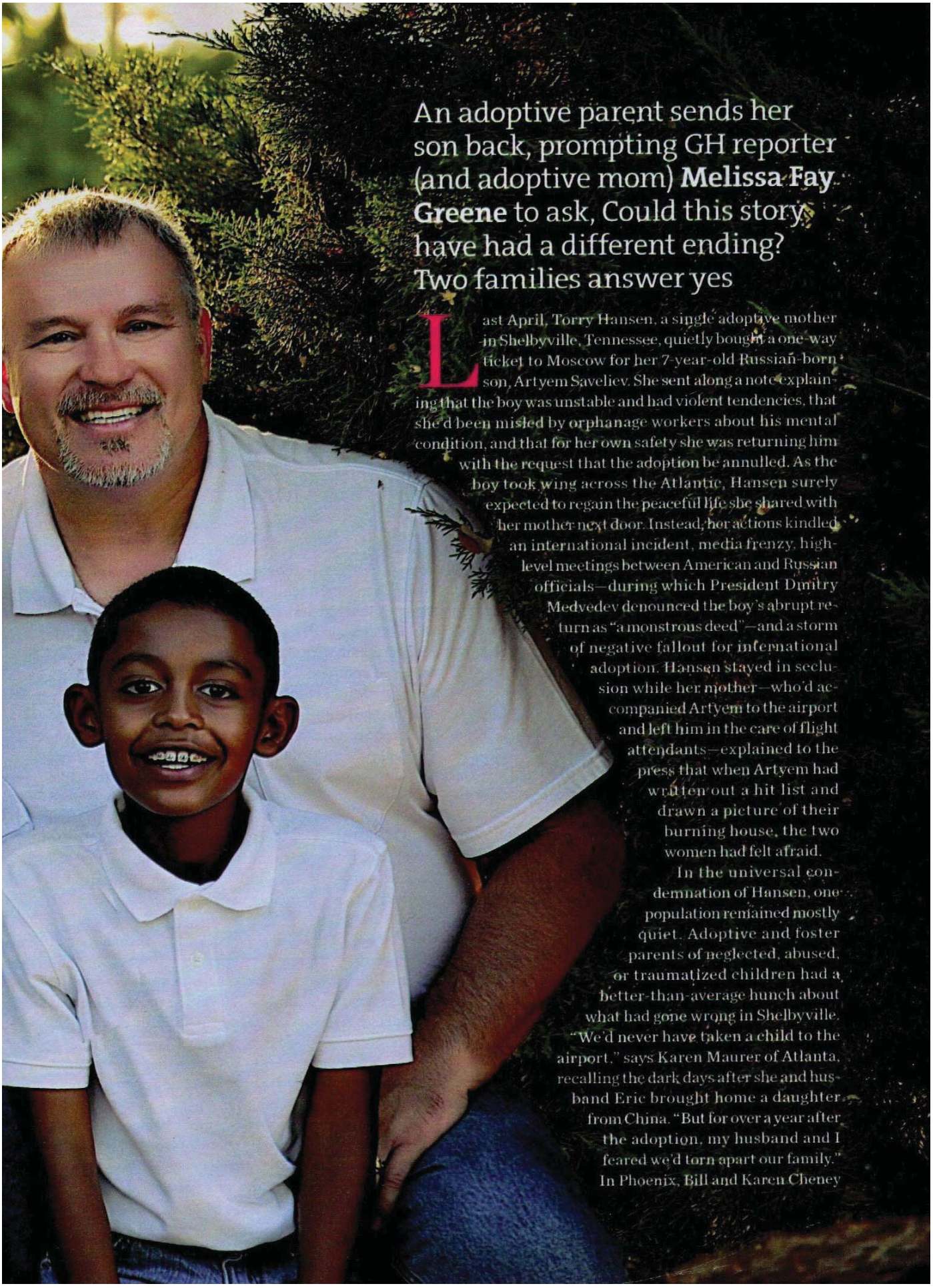
**THE CHENEYS**
Karen and Bill Cheney of Phoenix with their Ethiopian-born sons last summer. The older boys—*from left*, Habtamu, 13, and Fikre, 11—arrived three years after the youngest, Mintesinot, 8, *far right*. "We overcame so much to get to this state," Karen says, remembering the rough stretch that ensued after they adopted a second time: "It makes the love all the sweeter"

# LOVE MEDICINE



## An adoptive parent sends her son back, prompting GH reporter (and adoptive mom) **Melissa Fay Greene** to ask, Could this story have had a different ending? Two families answer yes

Last April, Torry Hansen, a single adoptive mother in Shelbyville, Tennessee, quietly bought a one-way ticket to Moscow for her 7-year-old Russian-born son, Artyem Saveliev. She sent along a note explaining that the boy was unstable and had violent tendencies, that she'd been misled by orphanage workers about his mental condition, and that for her own safety she was returning him with the request that the adoption be annulled. As the boy took wing across the Atlantic, Hansen surely expected to regain the peaceful life she shared with her mother next door. Instead, her actions kindled an international incident, media frenzy, high-level meetings between American and Russian officials—during which President Dmitry Medvedev denounced the boy's abrupt return as "a monstrous deed"—and a storm of negative fallout for international adoption. Hansen stayed in seclusion while her mother—who'd accompanied Artyem to the airport and left him in the care of flight attendants—explained to the press that when Artyem had written out a hit list and drawn a picture of their burning house, the two women had felt afraid.

In the universal condemnation of Hansen, one population remained mostly quiet. Adoptive and foster parents of neglected, abused, or traumatized children had a better-than-average hunch about what had gone wrong in Shelbyville. "We'd never have taken a child to the airport," says Karen Maurer of Atlanta, recalling the dark days after she and husband Eric brought home a daughter from China. "But for over a year after the adoption, my husband and I feared we'd torn apart our family."

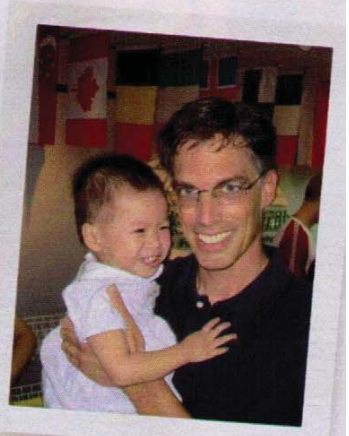
In Phoenix, Bill and Karen Cheney

had at times longed to escape the tumult of their life after adopting three older boys from Ethiopia. "We did fantasize about the airport," says Karen. "We fantasized even more about turning back time."

**Adoption literature brims with upbeat slogans**—"Love at First Sight!" and "Forever Families!"—assuring prospective parents that they've come to the right place. Roughly two million adopted children living in American households prove there's truth in those phrases. But "A Match Made in Heaven" fails to capture the commitment and resilience demanded of adoptive parents, and the courage traumatized children need to attach to new caregivers.

Institutionalized children in particular may be at elevated risk for cognitive brain damage and mental health problems. There's also evidence that children adopted internationally have "much higher rates" of fetal alcohol syndrome, autism, and brain damage, says Ronald Federici, Psy.D., an adoptive parent of seven and clinical neuropsychologist in Clifton, VA, who works exclusively with traumatized adopted children from all over the world. Why, when Torry Hansen realized she was unequal to the task of raising Artyem, didn't she ask for help from her adoption agency, other parents, or the International Adoption Clinic at Vanderbilt University Medical Center? That was what everyone wanted to know. Had the adoption agency prepared Hansen (there is evidence they did)—and had she prepared herself—for the daunting challenges of bringing home an older, post-institutionalized son of an allegedly alcoholic mother?

That Artyem raged, threatened, and played with fire seems to have surprised Hansen, but it didn't surprise other adoptive parents of damaged children. Having been there themselves, parents like the Maurers and the Cheneys understood that figuring out where to turn for help isn't easy when you're in an advanced state of panic. It can be very hard to think clearly when you are on the front lines with a shrieking, flailing child who hates you.



"We were rock stars in our neighborhood for having 'rescued' an orphan, but our life was joyless"

## The Maurers
## BUILDING BLOCKS OF LOVE

Karen Maurer is a creative director at IBM; her husband, Eric, is a mental health clinician at a local Atlanta hospital. They live in a leafy neighborhood of comfortable homes near Emory University. When their sons, Colin and Ian, were 8 and 7, they were struck by the bright and happy adopted Chinese daughters of several families among their close friends.

"I'd always wanted a daughter," says Karen; Eric was intrigued by the idea of becoming "something other than this standard-issue white-bread family."

From their observation, it appeared that Chinese babies arrived healthy and emotionally intact. But the couple was about to learn a hidden truth of intercountry adoption: National generalities are not foolproof, especially when the adopted child is not an infant.

South Korea has long represented the gold standard in orphan care and in the excellent emotional and physical health of most of its children arriving in the U.S. for adoption, while countries of Eastern Europe have represented the other end of the spectrum, but the country of origin is less important than a child's individual history. A baby can be doted upon in a developing country, or neglected in a developed one. For infants, there really are only two continents: the land of well-being, and the land of lack.

Karen and Eric were thrilled when their adoption agency offered them the referral of 20-month-old Liana. In her picture, she had a pale, narrow face, an upright thatch of hair, and a fierce expression. Karen thought she looked very determined. She and Eric accepted the referral and then made the fateful decision: Uncomfortable with the thought of traveling so far from their sons, they agreed that Karen would stay home while Eric flew with his mother, Pat, to pick up their new daughter.

**In a hot, packed room** in Guangdong Province in August 2005, more than a dozen American parents were handed their babies; the joyful parents wept and the terrified babies screamed. Liana, at 2, was the oldest. Eric was alarmed by her appearance: "She was tiny and underweight. Her skin was almost greenish."

Liana's first impression of her new father, Eric believes, was that he was "a freakishly tall, blue-eyed white man who didn't speak the language."

Over the next few hours, the other babies simmered down and their new parents fell in love. But Eric was not falling in love. Liana's misery was contagious. She screamed every time she looked at him, and *continued on page 184*

## Love Medicine

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suffered from explosive diarrhea. Her muscle tone was floppy. She couldn't eat solid food, gagging on anything more than watered-down rice milk.

"In phone calls over the next two weeks," Karen says, "Eric described Liana as 'angry,' 'freaked out,' 'very sad,' and 'clearly the most difficult child in our group.' He said, 'People feel sorry for me.'"

What Eric thought, but didn't say, was, *What have we done?* What Karen thought, but didn't ask, was, *Oh, my God, what's coming home?*

As all that was familiar in Liana's world crumbled, only the gangly man with a kind of permanent look of concern on his face was left standing. She latched on to him. It was not a happy attachment; it was the glue of desperation, grief, and fear.

holding her. When Karen tried to pick her up, Liana dropped to the ground, screaming."

"She would *not* let go of Eric," says Karen. "I went from being jealous of him to, honestly, being glad it was him and not me."

Eric felt like a swimmer who had gone to sea to rescue a drowning person but instead gotten strangled and dragged underwater. "I'm a mental health therapist," he says. "I started to fear we were dealing with cognitive as well as emotional damage."

Minte, at age 3, with Karen and Bill soon after they brought him home from Ethiopia

**Nearly every baby is** wide open to learning the sweet pas de deux of call and answer, babble and smile, touch and giggle. Babies compromised in utero by congenital issues, alcohol, or drugs may have trouble from the start, yet most infants seek connection with their caregivers.

Hugging, snuggling, kissing, and closely-held breast- or bottle-feeding all instruct a baby in the arts of intimacy, communication, and happiness with a mother, father, or other attachment figure. These are the building blocks of love.

But what if, on top of physical or neurological damage, love, kindness, and delight *don't* envelop the baby? If she is fed from a bottle that is propped against the bars of a crib, or lies in soiled diapers for long hours; if no one burbles baby talk to her and no one rejoices when she rolls over and no one comes when she cries, the baby stops reaching out. As the infant withdraws and shuts down, her brain fails to develop key pathways, the elemental approaches to love. Love is a duet, not a solo.

"These internationally adopted children often have no idea of what is going on around them," says Joyce Maguire Pavao, Ed.D., founder, director, and CEO of the Center for Family Connections in Cambridge, MA. "There's nothing familiar."

Suddenly, these kids are wearing Baby Gap clothes that don't feel right. They're surrounded by strange people speaking an alien language and urging them to eat weird things like strawberries. They're required to do frightening things, like sleep in a bedroom alone. They don't understand what's happened to them.

"Things may not have been fully explained to them," says Pavao. "Or they may have been told they are simply coming here to learn English; they may not realize this is their family. They may think someone is looking for them in their home country and may fear they are doing something 'bad' by being here."

When they are age 3 or older, survival strategies—hoarding food, showing their best face to any adult who might help them, and thrashing the competition (the new siblings)—get them in trouble, but they have no idea how to live in a tranquil and loving family. "Attachment to and trust

## Country of origin isn't foolproof. For infants, there are two continents: the land of well-being, and the land of lack

"I'd been expecting a perfect little girl," says Eric. "What I had was a real human being with serious emotional issues."

At the Atlanta airport, Eric distracted Liana just long enough to place her in Karen's arms. She winced, then lunged back to Eric, locking her arms around his neck. She screamed when forcibly detached from him to be inserted into her car seat, later her high chair, and finally her bed. Colin and Ian had expected to be charmed and loved by their new sister, but when they tried to pick her up, she yelped and struggled for freedom. Ian offered his favorite stuffed animal and she let it fall. They rolled her a ball and she looked away.

"I think the boys felt, *Dad went away and came home with this really angry person,*" Eric says.

"For months," he says, "Karen could only get near Liana when I was

in a new caregiver take a long time to build—sometimes as long again as the number of years a child has already lived," says Pavao.

**Liana, at 2, didn't speak** and refused to walk. Then she started picking and tearing at the skin of her face till she was covered with bloody spots. Outside of the house, she'd run to strange women and men for hugs. Attachment experts say this can be a sign of "indiscriminate affection." It is the signal of a child who doesn't know to whom she belongs. "We were rock stars in our neighborhood for having 'rescued' a Chinese orphan, but our life was joyless," says Eric.

Karen signed up for a music class where toddlers sat in their parents' laps on the floor, clapping hands and shaking tambourines. Liana ran to the only father in the room and squeezed into his lap beside his child, wailing when Karen came to retrieve her. "It hurt my feelings," says Karen. "It was embarrassing."

She dropped the class. The marriage grew strained.

With Eric on leave from work, finances were tight. The couple were exhausted and sad, but did not seriously consider disrupting the adoption. "That's not the kind of people we are," says Karen. "I knew I would not give up. I thought, *I may not ever love her, and she may not ever love me, but I am going to raise her.*"

## The Cheneys
# RESCUING THE RESCUERS

Across the country, as Karen Maurer struggled to bond, Karen Cheney neared collapse. A recovery-room nurse, she'd treated an abused child of intercountry adoption, and the case had opened her heart toward Africa's orphans. "I thought I was so well prepared! I'd read all the books and taken all the classes," Karen says of the emotional roller coaster she and Bill boarded upon bringing home first one, then two more, unrelated school-age boys from Ethiopia. Like Artyem, these children didn't arrive unscathed. It was the oldest of the three—though not the first adopted—who nearly defeated them.

Karen's husband, Bill, is a retired wrestling coach, teacher, and training specialist for blood systems with an adult son from his first marriage. Their first son together, Mintesinot—"Minte"—arrived in March 2005 as a grief-stricken 2½-year-old who'd lost both his young parents to HIV/AIDS. He threw tantrums, hoarded food, willfully disobeyed, and ran to strangers for hugs. "Mintesinot is my first child," says Karen. "I fell in love with him the first time I saw his picture. I would do anything for this kid."

The tantrums and hoarding were bad enough, but Minte was giving off worsening signals of inner unrest. He would not turn to his parents for comfort, but attempted to dominate them. He yelled at them and at other children. "He pinched a boy at Sunday school who took something away from him," says Karen. "He didn't even feel sorry when the little boy cried."

The Cheneys sought every kind of therapy along the way, but Minte turned 6 before they found the right person: Kerri Tripke Garner, LPC, a local practitioner of Theraplay.

Created in Chicago in the 1960s by psychologist Ann Jernberg, Ph.D., while she was consulting for Head Start, Theraplay coaches parents and children, from toddlers to teens, in the sweet, silly interactions of childhood that they never enjoyed together. "Theraplay uses simple games to create moments of mutual pleasure and delight between parent and child," Garner says. "These moments actually change the child's internal →

## When Adoptions Fail

**Is it ever OK for an adoptive parent to call it quits?** In part because disruption is so rare, "there's a stigma attached to it," says Anna Belle Illien, executive director of Illien Adoptions International, Inc., of Atlanta. World Association for Children and Parents (WACAP), Torry Hansen's agency, has placed roughly 10,000 children in 35 years; only 1 percent of these placements failed the first time around. "Families feel terrible guilt and a sense of failure," says Illien. "But consider how difficult it is to assess the needs of a child in an orphanage in another country, and to match that child with the right family—and to do it all on paper! **We need to destigmatize disruptions.** They will always happen, so let's bring them into the open." Under current international regulations (the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, which the U.S. implemented on April 1, 2008), adoption agencies are held responsible for a child's welfare. When a placement is faltering, an ethical agency's role is to monitor the child's welfare, help the family with resources (therapists, special services for the child), and propose solutions. As a last resort, the agency will **find a new family better prepared to meet the child's needs.** It takes skill to identify the right family for a child, but when it works, it is a win-win situation for everyone—especially the child. "Rather than label these 'failed adoptions,' we should see them as opportunities to **get it right the second time,** as new beginnings," says Illien. "We should be amazed by the number of intercountry adoptions that actually *work,* where the parents and children find ways to make them work. *That* is the miracle."

## Love Medicine

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framework of belief from *I am a source of stress and shame* to *I am a delight and I bring joy to my caregiver and to the world.*"

Laughter and fun are great healers. When parents and children play together, fear of intimacy dissolves, family members tune in to one another, and love itself often blossoms or develops.

"I took off Minte's shoes and socks to play 'This Little Piggy,'" says Karen of her Theraplay sessions. "We sang and acted out 'Row, Row, Row Your Boat' with him in my lap. We passed balloons back and forth with our elbows. At the end, I cradled him in my arms and he nibbled a cookie from my fingers. Minte wanted to be in charge. Theraplay reminded him that I was the parent, I was in control, and I would keep him safe. After about six or seven months of once-a-week sessions at the clinic, we saw signs of his softening."

New patterns introduced in Theraplay were transposed to the larger canvas of home. "Minte started listening to us," Karen says. "He stopped running to strangers for affection. He began to trust us to feed him, so he didn't need to steal food and hide it. He let us be his parents." Glowing with success and confidence, Karen and Bill had the happy thought, *Let's adopt again!* A brother would round out the family and give Minte someone to grow up with. They contacted their adoption agency and got a referral for a 9-year-old: Habtamu. Viewing photos of other children, they fell in love with the sad face of 9-year-old Fikre. They decided to adopt both boys, and then fell off the cliff.

**In August 2008,** Karen Cheney and her sister flew to Addis Ababa. Fikre was gentle and grateful for affection. Habtamu, with angry eyebrows and a vigilant manner, remained stiff, suspicious, and off-putting. Karen couldn't help but note that Habtamu's 12-year molars were erupting. So he was about 12, not 9—but he acted like a 2-year-old. On their first night in a hotel room together, Karen turned off the TV to prepare for bedtime, and Habtamu flipped out.

"He was screaming so loudly we were afraid people in neighboring rooms would call the front desk to say we were hurting the child," Karen says. "He was completely out of control." He threw another tantrum on the flight to America, and soon was convulsing in fury several times a day in Phoenix. They were the tantrums of a toddler, thrown by a prepubescent boy with a deepening voice.

Then the preteen turned his rage and hatred upon 6-year-old Minte. "One day I stepped from the kitchen into the garage to get some paper cups," says Karen. "When I returned, Habtamu had Minte in a headlock and was pounding his head on the tile floor." On another day, Karen watched the three boys splash in the backyard pool. The beach ball flew into the bushes. As Karen turned to retrieve the ball, Habtamu yanked Minte underwater and held him down. He was trying to drown him.

"Bill and I realized we could not leave Habtamu unattended, *ever*," she says. "We changed our work schedules so that one of us was always home, always watching him. When I showered, he had to sit on the floor of the bathroom nearby. We bought motion detectors to make sure that no one moved around at night without our knowledge.

"In bed at night, we said, 'I want to put him on a plane,' 'I want to get on a plane myself,' 'What did we do to our *life*?'" Garner, the Theraplay teacher, urged Karen to bring Habtamu in to see her, but Karen refused.

"I hated him," she says. "I didn't feel he deserved to be loved. Or that I could do it."

"When children have known neglect and trauma, they develop a controlling type of relationship with parents and siblings," says Seattle-based family therapist Deborah D. Gray, author of *Nurturing Adoptions*, aimed at adoptive parents and caregivers of hurt children.

"These children may become caretakers of younger siblings, or they may act punitively toward them. Parents must establish boundaries. They want to stay sensitive and caring, but not allow themselves or any other family member to be emotionally or physically abused."

Overwhelmed parents may feel ashamed that, after years of adoption paperwork and tens of thousands of dollars in expenses, their new child is home and they're not happy. Some first-time adoptive parents think, *I wasn't meant to have children.* Others isolate themselves, reluctant to describe their hell to anyone. But if stressed adoptive parents are given access to social workers, therapists, and experienced parents, they can regain energy and hope. Research shows that post-placement services can spell the difference between adoption success and failure.

### The Maurers
## "WE JUST KEPT MOVING AHEAD"

"We thought it would take a few weeks for Liana to attach to our family," says Eric in Atlanta. "It took two years."

After a few months of misery, Eric and Karen revealed their situation to other parents of children from China and from Ethiopia. They had hesitated out of fear of being judged and criticized, but were relieved to find understanding and advice. One friend told Karen, "Maybe Liana was treated roughly by women in the orphanage and is afraid of women."

"Another wondered if she felt I threatened her relationship with

Eric," says Karen. "A third suggested that I might unconsciously be giving nonverbal cues that pushed her away. And a fourth shared that she'd gone through serious depression after her adoption and that it wasn't predictive of her future life with her child. All felt there was still hope for us."

Eric and Karen tried to pursue a normal life with Colin and Ian while, perched in a backpack high on Eric's shoulders, Liana watched noncommittally from above. "There was no one thing that marked a turning point," says Eric. "We just kept moving ahead."

There were almost-imperceptible glimmers of progress. One day Eric stepped into the kitchen for a glass of water and 4-year-old Liana—left behind in the living room with her mother—glanced up from her toys, but didn't freak out. One evening she let Karen brush her hair. One time, Liana rested her hand lightly on Karen's leg while Karen read aloud. Then one day Liana's parents let her loose on a soccer field, and she tore across the grass like a race car on a speedway.

*"What?"* cried Eric. "We've got an athlete?"

Whenever life overwhelmed Liana, she could retreat to Eric's embrace, and he was always there. "Over time—maybe two, two and a half years—she evolved from this frightened, clingy, miserable person," says Karen, "to a lively, strong, happy girl, a child whom we could not live without."

Now Liana is 7. She has a beautiful, animated face; her eyes disappear when she giggles, which is often. She is a seriously motivated first grader. "At night I like to come in Mom's bed," says Liana. "I help her with her Sudoku." Liana is popular with friends, a funny sister, and a star on the soccer field. Now Eric is thinking, *College soccer scholarship.*

Liana has maintained a keen attachment to Eric, but it's no more exaggerated than a little girl's love for her daddy. Though her rough start in life left her with some learning delays, she does not fit the profile of a cognitively damaged child.

Karen and Eric did not seek professional help. The support they received from fellow adoptive parents, and trust in their own parenting abilities, got them through the darkest hours.

"My dream of having a daughter has come true," says Karen. "I love Liana so much. She's a perfect mix of tomboy and girlish, an athlete who loves cute shoes. She's all I ever wanted. Sometimes she glances up at me and, out of nowhere, she says, 'I love you, Mom.'"

## The Cheneys
# FROM "HATE" TO COMMITMENT

At a low point, "Bill and I wished we could turn back the clock and be content with raising Minte," says Karen in Phoenix. "We knew we couldn't. We said, 'Habtamu's in our family now. We either have to help him or get used to him.' I turned to adoptive parents for advice. One said, 'Can you try to see things through Habtamu's eyes? Nobody asked him if he wanted to be adopted; he's just here. What's going on with him?'"

Habtamu's paperwork indicated that his mother had died when he was 5 years old. "Tell me about your mom," Karen said to him one day, and was shocked by his matter-of-fact reply: "She is very sick. She stop going to work. One day she go to the hospital and she dead. My uncle take me to see her. I see her dead in a box."

"He talked about her without emotion," says Karen. "He talked about her death as if he were telling about going to the grocery. I started to cry, but he sat there dry-eyed."

"Do you have any happy memories of her?" Karen asked.

"One time I fall down. I hurt my head. She stay at home to take care of me," Habtamu replied.

"Where did you live after your mother died?"

"After Mother die, I live with Uncle. He leave early for work and come home late. I take care of myself. Sometime I forget my key. After school I cannot get in. Big boys chase me and hurt me."

"I still hated him because he had ruined our life," Karen says, "but I began to think about everything he'd been through. Another adoptive mom told me, 'Love is a commitment, not a feeling. Don't wait to be swept away by love. Just give him what he needs.' I thought, *I'm his mother, I've committed to him. I'm going to do everything I can to break through to that hard little heart.*" She called Theraplay to say, "We're coming in."

**"At every session** of Theraplay, we start with check-in," says Garner. "That's when the therapist and parent notice characteristics of the child: 'I see you brought your sparkling eyes with you today!' we'll say, which sends the message, 'You bring me pleasure and delight. You catch my attention.' Every Theraplay session also includes 'checking for hurts,' which sends the message, 'I can care for you; I can meet your needs.' That's a very important message for a child who had to look out for himself."

Habtamu resisted at first, Garner says, "but Karen grasped the importance of caring for her big boy's hurts." At home, a bruised knee was not a nuisance or an interruption, but an opportunity to change Habtamu's internal response from *Adults are unreliable; I'll take care of myself* to *I can relax into the nurture she provides; she is reliable and safe.*

One day Garner used stuffed animals to present a story based on Habtamu's life. A puppy loses his mother, refuses to accept kindness and love from a new mother, then realizes that his grief is blocking the love trying to come his way. Habtamu was riveted, visibly moved. →

## Love Medicine

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That night at bedtime, he began a faltering conversation with Karen, expressing his wish to be less defiant and more accepting of what she and Bill were offering him.

"Angry. Sorry." Every night that week, he took up the theme again. This, says Garner, was his first step in the direction of health.

"I learned," says Karen, "that you can't help your child if you're constantly triggered by him. I saw that Habtamu's temper reduced me to feeling like a child getting yelled at. I had to stop indulging in my own hurt feelings and to remind myself, 'You're the adult here.' Once I could stay balanced during his fits, I could say, 'Habtamu, I'm here. I'll be right here for you when you finish screaming.'" Change was incremental: One afternoon Habtamu did not throw a fit when the TV went off; one night he thanked Karen for dinner; one day he raised his fist toward Minte, then slowly unclenched it.

Little by little, the Cheney family inched into the sunlight. Today Habtamu is a handsome, quiet boy of 13. Those fierce eyebrows lift, at times, with amusement or tolerance. He is moody, but watches his temper, separating himself from the family when he feels his temperature rising. In therapy, he continues to work on knitting together the pieces of his broken history, on respecting that his first family did the best they could for him under the circumstances, and on appreciating the fact that he has reached safe harbor and is loved.

"Habtamu is doing amazingly well now," says Karen. "He's affectionate to all of us; he hugs me and says, 'I love you, Mom,' and he's getting closer to Bill, too. He and Minte are fine now—normal, everyday brothers. We leave them alone together all the time without worrying. If you ask Habtamu what made the difference, he says, 'Going to Ms. Kerri.' I hate to think where we'd be without her. The difficulty we had at the start makes his love for me all the sweeter. And I love him! We overcame so much together to get to this place. Not only did I crack into his hard little heart, he cracked through to my hard heart as well. He still pushes my buttons, and I push his, but we're overcoming it together."

**Last August, CNN reported** that Artyem Saveliev had been returned to a Russian orphanage. Whether or not any Russian families tried, and failed, to give him a home was not reported. Torry Hansen's parental rights have not yet been terminated; a juvenile court in Tennessee will decide what, if any, obligations remain for her. Fallout from the case continues, but the repercussions are not all bad. Russia has announced its determination to more closely scrutinize U.S. adoptive families, while the U.S. has noted the need for American families to have access to thorough and truthful medical and psychiatric information prior to committing to a child. In the current system, adopting American parents may not see the details of their child's medical and psychological profile until they appear in Russian court finalizing the adoption.

Meanwhile, it's certain that every year, a fraction of adoptive parents will be unnerved by a new child's issues. Finding a way to love a traumatized child, and helping that child learn to love, takes *years,* say battle-weary parents. Those parents who survive and thrive often say that it was the hardest and most satisfying work of their lifetimes, and that it unlocked the door to their greatest treasures: their own beloved children. ■

*Melissa Fay Greene is an award-winning journalist. Her memoir,* No Biking in the House Without a Helmet, *will be published this spring.*

## Modern Romance

*continued from page 139*

# Sweet Style RESOURCES

Seven great shops for pretty home decor and details

**1 Ballard Designs** A favorite resource of decorators, the company's wares have a romantic Francophile feel (curvy side tables, vintage-look clocks) plus plenty of sweet finishing touches (ballard designs.com)

**2 Cath Kidston** This plucky Brit reinvented the cottage rose print in punchy colors and hardworking materials (oilcloth, machine-wash cotton). The U.S. site now lets you hop virtually across the pond to indulge in the cheery goods (cathkidston usa.com)

**3 & 4 Ebay and Etsy** Skip the flea market (it's too cold out anyway), and opt for either of these online "resalers" of vintage (or vintage-looking) goods at affordable prices. Search for keywords like "Victorian," "cottage style," "romantic," "French country," and "distressed" (ebay.com, etsy.com)

**5 Laura Ashley** The firm's iconic English-cottage floral patterns and classic stripes lend a romantic air to a range of furnishings. We especially love the budget-friendly bedding (bedbathandbeyond.com)

**6 Shabby Chic** Rachel Ashwell, the undisputed queen of perfectly aged elegance, is still going strong. Relax into her Simply Shabby Chic line at Target—everything from desks to doormats—or her new Shabby Chic furniture collection for Miles Talbott (shabbychic.com)

**7 Wisteria** Your go-to for items with a little patina—from one-of-a-kind weathered mirrors to even-better-than-vintage-looking lighting (wisteria.com)