

Want more info?

Read about April Turner's experiences growing up without her mother, her successful search for her mom, and what they did during their 10-day reunion after 15 years of separation in the full version of this story online at www.af.mil/news/story.

Mother, daughter reunite after 15 years

AVIANO AIR BASE, Italy — It was a mother's nightmare. **Juanita Heismann's** daughter, **April Turner**, was gone without a trace. After dropping off her first-grader for a scheduled visit with her estranged father in Lawton, Okla., in June 1988, Mrs. Heismann panicked when April's father didn't show up to return her daughter. "I was angry and afraid," she said. "I tried to look for them using every means I could, but they were gone as if they just disappeared."

The father and daughter moved, and she had no idea where. The young mother, who had two other children, quickly realized she couldn't handle the ordeal alone. "I went through a wide scale of emotions," she said. "I cried. I ranted and raved. There was nothing I could do, and I felt so hopeless. But then, after a lot of praying, I made peace with God."

She moved on with her life, marrying Tech. Sgt. **Richard**

courtesy photo



Juanita Heismann (left) and her daughter, April Turner, get their first portrait taken at Aviano Air Base, Italy, after more than 15 years of separation. After unsuccessful attempts to find her mother using an online company, April ironically obtained contact information on her mom by using a search engine.

Heismann who's now assigned to the 603rd Air Control Squadron. "I didn't worry because I realized I would see her again someday — whether it was in heaven or here on Earth."

In June 2003, Mrs. Heismann returned home from Bible study. "I had just told the others about my ordeal with my firstborn daughter and how God guided me through it," she said.

She checked her e-mail, and buried among spam and junk messages was a name eerily familiar: April Turner.

Once she read the first few lines, she scared her husband with a loud scream.

"By the time he ran to me, I was incoherent — a sobbing, crying mess," the mother said. "I [ran] to my friend's house across the street. I had to tell somebody, anybody."

April, now a 22-year-old serving with the Army in Washington, D.C., said she was in shock and disbelief when her mother responded to her e-mail. The two quickly made plans to meet in Italy for a 10-day visit.

After the visit, her mother said, "I hated to see her go. I bawled the whole way to the airport. But I love having her in my life again. Her siblings adore her. She's a part of the family now."

— Senior Airman Julie Weckerlein 31st Fighter Wing Public Affairs

by Airman 1st Class Mark Woodbury



Scarlett (left), 9, feeds Sweet Pea while **Myles (right), 11**, grooms the donkey with **Preston, 7**, sitting on him. Sweet Pea is the character behind the children's newly published book. They're currently working on their second book that'll highlight Sweet Pea's adventures at her new home on the family's property off base.

Pet donkey inspires children to publish book

EDWARDS AIR FORCE BASE, Calif. — Three children of an Airman here have completed a two-year project and published their story.

Myles, Scarlett and Preston Gallagher are the children of Chief Master Sgt. **Richard Gallagher** and his wife, **Gwenyth**. The youngsters published a children's book, "The Adventures of 'Sweet Pea' the Donkey," about their pet donkey.

Sweet Pea takes on human characteristics in the book and shares her different experiences with her friends — horses — at the Edwards' stables.

"This has been a project that the kids really wanted to see happen," said the mother of the authors. "I always encouraged them to write down the different story ideas they came up with concerning Sweet Pea, but once those stories were put on paper, the kids really were the driving force behind wanting to get the stories published into a book."

The roughly 28-page book has a different Sweet Pea story on each page with an illustration drawn by 9-year-old Scarlett that goes along with each story.

"I hope that people like it," Scarlett said. "We put a lot of time and hard work into the book."

— Airman 1st Class Mark Woodbury 95th Air Base Wing Public Affairs

Airman struggles to save her family

LANGLEY AIR FORCE BASE, Va. — Soon, Airman 1st Class **Ayaan Nduli** hopes to sleep well at night. It would mean years of worrying and waiting were over. It would mean her family is safe.

Her story begins in Somalia during 1981, when her mother, **Sahra Cali Sherwac**, asked a South African woman named **Zandile Nduli** to adopt her third child. She wanted to give her child what she couldn't give her other two — a chance to have a different life by escaping the confines and limitations of a Third World country.

Ms. Nduli was with the United Nations working in Somalia teaching students the skills to become midwives. She agreed to adopt the child and made plans to leave for Kenya. She also made plans for the Sherwac family to join them in Kenya, but that's when things began to unravel.

"I'll never forget the day we tried to leave," Airman Nduli said. "We were thrown in jail."

Rumors that Mrs. Sherwac had sold her daughter

to Ms. Nduli circulated to Somali soldiers. When Ms. Nduli and the child attempted to leave the country, they, along with Mrs. Sherwac, were arrested and thrown in jail.

After several weeks, Ms. Nduli was able to substantiate the adoption, and the three were released. Ms. Nduli took the child and left for Kenya, but the Sherwac family, which included new baby sister **Ikran**, never came. Fighting broke out in Somalia, and Ms. Nduli lost contact with the family. Contacts in the U.N. office in Somalia tried to locate them, but they found

nothing. The Sherwac family was gone.

Ms. Nduli took Airman Nduli to England where she was legally adopted and became a British citizen. They eventually moved to Nashville, Tenn. Years passed, but they never forgot the Airman's family.

"We never stopped looking," Airman Nduli said. "Not a day went by when my [adoptive] mother and I

didn't think of them. Not a week went by without us looking for them."

On New Year's Eve 1999, a friend located the lost family. Soon Airman Nduli was talking to her biological mother for the first time in 13 years.

Ms. Nduli chartered a plane so she and the teenager could finally see her biological family in Kenya. She learned that her brother was killed during Somalia's civil war, and she had a second younger sister, **Ifrah**. Ms. Nduli found a house for the family to stay in, but after she and Airman Nduli returned to the United States Kenyan soldiers burned the Sherwac family's house and beat them because they were Somali, she said.

"They had no choice but to go to a refugee camp," Airman Nduli said. "My mother and I went to visit them in the winter of 2002, and all I could do was cry."

The Nduli family has desperately been trying to move what's left of the Sherwac family to the United States, but problems keep plaguing the process.

"I know there are horrible things that go on in those camps. I just want to get them out of there," Airman Nduli said. "I wish I was there with them, but I know everything happens for a reason — and my being adopted will make it possible for them to have a better life. It would mean for the first time in years, I could sleep peacefully knowing my family was safe."

— Airman 1st Class Kerry Johnson 1st Fighter Wing Public Affairs

by Tech. Sgt. Ben Bloker



Airman 1st Class Ayaan Nduli holds a photo of her mother, Sahra Cali Sherwac. Airman Nduli is attempting to bring her family from a refugee camp in Kenya to the United States.

Learning about America

A Japanese girl picks up an American flag during the 16th annual American Day celebration outside Misawa Air Base in June.

The event brings visitors who are interested in learning about American culture from throughout northern Japan. More than 70,000 people attended this year's event.

by Staff Sgt. Andrew Rodier

