

PCVs in Ethiopia

Posted on [May 10, 2010](#) by [bhillenbrand](#) | [1 comment](#)

Break out the old copy books. Peace Corps teachers are returning to Ethiopian schools

In the coming year, Peace Corps will tinker with the assignments new PCVs in Ethiopia will undertake. Projects in agriculture, the environment, and education are in the works

by Barry Hillenbrand (Debre Markos 63-65)

When Peace Corps returned to Ethiopia in 2007 the new PCVs were assigned to work with PEPFAR, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. Part of the funding for the grand return of Peace Corps to Ethiopia came out of PEPFAR's budget, and that helped speed Peace Corps back to Ethiopia in the days when funding was a particular problem. The new groups of Volunteers have all worked fighting Ethiopia's pressing AIDS crisis.

But many RPCVs had hoped that Peace Corps/Ethiopia would return to education, a program that made a lasting impression all over the country. Indeed, the new PCVs, hard at work with AIDS programs, were constantly running into people who would ask if they knew "Mr. Bob from Ohio who taught maths" or some other long-remembered teacher they had in secondary school thirty or forty years ago. Peace Corps — and America — still has a good reputation across the country because of Peace Corps teachers.

It now seems that Peace Corps will be returning to teaching. This year Peace Corp will expand assignments for new PCVs to include projects in agriculture and the environment, as well as continuing work in health. In the summer of 2011, PCVs will be sent to Ethiopia to work not only in health and agriculture, but also in teaching. The summer 2011 group may number as many as 70 PCVs. It will probably include English teachers, as well as primary school teachers and English teacher trainers. But details of the new programs, including the size and specialities of the new contingent, are still being worked out by Peace Corps and the Ministry of Education.

Keep clicking into the HERALD. More details are on the way.

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Projects

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Realizing Ethiopian dreams in America

Two RPCVs work with an old friend to bring Ethiopian culture to a new museum in Chicago

by Drew Gannon

*Editor's note: This well-crafted story was written by Drew Gannon, a Northwestern University journalism student. All of us who served as PCVs in Ethiopia or Eritrea were indelibly marked by the experience. But some of us ended up linking our lives after Peace Corps to things Ethiopian in a very direct way. **LaDena Robichaud Schnapper** (Dessie, Awassa 63-66) played an important role in arranging the exodus of Ethiopian Jews to Israel, and has been active in various Ethiopian diaspora causes. **Charlie Sutton** (Addis 66-68), who makes a cameo appearance in this story, has kept in touch through the years with the music — and musicians — of Ethiopia. Recently Sutton wrote a wonderful four-part memoir of his Ethiopian musical odyssey for the [East African Forum](#).*



JUST CHECKING: Oh it's just a bunch of old African stuff

left, advising Schnapper to move her truck and warning her not to park an unidentified vehicle on the streets of the nation's capital again.

"It was definitely an adventure," Schnapper recalled. "But my truck wasn't filled with just stuff. It was filled with treasures." The truck contained 60 large packing boxes filled with Ethiopian artifacts. After being housed in the Ethiopian Embassy for 11 years, the artifacts were finally being relocated by Schnapper to their new home: the Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago.

Schnapper is what you could call an Ethiopian enthusiast. Originally from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, Schnapper served as a Volunteer in Dessie and Awassa. In her three years in Ethiopia, she learned Amharic,

WHEN LADENA SCHNAPPER saw all the police cars on Washington D.C.'s International Drive, she knew there was a problem. "Lady, is this your truck?" the police officer asked her as she first stepped out of her car. "Are you aware of all the trouble you caused? My God, this is D.C., this is post 9/11, and this is the embassy row. Don't you realize what a truck like this parked on this street without any identification could possibly mean?"

Schnapper's 26-foot U-Haul was parked outside the Ethiopian Embassy in Washington. Overnight, Homeland Security had placed the truck on a satellite and scanned it with radar. By the time Schnapper arrived, dogs were already inside, sniffing its contents. Once the officers decided that the truck was just filled with "old African stuff," they

submerged herself in Ethiopian music and dance, and helped the students in the area. “We were part of the second group to go out following Kennedy’s word: ‘ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country,’” she said. “I called it my Ethiopian imprint because I haven’t let go of it since.”

Returning to the United States, Schnapper maintained her connection to Ethiopia. In 1984, she helped establish the [Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago](#). She interviewed Erku Yimer to become the organization’s executive director. Yimer had been a student in Dessie when Schnapper taught there. He moved to Chicago as a refugee. For the past 47 years the two have remained close. “LaDena is wonderful,” Yimer said. “She is a friend to the ECA and she is my dear friend.”

Schnapper also became the International Coordinator for the American Association for Ethiopian Jews in Chicago. She returned to Ethiopia for two years to assist — some would say “direct” — in the final exodus of the Ethiopian Jews to Israel. She was a big player in Operation Solomon, the one day airlift of 14,000 Ethiopian Jews to Israel in 1992. After her work with the Ethiopian Jews, she moved to Washington D.C., where she met Tesfaye Lemma who, like many other Ethiopians, came to the United States in the 1980s to escape the Red Terror of the Derg.

Tesfaye Lemma is a composer, choreographer, conductor, and cultural expert. His artistic works are well known in Ethiopia and by Ethiopians in the United States, especially by the older generations. Perhaps Lemma’s most notable accomplishment was his role as director of [Orchestra Ethiopia](#), an orchestra made up of traditional instrumentalists, vocalists, and dancers from all over Ethiopia. It was the first ensemble to bring together these diverse instruments and ethnic groups. Lemma served as its third director from 1966–1975, and composed and arranged music for the ensemble.

Under Lemma’s direction, and with the help of Charlie Sutton, then a PCV in Addis, the group toured the United States, performing in twenty cities under the name “The Blue Nile Group.” Orchestra



BEATING THE DRUM: Tesfaye Lemma and a classic atamo



Ethiopia also released two LP recordings, one in 1969 and the other in 1973. The ensemble disbanded in 1975 after the Derg took power in Ethiopia. In the 1980s, Lemma came to the United States. “Tesfaye was a man of dreams,” Schnapper said. “His dream was to set up a cultural center, and a folkloric band, and eventually a museum for Ethiopia.” Schnapper became Lemma’s administrative assistant, helping him realize his dreams. They formed the Ethiopian-American Cultural Center and the Nile Ethiopian Ensemble, the first folkloric Ethiopian dance group in the United States.

ICKA MESHENYA GIBZA (ARTIFACT SEND-OFF PARTY): Annette Scheckler, Embassy staff; Charles Sutton; LaDena Schnapper; Tesfaye Lemma; Tsehaye Debalkew, Embassy PR officer

Still, Lemma, was not satisfied. “He said, ‘No, they need to learn more, all these people in America. We’ve got to start a museum.’” Schnapper said. Lemma returned to Ethiopia in the 1990s and accumulated, by Schnapper’s estimate, a thousand cultural artifacts, including religious relics,

agricultural tools, paintings, musical instruments, and clothing. With the help of a wealthy Ethiopian businessman, these artifacts were shipped back to the United States. Lemma and Schnapper named their new museum Tesfa, meaning “hope” in Amharic.

Unfortunately, in 1998, Lemma entered a nursing home to receive intense medical care for his diabetes and kidney failure. At the same time, Schnapper’s mother fell ill, and she returned to the Upper Peninsula to care for her. Having no one to maintain the museum, the artifacts went into indefinite storage at the Ethiopian Embassy. “The artifacts were stored two levels underground the Embassy,” Schnapper said. “They were safe and secure, but they gathered significant amount of dust and I’m sure all of the mice of Washington D.C. visited at least once and probably every bug in the world that liked skin and horse hair made their way to the boxes down there.”

In fall 2009, Schnapper learned that the ECA had received grants to move a larger, more permanent building in Chicago. These new facilities provided the organization with more space for their various services, including tutoring programs, English languages classes, and placement services. The organization also hoped to start their own cultural museum. Schnapper became the liaison between the ECA and Lemma’s artifacts. Schnapper returned to Washington D.C. and spent several weeks with the artifacts, dusting and repackaging them. In January, with the help of the staff of the Ethiopian Embassy and with only a minor altercation with Homeland Security, the artifacts were on their way to ECA’s new building in Chicago. The ECA staff is now organizing the artifacts and hopes the museum will be completed within the year.

“I see the museum really as a bridge, a very vital bridge,” Schnapper said. “It serves as a link between the past and the future generation of Ethiopians, and between Americans of all ethnic groups and this fantastic 3,000 year old rich culture. I would like Ethiopian children to realize the glory of their past and for all Americans to see what Ethiopians can offer to the world.

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News of Ethiopia

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As elections approach, violence and money games

Just a few more weeks until Ethiopia’s May 23 elections and already the charges and counter-charges are flying. In an interview by phone with Bloomberg news agency, opposition coalition leader Merara Gudina said that the election so far “looks like sort of a war, not an election,” Merara accused loyalists that the government party have thrown stones at his car, breaking its windows and puncturing its tires over various occasions while campaigning in the Oromiya

region in April. Ethiopian government spokesman Shimeles Kemal said one of the ruling party's candidates had been stabbed to death, in a first murder accusation against Medrek, the country's main opposition coalition.

No one is sure who is really ahead in the election, of course, but following the money is one way of getting a sense of the flow of the campaign. One report in Afrik.com has it that big money is flowing from the business community to Meles' ruling party. More than 22 million birr, about \$1.6 million, has been raised by the business community. As the ruling party tells it, the business people approached the party with offers to help in the election and, according to Hailemariam Desalegn, EPRDF election coordinating committee member and government whip at parliament, "We told them to mobilize all the business people and raise a target of 20 million birr; however, they raised 22 million birr in cash." Another 10 million birr, Hailemariam said, had been targeted for buying t-shirts. But companies volunteered to make the t-shirts for free, so in effect that's more money given to the ruling party.



A NOSE FOR TROUBLE: Prime Minister Meles



ABSENT HERO: D.C. fundraisers and picture of Birtukan Mideksa

Meanwhile, the opposition parties are raising money in the United States. Hundreds of Ethiopians in the Washington, D.C. metro area paid \$30 on a Sunday in April to hear from major contenders for the 23 May parliamentary election back home. Bertukan Mideksa, the charismatic chairperson of the Unity for Democracy and Justice party, was noticeably absent. She is, of course, in jail in Addis. Though her photo captioned "Free Birtukan Mideksa from Kaliti Prison" was placed on the table. Gizachew Shiferaw, her deputy, waived to supporters as he entered the room and took to the stage. "I greet you in the spirit of peace," Gizechew said, raising his

right hand aloft. That gesture has become an opposition symbol in the election. "Our leader, Bertukan Mideksa, languishes in prison, but we will not stop our struggle," he said to loud applause and cheering. Medrek brought former foes under the same political platform. The National Election Board of Ethiopia does not permit Ethiopian citizens living outside the country to vote absentee ballots, so these meetings focus on getting financial support — not votes — from the diaspora.

The health of children and their moms

Every year 381,000 children in Ethiopia die before their 5th birthday. This includes 120,000 newborn babies. Twenty-six thousand women also die annually from complications in pregnancy. Save the Children's State of the World's Mothers 2010 highlights the annual mothers' index, which ranks the best and worst places to be a mother. Ethiopia is ranked 20th among the least-developed 40 countries for women's health and well-being and 32nd out of 42 least-developed countries in children's health and well-being. The index is based on an analysis of indicators of women's and children's health and well-being.

Water problems, to the north and south

Ethiopia has lots of water problems, big and small. Getting water in villages is a constant problem. But sometimes the water problem goes beyond the village and is entangled with other issues, like electric power or international affairs. Ethiopia wants to build a dam on the Omo River which flows from southern Ethiopia into Lake Turkana in northern Kenya. The Ethiopian government awarded a \$2.1bn contract to Italy's Salini for the construction of the dam, the country's biggest infrastructure project ever. But environmentalists are appalled at what they consider the damage the project will cause. A report by International Rivers says that the project, called the Gibe III Dam, "will devastate the fragile ecosystems of the Lower Omo Valley and Kenya's Lake Turkana, on which 500,000 poor farmers, herders and fisherfolk rely for their livelihoods." Campaigners also fear that the dam would reduce the flow of water into Lake Turkana and would flood a huge area, creating a 150km-long lake.

But Ethiopia's government disagrees, saying that the dam is needed to generate enough electricity for its population and to sell abroad. Tewolde Gebre Egziabher, head of Ethiopia's Environmental Protection Authority, says that the project was "very sensible." He told the BBC that "the advantages for the whole country, the local communities, and even for our neighboring countries, including Kenya, far outweigh the small problems that will be caused at the short term." Construction work is underway on the dam, which would be Africa's second largest hydro-electric dam. But International Rivers says the government still needs about \$1.4bn to complete it. Are you listening World Bank?

Ethiopia also has a water problem to the North. For generations, Ethiopia and its sub-Saharan neighbors have been battling Egypt over the water which originates in the south, including Lake Tana, and flows north to water the Nile Delta. Last month the squabble came to a head when upstream countries declared after a water meeting in Sharm El-Sheikh that they would launch separate talks on control of the water since Egypt and Sudan refused to revise water pacts dating to 1929. "Egypt's historic rights to Nile waters are a matter of life and death. We will not compromise them," said Moufid Shehab, Egypt's minister of legal and assembly affairs. The 1929 deal, brokered on one side by British colonial powers in Africa, gives Egypt 55.5 billion cubic metres a year, the biggest share of a flow of some 84 billion cubic meters. It also gives Cairo the power to veto dams and other water projects in upstream countries that include six of the world's poorest nations. "We will not sign on to any agreement that does not clearly state and acknowledge our historical rights," Egyptian Water Minister Mohamed Nasreddin Allam said.



WHO OWNS THE WATER: fetching water from Kenya's Lake Turkana threatened by Ethiopia's Gibe III Dam

The Ethiopians are not amused. "Egypt has tried in the past to complicate the issue. They are dragging their heels," says Shimeles Kemal, spokesman for the government of Ethiopia, which, we all know, is the source of the Blue Nile. Egypt and Sudan "are pushing for a position that would negate everything we've achieved in years of talks and negotiations," said Isaac Musumba, Uganda's state minister for regional cooperation. They control the White Nile. Upstream states have invited Egypt and Sudan to take part in the new deal — whose legal standing would be uncertain — but on their terms. "We hope to convince them," said Christopher Chiza, Tanzania's deputy minister of water and irrigation. Talk of such a deal triggers alarm in Egypt, where Nile waters feed a farm sector accounting for a third of all jobs. Egypt, unlike upstream nations, cannot rely on rain and gets 87 percent of its water needs from the Nile. Climate change and rising sea levels could also swallow much of the slim, fertile Nile Delta in Egypt, already the world's largest wheat importer.

Coffee and climate change

And speaking of climate change, Ethiopia seems to be having problems of its own with global warming. According to a study conducted in the Ethiopian state awkwardly named Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Regional State, coffee is under threat from climate-change induced diseases. Farmers in the study area reported that yields of coffee and other crops had fallen in the last four years. The study attributed this to a loss of soil fertility, drought and unusually high rainfall at the wrong time. Also, a slight increase in annual maximum and minimum temperatures was recorded in recent years at Yergalem. "High temperatures aggravate the problem of coffee berry disease during a long dry season," the study noted.

The study added the threat is not isolated to The Southern Nations. An analysis of 32 years of climate data from Jimma, a city in Oromia Regional State and an important coffee area, found that before 1984 temperatures were too low for beetles to regenerate more than once a year. But after the temperature began to rise, the insect began to regenerate twice per year causing increased damage to crops including coffee.

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News of Eritrea

Posted on [May 10, 2010](#) by [bhillenbrand](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

Sanctions and glimmers of gold

Eritrea has been under scrutiny for its support of terrorism. But occasionally there is good news

Last week, Eritrean President Isaias Afwarki flew to Egypt for a visit with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Isaias must have been relieved to find a place where he received a warm welcome. Eritrea and Isaias have not been on the world's Diplomatic A List recently. In December the United Nations Security Council called on nations to impose sanctions on Eritrea citing its border dispute with Djibouti and its providing arms and training to the al-Qaeda-linked Al-Shabab militant group in Somalia. The sanctions have begun to sting as country after country made life difficult for Eritrea. The Canadian Cabinet, for example, has approved sanctions against Eritrea in May noting its support for Al-Shabab. Al-Shabab has been recruiting Canadian youths to join their forces. The sanctions include a ban on weapons sales, and Canadian banks have been ordered to freeze any assets belonging to Eritrean political leaders and military officials. "Canada is concerned by Eritrea's support of armed opposition groups in Somalia," said Dana Cryderman, a Department of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman. She said the sanctions were targeted at senior government and military officials. "They are intended to minimize adverse impacts on the general population."

Similar sanctions have been imposed by the European Union and the United States. Eritrea is becoming more and more isolated. Not only has it alienated nearly all its neighbors, but its support for rebels, including Al-Shabab, in Somalia has made Europeans and Americans extremely wary of Eritrea.

The sanctions come on top of report after report from human rights groups citing Eritrea as one of the worse violators of political rights. For example, Paris-based Reporters Without Borders said this month that Eritrea permits no independent media and the state-run newspapers and television network do not allow stories that challenge the

nation's leadership or its policies. The government has described a free press as "incompatible" with Eritrean culture and last year President Isaias said no Eritrean should want or need to attack their own country. "Around 30 journalists are currently held somewhere in its 314 prison camps and detention centres. Four of them have died as a result of the extremely cruel conditions in these prisons. Others have just disappeared," RSF said in a statement. "Ruled with an iron hand by a small ultra-nationalist clique centered on Afeworki, this Red Sea country has been transformed in just a few years into a vast open prison. Africa's biggest prison for the media," it said. RSF ranks Eritrea as the worst abuser of press freedom in the world, placing it below North Korea three years in a row.

SOME GLITTERING GOOD NEWS

Most of the news from Eritrea tends to have a sour tone to it. Part of the problem is that not many reporters travel to Eritrea and so most of the news comes from opposition groups in the diaspora, reports from human rights groups and statements by Western governments. But there are a few glimmers of good news. Like the seemingly successful efforts by Eritrea to ramp up gold production. **Ron Gonella** (Adi Quala, Eritrea 66-68) forwarded us a note from one of his former students, Kahsai Woldai, now living in Germany, enclosing a press release from Nevsun Resources, a Canadian mining firm, saying that mining operations in Eritrea are close to going on line. The mines will provide a stream of copper, zinc, silver and gold that will help generate welcome foreign currency income for Eritrea. (Just how these exports will avoid sanctions being imposed by the U.N., the E.U., and the U.S. is not clear. China may be buying.)

It's not been an easy road for Nevsun to get the mine going. At one point Eritrea suspended their contract and a new agreement had to be drawn up. But according to latest reports from the company, they are "now more than halfway through building Eritrea's first mine, on schedule to commission the gold-silver-copper-zinc operation before the end of the year. The company began pre-strip mining in March at Bisha, about 250 km west of Asmara. The pre-strip is expected to take six months while a hill adjacent to the deposit is partially removed to make room for the open pit. Nevsun expects to start stockpiling ore early in the third quarter." The mine is made up of several layers which contain gold, silver and copper in varying — but very promising and profitable — concentrations. The initial projections are that the mine will produce for at least ten years. The company has other mining operations underway in the area and is one of the rare foreign companies with a contract to work on a profit-making project in Eritrea.

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Fiftieth Anniversary

Posted on [May 10, 2010](#) by [bhillenbrand](#) | [3 comments](#)

Lots of ideas, few firm plans

September 2011 will mark the fiftieth anniversary of Peace Corps. Plans are slowly — very slowly — taking form

Everyone agrees that next year's Fiftieth Anniversary of the founding of Peace Corps is going to be a big deal. Or at least it should be. The problem is that no one is quite sure what sort of commemorative events will take place. We at the HERALD would love to share with you a timetable of events, but no such schedule exists yet. Both [Peace Corps](#) and the [National Peace Corps Association](#) have web pages devoted to the Fiftieth, but they contain very little information

on events that are firmly scheduled. Nor is it particularly clear what role — if any — returned Volunteers will play in the plans being devised by Peace Corps and the NPCA.

For those among us who like to plan way, way ahead, mark the weekend of September 25 on your 2011 calendar. The place: Washington, D.C. That's more or less fifty years from September 21, 1961, the date on which Congress passed the Act that formally created Peace Corps and the date used as Peace Corps' official birthday.

What will await us in Washington in September 2011 is still very much a work in progress. Peace Corps professes to be committed to making the most out of the anniversary. They see it as an opportunity to remind America that Peace Corps is still alive and well and that Volunteers are still serving around the world. They want to gin up enthusiasm for Peace Corps in Congress. Raise awareness, as they put it. The Anniversary hoopla, they say, will also help with recruiting. In a recent conversation with **Linda Berghold** (Addis 62–64) new Peace Corps Director Aaron Williams (Dominican Republic 1967–70) expressed great anticipation about the upcoming celebration of the Peace Corps' 50th year. Linda says that "Williams hopes to celebrate the Peace Corps, not just by giving us a pat on the back for past accomplishments, but by highlighting what the Peace Corps experience continues to bring back to our nation, our communities and our families."

It seems to us that there is something of a disconnect between RPCVs and the planners at Peace Corps and NPCA. Many RPCVs see the Fiftieth Anniversary as a chance to get together to reminisce about their service, celebrate their accomplishments, and re-connect with long lost colleagues. RPCVs are seldom known to pass up an excuse for a good party. The brass at Peace Corps and NPCA see the anniversary as a fund-raising and consciousness-enhancing opportunity. It's not that RPCVs are disinterested in expanding Peace Corps. The work of RPCV groups like [Push for Peace Corps](#) have been key in getting more funds from Congress and supporting Peace Corps expansion. Many RPCVs are active in their communities continuing their work to further international understanding. Still, an opportunity for a good party and a bit of sentimental commemoration also seems worthwhile.

So for the moment we are all awaiting some announcements from Peace Corps — and the NPCA — about their plans for the big weekend. We are told plans are being finalized, which in Washington-speak means they are being vetted by lawyers. Peace Corps has apparently reserved the National Mall for that September weekend. Prior to Aaron Williams becoming Director, Peace Corps was all atwitter about throwing a massive cultural jamboree on the Mall, sort of National Geographic folk fair meets American volunteerism. But that idea seems to have faded. Peace Corps is having second thoughts about spending money from its newly increased budget, hard-won from Congress, on a party on the Mall. Private funding is a possibility (NPCA already has a "partnership" with Geiko on its Fiftieth Anniversary website urging RPCVs to click for a free insurance quote).

For the moment it seems that neither Peace Corps or NPCA will be sponsoring a conference or a headquarters hotel. No central meeting is planned. There is talk of a gala (read: costly) dinner on Saturday night, September 26, and perhaps some arrangements with various embassies to throw receptions or dinners. And, of course, a Sunday morning walk across Memorial Bridge to Arlington Cemetery to visit JFK's grave.

So it seems that it will be up to country-of-service groups — like E&E RPCVs — to make many of their own arrangements for the weekend. Historically, the largest number of attendees at RPCV conferences has been from E&E RPCVs — and we expect similar participation in 2011 since we have been receiving queries about "the 50th" for several years now. We plan to have the kinds of events we have presented in the past — updates about Ethiopia and Eritrea managed by **Shlomo Bachrach** (Staff 66–68), casual social gatherings, and an injera & wat dinner. A few of us have already begun making some inquiries about hotels and meeting places so that we will have a place to stay and get together. Any suggestions, ideas, or help in such a project is welcome. Please contact Marian Beil at marian@haleybeil.com or send a note to the HERALD at herald.editor@ethiopiaeritrearpcvs.org.

Other celebrations

Despite the lack of plans coming from NPCA and Peace Corps, some projects have gotten off the ground. Universities that hosted Peace Corps training projects are planning commemorations and displays. For example UCLA, where several Ethiopia groups trained, is planning an exhibition and celebration that may take place in March of 2011. Several big events are scheduled for the [University of Michigan](#) in October. President Obama worked a mention of Peace Corps in the [commencement address](#) he delivered in Ann Arbor on May first. Several projects to collect archival material are underway, including [one](#) sponsored by Peace Corps.

We are sure other projects are underway and if you hear of them please let us know. And we, for our part, will keep you informed of what grand events Peace Corps intends to stage, when, at last, those plans are announced. *BRH*

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3 Comments

Reminiscences

Posted on [May 10, 2010](#) by [bhillenbrand](#) | [2 comments](#)

A tale of two lives in Eritrea/Ethiopia

From Kagnew Post as a military dependent to Dembi Dollo as a PCV

by *Ginger (Mary) Kayton Hajoglou (Dembi Dollo 72-74)*

1962

How could Africa be so cold? That was my first impression upon landing in Asmara, Eritrea, in November of 1962. I was 12. My family and I were accompanying my father to a military base for the next three years. For three months we lived in the Hamasien Hotel waiting for our household goods — including a red Chevrolet.

My father, who was a nonconformist when it came to living on Kagnew Post, chose to rent us a house “on the economy” in the Casa Bunda area in town. We had Tigrinian neighbors on one side and Greek neighbors up the hill. We soon had friendly relationships with both. I attended a DOD school on post. We all loved living in Africa and made many trips to Massawa, Karen, and other local spots. I used to walk alone over a mile to school through the poorest of poor neighborhoods and I always felt safe. I don’t think my parents knew I walked.

There were two major events that happened while we were there. First, Eritrea became part of Ethiopia. My father was put on alert to be ready to flee at a moment’s notice if there was violence. However, it was all very peaceful. The second was the assassination of President Kennedy. We joined the world in grieving.

Two other events stand out in my mind as well. The very first Peace Corps Volunteers came to visit our school to talk about their experiences and the work they were doing. I don’t remember any names, but perhaps they remember us. Second, one year the Army spared no expense in importing fireworks for a Fourth of July display for the military families. However, no one bothered to tell the town what was going to happen! The morning after the grand show, we discovered many Eritrean families had fled the town thinking the post was under attack. I could go on and on with memories, but to sum it up, I cherish my time in Asmara with all the wonders it had to offer.

1972

Let's fast forward to 1972. Here I am in Ethiopia again, but now as a Peace Corps Volunteer, sworn in and everything. There were 120 of us in my training group, but half didn't make it to a second year. I trained in Shashamanie with one group, and the others, further south. Our trainers were wonderful and thanks to them my Amharic was passable. It was quite the experience since we were rewarded for not going to Addis on our days off; we were encouraged to live locally and visit local areas of interest. I don't think the Peace Corps was quite ready for us though as I received a first aid kit with some band aids and a thermometer!

I lived in Dembi Dollo, Wollega, far to the West of Addis. The Amharic I worked so hard to learn was useful in town, but most people spoke Galligna so I learned the essentials of a third language. I flew in and out of Addis and Dembi since there were rocky roads in the dry season and no roads in the rainy season. It was a place of plenty, especially compared with the east of the country that was suffering from drought. Because of my status as a "Peace Corpse," I had wonderful interactions with the town leaders including an Araja Governor. There was a large Italian and Greek community with which I became very close, as well as my fellow teachers. I lived through a strike by students that resulted in gun fire and injuries. There was no school for three months, though the teachers showed up everyday and signed in. Once it calmed down, life went on as usual.

My two years ended in a boom. Haile Selassie's government was overturned; and I was in Addis the day he was transported to jail. Nothing was the same after that.

Peace Corps promised "the toughest job you'll ever love" and it delivered.

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2 Comments

Historical Notes

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The Land of Punt update

New research confirms that the ancient Land of Punt was located in Ethiopia. But the HERALD told you that two months ago. Still the new details are fascinating

In March the HERALD ran an [article](#) by old Peace Corps friend Jon Kalb suggesting that the Land of Punt, mentioned in ancient Egyptian texts, may well have been Ethiopia. Now an article in the British newspaper The Independent, says that new research on — of all things — baboon mummies long stored in the British Museum also shows that Punt may have been Ethiopia. Several ancient Egyptian texts record trade voyages to the Land of Punt, dating up until the end of the New Kingdom, 3,000 years ago. But scholars did not know where Punt was. Ancient texts offer only vague allusions to its location and no 'Puntite' civilization has been discovered. Somalia, Ethiopia, Yemen and even Mozambique have all been offered as possible locations.

However, new research claims to prove that it was located in Eritrea/East Ethiopia. Live baboons were among the goods that the Egyptians got from Punt, and a research team have been studying baboon mummies in the British Museum, and by analyzing hairs from these baboons using oxygen isotope analysis, they were able to work out where



GHOST OF THE BABOON
MUMMY: Made in Ethiopia

they originated. Working on a baboon discovered in the Valley of the Kings, the researchers compared the oxygen isotope values in the ancient baboons to those found in their modern day brethren. The isotope values in baboons in Somalia, Yemen and Mozambique did not match, but those in Eritrea and Eastern Ethiopia were closely matched. The team concluded that “Punt is a sort of circumscribed region that includes eastern Ethiopia and all of Eritrea.”

The team also thinks that they may have discovered the location of the harbor that the Egyptians used to export the baboons and other goods back to Egypt. One member of the team, Professor Nathaniel Dominy of The University of California, Santa Cruz, points to an area just outside the modern city of Massawa: “We have a specimen from that same harbor and that specimen is a very good match to the mummy.” So Jon Kalb seems to be on the right track. And you read it first in the HERALD.

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