

My name is Camille Smicz. My husband Ron and I adopted twin boys from International Adoption Guides (IAG) in 2008. We live in Bend, Oregon and I flew here to South Carolina for the purpose of sharing our story with the court.

We have a biological daughter named Piper who was born in 2005. After she was born, we struggled with secondary infertility for over 2 years and suffered miscarriages. We made the decision to adopt internationally and did a lot of research. During our research, we heard about 4 million orphans in Ethiopia. We then felt Ethiopia was calling to us. We continued to research which agencies were authorized to facilitate adoptions out of Ethiopia. That is when we narrowed down our search to IAG. We read everything available about Ethiopia and their people.

In January of 2008 we submitted our formal adoption application to IAG. Once we were approved by IAG, we starting working on all of the documents required by the United States and Ethiopian governments. We were assigned to adoption coordinator named Alisa Bivens, who was based in North Carolina. We conversed regularly with Alisa via e-mail and phone calls. We worked tirelessly on meeting all the requirements. We finalized our dossier in June of 2008, at which time we were added to IAG's waiting list for 2 children. Our request was for 2 healthy children younger in age that our biological daughter who was 3 years old at the time. We envisioned a toddler and infant sibling group.

In August of 2008 we were still on the wait list and Alisa flew to Ethiopia. We were told she was there networking with government officials and IAG staff. When Alisa returned to the United States, she sent us an e-mail that said she had good news and would be in touch the following day.

The next day Alisa called me early in the morning and asked if we would be interested in adopting twin boys. We were thrilled! She said they were newborns who were found abandoned in a box. They had been named by someone at the orphanage Samuel and Samson. She e-mailed us photos and blood test results. After discussing it with my husband we decided to accept the referral for them on August 21st, 2008.

Because they were abandoned we were asked what date of birth we wanted to use on their paperwork. We selected July 23rd, 2008 because that is the day we were told that they arrived at the orphanage. In September of 2008 we were told that Samuel had been hospitalized for unknown reasons. We prayed for him and requested updates. However, we were never told anything more about his condition.

On October 22nd, 2008 we were told that we had passed court. That Samuel and Samson were legally our children in the eyes of the Ethiopian courts. We couldn't wait to meet them.

The next step was us flying to Ethiopia to meet with the U.S. Embassy and then bringing home the boys. We prepared 4 Rubbermaid containers (weighing 200 lbs) full of donations for the orphanage. We spent thousands of dollars in supplies; such as medicines, vitamins, shoes, clothing and toys. We were also told we needed to bring gifts for the orphanage staff specifically the nannies. They suggested cash gifts since "one can only use so much body wash". We prepared handwritten cards for the nannies with cash and African American angels.

Ron and I flew to Ethiopia on November 25th, 2008 with our 4 containers of donations. We landed in Ethiopia and were greeted by Haile the man in charge of the orphanage. We happily gave him our donations and thank you cards and gifts for the nannies. We asked if we could deliver them in person to the children and staff and were told no. We were not permitted to see the orphanage in person. Later we found out that Haile kept all the donations for himself or sold them for profit. None of the gifts made it back to the nannies.

On November 30th, 2008 we were staying at a guesthouse in Addis Ababa Ethiopia. Haile and 2 nannies showed up at the guest house with Samuel and Samson. We were overjoyed with meeting our sons for the first time. Over the next several days we prepared for the U.S. Embassy appointment. The day of our embassy appointment, Haile met us in the lobby of the guesthouse with the agency director, Jim Harding. Jim, an American, told us that he was also an adoptive parent.

Haile met with each of the families, coaching us on what to say at the embassy appointments. Haile wrote down on a piece of paper, that our children were found in the Lideta neighborhood by a police officer. This was new information to us. Since we were told by Alisa when we accepted the referral that they were abandoned in a box, but we didn't know where or by whom. I was excited by this new information. On the way back to the guesthouse I asked our taxi driver to take us by that neighborhood so we could memorialize it with photographs.

We toured the neighborhood, taking video and photos. We looked for police officers, hoping to run into whoever found our boys. We wanted to thank them for taking care of them, even for the short while. We looked for familiar faces, hoping to see a relative.

During our time in country we fell in love with Ethiopia. After passing the embassy appointment, we flew home with the boys to the United States in December of 2008. Our family was complete. We were bonding and worked hard at attachment.

In May of 2008, I read on an internet message board that the Ethiopian judge in charge of adoptions, issued a statement that she no longer would be processing any future cases involving abandonment because of suspected corruption. Even though we already had passed court, I started to become concerned and suspicious of our abandonment case. I reached out to Alisa Bivens and Jim Harding and Mary Mooney. I asked them for a copy of the police report or any documentation from our case. Jim replied that there would be a \$200 translation fee, but that he would send us the documentation. I agreed to pay the fee and anxiously awaited the information.

A few days later I received an e-mail from Jim Harding. It included a copy of a Ministry Of Women's Affairs (MOWA) report. It stated that the boys had been relinquished by their maternal grandmother. The report indicated their birth mother's name, their birth father's name, that both parents were deceased, dates of death and grandmother's profession and statements indicating why she was unable to care for them.

I was stunned. We missed an opportunity to meet their grandmother, their only living relative. We could have met her, hugged her, reassured her, showed her grandchildren were being adopted by an American family. That we loved her grandchildren. We could build a relationship with her. I was devastated that we would likely never be able to meet her. By the time we saved enough money to travel back to Ethiopia, she could be dead. But at the same time I was also thrilled because we now have some history. We know their story now.

I heard about an Ethiopian investigator named Teraki who specialized in adoption meetings. He was a videographer who meets with birth families. He will find the birth families and then translate the conversation. Then he sends the adoptive family a video of the meeting. I hired Teraki and e-mailed him the MOWA report with hopes he would contact and interview their grandma. He spent 2 weeks researching and trying to find any living relative. He contacted us back with his results. He told me that the MOWA documents were fraudulent. Their grandmother didn't exist. Their whole birth story had been fabricated.

My children and family were exploited for money. When I confronted Alisa, Jim, and Mary about their lies, I was brushed off. They of course denied any wrongdoing. To this day, we still do not know the truth. We would give anything to know their history. We don't even know if they were true orphans or how they came into care of the orphanage. My sons ask regularly what happened to their birth family. I don't even know what to say or how to answer their questions. The emotional toll is tremendous.

My recommendation to the court is that Alisa Bivens, Jim Harding, and Mary Mooney receive a sentencing that is the maximum amount allowed. My children and my family will be dealing with the effects of their lies for the rest of our lives. I believe the defendants should be punished for the rest of theirs.