

The Herald

News for those who served with the Peace Corps in Eritrea and Ethiopia.

MONTHLY ARCHIVES: MAY 2012

Editor's Note

Posted on [May 22, 2012](#) by [janetlee](#) | [8 comments](#)

by **Janet Lee (Emdeber 74-76)**

This is the first issue of *The Herald* completely under my helm. Once again, I express great thanks and appreciation to Barry Hillenbrand for his dedication and years of service and his confidence in me as an editor and writer. His will be big shoes to fill, but will be made much easier by the patience and guidance of Marian Beil, our stalwart president. It has also made easier by the number of Volunteers who came forth and volunteered with articles, suggestions for articles, suggestions of authors, books to review, or willingness to review a book. *The Herald* belongs to all of us. It just needs a few people to tie it all together. Please keep the ideas coming.

I have long admired the dedication of Gloria Curtis (Asmara 63-65) who has continued volunteering and being of service to Ethiopia through the Denver Sister Cities Initiative and its partnership with Axum. Others may want to follow suit and investigate ways in which their hometowns may become involved in like partnerships.

Many of us have had an opportunity to return to Ethiopia and to our town or village and search out our old home or school. Linda Seal (Debra Berhan, Asmara 1964-66) had such a chance and reflects on the changes that she witnessed on her journey back in *Home Again*.

I have been "lurking" on a couple of Facebook Groups, one for current Volunteers and one for the incoming group that will be traveling to Ethiopia in June. The current Volunteers, experienced all, use Facebook to share work-related materials, make hotel arrangements for the big run in Awassa, pass on favorite DVDs and reading material, or share extra socks and toothbrushes from caring family members. The incoming Volunteers use their group to introduce themselves and seek advice from the more experienced Volunteers on what to pack: skirts or pants? Contact lenses? Shoes or boots? Laptop or netbook? They cannot contain their excitement or their fears and the experienced Volunteers have provided them with sage advice through the use of videos (here is my toilet, my shower, my school) and blogs. I came across a blog that illustrated the same joys and frustrations that we all faced during our years of service, well, with the added complications of laptops and cell phones. With permission, we are publishing Jennifer Miller's (Debre Markos, 2011-), *The toughest job you'll ever....love?*

By popular request, Nancy Horn (Ethiopia VII) has summarized the Education and Population Update she presented at the 50th Anniversary Reunion in Washington, DC last September. It is chocked full of valuable information.

We follow with an update from our President, Marian Beil on the RPCV Legacy Program, an ongoing success, and also general news of interest to E & E RPCVs about the upcoming Return to Ethiopia and our very own Facebook Page.

We couldn't let Barry off the hook and reached out to him one last time. He put together some recent news from Ethiopia and Eritrea. I am sure the beer labels will bring back some fond memories.

Finally, my favorite! Book Reviews! Remember that if you click on the book jacket, and purchase the book through Amazon, E&E RPCVs gets a small portion of the sales. And by all means, suggest that your local library purchase these titles for others to read. It is in this way that we keep the books alive — and further the Third Goal.

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Projects

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Gloria Curtis continues her service to Ethiopia with Denver Sister Cities

By Janet Lee, Emdeber (1974-76)

If Gloria Gieseke Curtis (Asmara 63-65) has been described as the “mother hen” of Ethiopia II, perhaps the same could be said about her involvement in [RPCV Colorado](#), and her latest project — the Denver Sister Cities International (DSCI)/Axum partnership. Like so many of us, she answered the call from JFK, “Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.” From the first day of training at UCLA, where she studied Amharic under the legendary Dr. Wolf Leslau (PhD.), Peace Corps has been an integral part of her daily life. She married Don Curtis (India VII 64-66), and their daughter Donna Jean Curtis and her husband Mike Walker (Kazakhstan II 95-97) followed in their tracks.

In the 1970s, Gloria and Don joined a few other RPCVs living in the Denver area and formed the Colorado organization, incorporating it as a non-profit, initiating a newsletter, and frequently serving on the board. It is little wonder that when an opportunity later arose for her to become involved with the Denver Sister Cities International (DSCI) project between Denver and Axum that she jumped at the chance.

Gloria will admit that it is difficult for her to differentiate where Peace Corps ends and Sister Cities begins, so intertwined are these two passions. When she makes presentations about Peace Corps to schools or civic groups, she always ends with Sister Cities; when she makes presentations about Sister Cities, she always begins with her involvement in the Peace Corps.

About Sister Cities

Sister Cities partnerships occur when a community decides to join with a community in another nation to learn about one another and to develop meaningful exchanges. The relationship becomes official with the signing of a formal agreement by the government leaders of the two jurisdictions. In the U.S. there are nearly 2,000 Sister Cities partnerships, and Denver alone can boast of having ten of them including the one with Axum.

DSCI

Axum became a Denver Sister City on January 20, 1995, when Mayor Wellington Webb signed the official proclamation. However, work on developing the relationship began much earlier when Daniel Yohannes, the late City Councilman Hiawatha Davis and others prepared the application. At that time Daniel Yohannes was the Vice Chairman of U.S. Bank. In 2009 he was nominated by President Obama to become the Chief Executive Officer of the [Millennium Challenge Corporation](#), an independent U.S. foreign aid agency that is helping lead the fight against global poverty. His appointment was confirmed by the U.S. Senate on November 20, 2009 and he continues to serve in that position.

Gloria's involvement with DSCI began in 1997 after she and Don made "sentimental reunion" trips to Ethiopia in 1995 and to India in 1996. Upon their return to Denver they joined the Sister City Committees of both Axum, Ethiopia, and Chennai (Madras) India, and over the years they have served on the Board of DSCI in various positions.

Sister City Axum

Although there is great need in Axum, as overall Ethiopia, the DSCI Axum Committee initially has focused its efforts on the overriding concerns of water and sanitation. Like many cities in Colorado, Axum has to deal with the scarcity of water, and it was only natural to bring in experts from Denver Water, the official water company for Denver and the surrounding areas to advise the committee, which has designed a low-cost, low-tech and sustainable water-treatment facility for Axum. In addition to local experts, the City of Denver has provided the Axum Committee with water testing equipment, training, and two pumps.

Gloria's efforts on behalf of DSCI/Axum

One of the main ongoing projects in which Gloria is involved is raising funds for a septic-tank truck and for pumps to clean out latrines throughout the city. Although the program has received a matching grant, additional funds are still needed. To meet this goal Gloria has spearheaded efforts through an annual fund-raising dinner at a local Ethiopian restaurant, and organized a silent auction of necklace and earring sets that she has made herself using beads and Ethiopian Coptic crosses, and other donated items that she has fashioned into creative gift baskets.

In addition to the water and sanitation projects in Axum, DSCI has benefitted from impressive renovation projects at the "City of Axum Park" in Denver. The Denver Parks & Recreation Department received special funds to add picnic pavilions, a wheelchair accessible jogging path, and all new playground equipment and basketball courts to the park.



Gloria was honored to consult with artists and City of Denver Parks personnel to design multi-cultural artwork on the exterior walls of the park's restroom facilities. One wall has colorful Colorado and Ethiopian flags unfurled over each other. Another depicts various sports scenes, including a female Ethiopian runner crossing the finish line. A third wall highlights the importance of coffee in Ethiopia, complete with a woman pouring coffee out of a traditional jebena, the tip of the Ethiopian flag overflowing from the adjoining side. And finally, there is a picture of a street sign in Axum that honors the Sister Cities' partnership. It is written in English and Amharic, and is the sign for "Denver Street," a major thoroughfare in Axum.



During the opening ceremonies of the newly renovated park, Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper welcomed dignitaries from Ethiopia, including Axum Mayor Ato Hagos Grebewahid, to a picnic in the park and the entire neighborhood was invited. Children and youth played cricket and soccer (aka football) and Mexican and Ethiopian



dancers performed traditional dances. Mayor Hickenlooper presented Mayor Hagos with a scale replica of the obelisk that is a prominent feature and tourist attraction in Axum.

One wonders where Gloria gets all of this energy, speaking to schools and clubs, designing jewelry, and putting together gift baskets for the silent auction. If you are ever new to an event in Denver, be it Peace Corps or Sister Cities, and have not yet met Gloria, you will soon find yourself whisked under her wing along with the rest of her brood, welcomed, warmed, and included.

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Journeys

Posted on [May 22, 2012](#) by [janetllee](#) | [2 comments](#)

Home Again . . . a Third Trip to Ethiopia

By Linda Seal (Debra Berhan, Asmara 1964–66)

I'm back from my third trip to Ethiopia, and I'm wondering if you can go home again. I still consider Ethiopia one of my homes because I lived there for four of my first six years out of college. From 1964–1966,

I served in Ethiopia as a Peace Corps Volunteer, and from 1968–1970, I returned as the wife of a foreign service officer. The two years between my periods of living in Ethiopia were spent in Washington D.C., where there were many Peace Corps Volunteers and Ethiopians. There was also a special invitation to the White House lawn to welcome Haile Selassie to America.

For my third trip to Ethiopia, I went back for the month of January 2012. I expected to go home again, but after almost a half-century, I saw many bittersweet changes.

Addis

On my way from the (new) airport, I noticed tall new buildings and also how crowded the streets had become. When I left Addis



Linda in Debre Berhan with two of her students – on the right, Berhanu Mogese

in 1966, the population was 500,000, and now it has grown to several million. The sight of dust devils and the smell of berbere in the air were familiar as was the sharing of the road with cattle, sheep, garis, buses and people, and the overall confusion of who had the right of way. The kindness of the Ethiopian people remained the same, but I did not like being called “ferengi” by the children in the countryside. I did not feel like a foreigner, but I was one, and they knew it.

I looked for places that I recognized and people whom I used to know. I recognized several city squares, but when I found my former house in Addis Abeba, I discovered there was a giant new fence around it. I couldn't even attempt to visit my home in Asmara because of the fighting between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Oh well.

Debre Berhan

I was sure I'd find my house in Debre Berhan, because it was on the main road to Addis. I hadn't traveled more than a few miles out of Addis when I realized that there was a new road. Gone was the bumpy old road and in its place was a new, paved road. But my house in Debre Berhan was no more, having been torn down to make way for the new road. What was once a village is now a city. I had hoped to meet the new Peace Corps Volunteers who were assigned there, but they were in Addis Abeba for training.

The only person I met whom I had known before was an Ethiopian who had married a Canadian teacher and returned to Canada with her. He and I had taught in Asmara, then part of Ethiopia, during my second year of Peace Corps service. Like me, he was visiting Ethiopia for the holidays in 2012.

I looked for a young man named Wondemagegnehu whom I had known in Debre Berhan in 1964. Originally he had been living in our compound as a student, later he became a friend of the family, and had visited us in Asmara and in Washington D.C. During my second trip to Ethiopia in 1968, he had moved back into our compound.

To my dismay and sadness I found out that he had died of yellow fever. However, I was able to meet his family, and found out that both of his children are now teachers.

Comparing the Volunteer experience

One of the delights of this third trip was being able to attend an afternoon of Peace Corps training, through the generosity of Dan Baker, the Acting Director of Peace Corps/Ethiopia. As much as I had enjoyed my ten weeks at UCLA, I think that the Peace Corps is doing a better job of training its Volunteers by having them train in Ethiopia.



Wondemagegnehu's children

I did have an opportunity to spend time with the two Volunteers stationed in Debre Berhan, Tony and Erin Portillo, and even though they had been in Ethiopia only a few months, it seemed to me that they had a better handle on customs and the people than I had after the same amount of time. I would have loved staying with an Ethiopian family when I first arrived in Ethiopia. Many of us early Volunteers formed close relationships with Ethiopians, but we also tended to hang around other Volunteers a lot. Tony and Erin's Peace Corps group is smaller. There were 13 Volunteers in Debre Berhan when I was assigned there, too many, I think, for a small village. That is one of the reasons I chose to teach in Asmara the second year.

While in Asmara no one wanted to speak to me in Amharic, only in Tigrigna, which I did not know. It makes me glad to see in the current Peace Corps training that the Volunteers are being taught the languages spoken in the areas they are serving. Finally, I am pleased to see that the Peace Corps is back in Ethiopia after a short hiatus, still involved in medicine and education.

William J. Clinton Foundation

Another delight of sitting in on the training was learning about the [Clinton Foundation](#) and its desire to hire Peace Corps Volunteers who wished to stay in Ethiopia beyond their two-year commitment. I think that this foundation has learned the lesson to let the local people take credit for whatever good they do. For them to help in the health care area is especially important to me since I just had learned of Wondemagegnehu's death due to yellow fever. I am sure that the Foundation's efforts will save some other lives that otherwise would have been lost. It seemed to me that in the olden days aid to Ethiopia was the type of "taking a lot of credit for giving electric sewing machines to villages without electricity." This is not the Clinton Foundation's way. With experienced Volunteers helping, I'm sure that their aid will get to the right people.

So, home again ????

I still possess the same warm feelings towards Ethiopia, but it is a different Ethiopia than the one I knew. I hold dear the children of my friend who now teach school, and the young woman who shared her family with me and taught me to make wat. I can keep in touch with them by email. The Peace Corps way of training is better now, but I still miss the old Ethiopia.

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2 Comments

PCVs in Ethiopia

Posted on [May 22, 2012](#) by [janetlee](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

The toughest job you'll ever . . . love?

by [Jennifer Miller \(Debre Markos, 2011-\)](#)

Editor's note: Used with permission from her blog [jebenajen.wordpress.com](#)

AS THE FIRST (RETURNING) GROUP of Education Sector PCVs in Ethiopia, G5 (as our group is called) has faced a multitude of hurdles. Some of these obstacles were anticipated, even expected, while others were never even imagined, even (as the saying goes) in our wildest dreams. I don't want to write extensively about the most serious challenges in a public forum such as this, but the time in our site has been an unfolding series of unanticipated *chiggers* (which — parenthetically — include difficult individuals + entrenched institutional/cultural attitudes/beliefs + low professional morale + omnipresent poverty + corrosive forces of corruption + lack of resources).

Chigger (Amharic for problem) + *otch* (plural suffix) = *Chiggerotch*.

Chigger (English for a bug that makes you itch) + *s* (plural suffix) = *Chiggers*.

This past week, some G5ers were in Addis working with Daniel O (our APCD) on “Training, Development and Evaluation” for the next group of Education Peace Corps Trainees (referred to as G7). G7 will be twice as large as our group (we were a group of 35 and they will have 70). They arrive in Ethiopia in one month. We eagerly await their arrival and are doing our best to make their road here in Ethiopia a little less rocky. We aren’t bringing in the Chinese road paving crew, but we are trying to eliminate some of the worst hazards and pothole-sized early morale busters. It will be hard enough for most of them, even with our improvements, especially if they are too idealistic. But how can you be one month away from starting Peace Corps training and NOT BE jazzed up about the adventures you imagine lie ahead, right?

The outline of G7’s training program is now in place and most of the sessions should help prepare them for their work as English Language Teacher Trainers. Apparently, the “teacher trainer” placement here in Ethiopia is different from most Peace Corps/Education assignments internationally because we don’t serve as direct classroom teachers. *Selazi* (therefore), we have an ambiguous role in our communities and it sounds like many of us have struggled (on a daily basis) to establish and maintain our professional working relationships with local constituents.

What are the basic requirements needed to survive in our assigned roles? Personally, having curiosity about humanity in all its complexity, beauty and ugliness has helped. Without an ability to embrace people as we are, sometimes inspirational and other times deeply flawed and incompetent, I could not work as an education PCV in Ethiopia. That may seem obvious, but if you don’t like being surrounded by humans and interacting with them all day, every day, this placement is not for you.

Recently, faculty and teacher’s lounges are places that lend themselves to the inevitable requests from me, the American, for all types of physical resources, which are nonexistent here. I am solid and secure in my role as a “capacity builder” without funding and I don’t want to be viewed as a visiting *farenji* who is here to distribute resources. Laptops are a dream for most primary and CTE teachers — and laptops are simply beyond their reach financially. The average wage earned in country per year is \$390. Teachers are paid very little, with Primary Teachers being the lowest paid of all.

In walks *farenji* Jennifer, the American. I sit down in the teachers’ lounge (after required greeting rituals), get out my laptop and help the school supervisor download pictures and print them out (in black and white) on the office printer for a school program. The supervisor needs more photos, so I take out my digital camera and snap photos of teachers, students, the garden, various science projects. We download these photos and he prints them out in the office, which has the only desktop computer in the whole school.

Everyone was elated to be photographed, and everyone wants to see the photos we just took on my computer. After sharing these photos as well as photos I have from home and travels to Tigray, everyone in the teachers’ lounge wants a camera and a laptop of their own. Completely understandable. I love my camera! I love my laptop! I consider them essential tools for my job and my life. The teachers ask me for these things (such requests are nothing new) and for one moment, I sincerely wish I could be the *farenji* American who hands each and every one of them a camera and a laptop. But what can I do? I am here for capacity building, right? In response to these persistent requests for resources, I get out my cell phone and pretend to dial . . .

“Hello? Hello? Is this the White House? Yes? Oh, great. Can I please speak with Barack? Oh, he’s busy? Can I please speak with Michelle? . . . Thank you. Oh, hello, hello Michelle!! How are you??

Yes? I’m fine, just fine . . . I am here in Ethiopia in Debre Markos working as a Peace Corps Volunteer. . . Yes, it is very nice here, I like it very much . . . So Michelle, I’m just sitting here with some primary school teachers and we were wondering if

you could send us some laptops?

Really? You can? Oh, thank you!! That is wonderful . . . How many laptops do we need? Hmmmm, let me see . . . (I survey the room and count the teachers who are watching me with amusement). . . . We need one, two, three . . . fifteen, sixteen . . . How about twenty? Okay, thank you very much. See you later! Bye!!



Michelle Obama on phone with Jen

At the completion of that dramatization, most teachers were asking me “Who is Michelle?” When I told them she is Barack Obama’s wife, and she is someone who can really get things done, we all had a good laugh. “She is the one who wears the trousers in the family,” I say, knowing that a similar concept of women “wearing the trousers” having authority and power exists in Amharic culture.

The PCV job is tough. One of the toughest assignments I’ve ever had for sure. And difficult to explain to others, though we are all trying to understand why it is so difficult here. I have found that I constantly have to fight for my right to exist as a female with authority and expertise. I have to fight to provide professional “Capacity Building” at my primary assignment (the CTE), which is only difficult because I expected my professional expertise to be welcomed, not ignored. The reasons for my personal struggles are still murky, but the overall picture is becoming more clear with passing time. So I persevere.

Some days I think: So . . . where is the love part of this whole PCV thing? Tough, yes. Love? . . . not today!

And then, two weeks ago, I started to work in the Primary School. It was then and there where the humanity begins to return. How can you not love being kidnapped from the 2nd Grade Teacher by the 1st Grade teacher, who is desperate for you to teach her eager class a song? *So what shall it be? Head, shoulders, knees and toes? Okay then, here we go!!* I catch the looks of pure and innocent joy on the faces of the children, who know these words in English but have never sung this particular song. They are thrilled to sing it first slowly, with actions. Then a second time, a little bit faster. And a third time, even faster!! If you happen to get kidnapped by a 1st grade teacher, just know that the absurd and intense dose of fun you will have inside that classroom teaching a silly little song to enthusiastic youth just might help you find the love you’d been missing at the CTE . . .



Welcoming students

GOOD NEWS: I am happy to share the good news that I was awarded a grant from Minnesota Returned Peace Corps Volunteers for Early Grade Reading Centers! This small grant will make a significant difference in the work I can accomplish over the next year and 3 months. Thank you MNRPCV!!!

OTHER NEWS: I mailed a package of letters to 2nd Graders in Fayetteville, North Carolina. The pen pal idea was very fun and motivating for students here. I read the letters that were crafted at home and only one second grader had the

audacity to ask for a laptop from the kids in the U.S. I had to smile as I wondered which older sibling or parent put that idea into the young man's head, or is he just advanced for his age?

Here is an image from a primary school in Mekelle. It is of a new idea that I'm inspired by: Mobile Pocket Libraries. I DEFINITELY want to make some of these Mobile Pocket Libraries and use them in our primary schools as "Mini-Libraries" and Early Grade Reading Centers. This idea links to the grant I wrote to MNRPCV. To know more about [Library Innovators](#), check out the [Beyond Access](#) link.

Libraries + Access + Books + Ethiopia = Toughest + Job + Love!



A mobile pocket library

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Fiftieth Anniversary

Posted on [May 22, 2012](#) by [janetlee](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

Education & Population Update

A Presentation at the 50th Anniversary Reunion

September 24, 2011

by *Nancy E. Horn, Ph.D. (Addis 66-68)*

NOTE: The data presented in this report were extrapolated from UNDP, UNICEF, World Bank, Government of Ethiopia and USAID documents.

Ethiopia Then and "Now"

When we all responded to President Kennedy's call to join the Peace Corps, Ethiopia was very different from what it is today. In 1966, when the VIIs landed, the population was estimated to be 25 million; when the census was conducted in 2010, the population was estimated at 88 million. Of this population, only 16% is estimated to be urban. The population continues to increase at 3.2% per year, despite a life expectancy of just 55.8 years, and a healthy life expectancy of only 42 years. The fertility rate has dropped from 7 to 5.9 over the past 15 years, while the maternal mortality rate remains high at 720 per 100,000 births. The HIV/AIDS adult infection rate ranges between 2.1% and 9%, depending on the source of the statistics. This pandemic has left an estimated 92,000 children under the age of 15 years (Est. 10.5%) as orphans. Child mortality rates have declined from 216 to 179 per 1,000 live births over the past 15 years. The estimated population of children under the age of 15 is 46.1% or 40.5 million.

Education Then and “Now”

With this huge school-age population, how has the Government of Ethiopia responded to the children’s need for education? Since 1967, enrollment numbers have been as follows:

1967 – 523,024 (Primary 496,334; Secondary 26,690)

1980 – 2.6 mil. (Primary 2.35 million; Secondary 216,876)

2003 – 10.07 mil (Primary 9.3 million; Secondary 725,059)

The Government spending on education in 1980 constituted 10% of the national budget, and by 2002 increased to 14.3%. Interestingly, Afar spent only 1.4% of its regional budget on education, while Oromiya spent 30%. In terms of birr spent per student, primary grades 1-4 received 86 billion birr, in primary grades 5-8, 160 billion birr, and in secondary grades, 283 birr is spent. In the year 2000, household expenditure on children’s education was estimated at 68 billion birr.

Since these numbers were reported, the Government of Ethiopia signed the Education for All (EFA) agreement, abolished primary school fees, and accepted the “avalanche” of children into schools for the first time, a disproportionate percentage of who were females. Although the abolishment of school fees was a direct incentive to send girls to school, the steady increase of girls becoming literate, attending school, marrying and becoming mothers also had an influence.

School attendance is difficult for many with urban children walking up to 2 kms. to school, but rural children (61%) walking between 3 and 5+ kms. each way. While the quality of education continues to improve, the primary completion rate (grade 8) in 2000 was 62.1% for males and 52.1% for females (or 57.1% total). The repetition rate for 1992/93 for primary grades was 11.6%, junior secondary (grades 9-10) was 19.3%, and for senior secondary/preparatory (grades 11 and 12) was 8.5%. In 2001/2002, primary repetition percentages increased to 16.4%, junior secondary increased to 20.8%, but senior secondary decreased to 0.4%. Examination pass rates may be related to repetition rates. In 2001/2, 66.9% passed the 8th grade leaving exam; 58.5% passed the 10th grade exam; and 54.1% passed the 12th grade exam, opening the doors to university for those who passed.

Key to understanding the quality of instruction is the student/teacher ratio. Prior to EFA, each primary teacher was responsible for teaching an average of 72.3 students per class, and secondary teachers an average of 54.2 students. After EFA, these numbers increased significantly, in some cases at the primary level to more than 150 students per class. When EFA was passed, there was an insufficient number of classrooms and teachers to accommodate the “avalanche.” EFA increased the demand for two-shift schools from 44.3% of primary schools and 78.6% of schools to an indeterminate percentage as statistics were not available at the time this report was written. Before EFA, teachers at the primary level taught 24 hours a week, and at the secondary level, 16 hours, but this has also changed.

Educational Structure

If a child were fortunate enough to participate in the total length of the educational process, over the years s/he would attend:

- Pre-School for 2 years (K1 and K2)
- Lower Primary for 4 years, after which s/he would sit a national exam that requires a mark of 50% to pass and continue
- Senior Primary for 4 years, after which s/he would sit the Primary School Certificate Exam
- First Cycle, Secondary for 2 years, after which s/he would sit the General Secondary Education Certificate Exam, which is in English
- Second Cycle/Preparatory for 2 years, after which s/he would sit the Higher Education Entrance Examination

- Higher Education/Diploma for 1-3 years (after 10th or 12th grade exams) (training programs/certificates)
- Higher Education/Undergraduate for 4-5 years

Passing grades differ with each examination.

Issues in Education

Since the Dergue, Ethiopia has been divided into regional states, each of which uses a chosen “mother tongue” as the language of instruction. However, national tests have not caught up with these teaching practices totally. The grade 4 exam is in both Amharic and the mother tongue, the grade 8 exam is in Amharic, and the grades 10 and 12 exams are in English. It was determined that the language of instruction in grades 1-4 would be the mother tongue, after which English would be the language of instruction. However, not all regional states adopted these practices, and in some English becomes the language of instruction only in the 9th grade. A mixture of the mother tongue and Amharic are used up until that time.

While the decision to teach reading, math and other subjects using the mother tongue was based on sound research on learning, the reality of some Ethiopian regional states is that one language may predominate but it is not the “mother tongue” for all. Hence, when non-dominant language speakers come to school, they may still be acquiring math and reading skills through the medium of a foreign language. Moreover, the decision by some regional states to delay switching to English as the medium of instruction creates a significant problem for young people desirous of passing the 10th grade exam, the gateway to a number of professional training programs (such as teaching and nursing).

USAID-funded Projects to Strengthen Education

After the fall of the Dergue in 1991 and the resumption of the United States interest in supporting educational development through USAID projects, USAID launched the Basic Education System Overhaul I and II (BESO) project. Attention was deliberately focused on the following concerns:

- **Teacher Training (Pre-Service Training at Teacher Training Colleges):** Focus was on: Increasing Subject Matter Knowledge through Self-Paced Computer-Based Learning; Creating Instructional AIDS Centers at TTCs to learn how to create Learning Aids from Local Materials; support of women through leadership and networking skill development; Administrative Strengthening through the provision of training to school administrators; and Curriculum Development Skills.
- **Teacher Training (In-Service Training held at Cluster Centers):** BESO created the system of cluster schools – schools in adjacent neighborhoods to TTCs – to bring teachers to a resource center, a Cluster Center, for in-service training on all of the topics addressed above and others. Workshops were facilitated, in general, by faculty of the TTC. Lead teachers of cluster schools came to the Center periodically to be trained in various topics, and then were to return to their schools to cascade what they had learned to their colleagues.
- **Textbook Development (Textbook and Learning Materials Project):** In an effort to address the range of primary education English language needs, this project worked with the Ministry of Education to develop English language textbooks for use in grades 1-8.
- **Girls’ Scholarship Program:** Because so many girls discontinued their education after 8th grade, a scholarship program was established for girls from rural areas to come to more urban areas to attend high school.
- **Community-Government Partnership Program (CGPP):** Under this project, implementers provided a maximum of three grants to primary schools. The schools, in applying, had to state how they were to use their funds; and at the end of the year, they were to write a report and, if they so desired, submit a second application with a plan for the use of the funds. Once a school was designated as a recipient, the first two grants were somewhat “automatic,” but to obtain the third grant, which was up to three times the amount of the first and

second, a more detailed plan had to be submitted. With the funds, schools built classrooms, provided furniture for teachers and students, built separate latrines for girls, created a teacher workroom, brought water into the school campus, and improved the school environment. A key, hugely successful, component was the establishment of Girls' Advisory Committees, convened to consider how girls can be successful students and stay in school until graduation. In evaluating this project, respondents said: "the grant gave us a teaspoonful, but we gave back a shovel-full." Because large numbers of parents and community members were involved, the lessons learned were continued and many communities are still supporting schools, though the project ended.

- **Community-School Partnership Program (CSPP):** This project was, essentially, a continuation of CGPP, with some additions: focus on orphans and vulnerable children (OVC), sanitation and health (provision of water for drinking and washing up), and other related activities to improve the school experience for primary school children.

In most recent years, USAID is implementing an extension to the BESO I and II projects, a project to develop reading materials in the regional states' mother tongues, and development of English textbooks using an English as a Second Language Approach.

USAID has also partnered with **Peace Corps** to support PCVs in teaching English as TTCs and Cluster Centers. The first tranche included 35 teachers in 2011, and the second, this year, will include 70 teachers.

Overcoming Educational Obstacles

EFA created havoc for TTCs as teachers were being trained in learner-centered methods. When the number of students doubled or tripled in primary school classrooms, teachers found it extremely difficult to implement the new methods as there were insufficient facilities and textbooks.

Teacher Training requirements are changing. When BESO I began, students who had passed the 12th grade leaving exam could attend a TTC for one year and earn a teaching certificate. This policy changed as fewer students were joining TTCs. The new policy allowed students with a 10th grade exam pass to attend a TTC for one year and earn a teaching certificate. When it was found that too much subject matter learning needed to be acquired, the MOE determined that teachers had to attend more classes (offered during school holidays) to achieve the equivalent of two more years of training for an active teaching certificate. Moreover, those with 10th grade passes would have to attend TTC for three years to be prepared adequately.

The health of teachers, parents and students also created problems. With a rising number of OVC, teachers were hard pressed to address the needs of the children. Hence, projects had to include an element of how to help these orphans and vulnerable children become successful students. This meant helping them with basic necessities – food, clothing, and housing – so that they could attend school regularly until completion.

Last, the issue of language continues to be a problem, not only for teaching and learning, but also for acquiring basic skills and testing for children to be able to continue their education.

With the current USAID portfolio, and working in partnership with Peace Corps, the US Government is pursuing educational excellence in Ethiopia with the Government of Ethiopia as a full partner in these endeavors.

RPCV Legacy Program

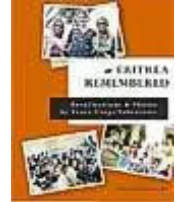
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Eritrea Remembered elicits fond memories of PCVs

PROJECT A GREAT SUCCESS

by Marian Haley Beil (Debre Berhan 62-64)

You may recall that this past winter E&E RPCVs published the book [Eritrea Remembered](#) as an RPCV Legacy Program Project as the result of a suggestion by Scott Rasmussen at the American Embassy in Asmara. (You can read an earlier article about the project [HERE.](#))



The American Embassy subsequently purchased copies of the book to share with Eritreans who have voiced their fond memories of their Peace Corps Volunteers to embassy staff. I have since received three notes from Scott about the book:

3/19

Hi Marian,

I just wanted to drop you a line to let you know the books came – they are beautiful! My staff has each taken a copy to review and they are so impressed with how well the RPCVs speak of Eritrea. We are planning an event with them in early May – we are trying to track down as many former Peace Corps students as we can for the event. I will keep you in the loop on this.

Again, thank you!

Best,

Scott

•

4/2

Hi Marian,

I hope you are doing well. I wanted to let you know that we received the books – they are beautiful! The Embassy had a booth at the Eritrean Book Fair that just wrapped up yesterday and we displayed copies of the book at the booth. We signed up nearly 50 people [for the event] who stopped to look at the book and ask about it. My staff told me “Once people start talking about their Peace Corps memories they just can’t stop!” We are planning our event for the first week of May.

Best,

Scott

•

5/9

Hi Marian,

The event was a HUGE success! We held it last Thursday, May 3. We billed it as the 50th Anniversary of the

Arrival of Peace Corps Volunteers in Eritrea. I offered a few remarks about the Peace Corps, the Peace Corps in Eritrea, and shared some stories from the book. We then distributed copies of the book to the 140 guests who came and then opened the mic for anyone who wanted to stand and share their memories of the Peace Corps. We had 15 people stand up and fill the next hour with their memories about the Peace Corps. One gentleman became emotional saying “They inspired me to be a teacher. I love teaching because of them.” Another gentleman ran to the microphone to get ahead of others coming up and said “I can’t keep quiet!” The participants credited the Peace Corps Volunteers with teaching them English, to be service oriented, and to speak passionately for oneself.

We are receiving more requests for the book — from individuals and libraries. Thank you for all your work on publishing the book. I will try to contact each of the contributors individually — we had several people come up afterward and point to names in the book saying “That was my teacher!” Some of them gave me their contact information and are anxious to reconnect with their teachers.

Thanks again! I first thought of this idea in early Spring 2010 – it was so fulfilling to see it materialize – and all because of you!

Thanks,
Scott

Posted in [RPCV Legacy Program](#)

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E&E RPCVs Group News

Posted on [May 22, 2012](#) by [eerpcv](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

by Marian Haley Beil (Debre Berhan 62–64)

“Return to Ethiopia”

Planning continues for the trip to Ethiopia this fall that starts off with a reception at the Ethiopia Embassy the evening of September 22. The embassy generously invites any RPCVs living in the DC area to the reception. You must RSVP to Russ Misheloff (rmisheloff@comcast.net) if you would like to attend. More details to come later.

If you are hoping to travel with the group that departs on the EAL flight on September 23, you MUST contact Russ Misheloff (rmisheloff@comcast.net) by May 30.

ALL ABOUT THE TRIP

We have a page of many details about the trip that you can access by clicking on “[Return to Ethiopia](#)” that is in the black bar above the photo header of each Herald page.

WHO IS GOING?

You can also see the list of those who have informed the planning committee that they are interested in making the trip. Let your cursor hover over “Return to Ethiopia” in the black bar above and “[Travellers](#)” will appear as a pull-down option. Click on it.

FACEBOOK PAGE

As part of the planning for the trip, E&E RPCVs has finally signed up for a [Facebook page](#). At this time it is primarily being used by travellers to exchange comments, questions and suggestions.

The group will continue use the Facebook page to make timely announcements of interest throughout the year that can't wait to be published in The Herald. Because this page is only for Peace Corps/Ethiopia and Eritrea Volunteers and staff, in order to be able to make post or make comments for our group on the page you must request to become a “friend,” and will subsequently be approved.

Finally a thank you to the Trip Planning Committee for all the work they are doing: Leo Cecchini who is heading up the operation, plus Sue Hoyt Aiken, Steve Cristofar, Nancy Horn and Russ Misheloff.

A follow-up on the Reunion Auction

Thanks to Nancy Horn (Addis 66-68) and some item donors and helpers who organized and those who purchased, the Silent Auction held during our 50th Anniversary Reunion was a wonderful success. In total E&E RPCVs receive \$4498.98 for its RPCV Legacy Program projects. The projects and the amounts they received from the auction are: Borana Student Advancement \$289.00; Ethiopia Reads/Awassa \$2151.58; HIV and Other Healthcare Books for Rural Communities \$1632.47; ITC for Metu School \$290.00; and Publish Eritrea Remembered \$135.84. (Item donors were able to indicate which projects they wished to support, thus the differences.)

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