

## The Herald

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

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MONTHLY ARCHIVES: DECEMBER 2012

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### Editor's note

Posted on [December 14, 2012](#) by [janetlee](#) | [1 comment](#)

**By Janet Lee (Emdeber 1974-76)**

The Herald welcomes back the RPCVs who journeyed to Ethiopia in The Return to Ethiopia this past September. Apparently everyone made it to and from in one piece. We are grateful. Joe Bell (Alamata 1969-71) graciously volunteered to collect anecdotes and memories from willing travelers and compile them into one coherent piece. What struck me most about this compilation was that although nearly 100 RPCVs traveled together on the same journey, they had vastly different experiences — reminiscent of our varying experiences at our sites. Thank you Joe Bell for rounding up these stories and setting them to print, even if it is electronic!

Although I was unable to attend The Return to Ethiopia due to work commitments, I, too, followed the progression of the trip through the many posts on [Facebook](#), and [posts](#) on E&ERPCV's [The Herald site](#). I was aware of the functions planned for the embassies, the Meskal celebration, and possible excursions to the various RPCV work sites. It also came to my attention that an Ethiopian-American filmmaker, Mel Tewahade, would be chronicling many of these events and debuting his film about Peace Corps in Ethiopia.

In late September, a colleague from the University of Denver sent me a link to an interview with filmmaker Mel in an Ethiopian publication. To my great surprise, I discovered that he was based in metropolitan Denver where I work. I followed the link to his website, found a phone number and gave his office a call. He, himself, answered the phone from the Ethiopian Embassy in Washington D.C., where he was making last minute preparations for the trip to Ethiopia. We promised to get together when he returned to Denver.

Mel, his videographer Cameron Terry, and I met at the Tattered Cover bookstore for an interview. It is evident that he is quite passionate about the relationship between Americans and Ethiopians, both past and present, as shown in his two primary projects: "Point Four, Part Two" a documentary about the collaboration between Oklahoma State University and Alemaya University near Harar; and a documentary about the Peace Corps in Ethiopia. In addition to the interview, a review of "Point Four, Part Two" is included in the review section of *The Herald*.

As the travelers crisscrossed across the country to historical sites and their placements, many had the opportunity to visit with current volunteers. Current volunteer Chuck Adams (Bonga 2011-13) wrote about his encounter with RPCV Karen Dawn Speicher (Bonga 1973-75) in a blog. Yes, most current Volunteers blog! With permission, I have included his posting, *The Spot in the Cow Field*, about Karen's return to her site after so many years.

London was the site of the XXX Olympics this past summer. Based on the Facebook posts from both current and returned Ethiopia PCVs, much attention was focused on the Ethiopian runners. I discovered that many of the Ethiopian runners trained in the small town of Bekoji, also the site of a current PCV. Joe Whelan, himself a runner, reflects on his experiences with the elite runners of Ethiopia in *Bekoji: the Town of Runners*.

While in Ethiopia, E&E RPCV President, Marian Haley Beil, met with two current health Volunteers in Debre Berhan, Tony and Erin Portillo. The Portillos are actually assigned to the small town of Zanjera, just outside of Debre Berhan, where they have embarked upon a project of building a track for local youth. They have applied for and have been approved for a Peace Corps Partnership Program grant, allowing them to solicit funds from family and friends. This grant is the 34th such grant approved for Ethiopia Volunteers since Peace Corps has returned to Ethiopia. It is one of two grants posted on the current Peace Corps Partnership Program web site. I have worked with a number of Volunteers over the past few years with these grants and have seen the effect that the grants have had on the Volunteers and the communities in which they served. Check out the Projects article for links and more information. Perhaps, support of the Peace Corps Partnership Program could be a potential Legacy Project?

Another direct result of The Return is the opportunity for collaboration between Ethiopia and the RPCVs. As reported by Marian Haley Beil in the Group News, Steve Cristofar (Addis 62-64) is in communication with the Ethiopian Embassy in Washington D.C. One such idea for collaboration is to encourage partnerships between U.S. colleges and universities and Ethiopian universities. RPCVs with connections to universities, either as faculty or alums, are invited to explore potential partnerships. For nearly a decade my place of employment, Regis University (Denver), has been sending nursing and physical therapy students to Ethiopia for Service Projects. It has also collaborated with a nursing school in Hosanna by sending books and supplies. I will be eternally grateful for the release time Regis gave me for a sabbatical for a library project in Mekelle. I am sure that other places of higher education have had both formal and informal arrangements with institutions in Ethiopia. Let's let Steve know of these projects to inform and perhaps compile a directory of possibilities.

Finally, my favorite: Book reviews! I do not believe that videos have been reviewed in *The Herald* in the past. The Reviews section of this issue contains two videos that relate to articles in this issue of *The Herald*: runners and the Point Four program. Perhaps this is a format that we can think about more in the future as they become available.

Now a **plea** from the Editor. I am open to ideas about future stories, current books and videos by PCVS or about Ethiopia and Eritrea, and willing reviewers. We are in great need of someone who will edit the news section for both Ethiopia and Eritrea. Please consider volunteering. I can be contacted at [janet@ethiopiaeritrearpcvs.org](mailto:janet@ethiopiaeritrearpcvs.org).

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**1 Comment**

## Journeys

Posted on [December 14, 2012](#) by [janetlee](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

# Ethiopian Peace Corps "Folks' Tales"

By [Joe Bell \(Alamata 1969-71\)](#)

With apologies to Shlomo Bachrach (1939-2012) the author of the book [Ethiopian Folktales](#) that many of us know from our time in Ethiopia in the 1960s and '70s, it seemed a convenient title for this collection of anecdotes from some of the Returned Peace Corps Volunteers who returned to Ethiopia September 24 - October 8, 2012. In preparing this essay, I learned that Shlomo, who was on PC/Ethiopia staff from 1966 to 1968, made Ethiopia his life's work, the most recent years of which were devoted to producing an on-line news report - "East Africa Forum" - and to the effort to trademark Ethiopian coffee beans. I also learned that he passed on just as our return trip was being planned.

By way of introduction, the idea for a 2012 Peace Corps Volunteers' reunion in Ethiopia first was announced at the 2011 Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Peace Corps by Leo Cecchini who proposed the idea. Details for the trip were announced in March in a email to all those with addresses on our database. Articles in the Herald then provided the latest in travel details. Subsequently Marian Haley Beil created a Facebook page for "[Ethiopia and Eritrea Returned Peace Corps Volunteers](#)," that enabled those going on the trip to exchange questions, advice, etc. (That page now continues for ALL E&E RPCVs and PCVs as an instant way to share our continuing reminiscences, reactions and thoughts of how we can continue to devote some part of our busy lives to the people we met there many decades ago, plus announcements of opportunities and other items of interest to those in the group. For months several Returned Volunteers devoted many hours to planning the trip for the rest of us. Leo Cecchini, Russ Misheloff, and Stephen Cristofar, were the main organizers and Darrel Hagberg, Marian and others helped with the effort.

My own involvement came way late in the process, almost too late to make the trip. But I did go and like most all of us, my life and consciousness have been once again deeply changed. This essay is a quick effort to collect and share the experiences and thoughts of those who reunited with other Volunteers, Ethiopian colleagues and former students and relived a transformative part of our lives.



The return trip had three phases: first, the months of planning, a gathering of the group at the Ethiopian Embassy in Washington, D.C., the flight, a reception at the American Embassy, meeting current Volunteers and other group events in and around Addis Ababa. Second, the return trips to communities of service, historic sites and reunions with Ethiopian former students, families, friends and officials. Third, most of us returned to Addis Ababa to share stories and experiences at a final dinner before we gathered in the new International Terminal for the flight home on the Boeing Dreamliner. Sadly, no one was permitted to travel into any part of Eritrea due to the continuing, even if quiescent, conflict between the governments of these countries.

Before departing most of us gathered for injerra and wat and socializing at the Ethiopian Embassy on September 22, 2012. Including some American 'sister city' folks, there were about a hundred Americans aboard flight ET501 from Dulles to Bole Airport, arriving at 7:45 a.m. on September 24. Among those waiting to greet us at the VIP lounge, with frankincense and the coffee ceremony, were Ethiopian Foreign Affairs Ambassador Taye, [American Ambassador Donald Booth](#) and Peace Corps Director Gregory Engle.



Following the audience with Ethiopian President Girma Wolde Giorgis at the Jubilee Palace

Thus began three days of non-stop events, both substantively serious and sublimely moving, including: a question and answer session with Ethiopian President Girma Wolde Giorgis at the Jubilee Palace; a conference on education with present day Ethiopian educators and Peace Corps Volunteers at the Kotebe College of Teacher Education; viewing a new documentary titled "The Peace Corps in Ethiopia;" Ambassador Booth's reception for hundreds at the Roosevelt House on the embassy grounds; the Meskel Celebration; and Ethiopian food, music, dancing and singing at the Hiber Club. Then we

split into various touring groups for visits around the country or to go to our other hometowns. Many took the “historic tour” as I did, flying to Bahar Dar, Gondar, Lalibela, Axum, Dire Dawa and Harar with side trips along the way.

Most of the anecdotes here are from the time we spent revisiting historic Ethiopia – searching for old friends, and distant changed places, seen again with new perspective.

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### ***The Shades of Green***

*Mary Myers-Bruckenstein (Addis Ababa 1968–70)*

Yes, it’s Ethiopia. The hillsides are green in various shades as crops of corn, wheat and teff are growing. All the farmers are at work plowing their fields — still with oxen and wooden plows; no tractors seen on these fields. The homes are neat, one story tukuls, dotting both the hillsides and the roadways. The cattle are everywhere and they are well “rounded” too. The donkeys and goats follow in groups along the roadsides, being driven to market. In front of every home there seems to be a dog curled up asleep in front of the door.



Teff, wheat and other crops, held up in outstretched hands, are offered for sale by farmers along the roadside. The crop production was that good this year. The children play in little groups with smiling faces and gleaming white teeth. They are not afraid and they plead for money, a pen or a photo. This is a new generation, in a new time in a once simple land of farming cycles. They all will have to come to grips with the signs of modernity and other sights now lining the roadways: Chinese-built factories, wind turbines on the hillsides, paved roads being constructed by great gangs of workers, greenhouses, new construction in every town, as well as increasing traffic jams and noise, and an overlying sense of confusion.

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### ***Above Addis Ababa***

*Betty Hagberg (Debra Berhan/Addis Ababa 1964-66)*

As our plane circled Addis Ababa before landing, I was astonished to see large groups of high rise buildings on the outskirts of the city. The government is building tens of thousands of condominium units in cities throughout the country. The days of tukuls and tin roofs in urban areas are beginning to fade. Poor and middle income families can participate in a lottery system for new housing. The winners get the opportunity to make a down payment and learn what it means to have a mortgage.



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### ***It Was the Trip of a Lifetime***

*Marvin Vinande (Nekempte/Nekmti 1963–65):*

After 50 years, returning to Ethiopia was a very momentous undertaking. Health issues were a concern; my wife Aralynn and I debated for many months whether to undertake the journey. In fact, it was great from the minute we landed in Addis. Concerns seemed to vanish as we returned to the place that taught me so much. The landscape was green and the flowers were in bloom. It was hot but not a problem.

Two of my former students, Asfaw Abose and Assebe Ergie, wearing suits and carrying flowers had waited in the main terminal for several hours but missed us as we were entered into the VIP lounge of the international terminal, but we had a very emotional reunion at our hotel. How could nearly fifty years have passed?

Two days later a group of Nekemte Volunteers and our former students traveled by a terrible road from Addis for 13 hours to return to the place where we had all once lived. The trip was exhausting but worth every minute. The town had grown up hillsides and changed so much that it was almost impossible for us to get our bearings. It is now home to a large university.

Together, we found our former school and shared many memories. We took a reunion picture in front of my old classroom. I am very proud of the fact that Asfaw went on to teachers college and taught seven years in the same school. Asfaw discovered my former house, now a café behind a new row of buildings that had sprung up along the main road in the past 50 years! The caretaker of so many years ago now still lives there; he hollered, hugged and kissed us, language was no barrier! A local wonderful family welcomed us to their home and an Ethiopian meal.

Upon our return to Addis, we had three days to meet with other former students and acquaintances. Shiferaw Negeri, who had worked for Ethiopia I volunteers John and Susan Lawson has a daughter on the Ethiopian National Women's football team. Zekarias Keneaa teaches and is currently Dean of the Law School. He is the brother of Lia Keneaa who has been a friend of ours for probably 40 years. Through mutual acquaintances, familial ties and the Internet, I finally found one student who made a great impact on my life.

Fekadu Kanno met us for dinner with his wife and daughter. Finding Fekadu made my trip complete. I not only found the students I sought, but I was also able to hear the about their lives and the impact I had on each of them. The students did not have an easy life. Two were imprisoned at different times but they survived and made good lives for themselves. Many of their children have degrees from the University. Hopefully the political situation will remain stable so that they can use those degrees.

Reconnecting with these wonderful people, hearing their stories, sharing memories and pictures with them, was truly what made the trip so very meaningful and wonderful. My wife and I now know what people mean when they say "It was the trip of a lifetime." In fact, the students want us to come back in three years . . . We will see!

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### ***Not Falling at the Blue Nile Falls***

Mary Virginia [Ginger] Hajoglou (Dembi Dollo 1972-74)

My historical tour began in Bahar Dar far from the town where I was a teacher. Never having been to the Blue Nile Falls, I had no idea of the trek ahead. The walk from the bus to the trailhead was easy, I thought to myself with a smile. Then, there it was — a rock strewn steep downhill slope connected to an equally challenging uphill climb. Taking a deep breath, I descended a few steps and stopped. No way could I keep my balance and navigate this path. Astoundingly, a beautiful strong hand grasped mine and down the trail we went. The hand belonged to a wonderful young Ethiopian man who became my savior. He and I never let go of each other.



Since it was market day, on the uphill direction trudged a continuous line of heavily burdened men, women and children — some herding goats, donkeys and yes, long-horned Zebu cattle. I was as great an interest to them as they were to me. We did some fancy dodging of cattle horns and long-stepped over freshly deposited manure piles.

Eventually, we made it to the Falls. They were cascading with a thunderous roar, looking like chocolate milk on its way to Egypt. I gathered my dwindling energy reserves and stumbled back down and then up the trail. Totally exhausted but feeling triumphant, my climbing partner and I returned to my bus. I tipped him way more than I should have, but I paid what it was worth to me to have that amazing experience. Though I never got his name, he earned my eternal gratitude.

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### ***A Tale of the Red Terror***

Charles Wood (Woody) Jewett (Aggaro, Addis 1966–68)

Long fascinated by Africa, thanks to reading Albert Schweitzer and to an uncle who had traveled there, I was thrilled to be selected for Peace Corps service in Ethiopia, immediately following Hobart College graduation and stateside training at UCLA. I landed in the small town of Aggaro outside of Jimma with fellow trainee Marshall Broitman. We joined a 2nd year PCV David Fox.



School started with the three of us teaching all subjects in grades 7 and 8. Ethiopian teachers approached us about providing living space for several deserving students, and soon we had six boys living in our out-building in the back yard. Two 7th graders, Girma Tesfaye and Fekadu Mengistu, were bright, focused, and hard-working. All the kids did minor chores in return for room and board. The town's power generator shut down the first month so we all read and studied at night using camping lanterns and candles. Girma became my Amharic tutor.

I extended for a third year and requested placement in Addis. Girma, who had been admitted to the Tafari Mekonnen School continued to live with me. We had electricity!

Afterwards, we stayed in touch as Girma progressed through high school (switching to the Commercial School) and then the university. Soon he was married with four kids. During the years of Dergue Terror we decided to NOT communicate so as not to jeopardize his family's safety. In summer 1996, at the end of a business trip to the continent, I stopped in Addis for a long weekend; I reconnected with Girma, met his wife Nejati and family, had dinner several times, and went shopping at the Mercato.

During the "Peace Corps 100" reunion visit, I again met with Girma, his wife Nejati and family. Sadly, I also learned the details of the death of my former student Fekadu at the hands of the Dergue. He had become a teacher and one day his school was visited by "committee members." Being an honest and forthright guy, Fekadu spoke out and almost immediately was arrested along with most of his fellow teachers. They languished in jail in Jimma for three weeks and then were shot. What a horrific history — the Dergue executing the young, the bright, and the future.

An equally devastating experience for me in Addis Ababa this time was visiting the Red Terror Martyrs Museum with friends. They saw, high on the wall of photographs of murdered victims, the photo and name of their student and would be "son" whose status had been a mystery. We all flinched and wept for yet another young hero, lost in Ethiopian history.

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### ***The Emotions of 46 Years***

Susanne Boyd (Gondar 1964–66)

Alan and I had already been discussing a trip to Ethiopia in celebration of our 50th wedding anniversary in 2013, so you can imagine our excitement when "Return to Ethiopia" — and the possibility of taking the trip with others who had shared the same experience — appeared in my inbox! We signed up immediately.



We reveled in the Facebook discussions in the ensuing months, covering everything from shopping hints and tipping to the costs of medication and packing lists. And to be having these conversations on Facebook, when we had lived in a town (Gondar) which only had a radio phone in the post office when we were there in 1964-66 as Ethiopia III's! We could scarcely contain our excitement as the day for departure drew nearer. What would Ethiopia be like after 46 years? Would we see former students? (Unfortunately, we did not) We were more than ready to see old friends, make new ones and have a real adventure.

The adventure began, of course, with our arrival and all the ceremonies in the airport, the audience with the President at Jubilee Palace, the Meskal celebration in Addis and it continued through our wonderful tour of the highlands, Harar and Dire Dawa. We could not have asked for a better group of people with whom to tour and share the trip of a lifetime.

With all the wonderful experiences we had, my most unforgettable moment on this trip was my reaction to seeing the countryside for the first time in 46 years. When we broke through the clouds to begin the landing at Bole Airport and we could see the verdant plots of green, the tukuls and the Meskal flowers, tears began to roll down my cheeks. In all our planning, I had not truly realized the depth of my emotional connection to Ethiopia, and I was so very glad to be back. Thanks to all who made it possible.

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### ***Break of Day in Dire Dawa***

Alma Toroian Raymond (Dabat 1967-69)

Long before first light, there is a distant chorus of dogs howling to one another. At 4:45 a.m. the Muezzin calls to the faithful from a nearby tower. A truck passes on the street below, headlights tracing a path across our bedroom ceiling. I'm drawn from our Delight Hotel room to the balcony where I have a full view of the city by moonlight.

By 5:30 a.m. there are a few people walking. Women ward off the morning chill with their shamahs pulled across their faces. A woman sweeps the cobblestone sidewalk in front of her shop. Unseen others call morning greetings to one another while tending brazier fires behind huts across the street. Morning tea and breakfast will be ready soon.

By 6 a.m. the sun is rising. I watch a few pairs of students jogging on the high school stadium track across the street. The first bus comes through town picking up passengers along the way. By 7 a.m. crows are flying, horns are beeping from the Bajaj taxis down on the street and the city is bustling. I am eager to be out there with everyone.

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### ***The Dabat Alumni Association***

Alma and Doug Raymond (Dabat, Addis 1967-69)

Our Return to Ethiopia was a constant stream of wonderful experiences. For an impression of just one highlight, we focused and decided to tell about the Dabat Alumni Association in Addis Ababa. It was as unexpected as it was gratifying.

Dabat, a very small town on the high plateau a couple of hours north of Gondar, had one school in the 1960s, and it ended with the 8th grade. We taught science, English and music there during the 1967-68 school year. Much to our surprise, Dabat has an active Alumni Association. It meets on the 7th of every month in Addis Ababa. Nasser Kutabish, a good friend who was once our 8th grade student, invited us to the October meeting.

We were pleasantly surprised to find that such a club existed at all, and I guess you could say we were more than slightly amazed when we found that the membership includes: Three international trading-company entrepreneurs; an executive accountant who is an articulate activist critic of the custom of child marriage; a criminal-court judge; a nun; a restaurateur; a man who is building a startup plant for producing household water filters; an athlete; a diplomat who represents Ethiopia's interests to the World Trade Organization, and more than one retired teacher. Five of the people in the list are women. A remote member in Denver, Colorado coordinates an auxiliary network in the USA.

The Association's principal mission is to raise money for civic projects. At the meeting we attended the discussion centered on three proposals: construction of latrines for Dabat's schools (there are now six schools, not just one); construction of wells with hand pumps for safer water supply, and construction of a town library. The general consensus was that the school latrine project would provide the greatest immediate benefit to the community.

We joined the club on the spot, and came away with a renewed impression of our former little town's vigor and dynamism.

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***Our Hopes Were Met 1000 Fold***

Millicent Keck Quam (Makele 1964-66)  
and Beth Crockett Schroer (Makele 1964-66)

Returning to Makele after 46 years, Beth Crockett Schroer and I took an early morning plane from Addis. Our first stop was Atse Yohannes Secondary School where we had taught. We would never have recognized it. Nothing looked familiar.

After seeking directions from two men, I asked if they had known any Peace Corps teachers. I was not prepared for the response of one of them, which was, "Yes, my teacher was Mrs. Quam." Of course I shouted, "I'm Mrs. Quam." We couldn't believe it. His name was Teama Giday and he had been my student in 7th grade English. We were so happy to see each other we couldn't stop beaming. He told us that he was visiting the campus for the first time in 10 years; he showed us around, and then walked with us past our two houses.

After this meeting, for the next two full days, Teama kept returning to see us at the hotel, bringing former students with him each time. All told, we saw and talked with 13 former students — one was a shopkeeper in town, another was a security guard, several others had been teachers, one a pharmacist, several were businessmen. All of them repeatedly expressed how much the Peace Corps had changed their lives personally and how much it had changed the educational climate in the country.

I had brought photos from our time in Makele. We went through them all, identifying students and hearing stories of their lives then and now. Sadly some of them had lost their lives in the struggle to free the country from the Mengistu government. But, many of them were quite successful, a number living in the U.S and Europe; very many of them having children with advanced degrees. I had hoped that my teaching would have allowed our students to get "better jobs" — I was shocked to learn that they were in fact leaders in the government, in business, and in education. Clearly I had had too "small" a vision for my students.

Our other significant experience was meeting the current Peace Corps Volunteers in Makele. We met them for dinner twice and visited one of their schools. Their lifestyles are so different from ours, 48 years earlier. They are living in small compounds, usually with two or three other Ethiopian teacher families. They do their own shopping, cooking, laundry. They are expected not to hire any household staff — as we were all encouraged to do. Their focus is more on living with and having Ethiopian peers. They work training elementary school teachers in English and in English teaching methods. We had spent more of our time teaching and preparing to teach. Both were appropriate for the times.

Ethiopia has changed vastly. There are many more elementary and secondary schools and many more trained teachers. The emphasis now is on in-house teacher training, not direct teaching — and at the elementary level, not the secondary level. What was the same, however, was the same attachment to their students and to Ethiopia and the same enthusiasm for their work that we had had almost 50 years ago.

By the end of our stay in Ethiopia, we had seen more than 40 of our former students. I had hoped that returning to Ethiopia would have the feeling of a "Homecoming." Those hopes were met 1,000 fold by the warm receptions we received everywhere.

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***I Don't Want it to End***

Ronald Lewis Peterson (Nekempte 1973-75)



My 1973-75 Peace Corps Ethiopia service came to life again for me in dramatic ways in 2011 and 2012.

In March, 2011 I published my first novel — [A Time to . . . : A Baby Boomer's Spiritual Adventures](#) — that focuses on a Returned Peace Corps Ethiopia Volunteer who relived milestone events in his life. Then I joined the Association of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers to reconnect with others who served. From that, I learned there was an RPCV living in my state (Michigan) who had served ten years before me in the same town and taught at the same school where I had. Marvin Vinande and I became friends.



These events compelled me to participate in Peace Corps' 50th Anniversary celebration in Washington DC last October. At a dinner at the Ethiopian Embassy in Washington DC, I met several RPCVs for the first time since we had trained together in Ethiopia some 38 years ago as well as one of our in-country trainers who now is the communications officer for the Ethiopian Embassy in DC, Tsehay DeBalkew. The memories that had been stored away for almost four decades soothed me like a cool breeze on a hot day. I was thrilled to also learn that a return trip to Ethiopia in 2012 was being discussed by Returned Peace Corps Ethiopia Volunteers.

Returning home, I received an email message from Alemu Hailemariam, a top student in my eighth-grade English class during my first year of Peace Corps service. We had lost touch after the Dergue took control of Ethiopia in 1975. He told me that he had been trying to find me since 2001 to thank me for supporting him during my Peace Corps service; he found my contact information on my website. He was the last surviving child of a peasant family and an orphan at the time we had met. I had only known that he was an excellent, deserving student. Today he is a health services quality officer with five hospitals in Addis Ababa and married to a government employee, Maledu. Together they have two college-educated daughters: Kidist (a clinical nurse) and Andnet (a geographer). This past spring they each provided their parents with a grandson.

When the return to Ethiopia trip was confirmed in the spring, I had to participate. The reunion with Alemu at Bole airport was very emotional. The following day, we met Ethiopia's president, Girma Wolde-Giorgis, at Haile Selassie's former palace and had our photo taken with him. He was sincerely interested in the relationship Alemu and I had developed. Two TV and radio networks must have also thought our story was interesting because they shared it with their audiences.

The time Alemu and I spent together in Addis with his family and on our trip back to Nekemte, the town where we had lived, was too good for words. On that trip, we were joined by two other RPCVs who had also served in Nekemte (Marvin Vinande and Doug Worthington) along with their wives and the three students they had supported.

The most memorable moments of that trip included touring our old school, visiting the spot where my old home had stood (It is now a computer training center) meeting old friends, and learning the terrible news that my best Ethiopian friend, the high school wood shop teacher, was killed by the Dergue about four years after I left Ethiopia. Tadesse Tiruneh had been the model for one of the main characters in my novel. His death, and those of some 500,000 others, during the Red Terror, served as a grim reminder of a time that, thankfully, has passed.

During my two-week visit to Ethiopia, I also toured the historic northern cities for the first time: Bahar Dar, Gondar, Lalibela, Axum, Dire Dawa and Harar. While these places are truly spectacular and inspiring, it was Alemu and his family, the many kind Ethiopians I had come into contact with, and the caring Peace Corps Volunteers, former and present, who I had met, that made this the most memorable, meaningful trip of my life.

Alemu and I don't want it to end, so we are developing a water project proposal for the school where we had met. If successful, it could serve as a model for others around the country. I also hope to use my public relations, media relations and marketing communications skills to help promote Ethiopia in America as a great place for businesses to invest and for tourists to visit. Ethiopia has changed a great deal for the better since the Peace Corps first arrived in 1962 and Americans owe it to themselves to learn much more about this wonderful country and its beautiful people.

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## *The Feeling of Connectedness*

Tom Andrews (Makale and Addis Ababa 1964-66)

Near the end of our trip, I could not help being a little jealous of all our travelling companions who were overflowing with stories of visiting their towns of service and connecting with former students. I was feeling the downside of having served as a lawyer and having made few ongoing relationships. Then, in Harar some of us toured the Ras Tafari Makonnen birthplace museum, with its photo gallery of prominent Hararis. I was startled to see a picture on the wall of the wonderful man I worked with for a year — Ato Mohammed Abdu Rahman. It showed him just as I remembered him, captioned with his official title as when we worked together, along with a picture of his father next to him — the descendants of the last sheik of the independent city state of Harar. Though he was assassinated by the Dergue, seeing his picture there on the wall finally gave me the feeling of connectedness I had been missing all along. And I shed tears of loss, too.



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## Friends

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# Ethiopian Film Producer Discusses Peace Corps in Ethiopia and Truman's Point Four Program

I would like to express my great appreciation to Mel Tewahade for granting me the following interview — Janet Lee, editor.

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*The Herald:* Briefly describe your journey from Ethiopia to the U.S. How did you ultimately end up in Colorado?

*Mel Tewahade:* My journey started in December 1977 from Massaw, Eritrea, where civil war took place between Ethiopian forces and Eritrean fighters. I walked to Port Sudan [314 miles] where I was a refugee for four months. I ultimately found a job as a sailor on a Greek ship and made it to Europe. I lived in Germany for two and half years and moved to Canada. I married and lived in Canada for fourteen years before moving to Colorado in 1993. I am founder and CEO of [Infinity Wealth Management, Inc.](#)

*The Herald:* As a Peace Corps Volunteer in Ethiopia, I recall an agricultural extension agent, a graduate of Alemaya University (the current Haramaya University) conducting training and research at my site. I knew there was some type of connection to Oklahoma State University. What was the relationship between the universities and what motivated you to produce the documentary film "Point Four?"



Mel Tewahade (right) talks with Peace Corps Africa Regional Director Dick Day in front of the Jubilee Palace.

*Mel Tewahade:* I was motivated to produce the “Point Four” movie because I grew up in Harer where my father was the Regional Governor from 1962 to 1969. I traveled to Alemaya (renamed Harmaya) with my father and the university left a lasting impression on me.

President Harry Truman appointed Dr. Henry G. Bennett to be the Assistant Secretary of State in charge of the [Point Four Program](#) (named after the fourth point in Truman’s inaugural address). In 1952, an agreement was put in place between the Ethiopian government and Point Four (predecessor to USAID). Point Four in turn contracted with Oklahoma State University (then Oklahoma A&M) to build and run the agricultural school at Alemaya. Emperor Haile Sellasie provided funds; the school was designed by Oklahoman engineers. Italian contractors and Ethiopian laborers worked together to open the school in 1956. OSU ran Alemaya until 1968 and then handed over the operations of the school to Ethiopians.

*The Herald:* You recently produced a video about the history of Peace Corps in Ethiopia. Did you have an early connection with Peace Corps Volunteers in your youth? What influence do you feel the early Volunteers had on the people of Ethiopia and what influence did Ethiopia have on those same Volunteers?

*Mel Tewahade:* Yes, I had a connection to Peace Corps in my youth. My eighth grade English teacher was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Addis at Menelik High School. I was always impressed with how nice most of the Peace Corps teachers were and not threatening like our Ethiopian teachers. They always had kind words for us even though we sometimes behaved badly. The Volunteers were tactful and showed us that we can solve problems without losing our temper.

Peace Corps Volunteers also loved Ethiopia for its people. Ethiopians left a lasting impression on the Peace Corps Volunteers. They witnessed that Ethiopians are close to one another and have strong love for their families. Ethiopian children are very much loved by Peace Corps Volunteers. We Ethiopians are grateful to all the Peace Corps Volunteers who helped countless Ethiopians in time of need. When we fled our country from communist persecution, many Returned Peace Corps Volunteers sponsored, lobbied, opened their doors and helped us to integrate into American society. We will never forget that.

*The Herald:* As you accompanied the group of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers on their “Return to Ethiopia”/50th anniversary celebration of Peace Corps in Ethiopia this past September, what surprised you most about this journey? What would you hope that these Volunteers take back home?

*Mel Tewahade:* I was surprised to witness the love Peace Corps Volunteers have for Ethiopia and its people. They truly cherish the time they spent teaching Ethiopian children. I was also surprised to witness the feelings that Peace Corps Volunteers had for their former students and how they worked hard to locate and meet them.

I was astonished to know how many Peace Corps Volunteers are in some kind of projects in Ethiopia. Some send books, help run orphanages, build libraries, and send medicine to Ethiopia. What I want the Peace Corps Volunteers to take back home is the knowledge that their work was not in vain and to let them know that they have transformed the lives of countless Ethiopians.

*The Herald:* The Third Goal of the Peace Corps encourages RPCVs to help Americans understand the people and cultures of other countries. Do you have specific suggestions to these travelers on how they may fulfill this Third Goal in respect to Ethiopia?

*Mel Tewahade:* As most RPCVs know, Ethiopia is an ancient country with ancient customs and practices. Some of these customs are good, like love of country and family. Others are not so good. For those who are not happy with the level of progress in Ethiopia, just remember that the country went through a very difficult time during the communist occupation. The country is just starting to recover from it. If Ethiopia keeps up with this growth rate, it will become a pleasant place to live and work.

Please help the current generation of Ethiopians learn more English so they may be able to succeed in business. English as language was literally destroyed in Ethiopia during the Russian time. Any help in that regard will be a great contribution, making English the language of commerce in Ethiopia.

*The Herald:* Peace Corps Ethiopia was reinstated a few years ago after many years of non-service. Any advice to these new Volunteers?

*Mel Tewahade:* I am happy that Peace Corps is reinstated in Ethiopia. I would like to see the number of Volunteers grow to the 1962 level.

During the 50th reunion, the new Volunteers came to Addis to watch my movie, attend a panel discussion on Education in Ethiopia, and also to enjoy the evening ceremony at the American Ambassador's residence. They are a bunch of great young people and are having great success in Ethiopia. I also learned from them that they stayed with Ethiopian host families in the villages during their training. That was unthinkable for us, even though I am Ethiopian.

The advice I have for the current Volunteers is to keep on doing what they are doing. You are the best and you keep changing lives. Stay with it, even when it looks that the problem is insurmountable.

*The Herald:* What new projects do you have on the horizon? Are there any roles that RPCV Ethiopia can play in these projects?

*Mel Tewahade:* People in Ethiopia went through hell for a long time. The communists traumatized the population in its entirety. The people need to build their confidence and feel good about themselves. Peace Corps Volunteers can go back to Ethiopia to participate in their fields of specialization.

I will be going back to Ethiopia to look at farming, tourism and the insurance business. Please feel free to contact me if you need have ideas to share.

Thank you

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**2 Comments**

## **PCVs in Ethiopia**

Posted on [December 14, 2012](#) by [janetlee](#) | [8 comments](#)

# **The Spot in the Cow Field: An RPCV Returns To Ethiopia After 35 Years**

**By Chuck Adams (Bonga 2011-13)**

Karen Dawn Speicher (Wukro, Bonga 1973-75) knew exactly what she was looking for: The place with the cows. Ever since her Peace Corps service in Ethiopia in the mid-'70s as a secondary school English teacher, one image that stuck with her was her mud-walled house in Bonga with the window that looked out on a cow pasture with a backdrop of jungle. There

she would sit, sipping warm milk with local honey, gazing out at the cows and murky forest beyond while contemplating her life after Peace Corps. It was a moment perhaps embedded in every Volunteer's service: the existential pondering, the long drawn out silences, the mysterious and unknowable future that lay out there, like a lion in the bush, waiting for you to reach out.



Karen had entered that thicket a long time ago, and now she wanted to reach back. Her return to Ethiopia coincided with the 50th anniversary of the Peace Corps Ethiopia program, and current PCVs like me were quite willing to host these returners and help them reunite with the people and places of their past service.



As we drove to Bonga in a rented 4x4, Karen told me stories about her life as a PCV at the start of the Derg regime. She had spent her first year in Wukro, but the revolution caused too many hardships for the Tigrayan people and Peace Corps reassigned her to Bonga for her second year. She said that Bonga in 1974 had an hour or two of daily electricity, but it lacked a hotel or restaurant. When she remembered a spat she had with her maidservant (something about using the same tub to wash clothes and to prepare food in), Karen grimaced. "That was the one thing we never agreed on," she said. "It was a gap between our two cultures."

When I told Karen we were nearing Bonga, she perked up, giddy at the thought of finally returning to her site after 35 years. "This is really happening," she said to herself. "I can't believe it."

We pulled around a bend and Bonga revealed itself to us in full panoramic view. "What is that huge building?!" Karen exclaimed. I could only shake my head. That huge building is the five-story Kafa Zonal Complex, an ugly behemoth built only a few years ago. It signified all that has changed since Karen served here.

Back during Karen's service, Jimma was the capital of Kafa. After the downfall of the Derg regime, in 1991, the new coalition government redrew the political map, placing Jimma inside Oromia and designating Bonga as Kafa's new zonal capital, thus ensuring its rapid expansion over the next twenty years. Karen's first impression of Bonga: "It sure is a lot bigger than it used to be."

We ate lunch at Kafa Coffeeland Hotel and then took a stroll down to the edge of the Kafa Biosphere Reserve, along the Barta river. Men were taking baths in the river nude so we did not linger for long. Returning up the hill, we passed numerous houses where entire families popped their heads out to look at us. It is a cultural practice to invite us in, but we sadly declined due to a shortage of time. Karen and her nephew Jared, who was traveling with her, were only day-tripping to Bonga, and had only a few precious hours to explore. Karen's number one priority was finding the home where she lived, or as she called it, "the cow field."

Karen remembered very little, but with my firsthand knowledge of present-day Bonga and its environs, we could zero in on a few possibilities. She knew it was in a flat pastureland area, that it was in a place with grazing cows, that it was only a short walk from the secondary school, and that she could walk into the jungle beyond the pasture and find monkeys in the trees. I had a particular area in mind.

The driver dropped us off at the gate to the Bishaw Wolde Yohannes Secondary School, the site where Karen believed she taught English. Back then there were only a few cinder-block buildings; now there were over sixteen. We stumbled across a groundskeeper and told him of our mission.

Karen was more to the point. "Where is the place with cows?" she asked him, expecting something so general to be somewhere so specific.



The groundskeeper leads the way. “Is that a cow?”

But after a few exchanges in Amharic, the



Karen and her nephew, Jared, in front of the school

groundskeeper said we could walk on a path behind the school to just such a place. When he saw that even a current Bonga PCV was lost, he became our impromptu guide, leading us through tall grass, reeds, and nettles along a path overgrown and muddy. The groundskeeper pointed out areas of matted grass, the result of a resident pod of hippos that staked out this no-man’s-land behind the school for their own.

We walked until we reached sight of the cow pasture, precisely the one I had in mind to show Karen. Bisected by the Barta River, it was on a flat piece of wetland, about four acres in size. Due to the rainy season, the river had flooded the path, leaving the cow pasture just beyond reach.

But the viewpoint convinced Karen. “That’s definitely the spot over there,” she said. “I can just feel it. Don’t know for sure, but it just feels right.”

So we backtracked to the main road and a re-routed around the school until we were tromping through the cow field, with only Karen’s intuition and gut feeling as a honing beacon to find this special place lurking deep within her heart and her mind’s eye.

While she was convinced this was the area, she had trouble locating her house. Mud-walled houses have a short lifespan; her house has likely long since disintegrated. But Karen moved around the cow field and down the footpaths of the neighborhood possessed of a conviction in finding this spot — if not her house then at least the view she had outside her window, the place where her past and her future collided over a cup of hot milk and a soundtrack of moos.

In the end, we never found Karen’s viewpoint. Uprooted by seasonal flooding, deforestation, population growth, and time’s slow-moving sculptural finesse, the image had eroded. But the picture and the moment had been stored on a long-dormant memory bank inside Karen’s body, and she simply had to step into a cow field to feel it rebooted. “I’m satisfied,” Karen said. She was looking out at Bonga but her mind was elsewhere.

We age and our lives spin off in wildly different directions. Thus we require places where we can go to be re-centered after periods of distress, like beacons in a tempest. As we left the cow field and walked back to the car, I wondered where my beacon would be located here in Bonga. I looked around at the hills, the lush forests, the tranquil palm groves. It all looked beautiful and poignant, but I now know that only one place will speak to me, and it will take decades for it to reveal itself.

## PCVs in Ethiopia

Posted on [December 14, 2012](#) by [janetlee](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

# Bekoji: The Town of Runners

By [Joseph A. Whelan \(Bekoji 2012-\)](#)

Most mornings, I rise with the sun in the village of Bekoji where I serve as a Peace Corps Volunteer to the sound of rapid footsteps stampeding past the walls of my compound. Without a visual through the aluminum, I often have difficulty determining whether the sound is a product of feet or hooves. I make my way out the front gate and jog a half-mile to “the forest” — ground zero for running in these parts. On any given morning, somewhere between 50 and 100 track-suit-clad men and women gather in a large, ovular area atop a hill that overlooks the small patch of eucalyptus trees and rugged, root-filled soil. I shoulder-bump those I know, and sometimes those I don’t, and go through the standard set of Ethiopian greetings.

Every couple of minutes, a fleet-footed train, typically comprised of 5-10 runners, takes off and descends into the naturalist training center, first at a boxcar pace and gradually building toward Accella Express.

I arrive not knowing exactly what to expect. The language barrier hardly prevents a flood of invitations — it seems I’m quite the novelty, with groups often competing for my company — but it does leave me in the dark when it comes to knowing how far or how hard we’re going to run.

We typically start with a couple snake patterns through the trees before heading out to surrounding fields and dirt roads that form a sort of clover leaf with the forest at center. The good thing is we don’t stray very far, so it’s easy for me to find my way back if I conk out, as I so often did while adjusting to the air at 9,300 feet over my first month at site. In all, the runners are very patient and quite attuned to my need for a reduced pace. They will often wait or circle back as I catch my breath, refusing to “hidu.”

“Berta, berta,” they insist. “Izo!” I dig a little bit deeper and fall back into the pack. Whatever direction the group leader chooses for the day, all treks ultimately return to the forest. The pace intensifies for one more circuit, building toward a crescendo of speed intervals around the oval. I give it everything I’ve got, which prompts a chorus of high-pitched trills and cheers, but I’m inevitably left in awe as the prize horses disappear in a vapor. After a standard set of cool-down exercises, we all sit in the grass awhile, soaking in the sunshine and sharing a few laughs before dispersing to go about the day.



A group of girls take on a hill

The north may have rock-hewn churches, heaven-scraping obelisks, 17th-century castles, and various other fascinating markers of Ethiopia's past, but there's a spot on the map



some 230 kilometers south of Addis that's currently carving out its own piece of the country's extensive history. Like those popular sites in Lalibela, stories coming out of this small highland town are of remarkable structures being chiseled on the side of a mountain. The difference, however, is in the sinew itself rather than architecture forged as evidence of brute human strength. As the title of a recent documentary aptly depicts, the "Town of Runners," Bekoji, lays claim to such high-caliber speed-demons as Fatima Roba, Derartu Tulu, Keninisa Bekele, Tirunesh Dibaba, and the 2012 London Olympic Marathon champion, Tiki Gelana. Judging by how tightly the community embraces its running culture, the list of common-Ethiopians-turned-world-class-athletes with roots in this town is destined to grow faster than the eucalyptus itself.



Running the snake.

I may be here to help improve the quality of English education in local public schools, but I certainly don't mind having a unique vantage point from which to observe the development of Bekoji's running youth. I've been calling myself a runner for the past decade or so, having completed eleven marathons and countless other distance events in that span. Prior to setting sail for Ethiopia, I volunteered for two years with Students Run Philly Style, a Philadelphia-based non-profit that uses running as a catalyst for fostering mentor relationships between volunteer adult leaders and inner-city youth. I was also a tour guide for City Running Tours, an Ambassador for The San Francisco Marathon, and maintained RegularJoeRunning.com. Bekoji and I make a pretty nice pair, the advent of which came by way of a chance pre-departure conversation wherein I learned of Running Across Borders, a non-profit working to establish and further the professional competitive career potential of local runners. I pitched a Bekoji assignment to my Program Director, not knowing at the time whether a Volunteer would even be placed here, on the basis that it would expedite my integration and offer a wealth of opportunities for secondary projects.

So far, my case has proven itself. I hit the ground running, literally, by showing up at the forest on my second morning, and have been known around town as the running "ferenji" ever since. I may be the slowest of the pack, but I could start charging admission for all the attention I garner. Running has been a terrific platform to spread the word about my purpose as much as it has been about quickly becoming a familiar face throughout the community. I am regularly greeted by my actual name, rather than some of the less desirable titles, as I run into athletes all over Bekoji.

I even get a tip-of-the-cap greeting and firm shoulder bump from Coach Sentayehu whenever we cross paths; he's the man responsible for starting the careers of those notable athletes who are the pride of Ethiopia. And there's plenty of room for overlapping my interactions with the running community and my work as a PCV. The runners benefit as much from our English exchanges as I do from sharing strides. I joke that we've established a running-for-English exchange program, but I have already talked seriously about some one-on-one tutoring time. There's also an incredible need for resources, starting with the shredded slabs of leather and laces that barely distinguish these incredibly talented feet from those of the legendary Abebe Bikila. I have a feeling I'll be teaching a few people how to write letters to companies like Saucony or Brooks for sponsorship requests. These things will take time to develop, but we're off to a running start.



Follow along with Joe in Bekoji on his blog,



[hewhoknowspatience.blogspot.com](http://hewhoknowspatience.blogspot.com)



Coach Sentayehu (right) describes the morning drill

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## Projects

Posted on [December 14, 2012](#) by [eerpcv](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

# Help students succeed through running

by *Marian Haley Beil (Deber Berhan 62-64)*

Tony and Erin Portillo began serving in Debre Berhan in 2011 as health Volunteers. During my visit to DB in September I had the opportunity to meet and have a delightful visit with them, and I mentioned that should they need help on a project they should contact me. And they have!

The Portillos live in the small agricultural community of Zanjera on the outskirts of DB, and they are working with several community leaders to build a running track — a simple, 400-meter oval — for youth of the area on grounds donated by the kebele leader, Ato Lema, for this purpose, and he has provided a signed letter of promise that he will maintain the upkeep of the track and set aside future kebele funds for that purpose. Zanjera provides little hope for the future of the young people who live there, and it has been shown that organized sports increase self-esteem and development in youth, and improve decision-making in girls (a special target group for this project). In Ethiopia, if students show promise as a runner, it can also increase their likelihood of sustained school enrollment.

The Portillo's project is seeking funding assistance for construction costs for materials, and renting of digging and pressing equipment for the track. The goal is to raise an additional \$4,700.

Recently the project was approved by the Peace Corps to be a Peace Corps Partnership Project that provides a link for fundraising. Click on [Local Track Project](#) to read the Partnership post, and to make an online donation if you would like to help out these PCVs — and the students of Zanjera.

I also recommend that you read a terrific article that Erin wrote for the El Paso Times entitled [Outrunning the Odds: Las Cruces Work in Ethiopia for change](#) about the project, the community and Ethiopia.

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## E&E RPCVs Group News

Posted on [December 14, 2012](#) by [eerpcv](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

# Help build collaborative relationships between universities where you have worked or studied and universities in Ethiopia

by **Marian Haley Beil (Debre Berhan 62-64)**

Following the “Return to Ethiopia,” Steve Cristofar (Addis 62-64) — one of the organizers of the trip — sent a “thank you” note to Ambassador Girma Birru, Ethiopian Ambassador to the United States, on behalf of all those who had participated. On October 12th Ambassador Girma responded with a letter that included the following statement:

*As I have indicated during my speech at the send-off gathering at our Embassy, The Peace Corps volunteers can help the Ethiopian people in areas of education by establishing collaborations between US and Ethiopian universities . . .*

The letter also included the name of a gentleman on the Embassy staff, who should be contacted by E&E RPCVs to explore a possible program of educational collaborations at the university level facilitated by RPCVs.

I asked that Steve follow-up on this suggested effort, and the following is a portion of his report:

There are currently 33 universities in Ethiopia, including many new ones; total enrollment over 100,000. Big shortage of materials, teachers, etc. Several of these [universities] have already signed Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with US universities.

What Ambassador Girma is asking is for RPCVs with university connections to contact their schools & try to elicit interest in cooperative arrangements with Ethiopian counterparts, in the areas of exchanges of professors; of students; joint research efforts; etc. Also, for RPCVs to suggest US university partnerships with Ethiopian universities in towns where the RPCVs taught or otherwise served. Another possibility mentioned is library-to-library relationships. Improvements in the quality of education are a major goal of the program.

[Our contact] has sent me some information on the Ethiopian university system: specifics as to where the universities are, how big they are, any specialities they may have or desire to have, and any existing collaborative relationships between Ethiopian & American universities. He stressed that they are NOT looking for financial support for such efforts, as programs already are in place for same, ie, from USAID & Dept of State. They are familiar with the logistics of setting up university-to-university collaborations.

...

E&ERPCV efforts could be directed toward encouraging individual RPCVs with university connections, either directly or possibly through their alumni associations, to get their institutions (or, possibly, individual professors or experts) interested in collaborating with Ethiopian institutions of higher learning. An additional area might be research papers or studies conducted by American universities that either pertain directly to Ethiopia, or that could possibly contribute to research efforts in Ethiopia.

RPCVs — if you are interested in exploring how you might be able to facilitate US university to Ethiopian university linkages, please contact Steve at [uzu@ethiopiaeritrearpcvs.org](mailto:uzu@ethiopiaeritrearpcvs.org)

This is an exciting opportunity for us to continue our service to the people of Ethiopia.

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