

The Herald

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

MONTHLY ARCHIVES: SEPTEMBER 2013

Editor's Note

Posted on [September 25, 2013](#) by [janetlee](#) | [1 comment](#)

By Janet Lee (Emdeber 1974-76)

It is Meskarem, the first month of the New Year, when the heavy rains subside and the perky yellow Meskal flowers bloom. School has begun in the US and will begin soon in Ethiopia. A new group of Peace Corps Volunteers (G9), comprised of 57 education Volunteers, has survived training and each Volunteer has learned of his or her assignment. The adventure begins. Included in the group picture (below) of the new Volunteers are Country Director Greg Engle (left), the new U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, Patricia Haslach (right of center, white suit) and Ambassador Taye Atskeselassie (left of center, gray suit), Director General for the Americas in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



This issue of The Herald begins with an interview of Peace Corps Ethiopia Country Director, Greg Engle. An RPCV (Korea) himself, Greg has traveled and worked extensively throughout Africa. It is evident that Africa has captured his heart. He is genuinely pleased with his assignment in Ethiopia and equally pleased with the Volunteers with whom he works. Read on and learn of his extensive hidden talents.

In a related article, Alma Torioian Raymond (Dabat 67-69), describes the recent adventure that she and her husband, Doug, pursued in “Finding Nasser” during their return to Ethiopia with other RPCVs celebrating the 50th Anniversary. The Raymonds were successful, both in finding their former student and also bringing about change at their former site of Dabat.

Joe Bell (Alamata, Wello 1969-71), describes the recent Peace Corps Connect conference held in Boston in June 2013 and updates us on the Ethiopian Sustainable Food Project [ESFP]. The project is thriving and continues providing needed

services.

Finally, my favorite. Book Reviews. RPCVs review titles by their fellow Volunteers or titles about Ethiopia.

And I close with welcome news. Marian Haley Beil, our stalwart leader, has found a news editor: Marianne Arieux (Asmara 1965-67) — “*Thank you, Marianne.*” Feel free to send her tidbits of information, and news sites of importance for the next issues of *The Herald*. With this addition, I feel *The Herald* is all the more complete.

Posted in [Editor's Note](#)

1 Comment

PCVs in Ethiopia

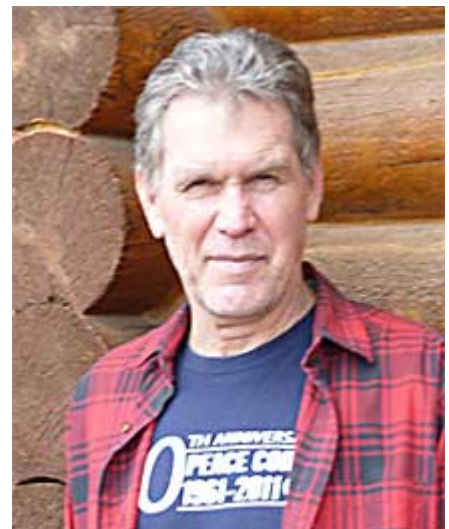
Posted on [September 25, 2013](#) by [janetlee](#) | [2 comments](#)

Greg Engle — Country Director, Singer/Songwriter Whose Hope is to “Leave This Place Better than Before”

by Janet Lee (Emdeber 74-76)

THE COLORADO ROCKIES may seem about as far away from Ethiopia as one can be, but it was the perfect spot for a conversation with Peace Corps/Ethiopia Country Director Greg Engle. Ethiopia and Colorado have more in common with each other than one might expect: altitude, mountains, intriguing rock formations, cool morning temperatures, abundant wildlife, and issues with water. It is no wonder that many Ethiopian immigrants now call Denver home.

Greg and his wife Maureen have a small mountain home southwest of Colorado Springs, the location of the University of Colorado/Colorado Springs, their alma mater from which both received degrees. It is a bit of a drive from Denver, where I live, and the hustle and bustle of traffic and city life. The mountain road took many twists and turns and climbed in elevation, yet my final destination was just 8,720 ft, slightly higher than that of Addis Ababa. After I turned off the paved highway, I found myself in a maze of well-maintained dirt roads with directions to “take this fork” or to “veer slightly to the right” at another turn. Few roads were named and the locals knew them by their numbers: CR 341 or CR 320. As I slowly ventured forth, I soon found myself face-to-face, nose-to-nose with a magnificent deer. After a furtive glance at me, it bounded off into the distance. A sign that it was going to be a great day.



Over tea, freshly baked cornbread, and the glorious white honey for which the northern region of Tigray is renowned, we quickly jumped into conversation about our shared experiences: Peace Corps, Ethiopia, Africa, and travel, typical of most RPCVs when they first meet no matter their assignment. Greg and Maureen are both RPCVs (Korea 80-81),

their Peace Corps service cut short when the U.S. Government made some drastic budget cuts. Rather than transfer to another Peace Corps assignment, Greg accepted a Foreign Service appointment and ultimately served in Ethiopia, Pakistan, Germany, Washington D.C. Cyprus, Malawi and South Africa over the course of nearly three decades. He also served as the U.S. Ambassador to Togo from 2003 to 2005. In addition to his other overseas assignments, he served in Baghdad from 2005 to 2006 as the Minister Counselor for Management Affairs. From these varied experiences, he has learned many languages including: Urdu, Hindi, Korean, German, and French. Having just recently taken the post of Country Director on June 30th 2012, can Amharic be too far behind?

Greg speaks enthusiastically of his job and the Volunteers in Ethiopia. He believes Ethiopia is exactly where Peace Corps should be. With 230 volunteers, including the group of 59 trainees (designated as G9), which arrived in country in early July, Peace Corps/Ethiopia is the third largest program in Africa after Senegal and Zambia. It is a relatively new program, with Volunteers reintroduced to Ethiopia six years ago, which faces the challenges and opportunities of a new and growing program.

Working with the Volunteers is “amazing,” and not at all a burden, Greg tells me. This makes his six or seven-day workweek manageable. There has been an explosion of Volunteers this past year, although the size of his staff has not grown proportionally. Whenever he himself needs a lift, he wanders down to the Volunteer Resource Center and chats with some of the Volunteers who inevitably wind up there to use the Internet, check on resources, receive updates, and meet with other Volunteers. He encourages them all to stop by his office for a five-minute chat whenever they are at the Peace Corps headquarters. It is one of his ways of keeping connected. He finds Volunteers with whom he works to be a great group — constructive and positive, and when faced with difficulties and challenges, they look at ways to make things better. Most of the early Volunteers in this series worked in the Health Sector and many took it upon themselves to work in the schools and set up clubs. Choices that made the biggest difference.

He met many of the RPCVs during the Return to Ethiopia in 2012 and was pleased at the connections between the RPCVs and current Volunteers. Greg was also touched by the stories of the RPCVs as they connected with former students and colleagues. He specifically mentioned the story of Doug and Alma Raymond, who met with a former student, Nasser Kutabish. As Doug relayed his story, tears welled in his eyes. Nasser and his brothers, now highly successful, credited Doug and Alma for much of their success, bearing great influence on their lives some fifty years prior. Greg frequently repeats this story with current Volunteers when they question their purpose in Ethiopia.

The most challenging aspect of his job, he stated, is finding suitable sites and productive jobs. Since it is a relatively young program, there isn't always a proven track record among the organizations and governmental entities with which Peace Corps works. It is an educational process with site visits typically taken one month after installation, where Peace Corps administration meets with officials and Volunteers. Everything flows from a positive and successful placement, otherwise the Volunteers struggle to determine where they might fit in. A successful work experience balances the daily inconveniences, minor health issues, and taunts of “ferengi.” The Peace Corps Office works diligently with the Volunteers, from PST (Pre-Service Training) to COS (Completion of Service), ensuring a successful assignment, which is of course about the Volunteers helping Ethiopians, as well as Goals Two and Three. He declares: it is “All about the Volunteers.”

The Volunteers of today are highly connected; each is assigned a cell phone for safety reasons. Most have reliable access to the Internet or are relatively close to a town or village that has Internet capabilities. For the twenty or so Volunteers who are not readily within an Internet zone, Greg must rely on texting for urgent communication. He encourages blogging, fulfilling the Third Goal while still in country, relaying to the outside world what Peace Corps life is all about.

In response to how RPCVs can best support current Volunteers, Greg does support direct contributions to the various Peace Corps Partnership Program (PCPP) grants written by the current Volunteers, but would also encourage direct donations to the PCPP Country Fund. Although this fund is relatively small each year, it enables him to award “mini grants” of about 3,000 Birr (\$160 US) to the Volunteers. The mini-grants are facilitative, providing the Volunteers with just enough funds to cover the expenses of refreshments, poster materials, or paints for events such as a Malaria Day program or Healthy Lifestyles. [Click](#) to donate to either Volunteer-designed grant programs or to the Ethiopia Country Fund.



“Sit right down next to me here” from the video *The Volunteers of Ethiopia*

It would be impossible to have a conversation with Greg without at some point referring to his music. I first learned of his musical talents through the release of the YouTube video [The Volunteers of Ethiopia](#) a montage of photos of current and recent Volunteers set to the song, *A Simple Prayer*, that he wrote for his children several years ago. He was recently asked by Peace Corps/Washington to produce a new video that covered the entire continent of Africa set to the same song and [A Tribute to Peace Corps Volunteers in Africa](#) was born.

Greg began playing the guitar at eight years old and has played it nearly every day since. Fourteen years ago, “songs came out” culminating in the production of the album *Take it Personally* produced in 2010 (available from Amazon as an [audio CD](#) or downloadable as an [MP3](#)).

Greg’s song *Woody’s Ghost* (original version) won first prize in the 2011 Woody Guthrie Folk Festival Songwriting Competition. (The YouTube version is [Woody Walks this Land](#).) After reading Joe Kline’s book, *Woody Guthrie: A Life*, Greg knew that one day he would write a song about Guthrie and one day the song just “happened.” While searching the Woody Guthrie Folk Festival website, Greg came upon the songwriting competition, entered it, and took first place. The song is a fictitious conversation that Greg had with Guthrie, whom he picked up hitchhiking in Oklahoma. In the piece, Guthrie states, that although his song, *This Land is Your Land*, is sung by school children everywhere, two verses are frequently omitted: the verses about people and neglected folks, and people that are forgotten on the other side of the door. In the conversation, Guthrie asks Greg to “promise this . . . to teach those verses to my kids.”

Two other songs from his album, *Take it Personally* have been set to YouTube videos: [Nelson](#) and [Market Day, Africa](#). Both songs are indicative of the powerful effects that Africa had on Greg throughout his three decades of service.

Greg Engle is not only the Country Director for Peace Corps/Ethiopia, but also a singer/songwriter with a “rough voice,” a humanitarian, and a gentle soul. He most certainly has had a great effect in all those countries in which he served, and like in his song, *A Simple Prayer*, his lasting effect in Ethiopia will be to “leave this place better than before.”



Market Day, Africa

Fiftieth Anniversary

Posted on [September 25, 2013](#) by [janetlee](#) | [2 comments](#)

Finding Nasser

by **Alma Toroian Raymond (Dabat, Addis Ababa, Asmara 67-69)**

We started looking for Nasser, our former student in Ethiopia, in July 2008 after we discovered on the Ethiopia & Eritrea RPCVs' website a [listing of other Volunteers in Dabat](#), the town where we served. We located one of those Volunteers in Columbus, Ohio after entering his name in a Google search and finding a church bulletin announcing that he and his wife would be addressing the congregation regarding their work in Dabat, Ethiopia, our teaching site.

Bill Hershey (Dabat 68-70) answered my first email and put us in touch with one of his former Dabat students, Abraham Dere Beyene, who was living in Atlanta. Abraham remembered us from our days in Dabat and said he would attempt to find Nasser.

On Christmas Eve of 2008, we received a letter from Abraham with an email address for a Nasser M. Kutabish. To ensure that this was indeed our former student, I sent Nasser a photo of the girls in his 8th grade class on December 26th, and asked him to tell me their names and how they were at the time he last saw them. The following morning, I went to my email as usual and was astounded to find an email from Nasser. He was elated to have heard from us, had all the right answers about the girls, and remembered the words to the songs my husband, Doug, had taught in music class. Nasser also included a photo of himself along with his excellent 8th grade final exam scores. It was the best Christmas present that we had ever received. We were all overjoyed at finding each other.

Arriving in Ethiopia

The first time Doug and I flew into Ethiopia was in 1967 on a Pan Am plane loaded with fresh Peace Corps recruits. This time it was 2012 with an Ethiopian Airlines plane loaded with 100 Returned Volunteers who were returning to Ethiopia in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the first Volunteers in Ethiopia. I recall having seen the Nile from my window seat in 1967. I didn't see the Nile on this trip, but it was obvious that we were flying over Ethiopia — the view of the countryside revealed cultivated fields, green land, villages with some farm buildings and an occasional mud and stick *tukul*.

We passed over the Simien Mountains of Northern Ethiopia. There were farms on every plateau, each separated from others by thousands of feet of rugged canyons. I could only imagine how difficult it would be to take crops to market or to visit anyone from the next plateau. I recalled that Ethiopians call across great distances to greet neighbors or share information.

Upon landing in Addis Ababa in the daytime, we were met by Peace Corps/Ethiopia Country Director Greg Engle, the press and diplomats. Ethiopian coffee was served along with other refreshments as speeches were made welcoming our arrival. I was in a daze.

Anxious to find Nasser and his wife Zekia, who had traveled together from Yemen to meet us and to spend the next two weeks with us, we left the reception and walked to the front of the airport to see if they were waiting for us inside near the ticketing and arrivals desks. The front doors of the airport were locked and nobody was allowed to enter

despite it being in the middle of the day. We rattled doors until it was confirmed that we could not go inside. Then we saw a couple in the distance with bouquets of yellow Meskal flowers hurrying from the parking lot toward the airport. We hadn't seen Nasser in 45 years, but he was totally recognizable. We had a wonderful reunion and met his beautiful wife Zekia for the first time.

From that moment, our Ethiopian adventure began.

Our first days in Ethiopia

It was 45 years ago when we said farewell to Nasser as we boarded a bus and left Dabat. During the Red Terror — that began in the mid-'70s — his father moved the family for their safety to Sana'a, Yemen from which their ancestors had emigrated. Now Nasser is a successful businessman, has a wonderful wife, and is the patriarch of a large family.



2012 - Alma, Doug and Nasser

Nasser had hired a van with a driver named Hailu who always kept the van nearby where he waited, cell phone in hand, for a call from Nasser. Hailu drove us from the airport to the very impressive Radisson Blu Hotel in Addis. The lobby of the Radisson was resonant with the joy of newly arrived former Peace Corps Volunteers visiting with their former students — mere teenagers the last time we had seen them.

We had arrived in Addis at the beginning of the major holiday called Meskerem, and thousands of Ethiopians were out wearing their very best for to celebrate the holiday, and carrying yellow Meskal flowers and tapers to light against the dark. The crowd made its way to Meskal Square not far from where we were staying. There were groups in colorful dress, singing and marching to the beat of large drums as they proceeded to the square where a giant bonfire had been erected and would be set aflame at the climax of the ceremony.

Nasser took us to lunch at the home of Semunesh Demetros. She remembered being in my English class when she was a young girl. Now she is a diplomat who was about to leave for Geneva to work on getting Ethiopia into the World Trade Organization. In addition to Nasser and Zekia, others in attendance at the lunch were: Nasser's brother Hussein, Bizu Ayane, Fasil Assefa, Senat Assefa and Getanet Berhane. These were among the many of our former students who have become successful in business as adults. They attributed their success to having met us all those years ago. When questioned about this, they said it was because our presence in Ethiopia showed them something different, and they realized that they could do something different, too. Some of them are diplomats; many of them such as Nasser are wealthy businessmen and women. One student had been a jet pilot for the Ethiopian Air Force. During the Red Terror, he was assigned to fly over and bomb the region that contained Dabat. Rather than bomb his hometown, he flew on to Saudi Arabia where he landed and announced his defection.

There is a general sense of upward mobility in Addis Ababa, with high-rise buildings being erected all around the city, as in other large cities we visited. Everything had changed so much that it was difficult if not impossible to find the two houses that we lived in when we were there in the '60s. We were able to find the building where the Peace Corps office had been located, and across the street, we found the former International Hotel where Peace Corps Volunteers stationed outside Addis often stayed when in the city.

Travel to Gondar & Beyond

As we traveled, we witnessed Chinese road workers widening and rebuilding the road that goes north from Gondar to the border with Eritrea. The difficult terrain made progress slow. The pavement disappeared a short way out of Gondar and was replaced by rocks that looked like they were destined to serve as a base that later would be covered with asphalt. The countryside was green, and droves of people were walking with donkeys and sometimes horses or mules on their way to or from markets and churches. These multitudes were not in existence when we lived there. In those days, we would see only a handful of people along the road. The rocky ride was jolting at times, and such it was as we rolled into Dabat after so many years.

Visiting Dabat

It is hard to describe the emotion we felt as we entered the town. Our house was the first thing we recognized, but it was much altered and there were people teeming around it reading postings on a bulletin board on the exposed wall. It seemed that the Chinese road project had claimed the front half of the house, exposing what had previously been an interior wall.

When we had come to Dabat in 1967, the house had been a roadhouse with a bar and rooms in back that were sublet. As Volunteers, we slept in a back room and the “bar” was our kitchen and living room. Some of our fellow teachers lived behind the big house and three teachers from the university in Asmara lived in another room adjacent to ours.



Doug starting a model plane engine - Nasser in blue, 6th from the left - 1968

A round mud *tukul* with a grass roof in the back corner of our compound had housed the *zebanya* and his family. I felt sorry for the old guy. He was supposed to sit on the cold front porch all night with his gun. In the daytime, he would take a long-horned cow out to plow fields. When we left Dabat, Doug gave him a pair of shoes. Doug’s shoes were big enough to fit the fellow, and he was obviously delighted with the gift. We had never seen him wearing shoes before.



1967 - Alma with a student in a field of Meskal flowers

During this return visit, we found Dabat in many ways changed for the better, and in other ways not changed at all. There has been a population explosion all over the country [*the current population in Ethiopia is 4 times what it was in the '60s*] and Dabat was not excluded from this startling growth. Technology had blossomed as well. Most adults in Ethiopia now have cell phones, including the citizens of the remote towns like Dabat. In addition to that, many have electricity for lights and widescreen TVs in their homes regardless of whether the homes are of modern construction or if they are roughly built of mud and stones.

We rolled slowly through town with children running alongside our van smiling and waving. Stopping near the old City Hall, we were amazed to see that it was still standing. The mayor and his entourage greeted us, shooed the children away and led us to his office in one end of the building. Apparently, the rest of the building was too dilapidated to be used. It was built by the Italians during their occupation in the 1930s. A small group of people anticipating our arrival greeted us, and then the Mayor and the Executive Director of the vocational school led us up a flight of stairs to his office and meeting room.

Walking Tour of the Schools

The mayor had a list of needs and was seeking associates to help with financing the projects. They needed school supplies, books and desks, and latrines. After the meeting, they took us on a tour of the schools. The old buildings that we taught in are still in use and it was hard to believe that we actually taught in those miserable little rooms that were more like small stables. I recall that some of the classrooms had dirt floors and the children sat on rocks or on the dirt. The Swedish Peace Corps came to Dabat while we were still teaching there and built a new school building. That building is still standing and is in use.



Nasser and Alma in old 8th grade room –
2012

There are seven school buildings in the town now including the ones that we used in the 1960s. One of the new school buildings is a vocational school. We peered through the windows and saw desks in that building. The mayor is hoping for a library and books, for a staff room, and for more desks for some of the other buildings. In my opinion, what the Dabat schools most sorely lack is latrines for boys, girls and the staff. Studies have shown that girls, especially adolescent girls reaching puberty, stay in school longer if separate latrines are available to them, and I would like to help remedy this problem. Members of the Dabat Alumni Club (all former students of ours) are making a visit to Dabat to explore possible solutions, and will report back to all of us. They are brilliant and hardworking people who can always find something to laugh about. They were fun when they were our students and they are fun and hard working now. Perhaps I will be able to get some ideas of where to start when I learn from them what the costs might be. (*See postscript for update*).

Nasser's Relatives

While we were in Dabat, we made some house calls. The first was to visit Nasser's relatives who hadn't seen him since he was a boy. The relatives who remained in Ethiopia live in a mud and brick house in town. They were happy to see Nasser and to meet his wife. A cousin who grew up with Nasser arrived and collapsed in tears of joy at the sight of him. It was a sweet reunion and we were privileged to bear witness. A beautiful young woman made fresh coffee while squatting over a small brazier in a dimly lit corner of the living room. The fragrance was wonderful and her lovely, almond-shaped eyes were all we could see of her in the dark corner. We noted the presence of a widescreen color TV on the wall silently flashing color. There were electrical lighting fixtures and most everyone one had a cell phone.

In Retrospect

Nasser and his friends have credited their success to having met us all those years ago. We would like to think that we did have a small role, but truth be known, it was Nasser himself who actually made the wise decisions and did the hard work. He is responsible not only for his success, but also for his very survival during those turbulent times. Many of his friends were killed and others survived by denouncing others. We are very proud to call this former student one of our dearest friends.

Postscript

Through a referral from Greg Engle, we connected with Patrick Wozny of the American Embassy in Addis, who gave us hope for potential funding for the latrine project, and the Dabat Alumni Club prepared and submitted a proposal for the latrine project to the Embassy. We have just received notice from the American Embassy that our latrine project has been funded. This is a wonderful result of our return to Dabat.

Projects

Posted on [September 25, 2013](#) by [janetlee](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

Ethiopian Sustainable Food Project [ESFP] attracts attention at 2013 “Peace Corps Connect” event

By *Joe Bell (Alamata, Wello 69-71)*

Peace Corps Connect, hosted by the National Peace Corps Association and held June 28-29, 2013 in Boston, was far more than speeches and seminars, valuable as those events were. The event also provided exhibit space and the opportunity for country groups of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers to recruit, reconnect, and educate to promote their projects.

Boston Area RPCVs, Friends of Niger and of Lesotho, the Peace Corps Iran Association, RPCVs of Madison, the Fallen PC Volunteers Memorial Project, the Ethiopian Sustainable Food Project and others were among the more than twenty Peace Corps related exhibitors present at the event.

PC Connect attendees showed not only commitment to the Third Goal of promoting American understanding of other people, they also showed how some RPCVs are providing direct assistance to current development projects in their former host countries. For some RPCVs, “the hardest job you will ever love” has not ended with their return home.

The Ethiopian Sustainable Food Project [ESFP] is just one example of how former Volunteers are using their skills to create, support and assist current development projects. Here is a description of the ESFP which was on display at Peace Corps Connect:

Half a dozen years ago, Charlie Higgins, an Ethiopia XII Volunteer (1969-71), potato farmer, university professor and founder of the ESFP, was driving through an Ethiopian village while participating in a USAID “Farmer to Farmer” project. An Ethiopian farmer knocked on the side of the old Toyota with his walking stick, and then pleaded for some disease tolerant potato seed that he had heard about. Charlie knew that all of the available potato seed was contaminated with every disease ever found in potatoes and the Ethiopian Ministry of Agricultural had no means to provide clean seed. Despite that, Charlie knew that “potatoes produce more nutritional food than any other crop that can be grown in the Ethiopian highlands.”



USAID had built a beautiful lab facility near Bahar Dar in north-western Ethiopia that had the potential to supply disease-free potato seed to the entire Amhara region of Ethiopia, but the facility was sitting empty, unused. Farmers in the Amhara region grow potatoes on about 80,000 hectares of land, but the yields have been extremely low due to the diseased seed. Over the past decades, the population has become quite dependent upon potatoes to supplement grain in the national diet. Between 1969 and today, Ethiopia’s population has increased from 20 to about 84 million people.

After USAID withdrew all support for potato projects, a group of Returned Ethiopian Peace Corps XII [69-71] Volunteers and US potato growers led by Charlie Higgins took the initiative in 2007 to help get the lab functioning and provide training for Ethiopian technicians to produce disease-free seed.

Six years on, Ethiopians working at the lab are now able to supply clean seed potatoes to five to ten farmer's groups (averaging 25 farmers per group) in the area around Gondar. The clean seed successfully increases the yield of disease-free tubers those farmers can sell to other potato growers. One hundred kilos of clean seed potatoes from the lab will produce 1,000 kilos during the first year and up to 10,000 kilos of potatoes in the second year.

Since potatoes are quickly re-infected with ubiquitous potato diseases in Ethiopia, growers must depend upon clean seed coming from the lab every three years to keep their yields up. The clean seed of these improved potato varieties yields three times more than the disease-infested seed commonly used.

The ESFP could achieve sustainability for this project in the future because farmers are now aware of and anxious to buy clean potato seed from the lab, to grow better potatoes, and to store, market and use them.

The next phase of the project concerns what to do with the extra potatoes now being produced. The past practice has been to leave the potato crop in the ground and dig potatoes as they are needed for food. But insects and diseases destroy 50% of the crop left in the soil. With increased production, participating farmers realize that they are able to market part of their crop after feeding their immediate families. However, the market price for potatoes is extremely depressed during the harvest period, and then several months after the harvest, the price for potatoes rises.

The ESFP, with the help of Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture Engineers, has now developed a potato storage method and structure the farmers can easily build on their farms with local materials to protect the crop from field losses.

Also, workshops showing farmers and their wives how to dehydrate potatoes and other vegetables using solar power have attracted over 250 participants. A solar dehydrator can be built with 50 US cents worth of plastic and locally grown bamboo. The dehydrated vegetables can be used to stretch expensive flour supplies, and they can be stored for many years. Farmers' wives who have participated in these workshops have also helped develop culturally acceptable recipes for the dehydrated vegetables.

As is well known, Ethiopia has had severe famines during years when the rains do not come. If sufficient potatoes and other vegetables are dehydrated at harvest time they can provide a reserve source of nutrition for the farming families during times of failed crops.



Lab for producing clean potato seed



Potato storage hut

Charlie Higgins and a few other former Ethiopian Peace Corps Volunteers continue support and return to visit the farms each year to oversee and audit the progress of the ESFP. So far, the group has raised and distributed about \$90,000 to support the production and distribution of clean potato seed over the past six years. Three large US potato growers have been providing funding for the project.

Now, more Ethiopian Group XII Volunteers and families are providing funding and serving as financial, legal and funding advisors for this growing project. So far, the administrative costs have been minimal, less than 1% of the gross donations, which are tax deductible through the Community Foundation of Central Washington. If more funds become available more farmers in other potato growing areas could be helped become not only producers, but also sellers of clean seed. The ESFP is seeking new sources of funding and looking for ideas to help publicize and support the ESFP. For more information, click [Ethiopian Sustainable Food Project](#).



Potato dehydrator

Photos: Thanks to the ESFP website.

Posted in [RPCV Projects](#)

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Books

Posted on [September 25, 2013](#) by [janetlee](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

A Time to . . .

A BABY BOOMER'S SPIRITUAL ADVENTURES

by Ronald Louis Peterson (Nekempte 1973-75)

CreateSpace

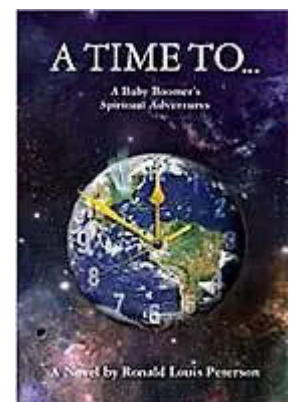
2011

434 pages

\$17.95 ([paperback](#)), \$3.99 ([Kindle](#))

Reviewed by Cheryl (Banister) Armstrong (Metu 72-73; Asmara 73-74)

I READ RON PETERSON'S *A Time To . . . A Baby Boomer's Spiritual Adventures* in one cramped sitting while flying between Washington D.C. and Addis Ababa. I was desperate to pass the time, and yes, this book was a page-turner. Trapped in a stairwell of a 9/11 Tower, Ron's character, Al Masterson, revisits his past, decade by decade. I could relate to each stage of Al's quest to puzzle out the meaning of his life experiences. I didn't grow up in New York, but I have had friends and relatives who have had brushes with gang life, and Al's childhood friend's tragic mistake rang true. Al continues his story through the tumultuous '60s and '70s, serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Ethiopia. I, too, served in Ethiopia and Eritrea and found these chapters compelling. Ethiopia is a challenging country to live and travel in, it's people are intelligent and sophisticated, it's



physicality beautiful, and it's spirituality deep. His chapters about 9/11 are insightful and moving. Al is a seeker of meaning and faith. His story will take you on a fascinating and exciting journey.

In Ethiopia with a Mule

by Dervla Murphy

John Murray Publishers, Ltd.

2004 (reissue — first published in 1968)

286 pages

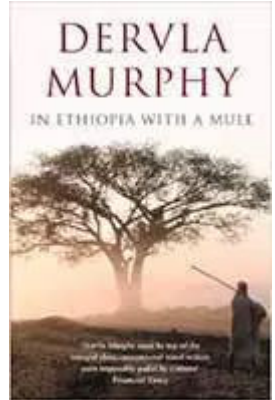
\$12.49 ([paperback](#)),

Reviewed by Alma Toroian Raymond (Dabat 1967–69)

DERVLA MURPHY HAS WRITTEN 18 books about her solo travels in remote and sometimes treacherous territories, including *In Ethiopia with a Mule*. She traveled in Ethiopia on foot with a pack mule named Jock. Together they trekked from the north through the rugged Semien to the southern regions. RPCVs who have had the opportunity to travel through the Semien mountains will identify with many of the tales in her book.

In Transylvania, she traveled by foot, on trains and even bicycled over the Carpathian mountains. In Ethiopia she was assaulted and robbed by *shifita*, and in Transylvania she was robbed by a train conductor who left her shivering on the station platform on a cold night without a coat or hiking shoes.

Regardless of the circumstances, she always carried on finding herself with hospitable, curious locals who invited her into their homes where they shared what little food, drink and space that was available and warmed themselves together around wood burning fires. In Transylvania, in addition to the food and drink, she was able to talk with people who, having recently been released from the tyranny of Nicolae Ceausescu, were eager to learn about how a democracy can be made.



The Lure of the Honey Bird

THE STORY TELLERS OF ETHIOPIA.

by Elizabeth Laird

Birlinn Ltd.

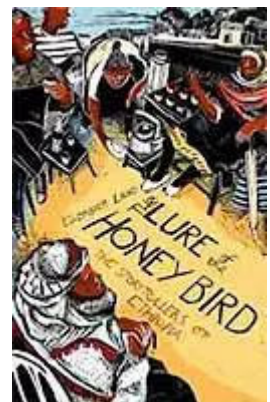
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Reviewed by Janet Lee (Emdeber 1974-76)

I FIRST BECAME AWARE of Elizabeth Laird having seen two anthologies sponsored by the British Council that contained her translations of stories she had gathered from across



Ethiopia. The anthologies had stories representative from even the remotest sections of Ethiopia. As a young Peace Corps Volunteer in the '70s, I had used Shlomo Bachrach's (PC/Ethiopia Staff 1966-68) *Ethiopian Folktales* as the text for my seventh grade students and knew the importance of stories and folktales in both preserving culture and expanding literacy.

The Lure of the Honey Bird is a memoir focusing on the time of her life that she spent gathering these stories. A British national, Laird first traveled to Ethiopia as a young teacher. Just 23 years old, she had the adventure of her life traveling to the mountain regions in the north, the city of Lalibela, and the Danakil desert. She was even introduced to His Imperial Majesty, Haile Selassie.

Following a successful career as an award-winning author, she had an opportunity to return to Ethiopia at the bequest of the British Council, which charged her with the joyful task of collecting stories from every region of Ethiopia. These stories would be printed in local languages as readers and distributed to schoolchildren in each region. She made several trips to Ethiopia, through mud and rain, heat and dust, illness and in health. It is a remarkable story.

Although I was mesmerized throughout with her vivid and insightful descriptions, two accounts resonated with me: Harar (my training site) and Welkite, the Gurage town where I caught the Land Rover to my village of Emdeber. Harar is that unique, walled-in city, where the women dress in brightly colored fabric. It was the home of the poet, Rimbaud, and famed for its hyenas. "There is something particularly alluring about an ancient walled city, and Harar, remote and isolated, set within its white walls on the green side of a hill, is a jewel." Harar is indeed, a fascinating place, but unfortunately off limits to current Volunteers.

I lived in a modified Gurage house, and woke each morning to an open ceiling, fascinated by its intricate design and openness. Laird writes, "When you step inside one of these extraordinary constructions you can only look up and gasp . . . It's like the pillar of a cathedral, and the wooden spokes that spring from it create an effect of a fan vaulting." These two wonderful descriptions confirm the accuracy of the remaining throughout.

As she travels from place to place, she relates the tales that she has heard, a treasure trove of stories that include [were-hyenas](#), kings, wild animals and young maidens. She notes the similarities and differences from the various regions of Ethiopia, and also similarities to biblical stories or tales and myths from other lands and earlier times.

It is a fascinating read.



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