

The Herald

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

MONTHLY ARCHIVES: FEBRUARY 2014

Editor's Note

Posted on [February 4, 2014](#) by [janetlee](#) | [1 comment](#)

Editor's Note

By Janet Lee (Emdeber 1974-76)

The Herald is a newsletter for RETURNED Peace Corps Volunteers from Ethiopia and Eritrea. "Returned" is very intentional. Not Former. Not Ex. Returned. Serving as a Volunteer is a life transforming experience and many of us long to return to Ethiopia. I had the opportunity to do so this past November in order to work with a colleague on cloth book publishing. Among the highlights were connecting with current PCVs in their communities: Addis Ababa, Mekelle, Axum, and Gondar.

While in Addis Ababa, I visited the "Red Terror" Martyrs Memorial Museum with Jennifer Miller and Paul Voigt. The museum was important to me because I was in Addis Ababa the day Haile Selassie was overthrown. Impulsively, I purchased two copies of "The Day of the Martyrs" at the end of the free tour. Imagine my surprise when Paul emailed me a few days later and asked if I knew that I was in the book. Sure enough, the author had reprinted [my book review of Maaza Mengiste's "Beneath the Lion's Gaze"](#) as published in "The Herald."

Addis is more crowded than I remembered and made more difficult to navigate because of the construction of a light rail system. Hopefully, this will ease the congestion in the near future.



Light Rail construction [click photo to enlarge.]

\I also had an opportunity to visit the library at the African Union building, a magnificent structure built through Chinese funding.



African Union [Click photo to enlarge.]

The workshops in Mekelle went well thanks to the efforts and participation of Scott McAllister, Jessi Axe, Avak Kahramanian, Sarunas Krukonis, Joel Miller, Pamela Cayemitte, and Marcelle Brown.



Cloth book by PCV Jessi Axe (Mekelle)

Avak and Scott accompanied me to a school for the blind where I was able to personally deliver a letter in braille from RPCV Brittany Franck.

Then I was off to Axum, a sister city of Denver, where I live. Because there was no flight to Axum from Mekelle (and who wants to fly to Addis and spend the night), I traveled overland in a private vehicle. The road was recently paved, and although I had been cautioned that it was "treacherous" it was smooth sailing. I don't remember twists and turns, but then I am from Colorado. Through the Peace Corps telephone tree, I connected with two local Volunteers: Christine Homan and Todd Paynich. While I was in Axum, I was able to visit the Axumite Library and the libraries at the University of Axum, which was a recent recipient of a container of books from a Denver-area university. The PCVs and I made plans for dinner for that night. Much to my surprise, we were guests of newly arrived U.S. Ambassador Patricia Haslach. I found her extremely knowledgeable and receptive to input from all around the table.



Janet with Ambassador Haslach



Readers will notice that “return” is a theme in this issue. We begin the new issue of “The Herald” with Charles Kreiman’s “Returning Home to Ethiopia” as he returns to his site of Assella. This return was part of a trip that he led for Denver Sister Cities International.

Returning to Ethiopia was also a theme in many of the stories by Maria Thomas (Roberta Worrick Addis Ababa 1971-73), whose books I review collectively in the next article, “Maria Thomas: A Life Cut Short.” Her stories brought back such memories for me: the lack of a variety of food, going to the next larger town to use a telephone, the smallpox eradication team. It is time to bring back a revival of her work.

I recently had dinner with a G10 couple, Ernie and Sue Bjorkman, soon to be departing for Ethiopia to begin their group training. They will be interested in Chad Miller’s article, “Pre-service Training: G9 was “Born on the Fourth of July.” If I read Chad’s summary of training correctly, learning Amharic will be a piece of cake after learning what all of the initials and acronyms mean.



Ernie and Sue meet injera and wat

This issue features two projects, one by a current Volunteer and one by a recently Returned Volunteer conducted in Ethiopia. In “Kids for Kids: Using Technology to Inform and Improve Behavior,” Benjamin Morse (Hawzien 2011-2013) writes about a video production project that he collaborated on that focused on encouraging good behavior practices for children. “Should You Eat Green Eggs and Ham?: A Small Town Book Project” by A.J. Gary (Chagni, Awi Zone 2012-2014) demonstrates how he was able to obtain books for a project and use them effectively in working with young children.

As always, we conclude this issue with book reviews. The first book is written by one of our own, *The Glory of the Kings* by Dan Close (Bekoji 1965–67) reviewed by Michael O’Brien (Gerawa, Garamuleta, Harrar Province 1967–69) and *The Power of Citizenship: Why John F. Kennedy Matters to a New Generation* by Scott D. Reich and reviewed by Danielle Hoekwater (Mekelle 2008–11).

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1 Comment

Journeys

Posted on [February 4, 2014](#) by [janettlee](#) | [4 comments](#)

Returning Home to Ethiopia

by **Charles Kreiman (Assella 1968–70)**

Late afternoon, our last day in Assella, trying to find the place I had called “home” 43 years earlier.

My home had been in the same compound with Zewde, the music teacher. Belihu our guide, a retired teacher, had been an 8th grade student and bass drum player in 1968. I drew a rough map from memory, the arc of the main road, now paved, turning east at the center of town, up the hill to the school, formerly Ras Darge, now renamed Chilalo Terara. On the map, I placed my home just north of the main road and down the hill from school. Belihu suggested that Tadesse, the retired woodworking teacher who lived a short distance away, might recall where Zewde had lived.

A knock at the gate, exchange of greetings, smiles, an invitation to come in. Tadesse seemed vaguely familiar; obviously elderly now, with only a few teeth remaining, but still animated and welcoming. In the large main room were his wife, daughter, and grandchildren. An offer of tea, more discussion. Graciously, Tadesse’s daughter agreed to join us, directing our driver Afera to go a short distance and then stop at an intersection. Tadesse’s daughter approached a gate and knocked. Again, the greetings, smiles, discussion.

Yes, they agreed, this had been Zewde’s house some 25 years ago although the street looked a bit different from the picture I had taken long ago. A crowd gathered; curious youngsters of course, along with some older folks as well. I explained, “*Ine bi Assella astamari c’ arba tsost amet bifeet nebrku.* [I was a teacher in Assella 43 years ago.]” (I recalled the words, but I’d never really mastered Amharic sentence structure or verb conjugation). Out of the crowd one woman came forward; she must have been about 10 or 11 when I was there. She recalled that a foreign teacher had lived on this street. I took out a picture of me from 1969. Looking at me and the picture, she nodded, now sure that I was the one she remembered.

Another woman stepped forward. “Which one was your house?” she asked. Replying that it had been at the back of the compound, she led me through a gap in the fence, down the path, and there it was, remodeled now into a two-family structure. But, yes, this was the place that had been my home. I snapped a picture and the flash lit up the scene. So, on my next-to-last day in Ethiopia, I guess I truly had returned home.

Assella was the last leg of three weeks in Africa, mostly in Ethiopia. I was fulfilling a dream of returning, an urge to reconnect, an unquenched curiosity about what was there now, who was there now, and how were they doing. As

Peace Corps teachers, we had struggled in our own minds and in our discussions with doubts about our purpose, our impact: Useful? Beneficial? Positive? Negative? I think we had one answer, when a man joined us on that street corner in Assella, recalling with pride that Mr. Bass (Ethiopia VII math teacher Bob Bass) had brought bread to the striking students camped on the outskirts of town. I hope that Bob's wife Bette (Ethiopia VII science teacher) takes comfort that her late husband, the ringleader of our group of strike supporters, is still remembered fondly by at least one former student.



(click to enlarge)

As many RPCVs have discovered, Ethiopia somehow maintains its hold on you. For me, it was an enduring influence both personally and professionally. Once stability returned to Ethiopia in the 1990s a return trip was a dream for me, yet remained unrealized by seemingly insurmountable obstacles. I'll admit some envy as I learned of others who had gone back. Reconnecting with Ethiopia X's at the 50th Reunion, the idea of making the trip to Ethiopia came was discussed. Although joining the September 2012 "Return to Ethiopia" trip was out of the question for me, I continued my connection with Ethiopia through the Denver-Axum Sister Cities Committee.

August 2012 - After my wife picked me up at the Denver airport upon returning from a business trip, we went directly to a Sister Cities meeting at an Ethiopian restaurant. When plans for a trip to Axum came up on the agenda, I announce that my wife Ellen and I were committed to be the first names on the list. Recent events had resolved those seemingly insurmountable obstacles, and I was eager to recruit as many Ethiopia X's as possible to join local Sister Cities folks for the 2013 trip to Ethiopia.

October 2013 - The Denver-Axum Sister Cities delegation, a group of 10 on Ethiopian Airline flight 501, flew nonstop from Washington/Dulles to Addis Ababa, having successfully solved the logistics of bringing along 8 boxes of Project CURE medical supplies for St. Mary's Hospital in Axum. In the end the only other Ethiopia X to make the trip was Ninian Beall (Wollamo Sodo). Once we arrived in Addis Ababa, visited major sites, and recovered from jet lag, our group embarked on the traditional "Historic Tour," with some extra time planned in our Sister City of Axum, under the guidance of Assefa, an engaging, knowledgeable, and thoughtful young man from our Ethiopian travel agency.

As we experienced Ethiopia in 2013, I sensed that Ninian and I reacted a bit differently from the others in our group. This was our second time around. Even after more than 40 years, the people, the streets, the smells, the *chika bets*, triggered memories, a familiarity, a warm, even comfortable feeling. For the others, there seemed just a bit more wonder and amazement as they absorbed Ethiopia for the first time.

Taking in the sites and marvels along the Historic Tour made up for my omissions of the past. Peace Corps veterans had advised us newcomer Volunteers to vacation in Kenya and Tanzania for needed R&R. There were detailed guides about where to go, where to stay, and how to get around, by air, train, or car, including the best hitch hiking spots. It was indeed a great vacation, but I had missed so much of Ethiopia. This trip brought home the sense that Ethiopia was a place of substance, with a long history, tradition, and cultural depth. I did include a brief excursion to Tanzania on this trip, photographing the scenery and as many species of wildlife as possible. But Ethiopia was different; more than the obelisks at Axum, the castles of Gondar, or the churches at Yeha and Lalibela, it was a total experience, reinforcing my connection with the place and the people of Ethiopia.

Sharing some of my pictures with other RPCVs after we had returned to Denver, one commented that "things" look very different from what he remembered. My reaction was yes, "things" are very different today. The cell phone towers are everywhere. More rural areas are now connected to the electric grid. Combines now harvest the lush

fields of Arsi (what we used to call “Arussi”). Addis Ababa is a mass of construction, new commercial and residential structures everywhere, a ring road, the beginnings of light rail. The road from Addis Ababa to Nazareth is a burgeoning commercial corridor, with numerous industrial sites and a “dry port” at Mojo bustling with trucks and shipping containers.

But these “things” while tangible and new, still seemed more of a surface change. Driving the newly re-constructed road from Bahir Dar to Gondar, one still must contend with laden donkeys, cattle, and sheep. Amidst new western style apartment blocks are endless numbers of chika bets with dirt floors and no glass windows. The deep-seated values of hospitality and kindness shined on the faces of the students who greeted us in Axum and Assella. Searching for my home in Assella, an impromptu crowd showed an almost instinctive helpfulness to a grey-haired *ferengi* who had been a teacher there 43 years earlier.

While in Addis Ababa I had the chance to walk from the Piazza to Arat Kilo, an area I had frequented during in-country training and on numerous weekend trips. It was another example of the juxtaposition of the old familiar and the new. As before, there were many jewelry shops, but some now featured more modern designs in the display windows. There were newer buildings in places, but many familiar sites, including the Greek Orthodox Church. As before, we ran into our share of street hustlers trying to sell their wares and beggars unabashedly requesting money. The International Hotel near Arat Kilo was still there, where we had spent many nights and enjoyed many cups of cappuccino, while across the street all I could find were unfamiliar university buildings where Peace Corps/Ethiopia Headquarters had once been.

As a historian and political scientist by training, I was struck by Ethiopia’s experiment in federalism. As PCVs in 1968, our formal language instruction had been limited to Amharic. In the name of national unity and identity, instruction in Tigrinya, Oromo, or other local languages had been strictly forbidden. Now elementary students in



Visiting a study hall (click to enlarge)

Assella learn in Oromo. Regional government bureaucracies flourish, helping to turn the formerly sleepy town of Nazareth into a regional center that is Ethiopia’s 3rd largest city. Yet there was questioning of how well all of this was working. At a hospital that needed a replacement commercial dryer, there was uncertainty whether funds for a new dryer would come from the regional government or the ministry in Addis Ababa; meanwhile sheets were spread on the grass to dry. Students who had their local language reinforced in school faced the challenge of taking national exams in Amharic. There were signs of regional jealousy in questions about the fairness and equity in the distribution of investment for infrastructure, business and industry. Gazing at massive memorials to those who



Chuck & Ellen at the International Hotel (click to enlarge)

had fought and died to oust Mengistu and the Derg, it was hard to find a sound rationale for such massive government spending for edifices while basic needs remain to be met.

I see a resemblance between Ethiopia's efforts to find a national - regional balance with America's continuing efforts to resolve federalist issues. The concept of a loyal opposition is not an easy one to accept or make work. News reports of Ethiopia include stories of arrest of political opponents and journalists who publish critical stories. Human rights advocates have been critical of government crackdowns and arrests. Ethiopia clearly has an ongoing challenge to achieve stability and growth while coping with internal tensions and less than friendly neighbors. While recognizing these shortcomings, I can still say I felt totally comfortable traveling around Ethiopia in 2013, even though it may seem inconsistent with my refusal on ethical grounds to set foot in Spain while Franco was in power.

This was truly a trip of a lifetime, expectations fulfilled, even exceeded, renewing and strengthening my connection to Ethiopia. For 2014, I will be serving as Chair of the Denver-Axum Sister Cities Committee, working on getting the sanitation truck we have purchased from Denver to Axum, among other activities. The full itinerary had left only brief moments to inquire about the fate of Ethiopian teachers and students I had known. So with my Ethiopian visa good for multiple entries over two years, I have good reasons for another trip to Ethiopia in the near future.

Posted in [Journeys](#)

4 Comments

Books

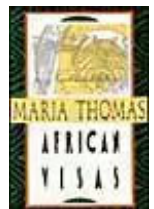
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Maria Thomas: A Life Cut Short

A review of her collective works by Janet Lee (Emdeber 1974-76)

In an email, Dinaw Mengestu, author of [The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears](#), wrote to me, "As always, thank you for your exceptional support of the book. There is nothing like individual support from readers to keep a book alive."

These words become a challenge, a duty, a promise as I discover, by chance, a posting on our group Facebook page by E & E RPCV President Marian Haley Beil alerting Ethiopia and Eritrean RPCVs to the book [African Visas](#) by Maria Thomas (Roberta Worrick, Addis Ababa 1971-73), published posthumously in 1991. The discovery of her work is a cause for celebration tempered by a profound sense of loss, the loss of what could have been. Although much has been written about her life, her work, and her death ([see RPCV Writers, October 1989, p. 7](#)), it is time for a new generation of Peace Corps Volunteers in Ethiopia to become familiar with her work and keep her books alive.



Roberta, her husband Thomas, and their young son Raphael left Ethiopia a year before I arrived so we did not have the good fortune to meet. Even so, there is a sense of familiarity as she writes about experiences of the day, whether

they are about the downfall of His Imperial Majesty, the rise of the military junta and the surrounding terror, smallpox eradication, dietary limitations, frustration with the Peace Corps administration, and projects that seemed to go nowhere. Ethiopia remained her “favorite place on the continent,” (blurb) just as it has for so many of us who one time served there. In a report in *Harper’s Magazine*, she wrote, “If you’ve ever lived in Ethiopia, you never really put it behind you. You follow the news, any you can get, avidly. You look for people who have just been there. You find Ethiopians on the outside, or they find you. You collect stories. You wait for any chance to go back.” As you are reading this, you are probably nodding your head in agreement. Who of us has not spoken to a complete stranger, be he a taxi driver or a shuttle driver at the airport, a baggage handler, or a convenience store clerk? It was definitely evidenced as 100 RPCVs and family returned to Ethiopia during the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Peace Corps just a year or so ago.

Seventeen years after their close of service, Roberta and her husband were once again posted in Ethiopia, where Thomas served as the deputy director of the Ethiopian mission of USAID. In 1989, they accompanied a group headed by Texas Democratic Congressman Mickey Leland to a refugee camp on the Sudanese border. The plane crashed 45 miles short of its destination on a mountain at 4,300 feet, missing the top of the mountain peak by 300 feet. There were no survivors. This was Congressman Leland’s sixth trip to Ethiopia. He was reported to have been especially eager to inspect the camp because half of the 50,000 refugees there were orphaned boys from Sudan (*NYT* obituary). Roberta accompanied her husband and the Congressman on that last fateful trip because of her fluency in Amharic.

The Worricks were part of a very short trend in the Peace Corps in that day to encourage the recruiting of skilled Volunteers (unlike the many of us “BA Generalists”) by actively recruiting married couples with children. One of the couple would be a Volunteer and the other a “non-matrixed” spouse. Remember this is in the early ’70s, leaving one to wonder if the “non-matrixed” generally received a fulfilling assignment and the accompanying sense of accomplishment. The Worricks had been married six years when they had joined the Peace Corps. He had been an agricultural economist and she had been teaching English, math and art in a private school in Vermont. Roberta went to Ethiopia as a technical writer for the dairy development agency in Addis Ababa. The agency was developing a program to educate dairy farmers with the concepts of modern dairy, including crossbreeding and hygiene, to increase milk production. Her role was in the development of a textbook, in consultation with World Bank technicians, to be given to agricultural extension agents and then interpreted for farmers. Of her early experience in Ethiopia she recalls, “Culture shock is a real thing, and going into Ethiopia, it was really enormous. When we joined the Peace Corps in Ethiopia, the Volunteers had the highest fallout rate and the highest extension rate — if you made it through the beginning, it was likely that you would want to stay a long time.”

After their Peace Corps service Roberta and her husband Thomas would live and work in Africa, including Tanzania, Liberia, Nigeria, and Kenya for seventeen years and return to Ethiopia. During those intervening years, she collected stories and memories that would become the basis for her future novel, [Antonia Saw the Oryx First](#), and both of her collections of stories, [Come to Africa and Save Your Marriage](#), and *African Visas*.

A 1963 graduate of Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, MA, she honed her skills as a Wallace Stegner Fellow at Stanford University (1986–87), a prestigious creative writing program. Her writing has appeared in *Redbook*, *Story Quarterly*, *Harper’s Magazine* and *North American Review*. Her prizes for short fiction include the *Chicago Review Annual Fiction Award*, the *National Magazine Award*, and the *Story Quarterly Fiction Prize*. Her books were reviewed in the *New York Times Book Review* and she, herself, had been called upon to write reviews in the *NYTBR* on books of African interest. Of particular note is a report she wrote for *Harper’s Magazine* in January 1987, “A State of Permanent Revolution: Ethiopia Bleeds Red” relating her experience returning to Ethiopia, then still under Mengistu’s rule.

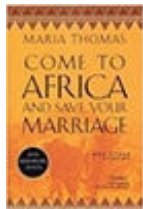
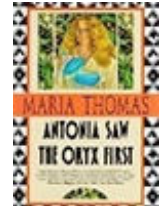


Roberta,
College

Shortly after her death, Peace Corps Worldwide (then Peace Corps Writers) instituted the [Maria Thomas Fiction Award](#) commemorating her legacy as a noted fiction writer. The award has been given annually since 1990 and has honored the likes of Paul Theroux and Bob Shachochis. graduation

Both the novel, *Antonia Saw the Oryx First*, and her first book of stories, *Come to Africa and Save Your Marriage*, were published in 1987. *African Visas* was published posthumously in 1991.

[Antonia Saw the Oryx First](#), the story of a young doctor born in East Africa of American parents during the late colonial period, received high acclaim by prominent critics. But I would like to focus this essay on her short stories and novella, especially those set in Ethiopia.



There are two stories in [Come to Africa and Save Your Marriage](#) with an Ethiopian theme.

“Why the Sky is so Far Away” reveals a more raw and graphic side of life in Ethiopia through the sensibilities of a group of male smallpox eradication Volunteers, Ethiopia being the last country to have active cases of smallpox in the late '60s early '70s. It was a rough and tumble existence traveling to the most rural parts of Ethiopia, where tribesmen are “armed to the teeth” with guns, spears balanced across their shoulders, big knives at their waists, and small knives stuck in their afros. The PCVs questioned the futility of vaccinating against this dreaded disease only to lose those lives to starvation due to a drought that no one will acknowledge. There are more questions than answers and there is no tidy ending.

On the other end of the spectrum, is “Second Rains” a love story of sorts where the central character, Charlotte Renoir, a Peace Corps Volunteer assigned to Ethiopia in 1972 as a secretary. She becomes involved with and later marries Kassahun Afewerk, who had a stunning face “a Byzantine face of ancient proportions — the high-domed forehead, the long, straight nose, the aristocratic mouth, the graceful cheeks, and the large, mystical eyes of an icon.” This was a marriage of convenience, which she embraced wholeheartedly. He was from the wrong tribe and knew that the overthrow of the Emperor was inevitable and that he would be put to death. Through this marriage, he would enlist Charlotte’s support in secreting his young sons out of Ethiopia when the time proved ripe.

“The Jiru Road,” the novella in *African Visas*, does not name its setting in Ethiopia (although it is so named in the blurb), but there is no doubt that this is Ethiopia. The novella opens with the motive for its protagonist, Sarah Easterday, in joining the Peace Corps, “I reckon I joined the Peace Corps because I was trying to avoid conscription . . . conscription into American life.” She wanted to go to Bengal, but was assigned to East Africa by the Peace Corps recruiter. “But (like the Spanish speaking applicants from the Southwest, who’d pleaded for Latin America) I got sent to Africa.” Roberta Worrick, had hoped to go to Latin American because of her Spanish skills, but she, too, was sent to Ethiopia. And like so many of us who couldn’t point out Ethiopia on a map before we joined, Sarah Easterday fell in love with Jiru (Ethiopia). During her training, she “had embraced a new landscape, lacy with tall eucalyptus, glowing with strange flowers; had learned a new language that popped with explosive letters; had survived a bout of dysentery which landed me in a hospital; had learned to drink honey beer and tell time by counting the hours from sun up (instead of from noon); had learned to dance the iskistis, which features a rhythmic pumping of the shoulders.” Her dancing skills soon gained her the name of “shoulders.”

She is a two-day bus ride, half-day walk from the capital (Addis Ababa is never mentioned by name) and her nearest PCV neighbor, Wally Martin, is several hours away. She is befriended by a hard-drinking American advisor, Jack Archibald, at the John F. Kennedy Coffee House and Bar in Makele (another allusion to Ethiopia). Today many of the coffee houses and internet shops in Makele are named after Barack Obama, such is the fascination with Americans of note. Archibald is definitely the stereotypical “ugly American” but in more than one instance comes to Sarah’s rescue. Sarah has a typical Volunteer experience with highs and lows, successes and disasters. After months of

teaching with no resources to children who are lethargic from hunger, the great drought happens. Sarah and Wally cook up a scheme to build a road from Wally's village of Bari-Cotu to Jiru, utilizing the food for work program that Archibald supervises. It is a road from nowhere to nowhere, and predictably is washed out when the rains do come, but not before she has made a lifelong connection within that community.

African Visas closes with an autobiographical story entitled simply, "Ethiopia." Maria Thomas/Roberta Worrick relates a chance meeting with an Ethiopian friend from her Peace Corps days in Ethiopia at a restaurant in Washington, D.C. As they renew their friendship, she longs to return and reflects on the pull the experience had: "Which meant that if you stayed, you never wanted to leave. And after you left, all you wanted to do was go back, and when you couldn't get there, you found Ethiopians on the outside, or they found you, or you found each other across the world like this, as if by magic." An opportunity arises for the Worricks to return and she enlists her old friend in Amharic lessons, the words pouring out from some recess in her memory. Her closing paragraph is prescient:

I wonder what it will be like in a few weeks' time, landing in Addis Abeba again, if the connections will all come back to make the picture clear. I remember vividly though, still, how the plane came in low over the land, we saw hills like waves on a choppy sea, the land cut up into plots, the conical rooftops. It was the rainy season and I had never seen such green.

I left a copy of *African Visas* with a current Volunteer during my most recent trip to Ethiopia. It should come as no surprise that she enjoyed it very much and will share it with other Volunteers and in this way, "keep the book alive."



Note: John Coyne has recently published an [interview with Roberta and Thomas's son, Raphael Worrick](#), on Peace Corps Worldwide.

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

2 Comments

PCVs in Ethiopia

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Pre-service Training

G9 was "Born on the Fourth of July"

By **Chad Miller (Debre Markos, Addis Ababa 2011-)**

Arriving the night of July 3rd, 2013 on a flight from Frankfurt, the ninth training group in the most recent incarnation of Peace Corps/Ethiopia began their PST (Pre-service Training) on Independence Day, 2013. Fifty-eight strong, the new class of recruits, bound to serve as the third group of volunteers in the education sector program known as ITELE (Improving the Teaching of English Language in Ethiopia), started a new chapter of their lives with

a day of orientation, paperwork, and administrative sessions — cushioned by a lunch of delicious, traditional Ethiopian food and the obligatory coffee ceremony — at the Peace Corps office in Addis Ababa. Within ten days, G9 had moved about two hours south of Addis to Butajira, one of the larger towns in the Gurage Zone of the [SNNPR](#) [Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region]. Butajira would be their home for the next ten weeks. Living with local families, the PCTs (Peace Corps Trainees) would get an unforgettable and invaluable immersion in Ethiopian culture and daily life (a process sometimes called “homestay”). During this same time period, they would receive intensive training: more than 140 hours of language classes (Amharic, Afaan Oromoo, or Tigrinya); nearly eighty hours of technical (education) training; plus almost ninety hours of other training, including cross-culture, medical, safety and security, and Peace Corps “Global Core” sessions. Butajira was a new training site for Peace Corps/Ethiopia and ushered in a new training model. Past training groups were placed in small towns scattered around a larger hub town; groups of around four to ten PCTs lived in each of the smaller sites, where they studied language with an LCF (Language and Cultural Facilitator). The whole group would come together by bus in the hub town for large group training sessions. This year all of G9 was located in Butajira for both their small-group language classes (held in LCFs’ compounds) and the large group sessions (held at local hotels). They lived with host families. Technical training sessions covered the structure and context of the Ethiopian education system, TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) methods, lesson planning, an overview of the *English for Ethiopia* textbooks, and much more. At the heart of the technical training experience was a two-week teaching practicum. PCTs with varying degrees of previous teaching experience had a chance to apply the skills and knowledge from their technical sessions by teaching local children in grades 3–8 at three public primary schools in Butajira. Education program staff, PCVLs (Peace Corps Volunteer Leader), LCFs, and active ITELE PCVs observed and gave feedback and constructive criticism to help each PCT develop a strong, reflective TEFL practice. A typical week during PST meant the trainees were busy with language and technical sessions from eight in the morning until five-thirty in the evening, Monday through Friday, with yet more language sessions on Saturday morning. Saturday afternoon and Sunday were free for socializing, catching up on laundry and other chores, and enjoying time with host families. Unlike previous training sites, Butajira offered several hotels with wireless Internet access, allowing Trainees to stay in much closer contact — for better or for worse — with their friends and family back home. The long training schedule, eleven weeks in total, was broken up by “Demystification” visits that allowed trainees to spend a couple of days at an active Volunteer’s site to get a preview of the reality of living and working in Ethiopia as a PCV (in Week 1); a visit to their future work sites with a local Community Liaison (in Week 6); and a recreational day-trip to Lake Langano (in Week 9).



Congratulations G9! In front row: PC/E CD Greg Engle (at left); Ambassador Taye Atske-Selassie Amde, Director General for the Americas, Min of Foreign Affairs (dark suit); US Ambassador Patricia Haslach (white suit) [click photo to enlarge]

Ambassador Taye Atske-Selassie Amde, the Director General for the Americas at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

At the end of Week 11, fifty-seven trainees took the oath and were sworn in as official Peace Corps Volunteers at the American Embassy in Addis.



When asked to reflect on PST, many trainees mention the intensity of the overall experience. **Jaynice Del Rosario**, of The Bronx, New York, remarked:

PST was one of the most grueling experiences of my life. The hours were long, the stakes were high, and I was often reminded that I was only a Peace Corps Trainee and hadn't yet crossed the finish line. It was hard. Every time I felt like I was getting into a groove, finding some normalcy, everything changed dramatically. I often felt displaced and lost, but I think that was intentional. The Peace Corps does a good job of making Trainees feel displaced during PST, which helps them adapt to their reality quickly, because integrating is composed of cyclical feelings of displacement.



Jaynice teaching English
(click photo to enlarge)



Sandra Turay, from Ishpeming, Michigan, said:

I was surprised at how tired I was all of the time. More schedule than I am used to! What happened to river time? Africa time? Ethiopian time? Nope, this is Peace Corps Training time and that means you are either in transit to do something, doing something, planning to do something, or feeling awkward because you aren't doing something and/or don't understand something. A lot of foreign somethings to manage in one day.



When asked about the most rewarding aspects of PST, **Sandra** reflected:

. . . (it's) a toss up between language training and teaching practicum. Learning new words and understanding some of the chatter around me gave me confidence that I would one day in fact know the language and integrate into my community. The teaching practicum gave me confidence in my job. Having never taught before, the two week practice run at Ethiopian education both gave me a better understanding of the system I am here to support as well as reassurance in both the need as well as my ability to serve . . . ”



Sandra teaches the names of animals (click photo to enlarge)



For **Richard March** of West Sacramento, California:

Without a doubt the language training was the most challenging aspect of PST. Trying to develop significant conversational skills in any second language in a matter of 10 weeks is a considerable task. Thankfully, my LCF was always prepared, presenting the content of our lesson plans with varied activities in order to ensure a high level of engagement and comprehension.



“Who is the tallest?” [click photo to enlarge]



For many PCTs, surviving/completing PST and being able to swear in as an official Peace Corps Volunteer is a reward in itself. **Kat Whitton**, of Lynn Haven, Florida offers,

No matter what you go through or what you feel or what you learn, on swear-in day you stand there proud and smile when they hand you that certificate. Because even if you aren't sure that you can complete service, Peace Corps is I survived, I understood what was being taught and even though my language needs work I still have faith that I can get through it. Peace Corps said I was alright and so did my fellow Volunteers and that means something.



Kat prepares a map of Africa for class [click photo to enlarge]



For most trainees, the home stay component of PST made a strong impression. **DeShantell Singleton**, of Georgetown, South Carolina said:

I was nervous about living with strangers, and I soon discovered that they were just as nervous about the American stranger who'd be living in their home. With time, the strangeness vanished and we became family, a real family that shared experiences that ranged from good, to not so good, to weird — and all in all, it was all good! Family Appreciation Day is my favorite memory from PST because of my preparation for the day. My host sister went shopping with me for a traditional dress. My host mother showed me how to properly wear it. My other host sister cleaned my shoes for me because she didn't want me to ruin my dress. My host brother gave me a purse to accessorize my attire. And during the ceremony, I sat between my Ethiopian mother and my Ethiopian father like their proud American daughter.



DeShantell enjoys her 3rd graders, and they enjoy her.
[click photo to enlarge]

For **DeShantell**, the most surprising thing about PST was:

. . . the level of support we received throughout the entire training. We had a great team of people who were ready to assist us with any and every problem imaginable. The only thing they were missing were superhero capes.

Note to Peace Corps: add superhero capes to next year's budget proposal.

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PCVs in Ethiopia

Posted on [February 4, 2014](#) by [janetlee](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

Kids for Kids: Using Technology to Inform and Improve Behavior

by **Benjamin Morse (Hawzien 2011-13)**

After serving two years as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Hawzien, I began to reflect on something that will continue to play a pivotal role in the development of countries like Ethiopia: technology. Technology is a fickle thing. We love it or hate it; there is not a lot of room to be impartial about our technological gadgets. Technology will either be the most remarkable tool we have ever used and it will improve our lives ten-fold or it will be an extreme disappointment and make us never want to invest in technology again.

Kids for Kids is an innovative educational project that combines community-prioritized topics with creativity and the paradox of using advanced technology in rural Ethiopia. This project is comprised of ten songs on the various topics of: HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, Hand-washing, Exercise, Environment, Nutrition, School Pride, Cheating on Exams, Gender Equality and People Living with Disabilities. The songs developed in this project will be distributed in schools and will target the newest generation of Ethiopians as they prepare to take over the reins from the older generation.

How is it possible that we were able to record, produce, film and edit ten music videos while living in rural Ethiopia, a country plagued with power outages, loss of cell phone network, water shortages and an overall harsh environment for electronic items? Over the past two years we were able to persevere and overcome these difficulties to finish this project on time and produce high-quality music videos.



My counterpart and best friend, Abadi Abreha, started this project over four years ago. He was a teacher at the local high school and later became a director at a primary school in rural Hawzien. He was motivated to take on this project having caught numerous students cheating. He wanted to address the problem through music and through creativity rather than looking past it or scolding the children. He believed so much in the project that he paid out of pocket for the first three songs while trying to gain support from NGOs in town and the local government. Despite heroic efforts, he was unsuccessful in getting any additional support for this project, and had to put the project on hold.

As fate would have it, I met Abadi a few years later when I moved to Hawzien. By this time, Abadi was no longer a teacher, but instead worked at the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia. We discussed the project and his interest in focusing on the children of Ethiopia, the future of his country. I remember watching the hand washing song with my jaw on the floor and butterflies in my stomach. This was exactly the project that any Peace Corps Volunteer would kill to have. This was a community-owned, innovative educational project that focused on high-priority topics and pressing issues tailored to rural Ethiopia. Here was a man who put his own money into the project. Here was a man who worked six days a week at the bank and still found time to focus on education. Here was a man who wanted to focus students on the necessary lifestyle changes needed to improve the quality of life in Hawzien. Needless to say, I jumped on the chance and started contemplating which grant I would apply for to fund this project.

In the beginning stages of the project everything was enigmatic to me. I didn't know how we were going to develop the messages. I didn't know where or how we would be recording these songs or who would be filming the videos and editing the songs. I didn't know who the singers would be or how we planned on training them. I didn't know how expensive this project would be or if it was even eligible for grant money. It was an exciting time, but our future was uncertain.

We started with the grant proposal and that seemed to reduce the ambiguity of the project as we broke down the numerous barriers that stood in our way. We developed the project for months before we submitted the proposal. We met with various local organizations and associations in order to develop community buy-in and support. After a long process we submitted the grant and started to plan the next stages of the project.

Abadi and I gathered materials and conducted research in order to develop the messages and content for the ten songs. He was reading books that were written in Tigrinya and produced by USAID. I was scouring the Internet for updated material and I was asking other Peace Corps Volunteers, doctors, professors and former employers for assistance.

After we had all of our content for the songs, Abadi and his brother, Yirga, wrote the Tigrinya songs based on the research we conducted. We then translated the songs into English and developed an innovative teacher's guide. This comprehensive guide is over 50 pages and has the lyrics in English and in Tigrinya as well as a participatory discussion outline for each song. There are pre-video and post-video discussion questions and there is also an advocacy component to the book. This book is designed to inspire students to take charge in their local community and to advocate for the messages from the songs. This project focuses on behavior change and more importantly it paves the way for the future of innovative education in Ethiopia.

One of the most amazing discoveries I made during this project was how Abadi created the music for the songs. This process shows the ingenuity of Ethiopians and the technological barriers and advances that make this resourceful mindset possible.

When I asked Abadi how he created the music for the project, I was surprised at his response. Not once have I seen Abadi play a musical instrument. Not once have I seen him write musical notes or convey to notion that he was capable producing music, but he is one of the most naturally talented musicians I have ever met.

His process begins with leaving the chaos of the town and heading out into rural Ethiopia with one essential tool: a fully-charged mobile phone.

He first thinks about the content of the song and asks himself: Does the topic need a fast or a slow tempo? Does this song need to cause excitement or serenade listeners and hone in on the message? Will this song need a Tigrinya beat? (Which sounds like a heartbeat.) Will this song need a progressive reggae beat? After he decides on the genre of each song he “sings the music with (his) mouth and records it on (his) mobile.”

After Abadi records the tune, he writes the lyrics based on the research and earlier discussions. He then records the lyrics on his mobile phone with the music that he created earlier.

With the recordings in mind, he provides training to the singers and discusses each song one by one. The singers then progress to record themselves on their mobile phones and return to Abadi for additional training. Genet, Abadi’s wife and our camera operator and music video editor for the project, records the perfected songs. She converts the songs to a CD and takes it to the recording studio, which is three hours by public transportation.

The studio studies the voice recording and composes it into an actual musical track. The singers, who have rehearsed extensively based on a voice recording come into the studio, record over the new musical track. After making the necessary adjustments, they are ready to return to the studio to lay the final track. Once the final track is recorded, our team is ready to move on to the music video recording!

What a process! This is something that is unique to a developing country and it is something that is unique to Hawzien. As a Peace Corps Volunteer, I have seen a lot of Ethiopian ingenuity, but this was one of the more impressing examples of an Ethiopian genius at work.

Technology brings us together and at the same time, it is what separates worlds. There are some fundamental differences that separate countries like the United States from countries like Ethiopia that are directly linked with technological advancement. After living in Ethiopia for two years I am proud of this technologically-based project and I am impressed with my Ethiopian counterparts who have taught me to think outside of the box with the technological tools that I have on hand. This project has bridged the gap of two cultures and meshed it into one collaborative effort to educate the children of Ethiopia.

Since I left Ethiopia about two months ago this project has continued to thrive. Abadi has taken it upon his shoulders and is in the process of expanding the distribution locations and even translating the project into Amharic, the national language of Ethiopia. I am very proud of this project because not only was it initiated by an Ethiopian before I came to this country, but is being continued by Abadi and his team after I have left. Peace Corps Volunteers always talk about sustainability, but it is something that is extremely hard to achieve for numerous reasons. I am proud to say that Kids for Kids will persevere and will continue to touch the lives of thousands of Ethiopian children for many years to come. Thank you to those of you who donated and supported this project throughout its development and a gigantic thank you to Abadi Abreha who has been my best friend, my project partner and who is now my brother. He exemplifies what an Ethiopian counterpart should be and he showcases raw talent and incredible ingenuity that the beautiful country of Ethiopia possesses with his achievements.



Kids for Kids receives recognition from Peace Corps: l-r PC/E CD Greg Engle, Ben, Abadi and Daniel Baker- Director of Programming and Training

See YouTube videos : [Kids for Kids: Hightlight Video](#) with a commentary by Abadi Abreha, and [Kids for Kids: Let's Support Gender Equality!](#)

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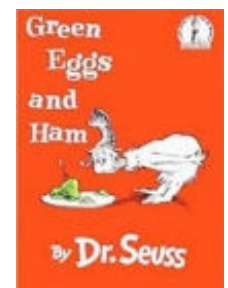
Should You Eat Green Eggs and Ham?

A SMALL TOWN BOOK PROJECT

By A. J. Gary (Chagni, Awi Zone 2012-14)

“No . . . but what is ham?” was the curious response given by my English club students when I asked them the warm-up question.

We were all gathered together on a cold Saturday morning in my small, ironically green model classroom to read Dr. Seuss's [Green Eggs and Ham](#). My students were sitting huddled together resulting in a colorful array of traditional clothing while I was standing before them holding the book of the week in my hands. It had now become a routine for us to start every weekly meeting with a children's story. As I read the peculiar tale of the insistent Sam-I-am and his unsettling breakfast food, my students listened to the fun and witty rhymes of Dr. Seuss and smiled at the amusing illustrations. To finish the lesson, we created funny rhymes and illustrations of our own and shared them with each other. My students love children's books and always ask me what book we will read next. I usually don't know until the next package of donated books arrives in the mail.

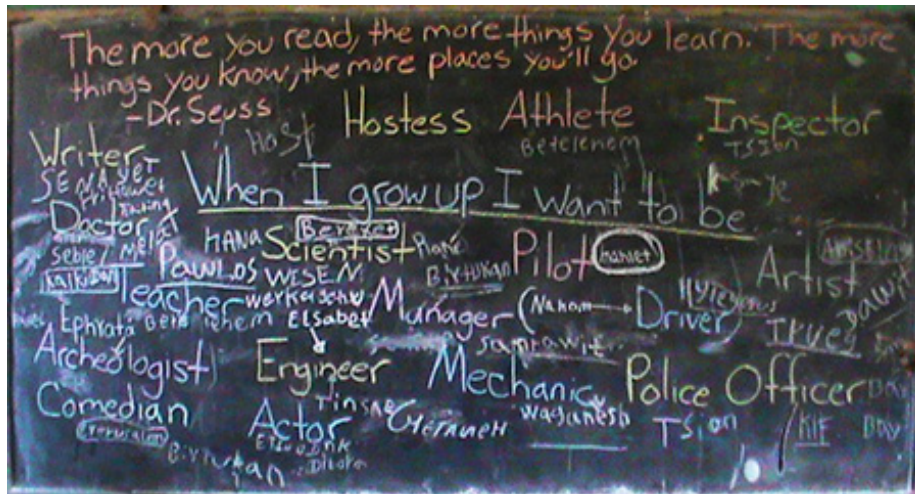


I started a book donation project a little over two months ago in an attempt to remedy the short comings of my school library. Current education Volunteers are expected to promote early-grade reading programs at their schools, but a major obstacle for many Volunteers is the lack of books at their school libraries. Many schools do not have the necessary resources to provide sustainable reading programs for their students. This was the unfortunate situation I found myself in when I first began working at my primary school. My library consisted primarily of old, dusty and underutilized resource books. There were a very small number of books that could be categorized as fiction and an even smaller number of books that would be appropriate for young readers. I wasn't sure how to fix the problem until another Volunteer told me about an organization called [BetterWorldBooks](#).



BetterWorldBooks is an online global bookstore with a mission to bring literacy and opportunity to people around the world. Every time you purchase a book from BetterWorldBooks.com, they donate a book to one of their non-profit partners: Books for Africa or Feed the Children.

I edited a list of 200 children's books I received from a friend and posted the list on my blog. In my blog, I humbly request for friends, family, and anyone else in a giving spirit to choose books from the list and purchase the books at BetterWorldBooks.com. Most of the books cost between \$5 and \$10. The purchased books are then sent to my address in Ethiopia at no cost. So far, a total of 80 books have been donated to my school and I hope to receive 200 books by early February. If you are interested in learning more about my book project — and perhaps making a donation, you can visit my blog at [thetravelingsword.blogspot.com](#).



When I grow up I want to be . . .

I have a lot of plans for the donated books. They will not suffer the same fate as the moldy resource books currently occupying the shelves of my school library. I do a lot of work promoting reading in my grades 5-8 English clubs. As I previously stated, it's already a normal routine for us to read a book at the beginning of every lesson. English club students are also permitted to borrow books for a few days to encourage reading at home with their families. Later in the year, my students will participate in a creative writing competition. The books play a significant role in preparing my students for the competition because they provide imaginative ways to experience English. Through reading, students learn how to be creative and spontaneous with the language which will help them become fluent speakers in the future.



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In Memorium

Posted on [February 4, 2014](#) by [eerpcv](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

The Herald was recently made aware of the fact that **Dr. Ed Cross** (Medical Director PC/Ethiopia 62-64) died in August of 2012 at the age of 91. Dr. Cross made having tropical diseases less ominous with his cheerful demeanor and old-fashioned jokes. e.g. "When you find out what that [ailment] is let me know — my wife has it, too." A terrific person.

[Click to read Dr. Cross's obituary.](#)

Harris Mirkin (Dessie, Addis Ababa 62-64) passed away May 30, 2013. After his time in the Peace Corps he earned a Ph.D. in Political Science and then became an associate professor for 45 years at the University of Missouri/Kansas City.

[Click to read Harris's obituary.](#)

Nancy Guillet Winter (Addis Ababa 62-64) died August 30, 2013 after having been diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (A..L.S. - Lou Gehrig's Disease) in 2011.

[Click to read Nancy's obituary.](#)

Posted in [In Memoriam](#)

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