

Fiftieth Anniversary

Posted on [October 26, 2010](#) by [bhillenbrand](#) | [10 comments](#)

More progress on planning for Peace Corps 50th Anniversary

Here are some more details on the Washington Celebrations

By **Barry Hillenbrand (Debre Marcos 63–65)**

THE PLANNING FOR THE SEPTEMBER 23–25, 2011 Peace Corps 50th Anniversary party in Washington has been, well, a bit fragmented. Should this be a surprise? No. After all, in Peace Corps, nothing comes easily. Smooth is not in the vocabulary, not even in this no-drama presidency. You may have noticed that it is really hard to tell what is going on. If you tap into the Peace Corps [website](#) looking for information about the 50th, you'll find a lot of enthusiasm for the historic event, but not much detail about what — if anything — Peace Corps is planning for that celebratory weekend. Much the same is true of the newly revised [website](#) of National Peace Corps Association which sports a rough calendar of events and a message board, both of which are helpful. Local groups and country-of-service groups are posting some of their activities on the site. But many of the events listed will take place outside of the September 2011 window in Washington. And many are not sponsored by NPCA or Peace Corps. So it is not surprising that I keep getting emails from E&E RPCV friends asking: what's happening? Fear not. Don't cancel your plane reservations — in fact, get ready to make them if you haven't. E&E RPCVs president **Marian Beil** (Debre Berhan 62–64) has been working to make sure that there will be plenty of activities for our RPCVs on the calendar in September. **Gigi Ott Wietecha** (Makele, Dessie 63–65) and **Judy and Dane Smith** (Asmara 63–65) have been schlepping around Washington in search of the perfect headquarters hotel and for a venue for a grand injera and wat banquet. The anniversary celebrations for E&E RPCVs are firming up nicely.



Washington, September 2011: here we come

THE HOTEL

For starters, we have locked in a wonderful hotel as the headquarters for E&E RPCVs. We've blocked off rooms at the [Crystal City Marriott](#) at National Airport in Virginia, a extremely nice hotel one Metro stop from Reagan National



The Marriott Crystal City: great rooms, fabulous bar, indoor pool, great transport

airport and just a three Metro stops from the National Mall and four from the Smithsonian. This is a great location. Okay, it is not quite as good as being in a downtown D.C. hotel, but the Crystal City Marriott is offering us a rate for truly fine rooms that can't be matched in the District — which is known for the high hotel rates it squeezes out of visitors. We have 100 rooms set aside for Friday and Saturday night at \$109 a night. We have also reserved a meeting room and a hospitality suite where we can gather casually, both at very good rates .

The hotel is walking distance to scores of shops and restaurants, including — get this! — **Harar Messob**, a good Ethiopian restaurant with a charming owner from Harar who is eager to greet old PCVs. The Metro entrance for trains to the District and all points in the Washington area is right downstairs in the hotel. The

hotel has an indoor pool perfect for group parties.



Yes, of course, we tested the doro wat and kitfo at the Harar Messob. Terrific.

THE SCHEDULE

Here's the schedule as we see it firming up:

Friday, September 23, 2011 Evening: An injeria and wat dinner at the



Ethiopian Embassy

Ethiopian Embassy for E&E RPCVs. Dane and Judy Smith have started working on the arrangements for this.

Saturday, September 24, 2011 Morning: a general meeting of all E&E RPCVs at the Crystal City Marriott for a country update, memorials, and get together. We are wide open to suggestions of possible speakers or activities for this event. Send your suggestions to Shlomo Bachrach — shlomo@eastafrikaforum.net — who is handling the country update part of the program or Leo Cecchini — leo@cecchini.org — who is doing so for the group update portion. *Afternoon:* Time for individual training groups to meet. Start contacting training-group friends now and begin to

plan your own mini reunion. If you would like a copy of the contact information E&E RPCVs has for members of your group, email Marian Beil at marian@haleybeil.com *Evening:* NPCA is planning what they are calling a “gala” which probably means a pricey banquet with heavy duty speakers at a central D.C. hotel. Some people may prefer to organize less expensive outings.

Sunday, September 25

Morning: the Washington D.C. RPCV [group](#) is planning the traditional visit to JFK's grave at Arlington Cemetery, a march across the Potomac with country of service flags, and a rally at the Arlington Cemetery amphitheatre or on the

Mall – or both.

SO WHAT'S PEACE CORPS DOING?

Not much, as it turns out. At a meeting of NPCA group leaders this summer, a Peace Corps official said that “If you folks throw parties [for the 50th anniversary] we will be attend. But we aren’t going to be sponsoring big blow outs.” The problem, she explained, is that Peace Corps can not afford, financially or politically, to spend money on big parties, gala events or even large scale conferences such as the one it helped sponsor a few years ago in Chicago. Recently Peace Corps successfully lobbied Congress for more funds for expanding programs, and it is not about to bring down the wrath of a congressional hearing by spending that hard won cash on celebrations, even one as worthy as the 50th anniversary. Peace Corps is not ignoring the 50th, of course. They are wringing as much publicity out it as they can. But they are letting others do much of the heavy lifting. So Peace Corps is joining with various universities like the University of Michigan, <http://www.peacecorps.umich.edu/events.html>, and the University of Wisconsin. Peace Corps is also working with the Smithsonian (which is paying the bills) to join in on the Smithsonian’s annual Folklife Festival on the Mall in August. But otherwise. Not much else. This has led our good colleague John Coyne to correctly kvetch over and over again on the excellent Peace Corps Worldwide [blog](#) that Peace Corps seems to lack imagination in marking this important milestone in our history.



John Kennedy's grave

HOW ABOUT THE NPCA?

The two big items on the NPCA calendar are the gala promised for Saturday night and the march on Sunday which will be organized by the super active Washington D.C. RPCV group. The NPCA is keen on sharing the spotlight with universities and the local RPCV groups. The NPCA is running a data base of activities. It’s not very up-to-date, but it’s a start. And they keep promising more details soon.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO NOW?

First, make your hotel reservation.

You can call:

800-228-9290

for a reservation at the Crystal City Marriott. Be careful to reserve at the right Marriott — the Crystal City Marriott At Reagan National — because the Marriott has a half dozen hotels in the Washington area, all with similar sounding names. Tell them you are with the:

ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA 50

so that you get the preferred \$109 rate. We have only 100 rooms at the preferred rate, so first come, first reserved.

OR

You can reserve online:

1. Go to www.marriott.com/wascc where you will find the home page for the Crystal City Marriott.
2. On the right side of the page is “Check Rates & Availability” (It should have a – in a small box in front of that text. If there is a + inside the box, click on it to get the +.
3. Enter the dates, number of rooms and number of guests you would like to reserve.
4. Several lines below is “Special Rates & Awards” with a + inside a box in front of this text. Click on the + to get a – in the box.
5. Find “Group code” in the list below.
6. Enter PECPECA for our group code.
7. Click the red button “Check Availability”
8. On the new page you will see under the “Special Rates” tab “ETHIOPIA ERITREA 50”
9. Click on the circle in front of “109.00 per night” to select it and more options will appear from which to choose.
10. Once you’ve made these selections, click on the red button “Continue.”
11. Fill in your personal and billing information.
12. Click on the red button “Continue.”
13. Review your registration information.
14. Click on the red button “Complete Reservation.”
15. In about 30 seconds you will receive a “Confirmation Number.” Write it down.
16. You will also receive an email confirmation of your registration.

Second, we’d like to get a list of people planning to attend so that we can organizing programs and such. So please email E&ERPCV Board member **CJ Smith Castagnaro**, (Harar; Debre Zeit; Addis Ababa 65-66, 67-69) at cjsmithc@yahoo.com. CJ has heroically offered to organize the group list. Let her know whether you’ll be attending. She’ll take it from there.

Third, we’d love to hear any ideas you have for activities on this historic weekend. You can add a comment below for all to see — and for us to act upon. You can include ideas in your messages to CJ. or send a message to Marian Beil. We will be needing help organizing this event. So feel free to volunteer — five year rule is hereby waved! — by sending an email to Marian or CJ or leaving a comment below.



Whether in St. Paul, or Chicago or Atlanta or San Diego, E&E RPCVs has always had a great turn out for Peace Corps celebrations — and a great time as well. Our RPCVs have been asking about plans for the 50th for several years and we look forward to enjoying it with each and every one of you.

Posted in [Fiftieth Anniversary](#)

10 Comments

PCVs in Ethiopia

Posted on [October 26, 2010](#) by [bhillenbrand](#) | [1 comment](#)

More details on PCV teachers returning to Ethiopia

Peace Corps is looking for 40 seasoned ESL teachers to work in teacher training projects

by Nancy E. Horn (Addis Ababa 66-68)

DURING MY LAST VISIT to Ethiopia this summer, I met with Nwando Diallo, the Peace Corps Director in Addis Ababa. She was very busy finalizing Peace Corps' agreement with the Ministry of Education to bring over 40 English as Second Language teachers in May 2011. USAID will fund the program initially. The Ministry would love to field 300 ESL teachers, but budget restrictions clearly prevent the deployment of a number of that size at this time.

The plan, subject to further adjustments of course, calls for five Volunteers to be placed at different Teacher Training Colleges. The remainder of the PCVs will go to Cluster Center schools that are not too far from the Training Colleges. Under present arrangements, Ethiopia's more than 35 Teacher Training Colleges take students who have completed 10th grade and pass an entrance exam. Students remain at the Training Colleges for three years, first earning a certificate and then a diploma. After completion of their studies, they are deployed within their own regions.

Cluster Center Schools emerged as the result of over 20 years of USAID-funded work by the Academy for Educational Development to develop a workable process for in-service teacher training. Faculty from Teacher Training Colleges visit the Cluster Center schools to deliver workshops. Under the management of the Woreda Education Office, teachers in surrounding satellite schools attend the workshops. They are expected to return to their respective schools to pass on what they have learned. But because of a number of problems, teachers do not always share what they have learned with their colleagues.

USAID and Peace Corps, working in partnership, hope to overcome this cascading blockage by putting PCVs who are experienced ESL teachers at the Cluster Center Schools to provide guidance and follow-up to the workshops. The PCVs at the Cluster Schools will visit the satellite schools to assist the teachers in delivering workshops in their respective schools.

The Teacher Training Colleges are located in the regional capitals, with very livable surroundings compared to the environments we served in the '60s and '70s. These towns have electricity, running water, and shops that sell just about everything. The locations have a good bus transportation system and both government and private hospitals.

Sound enticing? Recruitment for these positions will soon be taking place. Check out the Peace Corps [Website](#) or stop in to your local Peace Corps recruiting office and find out more. Training, in country only, should begin some time in May, 2011, with PCVs moving into their locations and beginning their work with the start of the school year in September.

Get in touch with me if you would like more information - horn.n@att.net - and then let me twist your arm a bit.

Posted in [PCVs in Ethiopia](#)

1 Comment

News of Ethiopia

Posted on [October 26, 2010](#) by [bhillenbrand](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

Ethiopian News Summary

compiled by [Barry Hillenbrand](#)

THE ETHIOPIAN ELECTION — AND ITS AFTERMATH

In May, Ethiopia held its long anticipated elections. The results were a great disappointment for everyone except for Prime Minister Meles and his ruling party. Ethiopia's 2005 elections were a significant victory for democracy and the opposition politicians who won major victories in the National Assembly and even swept local elections in places like Addis. The result in 2005 were a great shock to Meles and his party members who replied with a crackdown on the opposition and a rebuilding of their own political base into an awesome machine.

The result of all this was that there was no hope of an opposition victory in the 2010 elections. Election observers from the European Union and elsewhere did not report massive ballot box stuffing. Meles' party did not need to do that. Thijs Berman, the EU's chief observer, said election observers had received numerous complaints of violence and harassment. "The sheer volume and consistency of these complaints is a matter of concern," Berman said. He noted that Ethiopia lacked a national voter list. "These shortcomings lead us to the conclusion that this electoral process falls short of certain international commitments," he said. U.S.-based Human Rights Watch also criticized the vote, saying voters were told they could lose food assistance, public-sector jobs, loans and educational opportunities if they voted against the ruling party. [For more details from the BBC and Reuter see: <http://bbc.in/9E3mOK> and <http://bit.ly/9VpFxB>]

When the results were published, Meles won a victory worthy of North Korea or Cuba. Meles' Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front — and its allied parties — won 545 out of the 547 seats in Parliament. Many observers fear that the country is heading back to a single party era for the next five years. Only one seat went to the major opposition grouping, the Ethiopia Federal Democratic Unity Forum, a loss of more than 100 seats from what the opposition held after the 2005 election. And one seat went to an independent candidate, Dr. Ashebir Woldegiorgis, the erstwhile president of the Ethiopian Football Federation. The rest of the seats were taken the government party or their allies.

The United States expressed disappointment — but not condemnation — with pro-incumbent trends leading up to the elections that favored Meles's party. "A number of laws, regulations and procedures implemented since the previous parliamentary elections in 2005 created a clear and decisive advantage for the ruling party throughout the electoral process," said State Department spokesman Philip Crowley. But the U.S. did not condemn the results. Meles rejected criticism of his ruling party's sweep of 99 percent of the announced parliamentary seats and compared the country's political system to that of Sweden and Japan. Right after the election, he noted that in Sweden the socialists ruled for 40 years.



Meles at the G8

In a speech in Ontario to the G8 Summit in August, Meles said, "Ethiopia is not moving towards a single-party system. It can, with some credence, be said that it is a dominant party system, but there is a fundamental distinction between a dominant party system and a single-party system. The democratic system in Japan has been a dominant party system for half a century, but it has not been a single-party system."

As opposed to 2005 when street demonstrations erupted after the elections, the post election period has been calm. Opposition Party objections to the elections went nowhere. The country's biggest opposition coalition demanded a rerun of the election, alleging pre-poll intimidation and some vote rigging. But the National Electoral Board however, rejected

the call, saying the party had no evidence. The Supreme Court backed the Election Board and threw out a case the opposition had mounted asking that the NEB ruling be overturned. End of protest.

Having gained complete political control of the country Meles and his allies moved to improve his image internationally and to ease up on political control. In a major move just days after Meles was sworn in for his fourth five-year term,

Birtukan Mideksa, a charismatic former judge who was sentenced to life in prison after being convicted of provoking demonstrations protesting the government's victory in the last national elections in 2005, was released from prison. Meles could afford to be magnanimous. Birtukan returned to her family's home in Addis Ababa after her release, where residents welcomed her with flowers and jubilant singing. She told journalists she had sought a pardon, but she did not say whether she would resume her political career or challenge the ruling party. "Those issues are for another time and place," she said.



Birtukan

In another important move the government signed a peace agreement with leaders of the Ogaden National Liberation Front which has fought for the eastern region's right to self-determination. This ends the Ogaden Front's 25 year-long insurgency. The agreement includes an amnesty for jailed leaders and members of the group. The group will also turn itself into a legal political group and continue a peaceful struggle. "Our group has come to understand the destructive nature of war and believed war is not the only option to the problem" said Saladin Abdurrahman, a Front official. "The peace agreement is crucial for lasting peace and to bring sustainable development to the Ogaden region."

Thus a certain amount of political peace seems to have descended over Ethiopia. The price for this tranquility, many believe, is extremely high. Human Rights Watch issued a report claiming that the Ethiopian government is using development aid to suppress political dissent by conditioning access to essential government programs on support for the ruling party. Human Rights Watch urged foreign donors to ensure that their aid is used in an accountable and transparent manner and does not support political repression. [To view the full report see: <http://bit.ly/cure2X>]



GREAT PROGRESS — AND PROBLEMS — IN EDUCATION

As Peace Corps plans to once again send teachers to Ethiopia, the United Nations and U.S. Agency for International Development has praised Ethiopia for its progress in education. In the last 15 years, according to a Voice of America report, enrollment in Ethiopia's has exploded. Only 20 to 25 percent of school aged children attended school 15 years ago. Nowadays nearly 90 percent of youngsters go to school. Of course, dropout rates are unacceptably high and the quality of instruction is very uneven. The full story from VOA is at <http://bit.ly/doCyaG>



ETHIOPIAN RUNNERS IN THE OLD STYLE

Jeré Longman of the New York Times has spent a lifetime covering the Olympics and those sports, like track and field, that are ignored on most sports pages. Recently Longman went back to writing about Ethiopian running. He did a lovely feature on Haile Gebrselassie who will be running in the New York Marathon on November 7. Jeré not only

looks at Gebreselassie, but the running system Ethioia has created. [See the full and excellent NYTimes story at <http://bit.ly/aXRZak>]



DAM PROBLEM

We all remember from the few hours of generator electricity we had every night back when we were PCVs that power is a development problem. In Ethiopia where only 2% of the rural population has regular electric power, the government is working to solve this by building dams. But the dams cause environmental problems. One of Ethiopia's — and Africa's — biggest dam projects is the Gibe 3 dam on the Omo river, south of Addis, currently being built and financed by the Chinese. Because of the dislocation of people in valleys, international opposition to the dam is mounting. [For more details see: <http://bit.ly/9oX2bX> and for a different view and set of facts, see: <http://bit.ly/9NyH9V>]



ADOPTIONS OF ETHIOPIAN CHILDREN INCREASE DRAMATICALLY

While Americans are adopting fewer children from overseas, adoptions of Ethiopian children have nonetheless steadily increased in recent years. Soon Ethiopia may surpass China as the top sources of adopted babies for Americans. In 2004, the peak year of American foreign adoptions, 284 Ethiopians were among the 22,990 children adopted from overseas. In fiscal 2010, the total number of foreign adoptions dropped to 11,000, but Ethiopia's share was around 2,500. [For more details <http://bit.ly/dDxbRn>]



FREE SPEAKING PM

Once the election was over, Prime Minister Meles resumed his world travels where he worked the crowds as a representative of not only Ethiopia but of all of Africa as well. He was at the G8 in Canada speaking for Africa. Some think he is not the proper person to represent the continent, [For an interesting analysis of that view from Britain see: <http://bit.ly/cNcv1o>] He came to New York for the UN opening and then took on an audience of students at Columbia University for a very lively give and take. [for details see the Columbia Spectator report on the meeting at: <http://bit.ly/cFaTCS>] And he also ruffled some establishment feathers at the Seventh African Development Forum where Meles said that November's climate conference in Cancun, Mexico, "will be a total fraud." Jens Stoltenberg, Prime Minister of Norway; Jean Ping, chairperson of the African Union Commission; Festus Mogae, former president of Botswana and Donald Kaberuka, President of the African Development Bank, appeared stunned by Mr Zenawi's words. The thousand strong audience however clapped in support of the frank assessment. [For more on Meles clear speaking see: <http://bit.ly/9AGoIi>]





LAND RUSH

One of the most remarkable developments in Ethiopia land development in the last year has been the sale of large parcels of farm land to foreign companies. The government's plan is for these foreign companies to import equipment and capital to develop the land and get it to produce crops for export. Indian companies seem especially eager to buy Ethiopian land. For details on a recent purchase of 10,000 hectares in Gambella see: <http://bit.ly/d3S6Nm> or check out what Punjabi potato farmers think of Ethiopian farm land at <http://bit.ly/aeayId>.

Posted in [News of Ethiopia](#)

[Leave a comment](#)

News of Eritrea

Posted on [October 26, 2010](#) by [bhillenbrand](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

Eritrean News Summary

Compiled by [Barry Hillenbrand](#)

DIVISIONS WITHIN ERITREAN DIASPORA

Battles within the Eritrean community here in the U.S. and in Europe are deepening. Some Eritreans complain that they are under pressure by agents of the Eritrean government to send money back to Eritrea to support the regime in Asmara. They also claim that these agents of the government generate support for demonstrations against United Nations sanctions against Asmara.

Those in the Diaspora who are opposed to the government of President Isaias Afwerki have recently held counter demonstrations in the U.S. and Europe. [For more see: <http://www.afrol.com/articles/36196>]



Demonstration in Washington D.C.



FORCED MILITARY SERVICE

One of the continuing sources of discontent in Eritrea is that students are forced into military service directly from secondary school. For many the military service is never ending. This service is frequently mentioned as the reason many young men flee Eritrea. [For a good NYTimes story on those who flee see: <http://nyti.ms/c24Nxp>] In May the United Nations Human Right Commission issued a report examining the conditions at the Sawa Military Camp where 12th grade students are frequently sent. It's scary reading. [For the full report see: <http://bit.ly/cOqvUP>]



ERITREA-DJIBOUTI DEAL

Eritrea has lots of problems with its neighbors. Ethiopia and Eritrea are facing off over their long-term border dispute. But Eritrea also has had problems with Djibouti which broke out into some pitched battles in 2008. In a surprise move, however, Eritrea announced that it had agreed to Qatar's mediation efforts to resolve their festering border dispute with Djibouti. [For more details see: <http://bit.ly/d7mouS>]



OPPS. DEAD LAST ON THAT LIST. AGAIN.

Each year Reporters without Borders publishes its Freedom of the Press list that ranks the world's press, from best to worst, in this category. On the recently published list Finland is number one. Although China works harder and spends more money on controlling the media — including the Internet — than anyone, the People's Republic is not the world's worst offender when it comes to media oppression. That honor — or dishonor — goes to Eritrea which comes in as 178. North Korea is runner up for worst at 177. China is 171. Ethiopia places slightly better than Eritrea at 139, nestled between Turkey and Russia.

Says the Reporters without Borders report:

Eritrea (178th) is at the very bottom of the world ranking for the fourth year running. At least 30 journalists and four media contributors are held incommunicado in the most appalling conditions, without right to a trial and without any information emerging about their situation. Journalists employed by the state media — the only kind of media tolerated — have to choose between obeying the information ministry's orders or trying to flee the country. The foreign media are not welcome. “

[For more see: <http://bit.ly/bE35Z1>]



ISAIAS AFWERKI INTERVIEW

President Isaias of Eritrea is not your typical autocrat. While he and his party have very tight control over the country, he does not lock himself up in the Presidential Palace with no contact with the outside world in the style of, say, North Korean leaders. No, Isaias, oddly enough, sits down for press interviews with visiting — but carefully selected — foreign journalists. Recently a Swedish journalist, Donald Bostrom, visited Asmara and talked with Isaias, and then conducted a call-in radio-style interview with questions from what seem to be common folks in Sweden. While the machine translation by Google is a bit dicey, the answers are rather interesting because, despite everything, Isaias is a very interesting and intelligent man. [You can read the interview at: <http://bit.ly/bSjKwI>]



President Isaias and Swedish journalist

Projects

Posted on [October 26, 2010](#) by [bhillenbrand](#) | [2 comments](#)

An Enduring Legacy

How my 1960s Peace Corps experience led to work for those fleeing the repression and the cruelties of their homeland

By **John G. Stauffer** (Adi Kayieh 66–68)



John Stauffer channelling Tom Hanks in Adi Caieh

DURING MY TWO YEARS TEACHING 6th and 7th grade science at the Lorenzo Tazaz Jr. Secondary School in Adi Kayieh in Eritrea, I got to know a 7th grader named Berhane — an excellent student with an endearing, sterling personality. I tutored him, and he and his cousin were our houseboys for our household during our second year.

One day walking to school together, I suggested, in passing, that he might come to America some day.

All in all, time in Eritrea was a fine experience. I grew to like the people deeply, and knew



Berhane — front right

then that this assignment was going to have a significant impact on me as well as on the Eritreans who accepted me. Little did I know how much this was to be. Upon returning to the United States, I gave “travelogue” slide shows about the experience. I started a 38-year career with a chemical company in Philadelphia. Except for an occasional chance meeting with an Eritrean cab driver whom I would entertain with a smattering of Tigrinya, Eritrea was pretty much out of mind for me. News of Eritrean independence reached me, and membership in the U.N., but still, it was with a reaction of “that’s nice.”

Then, in 2002, out of the blue, I began receiving calls from former Eritrean students, now successful and living in North America. They just wanted to catch up a little bit. At one point, I was told that Berhane, still in Eritrea, wanted to hear from me. I was able to connect with him, exchanging e-mails and later, phone calls. I invited Berhane to come to Pennsylvania and provided a round trip business class plane ticket. The return ticket was for 6 months hence.

He never used it.

After his arrival at my home, Berhane made trips around the US to visit friends who had resettled here. He applied for political asylum, which was soon granted. It was then that I learned the horrible fate that had befallen most of the people of Eritrea at the hands of the brutal regime that had taken control upon independence. The list of ongoing



Berhane and family in the U.S.

transgressions includes endless military conscription and government work starting right after high school, the suppression of the freedom of speech and religion, the threat of death for those attempting to leave the country without permission. The situation is so acute that hundreds of thousands of Eritreans have fled the country. Many now are living in subsistence refugee camps in Ethiopia and the Sudan.

Being a loyal person at heart, I agreed with Berhane that we should not rest until the horrible situation in Eritrea is relieved. So we got together with an Eritrean American living in Ohio and a couple of Americans living near me to form an organization we called The America Team for Freedom for Eritrea. Our goals were to create awareness particularly in the U.S. Government and human rights organizations, of the situation facing Eritreans. We also encouraged unity among the disparate Eritrean opposition organizations. We provided information about current events to the Eritrean Diaspora through our web site.

After several years, we added attention to Eritrean refugees to our objectives. With help from my church, we sent the team member from Ohio to Shimelba Refugee Camp in northern Ethiopia, to deliver some cash assistance and establish a relationship with the camp. We devoted attention to the needy refugees hosted in Ethiopia who at the time were not permitted to work. Aid agencies and refugees alike agreed that providing scholarships and study opportunities for refugees to study in Ethiopia would provide hope for them. Studying would allow them to move their lives ahead once they resettled in a place where they could be employed. With help from the UNHCR — the UN refugee agency — we distributed applications in two refugee camps for scholarships in medical-related studies. We had 350 applications, and ended up sending 35 students to college in Addis Ababa, in September, 2009.

In August of 2008 the U.S. Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration designated all of the more than 6,000 refugees in Shimelba Camp as candidates for resettlement in the U.S.A. They began arriving in late 2008. Our team organized to welcome them. We provided clothing, blankets, kitchenware, toys and food. We helped refugees to deal with issues with the agencies responsible for their initial resettlement. Perhaps 3,000 Eritrean refugees will arrive in the U.S. in 2010.

In 2009, we wrote a 75-page Tigrinya-English Picture Dictionary for new refugee immigrants with basic words illustrated and given in both Tigrinya and English.

By January, 2010, the Team had decided that it could not continue doing both political activism as an opposition group and its humanitarian support for Eritrean refugees. The group reorganized to be 100% humanitarian. We renamed the group The America Team for Displaced Eritreans and launched our website as EritreanRefugees.org.

We limit content to information and resources pertaining to Eritrean refugees. We also publish news about Eritrea. We recruited six Eritreans and one American to join the board of directors. The IRS granted us 501(c)(3) public charity status.

We are always in need of funding to continue our program of scholarships in Addis Ababa and of assistance to new refugee/ immigrants coming to the U.S. RPCVs interested in helping the Team's effort should visit our web site at www.EritreanRefugees.org. Donations, of course, are needed and most welcome.



John Stauffer with Eritrean refugees

Posted in [RPCV Projects](#)

2 Comments

Books

Posted on [October 26, 2010](#) by [bhillenbrand](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

A journey of discovery

When an adopted Eritrean orphan returns to her homeland her experiences are remarkably similar to those of a PCV arriving in-country for the first time

[My Fathers' Daughter](#)

[A Story of Family and Belonging](#)

by Hannah Pool

Free Press, Simon & Schuster 2005

\$25.00

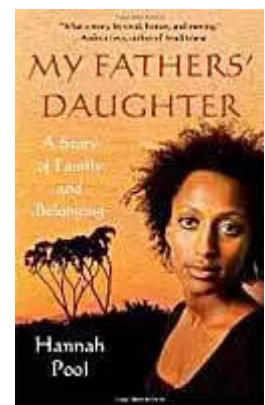
Reviewed by Mary Schultz (Asmara 65-67)

HANNAH POOL WAS BORN IN ERITREA was born in Eritrea in 1974. She was adopted after her mother died in childbirth. She grew up in Manchester, England, believing she was an orphan. As a young adult she discovers that her father and her family live in Eritrea, and she decides to visit them.

My Fathers' Daughter is the story of Hannah's visit to Eritrea, of meeting her family, and eventually visiting the village, and the house, in which she was born. She sees the bed where her mother died.

As she travels to Eritrea from England via Germany, she meets Eritreans who cannot understand that she does not speak Tigrinya, a soldier who cannot understand why she has a passport instead of an ID card.

Hannah is a journalist, and her writing is wonderful. I felt like a visitor to the villages as I saw her meet her family and their homes for the first time, understood her stomach ills from the food, heard her brother tell her that her father



said her skirt was too short. I especially enjoyed her descriptions of the “rickety blue buses [. . . of] ancient Italian stock,” because I rode on those buses in 1966.

Hannah is as amazed at some facts of life in Eritrea, as I was as a Peace Corps Volunteer. When she asks her brother how far it is to her sister’s house, he answers, “They have a good house and they have enough food.”

“Does he mean just enough?” she asks herself. “Surely if he meant more than enough then that’s what he’d say. . . . ‘Enough food’ is not a phrase I have ever used with regard to a person’s wealth or quality of life. . . . [I]t is a meaningless yardstick to me. People talk about not having ‘enough space,’ ‘enough money,’ ‘enough holidays,’ but never ‘enough food.’”

The plural use of “fathers” in the title refers to her two fathers, her birth father and her adoptive father. Her adoptive father raised her, as her adoptive mother died when she was a young child. Her birth father has much influence on how she sees her birth country and village, and how she interacts with her other newly found family members.

This is a short autobiography of 277 small pages. The book is of interest not only to those who have spent time in Eritrea, but also to adoptees and adoptive parents.

Click on the book cover or the bold book title to order from Amazon where it is \$16.50 and Ethiopia & Eritrea RPCVs, an Amazon Associate, will receive a small remittance.

Posted in [Reviewed: Books, movies, etc.](#)

[Leave a comment](#)

Reminiscences

Posted on [October 26, 2010](#) by [bhillenbrand](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

Ethiopia Before

On the road of forty years a donkey

cries, lamenting his load of

eucalyptus leaves for the cooking

fires of Addis, and in the not-yet light, slumps

and dies. Even so, he’s whipped by

an Oromo, whose wife has just

stillborn their eighth child.

Rise with me now, from the dust
on the road to see herds and
huts and then one house, where, safe
behind walls set with broken glass, a ferengi
yawns and longs for his thesis on Yeats.
At night the stars hang closer than
his ceiling at home. They do it
With altitudes, he says, and forgets.
But eucalyptus ghosts will
waft along his road, riding death
tanks past the donkey.

— Benjamin H. Thomas (Addis 62–64)

Posted in [Reminiscences](#)

[Leave a comment](#)