holding. Simon ran out to play with him. We feel that he knows the hotel and surrounding areas quite well now, so we have given him a bit of free rein. Alex went up to the bedroom as he wanted to look for a book, and I stayed in the dining room, enjoying my second cup of tea. Simón pulled funny faces at me through the window while he chatted to the Portuguese man with the bird.



When Alex came back from the bedroom with his book, he gave me the big news. He had spoken to Endalnew. He had called to tell us that we wouldn't be going to the transitional house this morning like we had done every other day. Alex saw the shock on my face, and continued with what he was saying, "Because we are going to pick him up and bring him home with us at 14.00 pm"

Starting today, Lion is going to be with us forever. I can't even begin to explain how this makes me feel. This whole trip has been an emotional rollercoaster and we are wearing our hearts on our sleeves. The three of us hugged each other, our eyes filling up with tears.

During the 4-hour wait, Alex took the opportunity to check and reply to some emails from work, while Simón and I went exploring around the hotel gardens. It really is a marvellous place - a real oasis in this chaotic and contaminated city. We started by walking along the jogging track that goes around the hotel - it might still be within the hotel grounds, but to us it felt like an adventure. We found all sorts of insects - some of them were massive. Simón picked them up with his hands and tried to get me to touch them, but I really wasn't convinced by the idea. As a nature lover myself, I have always tried to instil a love of flora and fauna into my son, so we also explored the vegetation in the garden. There were so many native plants, which I am unfamiliar with, but we did manage to recognise rosemary, thyme, rose bushes, geraniums and cypresses. Ethiopia is one of the 12 countries in the world with the greatest diversity of flora. There are between 600 and 1400 autochthonous plants - 20% of which are flowers. Ethiopia is the country with the greatest number of autochthonous species of flower in the whole of Africa.

While walking along the disused jogging track, we came across half a dozen workers fixing pipes and lifting the ground up. There are construction workers all over Addis - unblocking, repairing or installing all sorts of things, both underground and in the buildings. As the city is constantly undergoing construction and restoration work, you quickly get used to seeing groups of workers everywhere that you go.

The garden quickly became too small for us explorers, so Simón and I left the hotel grounds to start our real adventure. The security guards looked quite surprised to see me walking out of the hotel with a small child, seemingly aimlessly. I don't think they are used to people just going for a walk - but I know that Addis is a safe city.

We went around the corner and we were already in the real Addis - I find the contrasts fascinating. We saw all types of cars driving up and down the street, people walking in all directions, dirt pavements full of puddles that we had to try to dodge, broken-down cars abandoned in the middle of the road, businessmen who stopped to talk to us and offer us their products, and curious pedestrians who smiled across at us. As we walked around the hotel block, we saw all sorts of things - it was a really fun experience.

I'm an adventurous and curious person by nature and I love tasting all types of different food. Even so, I decided not to try any of the raw meat that they were selling at the small stalls scattered along the street. They have massive pieces of raw meat just hanging from a hook - it's not refrigerated, so it is surrounded by flies. It is a real delicacy here, but for health reasons not even Endalnew eats it - so we don't either. Kitfo is a raw meat which is cut very finely and is served with a typical Ethiopian spiced butter and either awaze or berebere sauce. Kurt and tere saga are other typical Ethiopian dishes that are also served raw. There is a story behind the consumption of raw meat in Ethiopia. Apparently, during the war times, troops were often assaulted at night because the scent of their meat roasting at night had given away their location. They realised that eating raw meat was an act of self-preservation - helping to ensure that they went unnoticed by their enemies. Many years later, it became an Ethiopian tradition.

After lunch, Endalnew arrived and we went with him to pick up the rest of the Spaniards and head on to the transitional home. When we arrived, Hailu and Kway seemed very serious - today was definitely not like all of the other days. They seemed sad. Or perhaps they were scared. Who knows how many months it has been since the last time they left the house or were separated from the rest of the children who are in the same situation as them? They were overwhelmed by what was happening - it's not surprising really, as they know very little about their future whereabouts. I felt myself starting to cry and I had to try to hide my tears.

The children are so transparent, so innocent and pure - it is difficult not to feel for them. Their parents noticed how they were feeling, as did we all, and all of a sudden, just like that, all of our excitement about this day faded away. Luckily, it didn't seem like Lencho really knew what was going on. We spent a few hours in the transitional home like we had done every other day - we didn't want to take them with us so abruptly.

Alex spent nearly all of the time teaching Yared how to play Uzu on the iPad - he did the same thing a few days ago with Yame. Everything is new to them, and they always seem really curious whenever we show something. Alex has really enjoyed spending time with them and it seems that they loved it too. Yared is the oldest all of the children, and we have all noticed, and commented on how intelligent he is. He is serious and responsible and is able to resolve all of challenges that he has to face. We were told that he might be too old to be adopted by a Spanish family - it really broke our hearts to hear that. If the International Adoption Law allowed you to adopt children that were older than your own, we would have taken him (but by law, they have to be at least one year younger than your youngest child is).





With Lencho on my back, I went with Simón to play football until it was time to go. The moment had finally arrived. Endalnew kept telling me to get into the van, but I told him that I really needed to speak to one of the carers, as I didn't know if there was a specific routine that I have to follow with Lencho. He looked at me and laughed saying "You already know, you have another child". I couldn't believe it - it seemed like he wasn't willing to explain anything to me, and I felt that this was stuff that I needed to know, for my son's sake. I quickly asked one of Lencho's carers who said "Give him powdered milk, just go by the quantities that appear on the box for his age range." I was shocked. She pushed me towards the van, and I felt myself laugh nervously. I don't know anything – whether or not they bathe him, what time he goes to sleep, if I have to get up in the middle of the night to give him a bottle, what he eats, or if he is even eating solids food yet. I really felt like I didn't know anything, despite spending the last few months thinking about what it was going to be like when we took our child with us for the first time.

We all got into the van with the three children - Hailu, Kway and Lencho. We had conflicting emotions. We cried with the joy of finally being able to take our children home, but also with sadness as we thought of how Hailu and Kway, who were speechless the whole journey, must be feeling. We also suffered for Simón – we wanted to make sure that he knew that our feelings towards him would never change.

In the van, Lencho spent the whole journey looking at everything around him with his enormous eyes. His body squirmed as he looked from one side to the other – he seemed to be bewildered by so many changes. He is an alert baby. I found myself smiling. I know that he won't have any problem in adapting as he responds so well to stimuli.

When we arrived at the hotel and walked down the corridor to our bedroom it was a very strange feeling - we didn't really know what to expect. Lencho wouldn't stop crying when we got there, and it broke Alex's hearts and mine – we didn't know how to console him. I prepared a bath, thinking that it might calm everyone's nerves. Simón, Lencho and I bathed together for the first time. It was the first time that I saw my son's naked body - my son from a different racial group.

The bath provided us with some much-needed relaxation and we enjoyed playing with Simón's toys. I don't think Lencho had ever had such a long and relaxing bath. When I took him out of the bathtub, we lathered him with almond oil and gave him a Shantala massage. I learnt this ancient Hindu massage technique in a baby massage class. He seemed to like it, and although he was probably scared, the heat of my hands over his body seemed to calm him.

I was shocked by some marks that I found on his bottom - it was covered in a rash and his skin was very irritated. I'm guessing that this was due to the poor hygiene or perhaps from poor quality nappies. I put the baby cologne that we use at home on him and I dressed him in a clean pair of pyjamas – he now smelled of home. I needed him to feel a connection to us - to our clothes, our scent and our habits. We went out for dinner and Lencho was fascinated by everything that was going on around him – he spent the whole meal observing everything. After dinner, he fell asleep in the buggy on the way back to our room. We put him in the cot and Alex, Simón and myself lay on the double bed – we were so happy that we were all finally together and we watched the animated movie *Up* on the laptop.

Simón finally fell asleep with his head on my chest. Who knows what a four-year-old boy will have thought about everything that happened today. Once he was asleep, Alex and I had the chance to discuss the emotional rollercoaster that we had been on today. Without a doubt, it had been an intense but bittersweet day.





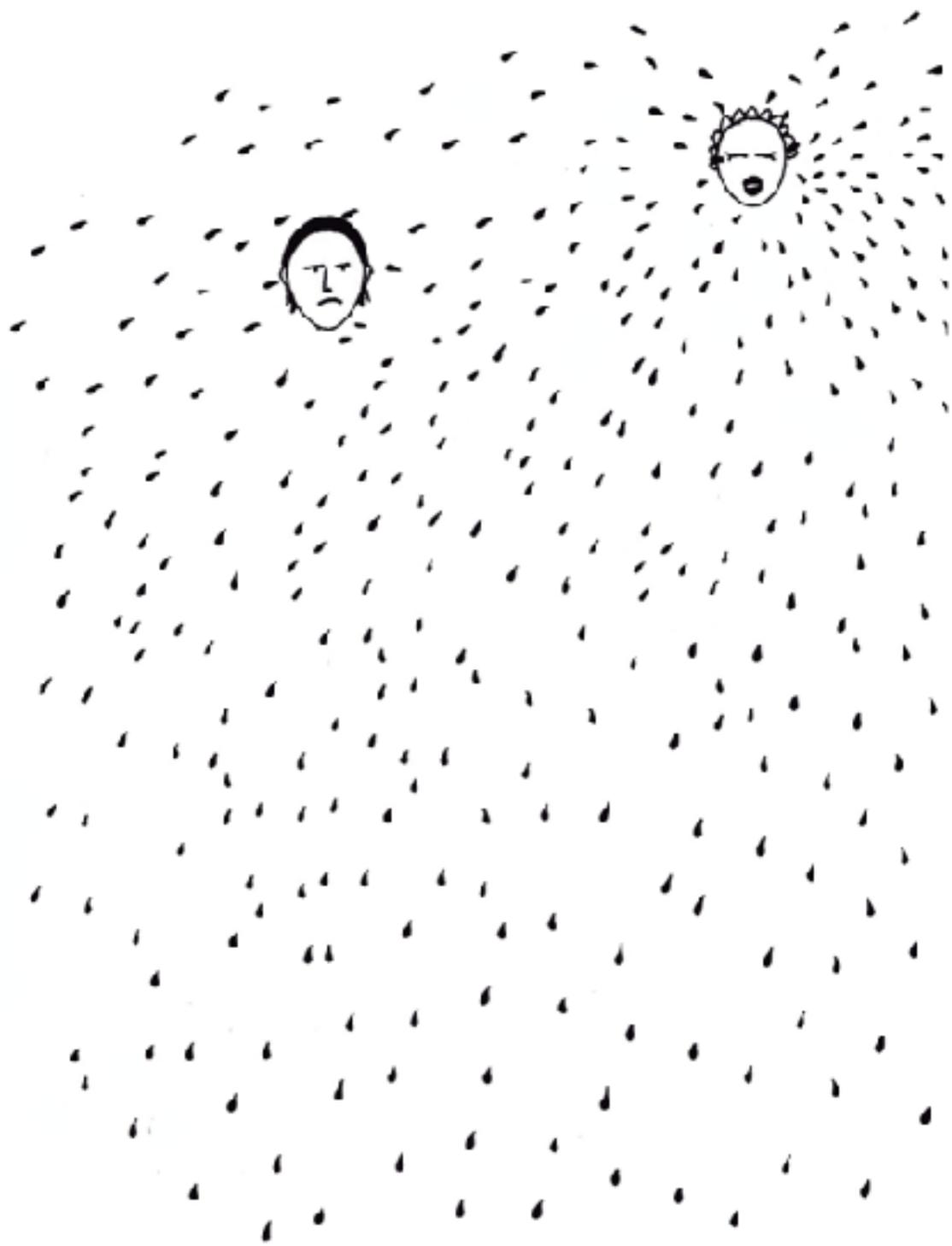
Thursday 4th July

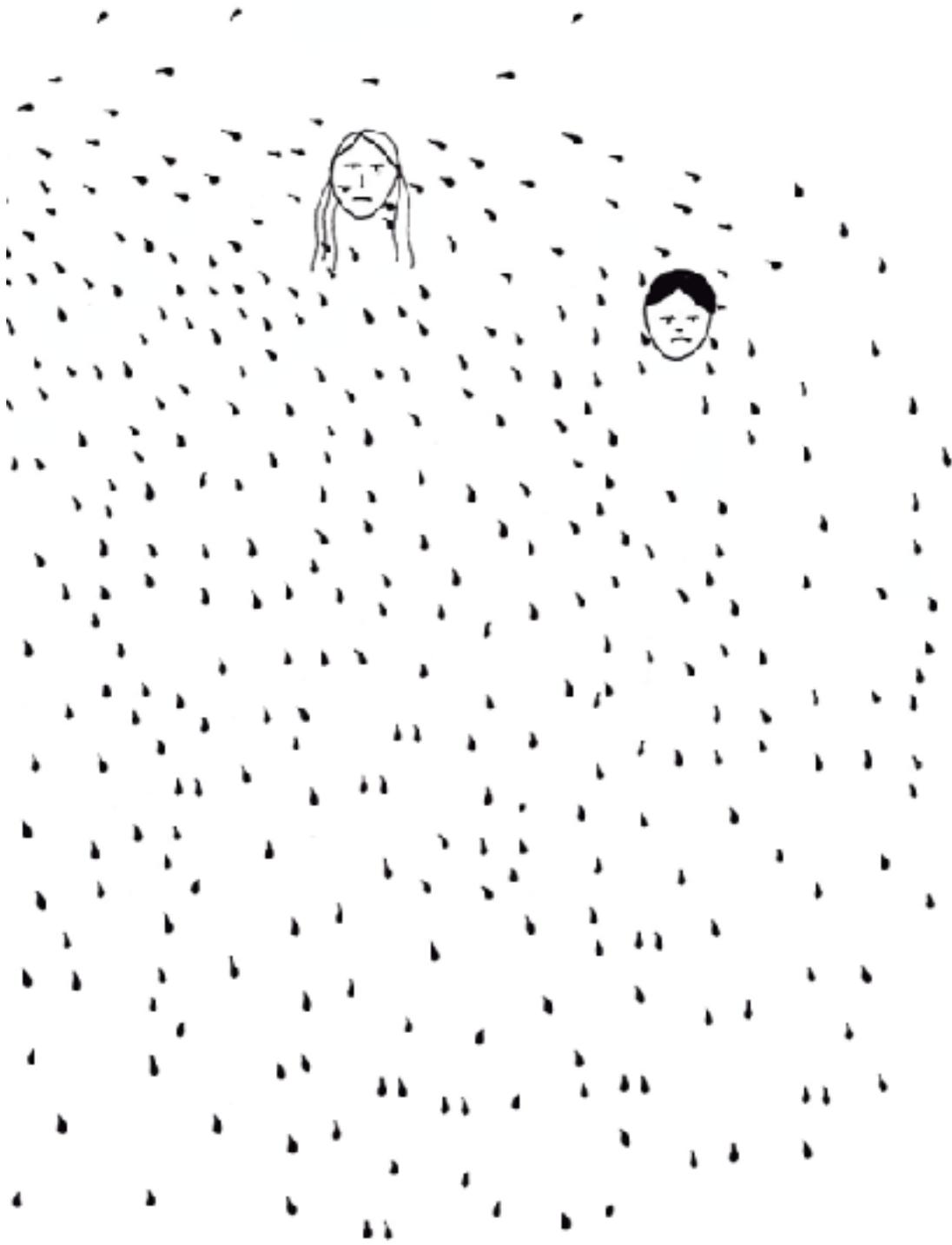
Getting used to each other

We did not make any plans for today - we decided to spend the day at the hotel getting to know each other, and more importantly, gradually getting used to each other. Although Lencho seemed happy and well rested this morning, we had a really bad night. He woke up screaming several times. He was disorientated. It was difficult to console him and we were up nearly the whole night. We were so tired this morning, now more than ever

Although I must say, as soon as we saw him on the bedroom floor exploring, laughing and playing with any random object that he came across, it was easy to forgive him for keeping us up during the night - it was all forgotten about. I watched him – realising that we still have so much left to discover about him, it's incredible to think about it. He seems to be such a happy child - you can tell that he has been very much loved, both in the Dukem orphanage and in the ECAI transitional home. I wonder how someone could possibly abandon such a beautiful child and it breaks my heart.

After breakfast, it started to rain heavily, perfect weather for a day like today – now we can just focus on getting to know each other. We spent nearly the whole day walking along the corridors of the hotel. Lencho has cried inconsolably a few times, but I think it's normal - everything is new to him, and he isn't following his routine. I feel quite frustrated when I think about how little advice we were given, but I guess it is a cultural thing.





We bought milk in the hotel supermarket and there were no indications on the box to tell us how much we should be giving him— it’s an imported product and the text is in Arabic. We also still had no idea when he should be napping, and how long for. Given our lack of any real “instructions”, it is hardly surprising that he spent so much of his time crying for the first few days. Poor us.

There were moments of real despair throughout the day. We are still tired from the journey and the last few days have been exhausting, but more than that, we are emotionally drained as we have a baby who we don’t know how to console. Tonight, Lencho finally cried himself to sleep at 20.30 pm. Once he had fallen asleep, we realised that what he wanted more than anything was to be held. Myself, Alex and Simón laid on the bed, we thought about all we had experienced today, and we enjoyed the silence. I feel much more at ease knowing that Simón and Alex are with me. Tomorrow will be another day.



Friday 5th July

Looking for harmony

When we woke up, Lencho was awake in his cot, which is made of iron bars and was probably built in the 1960s. He was making faint sounds and experimenting with his vocal instruments. When we heard him, we looked over at our clock and we were surprised to discover that we had woken up so late, it was already 9.30 am. Our bodies and heads needed a good rest and it seemed like Lencho's did too.

We all woke up in a good mood - with our batteries charged. It seems that Simón is gradually accepting the idea that he has a little brother - he doesn't shut himself in the wardrobe to play on his own anymore. Lencho seems to greatly admire his big brother - he watches him intently wherever he goes. He can barely move - he squirms about but he hasn't learnt to crawl yet.

Endalnew called us to tell us that the judge's final ruling was still being prepared. This meant that we wouldn't be able to get his birth certificate sorted until Monday. Everything happens at a different pace here - the paperwork that you could sort out in 2 days in Barcelona takes 2 weeks to sort out here. Throughout the whole adoption process, we have had to accept that this is how things work around here and there is nothing we can do about it. Nonetheless this time we are able to see the positive side - the longer we spend with our son before returning home, the less traumatic the whole process will be, as we will have had more time to create a stronger connection with him. Once the birth certificate is ready, we will have to wait for at least another week for him to be issued his Ethiopian passport that will allow us to leave the country.

This morning it rained, as it has done nearly every day since we have been here. We were the last ones down to breakfast. Even still, we didn't feel rushed - they are very friendly here. There is no better feeling than knowing that you don't have to do anything or go anywhere and you can just sit and watch the rain through the massive windows in the dining room. We gave Lencho a bit of everything on offer in the buffet - he eats absolutely everything. The thing he seems to like most are whole tomatoes - I don't know if it is because he likes the look of them, or perhaps they gave them to him in the transitional home, but either way he loves them.

After we went to “explore” the hotel gardens and we called into a travel agency to see if we could find something to do today. We miss Abraham, but we decided to hire a guide to take us up to the top of a hill - apparently, it has great views of the whole city. Unfortunately, we had to turn back when we were halfway there because of the torrential rain and we took shelter in the Weyin Ethiopia. This is another cultural restaurant, like the Yod Abyssinia, that promotes the culture of the Ethiopian tribes - we were the only people in the whole restaurant.

The electric current is not very strong in Addis Ababa; in fact, it always seems semi-dark everywhere that we go. We shared an injera with our guide who explained the country’s political situation to us while we ate.

After lunch, we went to the city’s Ethnological Museum. Interestingly enough it is located in the ancient palace where Haile Selassie, the Emperor of the First Kingdom of Ethiopia, lived from 1930 to 1974. The origins of his kingdom go back to the dynasty of King Solomon and Queen Makeda - the Emperor of Axum who is also known as the Queen of Sheba. Haile Selassie is an important figure in both Ethiopian and African History. His name was Ras (duke) Tafari Makonnen. Ras Tafari gave the name to the Rastafarian movement that started in Jamaica in the 1930s and Selassie was considered as their Messiah who was going to lead them to a prosperous future with eternal peace.

To get to the museum, we entered through the University of Addis’s campus - it just so happened that the students were graduating today. It was fantastic to see all of the students wearing their mortarboards and gowns and taking group photos. We gave them our congratulations - many of them seemed very surprised to see us there, as the campus gardens isn’t really a place for tourists. Many of them took photos with Simón who just laughed along with them.



The museum was very interesting. We saw autochthonous paintings, typical tribal outfits, musical instruments and Orthodox crosses. We also walked through some of the rooms that Haile Selassie had lived in. After that we went to the Saint George’s Cathedral and a guide told us the story of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon.

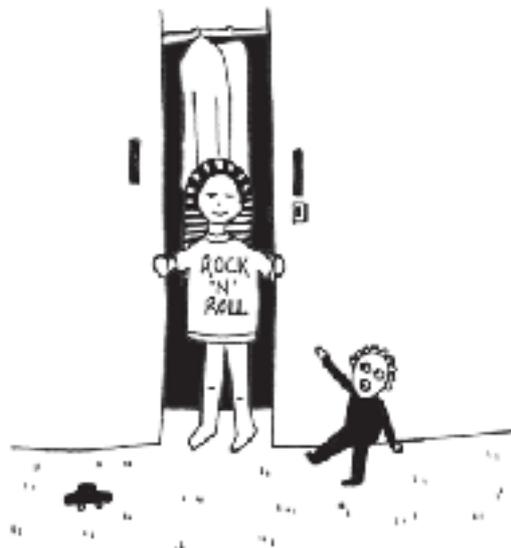
The Queen of Sheba, known in Ethiopia as Makeda, travelled to Israel to meet King Solomon. She had a child with him who would later become the first emperor of Ethiopia, Menelik I. Tradition tells that some time later, young Menelik decided to travel to Jerusalem to meet his father and upon his return, he brought the Ark of the Covenant to Ethiopia. It is said that the Ark is now found in the city of Axum. The chapel of Our Lady of Sion, where the Ark is now located, is carefully guarded by a monk who has been specifically chosen for this task.

In the cathedral, there were loads of stained glass windows that told the stories of Judaism and Catholicism. I would have loved to have taken photos of all of the lions that I have seen during this trip, in all different formats. It would be a way of showing Lencho just how important his name is here in Ethiopia. Although the lion symbolises the Ethiopian dynasty, it can still be found all over Ethiopia, for example on the country flag or on the back of the coins. This makes me enormously proud.

Today was a really nice day. We are all getting used to the new situation and every time we look at Lencho and pull a funny face, he laughs. Simón wanted to get in Lencho's cot with him tonight, but then again, he also threw water at his face when they were in the bath together and he kicked him a few times when he thought no one was looking. I guess that this type of jealousy is normal between siblings.

Tomorrow we have to wake up at 7.00 am. Haile is coming to collect us to take us to Dukem, the town where they found Lencho. It's going to be tough, but given that we are so close, we feel that it's something we have to do. Tomorrow we will go and visit the orphanage where he spent the first few months of his life, from when he was 2 months to 6 months, before he was taken to the transitional home in Addis Ababa.

I wonder how the rest of the Spaniards are getting on, we haven't seen them in several days but I still feel very close to them. I especially want to know how the children - Hailu, Kway and Muluken are getting on. We haven't heard from them in three days and I have tried to call the Yedesta Guest House on various occasions - I don't know if I jotted down the number wrong, or if they just don't understand me when I speak. We have asked Endalnew to try to organise for us to all spend Sunday together. Tomorrow he will confirm whether this suits the others or not.





Saturday 6th July

Excursion to the southeast with Haile

Haile came to collect us from the hotel at 8.00 am to go to Dukem. We were very excited because we were finally going to meet the nurse who gave Lencho his name and who looked after him for the first few months of his life at the orphanage. It is an important meeting and one we have dreamt about since Barcelona. Not all adoptive parents are this lucky, as many of the children come from regions that are difficult to get to, like Tigray, in the north of the country or Benishangul-Gumuz, the area that borders with Sudan. They would need to travel for several days to get there. In our case, it was practically a compulsory destination as it was also en route to Nazret where Haile wanted to show us one of his NACID projects.

When Haile arrived at the hotel to collect us, he also gave us a copy of the documents that had been issued by the Court of Addis – physical proof that the ruling for adoption had been favourable. He had been entrusted with the task of handing over the documents to us as he is Gidey's husband - she is the director of the transitional home. There was a small photo of Lencho attached to the document. This photo was taken after he was found when he was only 3 months old. I remember thinking how adorable he was the first time we saw this photo – I now find that I am falling in love with him more and more every day, mainly due to his happy personality.

His most prominent features are his enormous black eyes. When I look closely at him, I can hardly see his pupil as it is practically the same colour as his iris. There is light in his eyes and you can see through this. When he looks you straight in the eyes you can get a real sense of how grateful he is that we are here - it seems as if he truly understands all that has happened and who we are.

We drove to the town of Dukem, it is just 30 km from Addis, but given the condition of the roads in Ethiopia, it took us nearly an hour and a half to get there. The traffic was very heavy when we were leaving the city and we came across all sorts of vehicles. There were also so many animals wandering along the streets and the sides of the road. Getting around in Ethiopia is always an adventure, even if you only want to travel a few kilometres.

We drove through a large part of the Oromia region, which is where our son is from. There are so many beautiful landscapes – we could see large sugar plantations and mountains in the distance. We ended up in the well-known Great Rift Valley. This is a great geological fracture, 4000 km in length that goes from the Red Sea to Mozambique, and many years ago, it divi-

ded Africa in two. Throughout the journey, we saw flocks of vultures and eagle-like birds flying over us. Ethiopia is one of the world's leading countries in terms of its bird diversity. It is paradise for any ornithologist - there are 800 different birds, 29 of which are endemic. In the Rift Valley, we mainly found aquatic birds like pelicans, herons, crowned cranes, flamingos and the Yellow-billed stork, as there are many lakes in this area.

Geographically, Ethiopia is a very interesting country - the high mountains are divided by the Rift trench and there are also arid deserts and dense forests to the north, south and east, and verdant forests that also form part of Guinea to the west. The road we drove along is the direct route to South Africa and we came across people selling bananas, papayas and bottles of water covered in wicker, used to help maintain the temperature. We spent the whole journey looking out of the window, totally engrossed in all that was happening around us. Lencho, who hardly made a sound, was the most curious of all - he didn't take his hands off the window frame the whole time, and he tried to lift his body up so he could get a better view from where he was sitting on our laps.



As we had come down from Addis, which has an altitude of 2,300 km above sea level, it felt a lot hotter in Dukem. When we arrived in Dukem, we went along the main street, which was full of small shops and people. We turned off to the right, driving along narrow dirt roads until we reached the orphanage. We parked on the muddy road and we found a little fenced-in house with the iron gate half-open. We went through the gate, and as we were walking across the yard in front of the house, three women came out to meet us. They seemed quite shy, but kind. They were the carers, and I got the impression that they weren't very used to visitors. As soon as they saw Lencho, their embarrassment seemed to disappear and their eyes filled with tears, clearly overcome with emotion. They passed him between themselves - kissing and hugging him tightly, speaking warm words to him.

I don't know if Lencho knew where he was or if he recognised the women, but we took many photos that we will be able to show him one day. I had to try to contain myself - I don't know whether I felt that it would be embarrassing to start crying and not be able to stop, or maybe I am finally learning to distance myself from things. During this trip, for one reason or another, I have cried every day - leaving me completely worn out and with no energy. This trip is very intense and beautiful, but nonetheless it is emotionally very draining.

Hawi Guma Tuji is the nurse who Lencho was handed over to when he was first found. She was the person who gave him the name Lencho – which means lion in the Oromo language. She said that she knew he must have been very strong as he had been able to survive, despite being so small, and that's why she decided to call him Lion. She also mentioned that he was always smiling. Hawi hugged him tightly – with a big smile from ear to ear. She looked at me, and asked if someone could take a photo of the two of us together. She was very proud that we had met, and I felt like she was giving me her seal of approval in her role as my son's "second mother". She asked me to send her photos of him growing up, and we certainly will do. She will have a place in my heart forever and we will always have this special connection, as she was the person who gave my son his name, and this means so much to us.

The small orphanage has an entrance hall, which is just a few metres in size – there is a mattress on the floor and a small table with a chair. Inside there are four doors - one leads to the small kitchen, another to the bathroom and the other two to the bedrooms where there are half a dozen beds and cots. All of them are empty. Once again, I am filled with mixed emotions. It seems to be such a sad place - it's full of cockroaches and there are enormous cracks on the walls.

I find it surreal to imagine that my son spent the first few months of his life here. I cannot take it in. There is only one baby at the Dukem orphanage now – his name is Rabra and he was found buried in the ground with his small head peeping out when he was just a few days old. I feel like I need to cry, but I try to be strong – they are waiting for our reactions. I try to show how grateful I am by keeping a smile on my face, trying to conceal the sadness that I am feeling inside. Any happiness I had felt before has now disappeared.

Despite it being such a tough situation, I can tell just by looking at the way the carers hug Lencho so tightly, that he was very much loved by them.





I felt bad that we weren't able to understand each other, as the women spoke Oromo. Luckily, Hawi can also speak Amharic so she was able to converse with Haile and interpret for the others. I felt so much better now that I knew that they are such good people, you could see it in their faces, and you could tell how happy they were to meet the parents who had adopted the baby who they had looked after and loved for all those months.

They offered us some broad beans and we were just about to try them when Haile recommended that we didn't do it as they might make us very unwell – their health standards are not what we are used to. I felt bad that we had to reject the food that they had offered us, but I imagine that Haile explained the reason. We took many photos with them and then went on our way. We left with mixed sensations, but we were still glad that we had the chance to get to know the orphanage where our son had stayed.

On our way to Nazret, Haile took us off course so he could show us a 40-hectare plot, which was owned by NACID, on which they had built a water pump. Unfortunately, as it was constructed on volcanic land, the structure has since been destroyed by the earth's fluctuations and they don't have the necessary funds to fix it. As we know, it is impossible to live without water, so he is trying to raise money to be able to fix the well and to build a new orphanage for children with special needs. He asked us if we would be able to help him from Barcelona.

I jokingly suggested that he could ask Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie for the money as they had adopted their daughter from Ethiopia and his reply was, "Oh really, who are they?". I managed to contain my laughter and I told him that it will be difficult to raise that much money but that we would certainly try.

Unfortunately, in Ethiopia there are no orphanages that house children with special needs - something that is very necessary. Haile said that he hoped that we hadn't felt that he was trying to put pressure on us to donate money by bringing us to this beautiful land. We told him that he didn't have worry and that we understood exactly why he was asking us for help and we promised to do all that we could to help him.

Haile is a wonderful man. He says that he may not earn any money, but that unlike many of his friends, he can sleep well at night. He says that the most important thing in life is to be at peace with oneself. Being surrounded by children and being able to give them the love they need, is something that brings him great joy and energy. Knowing that what he does will help these children to have a better future is what motivates him to continue. In Nazret, he doesn't only support abandoned children, but he also runs schools and provides training for women, as well as funding microloans for them.

We arrived at Nazret – it is a town that is bursting with life, with buildings all over the place and there is even a leather factory that is contaminating the rivers and which gives off a very unpleasant scent. Haile complained that he is tired of the fact that no one in the government seems to be listening to his cry for help. He also mentioned the terrible situation of the lions in the Lion Park in Addis. He told us that things like this continue to exist due to the complete ignorance of the government that is in power. I hope that by the time we next come back to Addis, this awful place, where not only the lions, but also the rest of the animals - 4 antelopes and one monkey - live in horrific conditions, enclosed in small areas full of rubbish, will no longer exist. It makes me feel sick even just thinking about it.

We stopped at a hotel to have lunch and we sat at a terrace surrounded by bougainvilleas. It was next to a big swimming pool where there was a group of children having a swimming lesson. We ate a lasagne that was quite good, and it didn't take long for Simón to take off his clothes and jump in to the pool and have fun with half a dozen kids that swam with him, carried him, played and laughed with him. I imagine they won't have seen many white children swimming in their boxer shorts before, so Simón quickly became the main attraction. There are never any tourists in any of the places that we go, just local people, so our experiences are always very authentic.

We head back to Addis and during the 3-hour trip, Kassaye told us many stories about his personal and professional life. We also told him about our lives, why we had chosen to adopt a child from Ethiopia and what we think of his people. It was a really pleasant journey as we were able to talk openly about our culture and his. We made plans to go on another excursion with him, and he repeated over and over again what a good time he had with us. He also reiterated that the Oromos are very good people, and that Lencho is bound to become someone truly special, and that qualities of the Oromo ethnic group will be reflected in his personality. We feel very proud that he is our son and we are excited to get to know him more. He behaved so well throughout the trip, he just watched his native land out of the window while we held on to him tightly.

It was such a lovely day and we felt so fortunate that we got the chance to see the rural side of Ethiopia. It is such a beautiful country, not only because of its landscapes but also because of the people that live here.





Sunday 7th July

A day in Debre Zeyit

At last, we all got to see each other again. The 13 of us went in a van driven by Helias with Endalnew as the co-pilot. We went along the road that goes from Addis to Djibouti – this is the road that connects Ethiopia with the sea.

Ethiopia previously had direct access to the sea through Eritrea, but when it became independent in the 90s, the port was closed and this had a serious effect on the country's economy, as all imports and exports were blocked. Now the only way to get to the sea is by going through Djibouti and we passed a land port on this road. All of the containers that arrive to the country by sea from other countries are located in this port.

We drove through Dukem again and so we were able to show all of the Spaniards the beautiful rural place where Lencho is from. Our plan was to spend the day at the Debre Zeyit Lakes. The name means the Mount of olives and it is located around 80km from Addis. Debre Zeyit is made of five lakes formed by craters - Lake Bishoftu, Lake Hora, Lake Bishoftu Guda, Lake Kuriftu and Lake Cheleklaka.

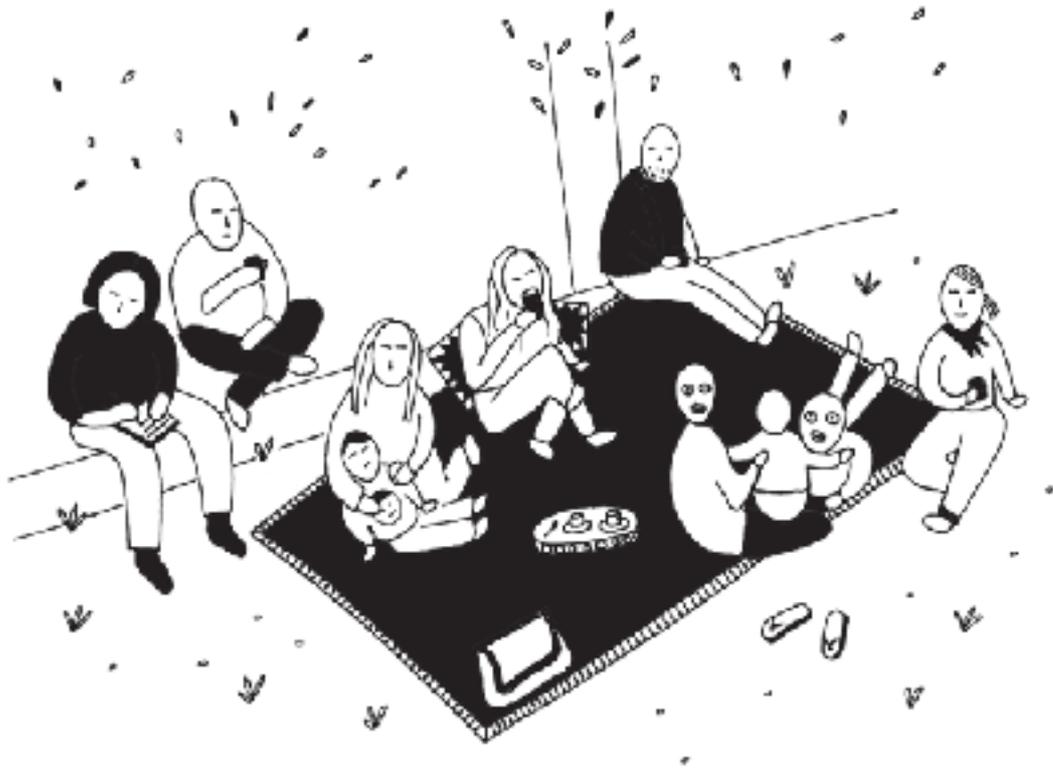
Debre Zeyit is the typical place where the residents of Addis go when they want spend time in the fresh air, do water sports, watch water birds or attend the local festivals that are held every year. The first place that we stopped was Lake Hora - the only way to get into the water was by going down the steps into the enormous lake.

The lake was full of local people listening to music, drinking beer, or spending the day with their partners. There was even a group of people who were being taught how to swim - I have noticed that a lot of Ethiopians don't know how to swim as there is no sea and the swimming pools are reserved for the more well off people. We went down the mountain to the lake and we noticed that everyone was looking at us - I guess they aren't used to seeing tourists. They even took photos of us with their mobile phones, especially of Simón who posed for photos with some of them. After about half an hour, we went back up, got in the van, and went for lunch at a place with a lovely view of another enormous lake under a massive cliff - the Bishoftu. The view from the Dreamland Hotel restaurant was beautiful and we ate on a wooden platform that was partially sheltered by a thatched roof. The children spent their lunchtime feeding some kittens that were under the table.

Later on, we went down to the lake - it was a haven of peace and by far the most pleasant place that we had been to since arriving in Ethiopia. There were grassy areas along the side of the lake, a children's playpark and so much vegetation to explore. We rented a big rug where we laid down, looking out on to the lake from the shade.

Lencho was able to crawl and explore around him and Simón, Hailu, Kway and Muluken spent their time playing in the children's park where there was a swing-set, a seesaw and a slide. There was no one else here, just us. We were brought some coffee on a tray and they served it to us in small cups. It was freshly ground and it was delicious, the perfect drink for such an idyllic place.

Ethiopian coffee doesn't need any milk because the highest quality coffee here is so sweet that it can be drunk on its own. It's made of coffee beans that are grown in the shade of the ancestral trees - this allows the berries to maintain their humidity until they are harvested. If they weren't grown in the shade, the coffee produced would be much more bitter. The Arabica coffee obtained from these plants has caffeine levels of around 1 to 1.5% - substantially lower than the percentage of caffeine in Robusta coffee, which is around 3%. Ethiopian coffee is very smooth and sweet and it is one of the most popular coffees in the world. Although the coffee produced varies from one region to another, the one thing that they all have in common is that no chemical products are used on the coffee plantations, and only manual processes are used.



Sometime between the 5th and the 10th centuries, a shepherd from the Kingdom of Kaffa named Kaldi noticed that his goats seemed to become very hyperactive when they ate certain berries from one of his plants. He was astounded and so he decided to try them himself. He did so, and the same thing happened to him, he was so excited. He decided to go and tell the monks from the nearby monastery what he had discovered, but they did not approve and ordered him to burn all of berries. He threw them into the fire and the roasted coffee gave off such an enticing aroma that the monks came back, this time with a different opinion.

The monks started to toast the coffee beans and they then distributed the grains amongst the monasteries throughout the country. They soaked the seeds in water and then drank it –this helped to keep them awake so they could pray at night. Soon after, the Arabs began to import the seeds and later on the Turks toasted and ground the beans - creating the drink that we all enjoy today. From there it was distributed to Europe via Italy and later on to Indonesia and America.



While we enjoyed our coffee, Alex and Iván went to see if they could hire a wooden boat and so shortly after we were able to go on a relaxing trip around the lake – all taking turns to row with the enormous wooden oars.

During the journey, I got very emotional when Jordi, holding on to Hailu's hand, said that he never could have imagined that it would be possible to love someone this much. Until he turned 46, Jordi had never wanted to be a father. Hailu never lets go of his father and both himself and Kway seem to be very affectionate towards their new families. It is very curious, because neither of them can speak to anyone else - they are from the area of Benishangul, which borders with Sudan and so they only speak Gumuz. In Ethiopia, most people speak Amharic, but Ge-ez, Tigrinya, Oromo, Gurage, Somali and Arabic are the other most common languages and there are many other minority languages.

If the children had spoken Amharic, then the people around us could have interpreted for us or we could have bought an Amharic-English dictionary, but obviously, there aren't bilingual dictionaries for all of the other Ethiopian dialects.

These children are wonderful, they observe everything without judging. You can tell what they are thinking just by the way they look at you. They look at you curiously, and as soon as your eyes meet theirs, they give you a shy smile – a smile that turns large and generous as soon as you smile back at them. Another way you can know how they are feeling, is the way that they look for continuous physical contact. They take your hand, touch your hair or hug your legs in a totally natural way. Whenever they walk past me, they say Lencho's name and they pick him up, placing him in positions on their bodies that I could never have imagined. One time, Kway picked him up and it was as if they were doing a choreographed routine that they had both practiced - he crouched down with him and supported him against his legs in a totally natural manner. Lencho never cries when he is in their arms, the complete opposite in fact.

We returned to our hotels in the late afternoon and all five children - Simón, Hailu, Kway, Muluken and Lencho fell asleep in the van. It was a really beautiful day, and not just because we were at such a beautiful place, but also because it is very moving to see how each of the families are getting to know and love each other. There is so much love here.

Without a doubt, this is turning into an unforgettable trip.





Monday 8th July

Everyone together at the Hilton

Today Gidey went to the registry office to collect the children's birth certificates. Lencho's birthday is recorded as the 20th of August 2012. It isn't his real birthday as he was found in the street, but it is what they estimate it to be. It is curious because his name is Lion and he is a Leo.

Strangely enough, according to Hailu's birth certificate, he is four-and-a-half-years-old, just half a year older than Simón and he is at least a head taller than him. We have been discussing it and we have all reached the conclusion that he must be about seven-years-old. According to the records, Kway will turn 6 in January but we also think that he is older than that.

Today everyone came to our hotel to spend the day together. We played in the children's play park, which they have finally opened - they have been doing some repair work there for several days. The children had a great day and us parents were delighted to see that our children were doing so well. Simón kept looking at us and saying over and over again, "They are my friends".

Endalnew called us to tell them he was able to go and request the children's Ethiopian Passports today - this meant that he was going to come at midday to collect the children and take them away for a couple of hours. With Lencho, this wasn't much of a problem, but when he arrived, the older children were very frightened, as they didn't understand where he was taking them and when they would be back. Hailu and Kway's parents suffered while they were gone as they hadn't been able to explain where they were going, but when they came back, they all gave each other a big hug.



It would take exactly seven business days for the passports to be ready. Once we had received them, we would then have to go to the Spanish Consulate to request the visas, which would take approximately three more days. This means that we might be able to bring forward our trip home. We are really happy because we can now start counting down the days until we can go home and present our little ones to our families. We spent the whole day making guesses as to when we might be able to go home, and while we are all enjoying our time here, the city of Addis doesn't have many resources and it is difficult to find things to do with the children every day. We are lucky that we all get on so well, and that we are happy to spend time together and to share these lovely moments. It is important for us all to share our emotions, as this is what connects us all to each other and talking about our worries and fears helps us to get through everything. Today we talked about how it often all feels so unreal. I guess it is a normal feeling after all that we have gone through, we will gradually get used to the adoption over time.

When Lencho came back, he held out his arms to come to me. He recognises me now. Just today, two people commented on this, and I nearly started crying. It is amazing how fast a child responds to love, and it seems that if a child is in need of a mother they respond even faster.

Although we are experiencing some beautiful moments of real closeness, it can sometimes be tough. Lencho wants to be held constantly, and we can't do that all day because we have to wash ourselves, eat, use our phones, get dressed, read, write... But most importantly, we have to make sure that we share our love evenly between our two children - Simón and Lencho. They both need us now, more than ever. It isn't easy to find the balance, and we end every day absolutely exhausted.



The four of us bathed together in the tub and the children went down for dinner in their pyjamas. I feel more and more at home here every day. I would love to make a documentary about this hotel - it is such a peculiar place, a meeting place for fascinating personalities, both Ethiopian and international. Every night the hotel organises a different themed meal - tonight was “Indian night” so there were lots of groups of Hindus that live in Addis Ababa.

We ate dinner next to a table where there were two women sitting. Neither of them spoke during the whole meal. I think they might have been from either Burkina Fasa or Mali. They were wearing two beautiful, bright-coloured wax-print outfits— each of them wearing a dress and turban. They looked so beautiful. In the dining room there were also some men who were wearing suits and who were speaking in French, I’m guessing they were from the Ivory Coast. A very serious looking man was sitting on his own - he had very dark skin, perhaps he was from Cameroon. An Ethiopian woman, who is married to a Swedish man, and now lives in Sweden, asked us if we minded if she gave Simón a hug. She told us that he reminded her of her own son who was at home and whom she was missing a lot. A woman from Zambia told me that she also had a child who was around Simón’s age. And there was another family - a white woman and her two mixed-raced children all of whom had dreadlocks down to their waists.

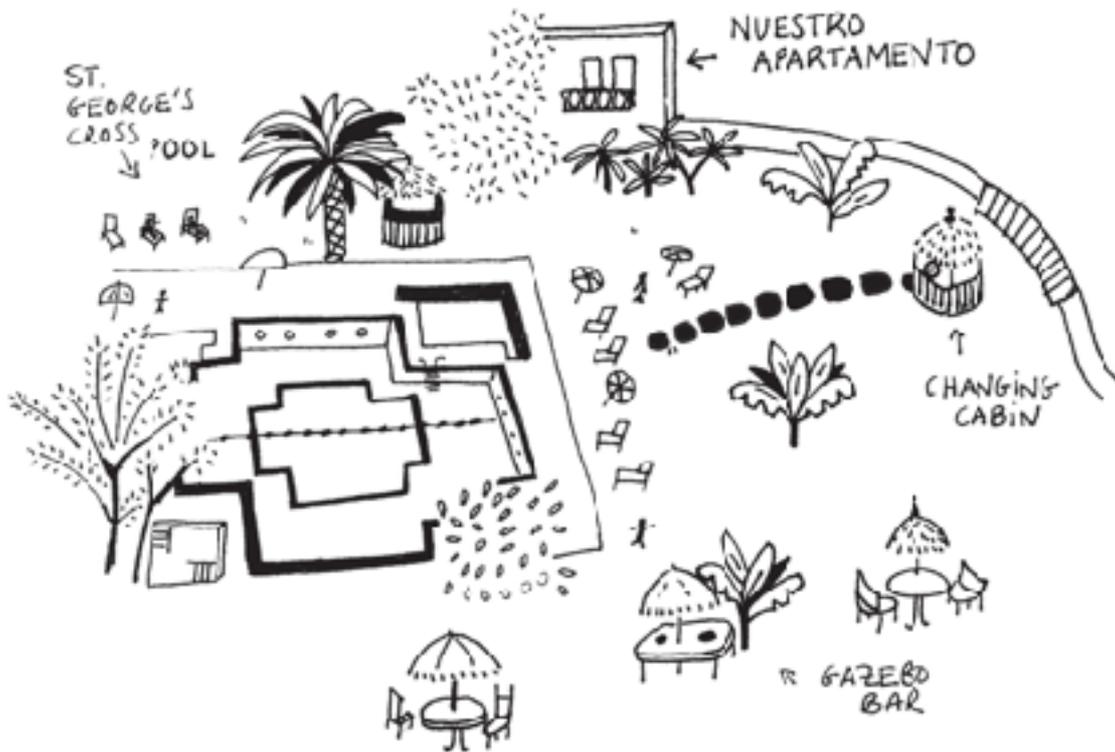




This is the description of all of the people that I saw on one single night. It is such an enriching experience to be able to spend three weeks surrounded by these types of people. So many interesting people congregate in this hotel, and I am learning so much about Ethiopia and Africa. I will certainly miss this eccentric bunch when I get back to Barcelona.

Addis Ababa is the headquarters of the African Union and the UN's Economic Commission for Africa - it is known as Africa's diplomatic capital. This is one of the reasons why our stay in the Hilton Hotel - a place where both social and professional meetings are commonplace - has been so interesting. I find it all fascinating, I have been captivated by the charming hospitality of the Ethiopian population and Africa has completely won me over.

Life in the hotel is hectic, and although nobody ever really seems to be in much of a rush, there are so many different people here and all of them have different objectives. I feel like I am a mere observer, but nonetheless, I imagine that I must also have an impact on this diverse landscape - we are one of the few adoptive families that stay here and go for walks around the hotel with their Ethiopian baby inside a baby carrier.





Tuesday 9th July

A tour around Addis Ababa

Today they have finally started to fill the swimming pool. It is a thermal pool and the water is currently at a temperature of 39 °C. While we were walking back to the bedroom, we walked past a passageway, which had a perfect view of the enormous swimming pool. It is shaped like the cross of the church of Saint George. It was a truly magical scene - the swimming pool was lit up and we could see the metres of steam that were being released into the atmosphere. The manager told me that in two days, when the swimming pool is finally full, the temperature will have gone down to 35 °C – that sounds fantastic to us, the average temperature in Addis during the raining season is 18 °C.

This morning we rented Endalnew's van again and we all went as a group to do some sight-seeing around Addis. It was cloudy all day and it was cold. They came to collect us at 11.00am and before that, the four of us were trying to save a beautiful yellow bird with a black head, which had got trapped in the hotel corridor. We managed to pick it up using a towel and then we held it in our arms until we got outside where Simón let it fly away.

We got in the van and first of all, we went to buy coffee – this is main product that is exported from Ethiopia - the second most exported product is sugar. Ethiopia's economy is based on agriculture and this makes up 45 % of its GDP. 85 % is labour and 90 % exportations. 25 % of the population live directly or indirectly from the exportation of coffee - nearly all of the country's coffee is exported. We went to Café To.Mo.Ca... We had heard that this is where you can buy the best coffee in the world. To.Mo.Ca is a family-owned company that was established in 1953. The initials of its name come from the Italian - Torrefazione Moderna Café. All of us, even the children, tried a black coffee and we bought bags of recently ground coffee to give as presents. It was delicious.



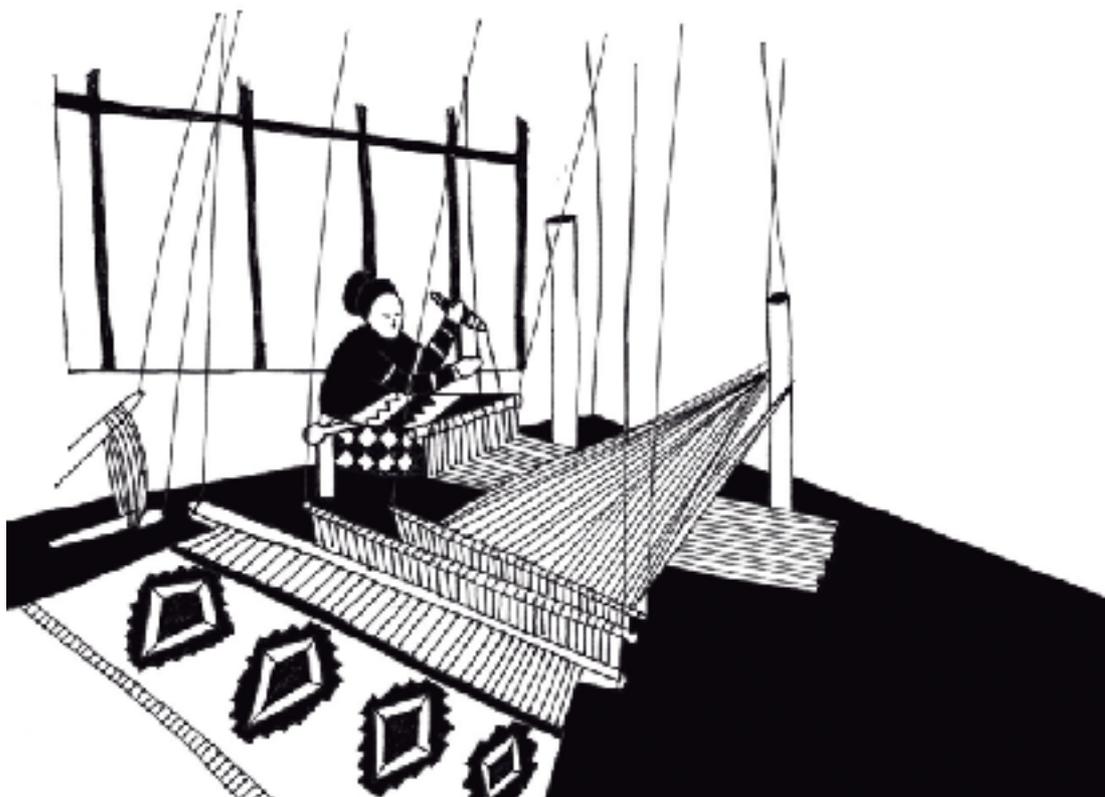
After that, we went to eat at Backyard; the food was quite good, although it was the same stuff as we have been eating everywhere - pizza, pasta and hamburgers. We miss Mediterranean food - here you have only two options, you eat this kind of food or you eat injera. The children are having a great time, everything is new to them, and they seem to be in a very good mood and full of energy, I don't know how they do it, they never seem to stop, well, I guess this time they had drunk coffee.

After lunch, Endalnew decided to bring us to a shopping centre. As soon as we entered, I lost everyone else. I was holding Lencho in the baby carrier and all of a sudden, I realised that I couldn't see any of the others. I went into a shop, which sold regional clothing, and there I met a woman from Colorado. She told me that her husband works in an NGO in Addis and that they spend half the year here and the other half in Denver. She told me how much she loves her life in Ethiopia and then she introduced me to another shop assistant, a friend of hers, and we chatted for a while longer. By then Lencho had already fallen asleep but his head was restless - I supported it in my arms while I chatted, waiting to see if anyone from the group walked past.

They had all disappeared because they had stumbled across a games room and they were in there playing on the machines. Apparently, Hailu had been having a great time, but as soon as he was told that he had to leave, he started to cry. He continued crying in the van, and it broke all of our hearts to see this - we were sure that this wasn't the only reason that he was crying. He continued sobbing, but now silently. Whilst he gazed out of the window with his back to all of us, I noticed how his mother, Rosana, was crying too. This isn't easy for anybody, and you have to remember that the adoption process is tough for both sides.

It is obvious that these feelings were going to come to the surface sooner or later. Hailu had lived with his mother until January when he was given up for adoption. We don't know why she made the decision that she made, but we do know that his biological mother was pregnant when she handed him over for adoption. Perhaps it was because she didn't feel that she could look after all of her children. But these are just assumptions - nobody knows anything else. None of us know the real reason why our children were abandoned, and having to deal with this isn't easy. It broke all of our hearts to see Hailu crying - we have found a special place in our hearts for all of these children - they are so beautiful and innocent and it hurts to see them suffering. From the back of the van, I also found myself crying about what was happening in front of me.

They don't understand our language, they don't know where we came from or where we are taking them to. Just like that, they suddenly have new parents who are from a different racial group, from a different country and who speak another language. It must be very disconcerting, especially for the children who are given up for adoption when they are older. There are times when we feel confused and we aren't really sure if we are doing the right thing. But there is one thing we are certain of - we will never abandon them.

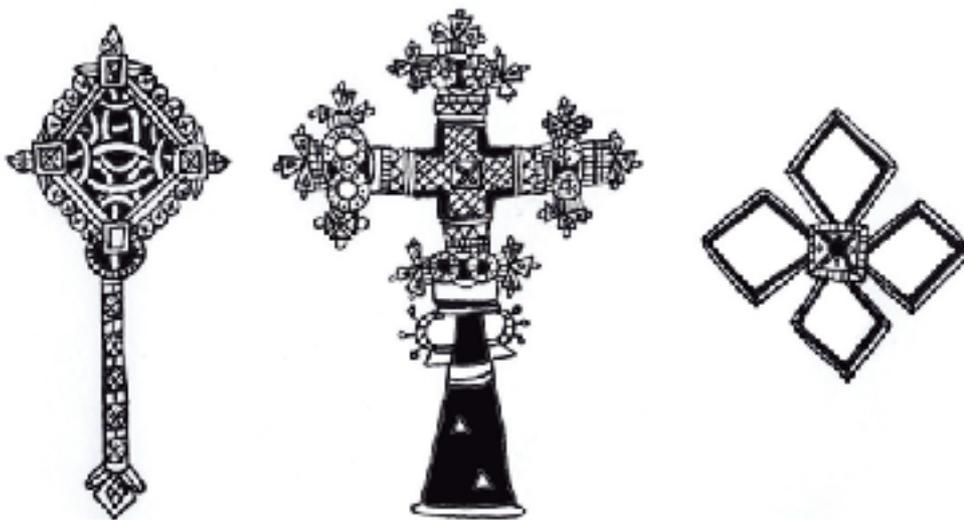


The last stop of the day was Salem's. This place displays the finest in Ethiopian handicrafts. In the open workshops, we were able to see how the artisans made their beautiful products. We got a real insight into the rich Ethiopian culture and history of artisanship. Salem's also nurtures the talent of local artisans – teaching them and providing them with opportunities to work. This is their way of giving back to the community - these professionals will go on to share their knowledge with future generations. Everything that is produced in the textile workshops, as well as the jewellery and the baskets, which are, weaved using the ancient Ethiopian tradition of basketry using dried grass, are available for purchase from the store. The products on sale are absolutely beautiful, and I feel like this is one of the places that has had the greatest impact on Addis Ababa – it promotes the work of artisans and provides them with a gallery where they can display their work.

From the yard, we were able to see the workshop where they were busy basting, weaving and making balls of wool – these would be used to make other products such as blankets, rugs, napkins and scarfs. The tools that they used were all made of wood and iron and they were all very authentic. I went inside the workshop because I wanted Simón to be able to see it properly. I greeted the artisans and they laughed and spoke in Amharic amongst themselves. I don't know if I was really supposed to enter, but I couldn't resist doing so.

We spent a long time closely observing what they were all doing and discussing the artists' work - we also chatted to the owner of the place. This is such an important cultural meeting place, and it is where you can find the best artisanal products in Ethiopia.

The artisanal products on offer here were much better than any of the others that we had seen up until this point. We bought several items to give as presents - some throws and napkins that had been made by the spinners, a couple of unique necklaces, small brass crosses that represent the 3 main religions in Ethiopia (Orthodox Christian, Muslim and Judaism) that can be used as bookmarks, and two silver Orthodox crosses, one for our home and another that we are going to give to some friends who dream of coming to Lalibela one day.



The swimming pool at the hotel is finally nearly full. Our plan for tomorrow is to spend the whole day at the climatized swimming pool. Addis is a chaotic city - it is very dirty and there is so much pollution and what we need now is some downtime. I was scared that we would be disconnected from real Ethiopian life during our stay at the Hilton, but to be honest it has been a very enriching experience. I have met so many interesting people. It is such an authentic place, full of tradition - a mecca of fascinating events. And I can't wait to see the atmosphere around the pool tomorrow.

Lencho and I bathed together in the bathtub in our apartment for nearly an hour. We played together in the water - he would touch my nose and laugh and then I would do the same thing to him. Our bodies are in contact, and now when I see the contrast between the colours of our skin it doesn't feel as strange. My little Lion and I are really starting to get to know each other, inside and out. Bath time is my favourite part of the day - it is when I feel closest to my children and it is the most private experience that we have. Every day I feel a greater connection to him, but I know that we still have a long way to go. It was the same with my biological son - I loved him more and more every single day and I still do.

Lencho makes it easy for me to get to know him - if I want to know how he is feeling, all I need to do is look into his enormous eyes. Every time he sees me, whether he is on the floor, in his buggy or in someone else's arms, he starts to kick his legs, hold out his arms and open his mouth to let out a little cry.

I got out of the bath, entered the bedroom, and stopped to look over at my three "boys" lying on the bed, half-dressed and playing together. I was overcome with emotion. Alex is a great dad - this is something I didn't know about him when we first met, but I feel that my children are so lucky that they have a dad like him.

Ever since we first met Lencho, Alex has felt a close connection to him. I don't know if it is because he is a man, and maybe because he has never been pregnant, the first time he met Lencho he felt the same way as he did when he saw Simón for the first time. In my case however, it is a process, and perhaps Lencho is going through the same thing. I am very aware that my love for him is growing every day, and I know that I will end up loving him as much as I love Simón. Our relationship is only just beginning.

I stay there, watching them and I realise how much love I feel towards all of them. I am so proud of this family that we have built together and I am proud of this journey that we have gone on together – our journey.





Wednesday 10th July

Simón makes friends

This morning it was sunny and after a substantial breakfast, like the one we have every day, we were finally able to swim in the pool. Simón went down to breakfast in his swimming trunks, he couldn't wait any longer - I can only imagine that it must have been absolute torture for him to have to wait so long for it to be open.

The Hilton seemed like a completely different hotel. The temperature of the water in the swimming pool was 35 °C and it was full of African children with their families or carers. Simón jumped into the water by himself and immediately joined in with a group of children who were older than him. We became friends with Tiona and her adopted sister Patience. The two of them are Kenyatas. Tiona is 6 years old, and her hair is full of braids – she seems really sweet and she has an adorable face. She reminds me of a little Michele Obama.

Tiona is a complete chatterbox and her English is perfect. She was born in Boston but she told us that she is from Kenya. She currently goes to school in Addis because her mother works for the UN and her father is in Nairobi. She told us that her father is the Minister of Kenya - she doesn't seem like a child who would invent something like that, in fact, she seems very mature for her age. She told me her father's name so that I could check if it was true, but I have forgotten it.

I asked Tiona where she preferred living - Addis Ababa or Nairobi, and she told me that her favourite place to live is in Mombasa where her parents spend the summer and where they have a house called the "Tiona House". She is a very polite girl and she surprised me when she talked about her adopted sister who is 5 years old. She whispered in my ear: "Can I tell you a secret? My sister is very annoying" and whilst she said it, I looked over at Patience and laughed at the name they had given her.



After about an hour and a half in the water, Alex and I got out of the pool, leaving Simón playing with about a dozen children from all over Africa. The majority of them were girls – they all seemed so feminine and charming and they never stopped giggling. It is fun to look at their different hairstyles - they are all so original. They all wear bright coloured swimming costumes that contrast with the colour of their skin. They are all very beautiful, as well as being bright little chatterboxes.

Nearly all of the children are on their school holidays so they were with their carers while their parents were working during the day. The girls climbed all over me, asking me thousands of questions, laughing and telling me stories about their lives. They told me that I have very soft skin; I found this very curious as I think the same about theirs.

It was great to see Simón getting so involved. The children ran in a horde around the swimming pool and tried to dive headfirst into the pool but they all ended up doing belly-flops. They all speak English and I am realising how important it has been on this trip, that Simón can speak English. This has meant that he has been able to communicate perfectly with all of the wonderful people we have met. He keeps saying “they’re my friends”, he doesn’t care about their age, gender or race, and I am so happy to hear it.

After lunch, Endalnew came to pick us up and we went by car to get Lencho's photo taken for his Ethiopian passport. What seemed like such a simple task, turned out to be quite the adventure – massive traffic jams, a shop with no ink to print the photo, accidents, blocked off streets, impossible footpaths... This is Africa so you have to be prepared for everything. You need to be flexible and presume that things are hardly ever going to go as you expect them to. It is better to accept this from the start; otherwise, you will very quickly despair.

The good news is that tomorrow morning we will finally be able to hand over all of the documentation to the Spanish Consulate in Addis so they can start to process his visa. It should only take a couple of days. If the passport and visa were ready on Monday, we would be able to catch a flight early on Tuesday morning and arrive home on the same day. It looks like we are going to be able to bring our trip forward a few days. We are very happy here, but nonetheless, we can't wait for our family to meet Lencho and I think that Simón will be excited to tell them all about his adventures and mishaps in Ethiopia.

We have tried calling on various occasions, but we still haven't managed to get in touch with the nurse who looked after Chrissy's daughter, Dela. I wrote to Chrissy to tell her, and she asked me if I could take the package that she given us for Abezener to the orphanage for children with HIV. She said that if we preferred, they could send a driver to our hotel to collect it from us. I have spent the whole day thinking about what to reply - I'm not sure that I want to see another orphanage, especially after the way I felt when we saw the orphanage where Lencho used to live in Dukem. I have been feeling very sensitive throughout this trip and I don't think I could deal with more emotional baggage.



I think it will break my heart to see the orphans who have AIDS - they can't be put up for adoption so they will be there forever. Some of them don't even have the virus but their siblings do, but by law, they cannot be separated, so they will have to live there until they are old enough to be legally considered as adults.

I wrote to Chrissy asking if I could let her know my decision in a few days. This trip is very intense and at times, it is proving to be very emotionally difficult for me. Part of me would like to go to the orphanage, to be able to chat to Abezener and hear his story, but the other part of me feels that I need a bit of stability.





Thursday 11th July

The farewell party

This morning it was sunny when we woke up. We have been so lucky – ever since the swimming pool was opened, the weather has been very good. This type of weather is uncommon during the rainy season – the sky is nearly always grey and it normally rains on and off throughout the whole day.

There were loads of children at the swimming pool again today. A Danish family who has adopted three Ethiopian children caught my attention. Their oldest son Jhonas who is 10-years-old, has cerebral palsy - this means that he is unable to move his legs. We started chatting with them when we were in the pool and I didn't even notice Jhonas' disability. He was on top of his mother the whole time and he was wearing armbands, but as there are many older children here who don't know how to swim, I didn't think much of it. When I saw him being carried out of the water by his father who immediately put him into wheelchair, I was so surprised.

Their second child is called Silas and he is 9-years-old and their third child is Nathaniel, who is 8-years-old. Interestingly enough, they had already decided that they wanted to name their third child, Nathaniel, and as it turned out, that was already his name. There are sometimes things in life that simply cannot be explained.

The family was very happy. The children's mother told me that she envied us for adopting a child - if they were a bit younger, they would have happily adopted a fourth Ethiopian child. She was here with her brother, his wife and their two sons – both with pale skin and platinum blond hair. Silas and Nathaniel – with their dark Ethiopian skin - ran around the swimming pool with their cousins. It was really beautiful to watch them all playing together – there was so much energy and so many contrasting colours.

Simón made another group of friends today - this time four children who were slightly older than him. They played "Marco Polo" together. Lencho was with me in the swimming pool, splashing about in the water. The water is so hot that it is practically impossible to swim - the only thing you can really do is soak in the water, and if you want to move to the other side, you just have to walk slowly. The pool has been filled with thermal water – this is supposed to be very therapeutic, so I guess it is not surprising that we always feel so relaxed when we get out of the pool, and we are never in a rush to go anywhere. It is like being at a spa - something that is highly recommended after all of the emotional stress that we have gone through during this trip.

At lunchtime, Endalnew came to collect us to take us to the transitional home. At last, we were going to have the farewell party that we had been organising since we arrived. It was a lovely afternoon. As soon as they saw us, the children gave us massive hugs. We all got very emotional when we saw how they greeted Hailu and Kway who they hadn't seen for several days.

One of the carers did the coffee ceremony for us. Drinking a cup of freshly made coffee is a luxury here. After that we prepared the piñata – we were so excited. We filled it with notebooks, coloured pencils, bracelets, sweets, balls and other little things that we had picked out. As we didn't have a piñata, we put everything in a strong paper bag and we hung it from the washing line - the children looked over at us, gobsmacked. They didn't really understand what we were doing, but as soon as they saw that we were filling the bag with objects, they started to get excited.





We all took it in turns to hit the bag using the wooden pole from the mop. We started with the youngest children and continued through to the oldest children. After a few goes, Tadele finally managed to break it and all of the contents fell to the floor – the children were all so excited. After a while, it started raining, so we quickly cleared everything up and went in to the “toy room”. Inside the room, there were four cakes, one for each child - Hailu, Kway, Muluken and Lencho. On each cake, “Bon voyage” was written in chocolate letters. Children sat in front of their own cake (Gidey held Lencho on her knee, as he was too small to sit by himself) - we took so many photos. It was a very emotional moment.

The six carers seemed very serious and this made me feel uncomfortable. I don't know if it was because they were sad that the children were leaving, or if it was because they don't agree with international adoption. As we are only able to communicate with them using gestures, I will never know how they really feel. I just hope that they understand that we are going to give these children so much love, and the one thing that they don't have - a family.

Alex brought a small speaker that he connected to his iPhone via Bluetooth so we could play some music. It took a while to convince the children to dance, but in the end, we managed it. We had all been waiting for this moment! Yared danced like a little Michael Jackson - he had so much rhythm in his body. He stayed at the back of the room and he danced behind Almedi – he seemed quite embarrassed, but eventually he got lost in the music and he amazed us with his moves. But then he realised he was being watched and so he hid behind Tsegaye. Although it was only for a few seconds, it was definitely worth seeing.

We've got some important news - our journey back to Barcelona has been moved forward to Tuesday. We are really excited; we can't wait to get back to our own environment - our own reality. We know that during our time in Ethiopia, we have started the period of transition with our little ones, but we also know that reality will hit home as soon as we arrive in Barcelona.

We can't wait to see Panchita. Pancha is our greyhound – she was rescued from the animal shelter, she is sensitive and intuitive and she follows me everywhere that I go. We have missed her so much and I am sure that she has missed us too.



Today the Catalans came to spend the day at the hotel - the children had a great time in the swimming pool. Jordi, Rosana, Juan and Cristina didn't swim because they hadn't brought their swimsuits, so the rest of us bathed with Hailu and Kway. We weren't sure if they would have swum before as we still have to use gestures to speak to them, but as soon as we saw how Hailu jumped into the pool and started to swim underwater we quickly figured it out. Kway didn't want to go down the stairs, but just a few minutes later, they were both laughing at how hot the water was. Luckily, they can touch the bottom in most parts of the pool so they were able to run around and play without having to swim.

Lencho loves splashing his feet in the water. This is a great time for us to connect with each other - his body clings to mine as we bathe and he holds on to me as we move through the water. As we spend so much time in the pool, the cuddles seem to last forever.

In the afternoon, the women went to Salem's to finish a bit of shopping – we went with Abraham who is finally back in Addis Ababa. I was delighted to have the chance to go back to this magical place. When we were done there, we went by car to a shopping centre where the Tigist & Haimanot Damtew jewellery store is located. This shop is owned by two Ethiopian twin sisters who make unique pieces of jewellery.

We bought some postcards made of very fine pieces of wood and some very original necklaces - I know I will wear these with pride. Haimanot was alone today, as her sister, who is married to a German man, had just given birth to a baby boy. Lencho was with me the whole afternoon and he behaved so well. He is a good boy and I feel very lucky. He kept himself entertained by looking at everything through the window. He is a curious, observant and loving boy. We have now got to the stage in which he doesn't want to be carried by anyone else who isn't me - his mother.

In the evening “uncle” Abraham came to babysit Lencho and Simón. Simón adores him so much; in fact, he didn't even seem to care that his parents were going out for dinner. Alex and I went to the famous Castelli Ristorante – it is supposed to be the best restaurant in the city. Brad Pitt, Angelina Jolie and even Queen Sofia have eaten here. We were welcomed by the waiters and headwaiters who were all dressed in white and I was surprised to find that they spoke to us in Italian.

In the Castelli Ristorante, all of the tablecloths are white and there are red roses in small vases in the middle of the table - something that is not very common here. We had a plate of prosciutto, calamari with a cream and garlic sauce and pasta with truffle and gorgonzola - it was all absolutely delicious. For dessert, we had vanilla ice cream with chocolate melted over it. Alex had a glass of red wine and I enjoyed a national gourmet beer called Meta Premium.

It was the first time that we had left the hotel without the kids. And it was the first time that we had gone out since having two children. The feeling was slightly different - now that we know that they have each other, we didn't feel as bad about leaving them. It was good for myself and Alex to be able to have a night out together, we laughed non-stop. When we got back, we went past the hotel lounge bar where there was live music playing - one of the waiters asked us if we wanted to come in and have a drink, but Alex replied saying "Thank you but we must go, we have the kids waiting for us in our room". As soon as he said "the kids", we noticed that our faces lit up - this was something that we had wanted to be able to say for so long. When we got back to the bedroom, Lencho was already sound asleep and Abraham and Simón were like two friends playing a game together on the iPad.





Saturday 13th July

A gift

This morning, Endalnew called us to tell us that the Catalans were going to the Mercato and to ask us if we wanted to go with them. As I had only seen the biggest market in Africa from the car that day when we went with Abraham, I decided to go with them - Alex doesn't like the hordes so he stayed with the children in the hotel. In the end, we were only able to explore the market from Endalnew's car, and we saw even less than we had done when we went with Abraham. We were all disappointed, but Endalnew explained that they are reforming the market and so if we weren't looking to buy wholesale, it's not even worth going in. In the end, there was nothing we could do about it - the next time we come back to Ethiopia we'll have to make sure to find time to explore the market properly.

I arrived at the hotel at lunchtime. We ate our lunch while sitting on the deck chairs at the swimming pool and afterwards we enjoyed a long dip in the pool. Lencho seems to be becoming much more alert by the day and he was in a particularly good mood today. He played in the water and there were a few occasions when I was tempted to fully submerge him in the water, like he seemed to be asking me to do - but I didn't dare.

I spent a while chatting to a charming old man - he must have been about 80-years-old. He is retired and he comes to the hotel to swim every morning. He said to me "I have a very good life". He is always smiling and he is a grateful man. He asked me how Lencho was getting on and then he said some beautiful words "May God bless you, this child is a gift for you. He will bring health and his own richness. You cannot know how grateful he will be to you for the rest of his life. You are giving him everything, opportunities that he wouldn't have here - you are giving him a life."



When I told him that when Lencho was found there was a dog next to him that had been barking continuously to try to get someone's attention, he nodded his head and smiled. After, he looked up at the sky and he told me that Lencho will always have a special relationship with dogs. I am a real animal lover, and I have always had a dog, so his words made me feel emotional. I nearly cried - he seemed to be speaking from the heart and while he spoke, he smiled so lovingly at Lencho and myself. It is lovely to hear such words, showing such love and comprehension. I sometimes feel rejected by a specific part of the Ethiopian population- I get the impression that they think that we are "stealing" or "buying" their children.

Afterwards Abraham took us to see the view from the Top View Mountain. From the small lookout point, we saw some lights above us and we went up the steps - curious to find out what was up there. We discovered the Belvedere restaurant - it has only been open for 2 months, and a couple of Italian-Ethiopian gourmards runs it. From the restaurant, as the name suggests, you can see the whole city. This was by far the best view that we have had of the whole city.

The Lonely Planet guide describes Addis Ababa as a city that is quite unfathomable on a structural level. It is described as an enormous plate of injera, which has different ingredients scattered haphazardly on top of it. The Spaghetti Neighbourhood is the area that was constructed by the Italians during their 5 years of occupation. The Noodles Neighbourhood is the Chinese neighbourhood where the construction workers live. Finally, the Wats Neighbourhood, the most modest neighbourhood of them all, the Ethiopian one.

Having fallen in love with both the views and the family's story, we decided to reserve a table to have lunch at the Belvedere with the group of Catalans the next day. It will be our farewell lunch - we will spend Monday in the hotel relaxing and packing our cases. We need to make sure we have everything ready to leave early on Tuesday morning.

We had dinner at the hotel tonight. Every day we are noticing that Lencho is becoming more and more attached to us and he seems much happier. I remember a conversation that we had with a Spanish couple that we met near the Mercato who had two adopted girls with them. We asked them how the whole process was going and they replied saying, "Well it certainly has its ups and downs". You can't and mustn't force the situation - it all has to happen naturally, and you have to take all the time that you need. Although I must say that despite the short amount of time that we have spent together, Lencho seems to be very connected to me. Whenever he can't see me, he starts crying inconsolably and as soon as I pick him up, he holds on to my neck with his tiny little hands - it seems that this is a happy and comfortable place for him.

While we were having dinner, Simón talked to us about when he was going to become a daddy. Alex and I were surprised. We asked him if he wanted to have children and he said, “Oh yes, of course, fifty and eight nine and I’ll go and collect them from the same place where we got Lencho. We asked him if he had thought of any names, and he said - “Hailu, Alberto and Alberta”. Then he stood up and went into the kitchen, just as he would if he was at home, and he pretended to be “Mr. Chef”. When he left the kitchen, he picked up a plate from the buffet, filled it with couscous and brought it to the table, pretending that he had made it himself.

Alex and I discussed the fact that if we want to register Lencho as Lion, then we should start calling him by that name as soon as possible. We have always been unsure as to whether to keep his Oromo name or to translate it. As he is a baby and he doesn’t associate himself with a name yet, it is quite easy to change it. We felt that if Hawi the nurse had given him such a beautiful name, that had such an important meaning, then we shouldn’t change it. We would call him Lion and that way we will always remember how strong and brave he was. Lion is a beautiful name, and it is very symbolic here in Ethiopia. The name Lion does him justice.





Sunday 14th July

Addis from above, a farewell

This morning another Abraham came to the hotel. He is the driver that Chrissy used the two times that she was in Addis when she came to collect Yedne and Dela. Abraham is a sweet-looking young man. He arrived while we were having breakfast and he sat with us. He came to collect the package for Freiwort who was Dela's nurse and for Abezener, the boy who lives in an orphanage with his younger brother who has HIV. Chrissy asked me to give one of the two Barcelona Football shirts that she had for Abezener to Abraham – she wanted to thank him for coming to collect the package. I let him choose which shirt he wanted, and he chose the one that has all of the faces of the players printed on it. As in many other parts of the world, nearly everyone here supports Barcelona. As soon as you tell the Ethiopians that you live in Barcelona, their faces light up – I imagine that they think that we must know all of the players personally. The other day at the swimming pool there was a boy who couldn't stop looking at us – later we heard him whisper to his father that Simón looked like Leo Messi.

Today we had lunch at the Belvedere Restaurant. Silvana and her brother Orazio who only returned from Italy 9 months ago run it. They had been living there for 15 years; in fact, they had an Ethiopian restaurant in the city of Friuli in the northeast of Italy. The restaurant was a great find, and everyone really enjoyed all of the food - focaccia, roasted peppers and aubergines, fried courgettes, margarita pizza, beef cooked on a hot stone and chocolate crepes.

The children spent their time playing in the outdoor yard between the dining room and the kitchen. We also met a group of people who work in a cooperation in Addis and another group of Italians who work for their country's embassy.



The funniest thing of all was that there were another two children who were about 4-years-old and they were also called Simón and Leo, it was such a coincidence. Their parents, like so many others that we have met during this trip, mentioned Lencho's eyes. He really does have beautiful eyes – they are somewhat translucent. I was looking into his eyes during the trip back to the hotel and once again, I wasn't able to find his pupils, they get lost in his black irises.

I had promised Simón that we would spend the afternoon in the swimming pool until it got dark - the water temperature is 35 ° C so you can even swim in the evening. Therefore, that's what we did – it was our way of saying goodbye. Tomorrow will be our last day in Addis, and the nostalgia is creeping in. Ethiopia is very far away, and who knows when we will be able to come back. It is our son's country and we will always have a special connection with it. This trip has been a wonderful journey for us all – we have discovered so many things, not just about Ethiopia, but also about ourselves.





Monday 15th July

Our last day in Ethiopia

We have spent two months calling our son Lencho because that is his original name. Sometimes it seems like this is the most natural thing to do, and that to change his name wouldn't make sense, but other times it sounds very strange and we don't feel a connection to the name. It is a reminder of his past – a past in which we weren't with him, and this makes us feel sad.

It is quite curious that over the last few days, several people have said to us, “He looks like a strong baby”. I always go on to explain that his name means lion in Oromo. It is said that lions are very observant, calm, loyal and strong animals, and the more I get to know my son, the more I discover that these are all adjectives that could be used to describe him.

Alex went with Endalnew and the rest of the men to pick up the children's Ethiopian Passports. Now that he has an official document that confirms that we are his parents, his adoption seems even more tangible. The Ethiopian passport is maroon like ours, and when we opened his passport there was a small photo of him inside – he looks so handsome. It was taken the day that Selam and the other carers took him from the hotel. Tonight, will be the first time that he will ever use it, and it will be valid from 2013 to 2018.

We spent the day in the swimming pool, and like every other day, we made new friends. This time we met some young Americans with Ethiopian origins. They had beautiful afro hair that sparkled due to the drops of water. These young men were from California and they had come here to work for a cooperation - they had come to teach English to the children in the orphanages.



In the afternoon, we packed our suitcases. Later we went out for dinner and Simón fell asleep at the table. He had never done that before. I don't think he can keep up with this pace for much longer. Lencho on the other hand was very unsettled today. From the first day that he spent with us, to today, so much has changed. The first day that we sat him in his high chair in the restaurant, he didn't complain or move. Today his chair swayed backwards and forwards with his movements. He shouts, sings and laughs. He is happy. He is alive.

Mesías, the headwaiter, brought out a cake that they had made for us – there was chocolate writing on top of it, which read “Bon Voyage” in chocolate. The waitresses brought it to us just as we were about to leave and I nearly cried with emotion. The people here are so lovely.

After dinner, we went back to the bedroom to kill some time as the taxi was going to collect us at 1:15 in the morning. We would arrive in Barcelona at 11.30 am the next day. I am tired, and there is a part of me that doesn't want to go. I'm quite frightened, but I am much more excited.

I think about how excited I am to get home and I am able to forget everything else. I can't wait to see my children in their own environment and see how they interact with each other. I also really miss our dog Panchita - I am used her always being by my side. But above all, we are excited for our family to meet our little Lion, and for them to gradually find a place for him in their hearts - like the one he has already found in ours.

In the dictionary, I find the following definition: the black lion or the Abyssinian lion is a rare subspecies of lion that is endemic to Ethiopia. It is the greatest predator of the grasslands where it lives. This lion, known for its long black mane, is one of the symbols of Ethiopia, and it can be found in the heraldry, monuments and on the national currency. It is in danger of becoming extinct and the only remaining members of this species can be found in captivity in the zoological (for me it is more of a zoo-illogical) of Addis Ababa. Although from now on, we will be able to find one in Barcelona.



Bon voyage Lion









Some addresses in Addis Ababa

Restaurants

Yod Abyssinia Cultural Restaurant

Mekanisa

Tel. 251 11 372 0607

www.yodethiopia.com

Weyin Ethiopia Cultural Club

Meskel Square (close to St. Stephan Church)

Gazebo

Hilton Hotel

Tel. 251 11 518 400 ext. 953

Lime Tree

Kasanchis Street with Bole Road

Open from 06.30 am until 21.00 pm

Tel. 251 911 611 178

www.limetreeaddis.com

Ristorante Castelli

Mahatma-Gandhi St, Piazza.

Tel. 251 11 157 1757

Makush

Bole Road 2nd Floor Mega Building,

Tel. 251 11 552 6646

Lucy Gazebo and Restaurant

King George VI St, (next to the National Museum)

Belvedere

High above Megananya Upper Roundabout

(Top View)

Tel. 251 11 62 7340

Backyard

Meskel Flower Rd. Tel. 251 11 467 3501

Zebra Grill

Meskel Flower Rd.

9th floor of the Bedesta Building, Bole St

Tel. 251 11 662 3630

Kaldi's coffee

Roosevelt St,

Tel. 251 11 371 4258

To.mo.ca café

Wavel street

Tel. 251 11 111 1781

Shopping

Salem's

Bole Menhame Allem area close to Edna Mall

Open Monday to Saturday from 10.00 am until 18.00 pm

Tel 251 911 645 619

www.salemsethiopia.com

Tigist & Haimanot Damtew jewellery

S Africa St., Adot Multiplex building, close to the South African Embassy.

Tel. 251 91 197 7486

tandhdesigns@gmail.com

Soul Rebels

Second floor of the Adams Pavillion in Sar Bet

Tel. 913 905 945 / 118 30 23 26

www.solerebels.com

Other things

Entoto Mountain

At the end of Entoto Avenue from Ara Kilo

National Museum

King George VI St

Tel. 251 11 111 7150

Ethnological Museum

Algeria St

Located in Haile Selassie's former palace and surrounded by the beautiful gardens and fountains of the main campus of Addis Abeba University.

Boston Spa

African Av. Bole District

Tel. 251 11 662 3605

book@kurifturesortspa.com

Merkato

Addis Ketema, to the west of Arada.

Hilton

Menelik II Avenue, 1164

Tel. 251 11 517 0000

Sheraton

Taitu Street

Tel. 251 11 517 1717

Anytime Anywhere Tours

Contact in Addis Abeba: Abraham Abera Tel. 251 91 168 0327

Contact in Barcelona: Olga Tebé Tel. 34 654 385 395

info@anytimeanywheretours.com



Some words in Amharic

Hello	Saylahm!
Peace	Selam
Greeting	Tena yistilign
How are you? (to a man)	Indemen neh, denna noo?
How are you? (to a woman)	Indemen nesh, denna nesh?
Goodbye	Dehna hunu, ciao
Have a good day	Melkamken
Good night	Denaderie
I don't understand	Alegebagnem
English	Ingleezigna
No problem	Chiggeryellum
Thank you	Amessagganalehugn
Thank you very much	Betam amessagganalehugn
Thank you	Ishy
You are welcome	Minim Chigir yelem, Minem ayedelem
Yes	Awo
No	Aye
It will be alright	Ishy, ishy
Don't be afraid	Ay zosh
Don't worry (to a boy)	Ahtahsehb
Don't worry (to a girl)	Ahtahsehbee
I'll be right back	Mel-less-ah-loo
I love you (to a girl)	Ehwatdeshahlehu
I love you (to a boy)	Ehwuhdihhahloh
Handsome, beautiful	Konjo
Very good (to a child)	Gobez
Kisses	Samis
Love	Fe qe re
Lion is very happy	Betam Lion
Smiley	Fandesha

Pee	Shinta
Poo	Caca
Do you have to pee?	Shinta bet?
Do you have to poo?	Caca bet?
Bathroom	Shin-teh-bayt
Bath	Mentenyet
Let's go	En heed
Car	Mokena
Let's go	Na-nee
Come here	Na
Yes	Awo
No	Adalem
Give me	Anta
Mine	Enyay
Look	Eee
Stop	Kum
Wait	Coy
Be patient	Ta gesh
Don't touch	Atinka
Dirty	Ko-sha-sha
All gone	Yellum
Enough, that's all	Becca, baka
Hot	Yekatelal
Eat	Be la
Jump	Zilay
Sit down	Touch
Stand up	Tinnish
Sleep	Te gna
Scary monster	Go ti chooo
Today	Za re
Church	Bet Christian, Beht Christyan

Doctor	Hakeem
Bank	Bank bet
Post office	Posta bet
Train station	Babur Tabia
Bus station	Awtobus tabia
Hospital	Hospital
Clinic	Clinic
Police station	Police tabia
Market	Gebiya
Shop	Suk
Airport	Awroplan marefia
Hotel	Hotel
Shoes	Chammas
Big	Tay-lick
Small	Tinnish
It's not the truth (with a smile)	Fugare
Family	Beta seb
Mum	Emaye
Dad	Abaye
Mother	Innate
Father	Abbat
Daughter	Se't lidj
Son	Wend lidj
Sister	Eyat
Brother	Wundim
Friend	Gwadegna
Wife	Meest
Husband	Bal
New flower	Addis Ababa
Flower	Ma zum
Ear	Joro

Nose	Afincha
Eye	Ayn
Tongue	Milas
Teeth	Ters
Hair	Tsegoor
Head	Ras
Leg	Yegr
Breakfast	Cours
Lunch	Messa
Dinner	Erat
Milk	Wet-et
Water	Wuha
Coffee	Boona
Do you want a coffee?	Ahfoolagahlo boona?
Bread	Dabo
Banana	Muz
Orange	Birtukan
Egg	Onkulal
Chicken	Dorro
Fish	Asa
Dog	Wusha
Cat	Dimmit
Giraffe	Katchalay
Snake	Ebob
Hyena	Jib
Lion	Anbasa
Fly	Zim
Day	Qen
Week	Sament
Month	Wer
Year	Amet

Monday	Senyo
Tuesday	Maksenyo
Wednesday	Rob
Thursday	Hamus
Friday	Arb
Saturday	Kidami
Sunday	Ihud
January	Ter
February	Yekatit
March	Megabit
April	Meyazia
May	Genbot
June	Sene'
July	Hamlae
August	Nehasae
September	Mesikerem
October	Tikemet
November	Hidar
December	Tahasas
What time is it?	Sint saat new?
One	And
Two	Hulett
Three	Sost
Four	Arat
Five	Amist
Six	Sidist
Seven	Sabat
Eight	Simint
Nine	Zetegn
Ten	Asser
Eleven	Asra and

Twelve	Asra hulett, etc
Twenty	Haya
Twenty one, etc.	Haya and, etc.
Thirty	Selas
Thirty one, etc.	Selas and
Forty	Arba
Fifty	Hamsa
Sixty	Silsa
Seventy	Seba
Eighty	Samagna
Ninety	Zetena
One hundred	Meto
Thousand	Shee
Million	Million
Black	Tiqoor
White	Nech
Red	Qey
Blue	Samaiaui
Green	Arengwade
Yellow	Bicha
Brown	Buna'ma
Lilac	WeynTej
Pink	Rose
Orange	Brtukan
Who	Man
Where	Wodet
When	Metche



Cooperation

The money that we raise by selling this book will be used to set up one of NACID'S projects in the area of Nazret – the construction of a well. This will enable them to be able to build the first orphanage in the country for children with special needs. If they do not have access to water, the source of life, then this proposal will not be feasible. Lencho changed our lives and so we would like the chance to change the lives of many more people just like him.



Amessagganalehugn

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