

## The Herald

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

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MONTHLY ARCHIVES: JANUARY 2015

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### Editor's Note

Posted on [January 17, 2015](#) by [janetlee](#) | [2 comments](#)

by Janet Lee (Emdeber 1974-76)

Winter hit with a vengeance here in Colorado over the holidays as it did elsewhere across the nation. Sub-zero temperatures made me long for Thirteen Months of Sunshine. But with a new year and a new semester, can Spring be far behind?

With Spring, comes some Spring cleaning. Perhaps you have a trunk of Peace Corps memorabilia in which the kids and grandkids have no interest. If so, the Hoover Institution Library and Archives at Stanford University is soliciting just such material for its research collection documenting war, revolution and peace in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, in particular East Africa. Read on for more details on how to contribute to this very worthy cause.

In this issue of *The Herald*, I would like to introduce you to Brittany Franck (Mekelle 2011-2013; PC Response Mekelle 2014). Although Brittany is recently returned and is attending the University of Denver, she has taken leave of her studies to work on a school-related project back in Mekelle under the auspices of Peace Corps Response. It is the best of all worlds. While in Mekelle as a Volunteer, Brittany worked at a school for the blind. I had the opportunity to visit it and “clearly see” why these students captured her heart. In “So that all May See: Ashenda Brings a Community Together,” Brittany relates a small but important step in building the confidence of these young women under her charge and the acceptance of the blind by the greater community. She utilizes the power of music and dance through the major cultural holiday of Ashenda primarily celebrated in Tigray. This is just one of many projects that is under her guidance. I hope to bring our readers more updates in the future.

Bill Graff (Addis, Sodo 63-65) and his wife Betty have returned to Ethiopia several times providing literacy and resources to students primarily in the area of SNNRP. Initially, the projects were pretty traditional utilizing printed books, with mixed results. He wondered if there was a better way to provide resources to a nation on the rise, thus an ebook project was born as outlined in “Why ebooks in Ethiopia? Why Now?” Some might question the wisdom of introducing a technology that only a few may use, but, as Bill shows, with wireless technology and the use of smart phones and tablets, there is greater access to more relevant material at less cost. Just as the country leap-frogged telephony by skipping the expensive laying of land lines and going mobile, perhaps the same can be true of books and information. Open source and open access books provide resources to the greater community while protecting the rights of authors. No, there is nothing like snuggling up to a good book, but is it not better that a future doctor, engineer, or policy maker have the most current information on the topic?

The members of the E&ERPCV board and the Project Champions, John (Ethi. VII, Gondar Public Health College) and Linda (Ethi. VIII, Haile Selassie I Secondary School, Gondar - now known as Fasildas Secondary School) Hillman, announced — and completed — a new RPCV Legacy Program project, “Water for Ethiopian Vegetable Gardens.”

To support the E&E RPCVs' other projects click on [“The RPCV Legacy Program and how you can help”](#) at the top of every page.

The Herald also has tributes to those who have gone before us. They made a difference then and their legacy lives on. Names and relevant links are listed **In Memoriam**.

Check your calendars for an upcoming reunion: The National Peace Corps Association and the Northern California Peace Corps Association have announced that next year's Peace Corps Connect event will take place in Berkeley, CA on June 5-6, 2015. The E & E RPCV Board is planning programs in conjunction with this event. If you have not yet attended a Peace Corps Connect, this would be a great opportunity.

John Coyne (1962-64) has done it again! In our Book section, Kathleen Croskran (Addis, Dilla 1965-67) reviews *Long Ago and Far Away*, published by [Peace Corps Writers](#). Peace Corps Volunteers in Ethiopia play a central role in this novel, but I don't want to give the story away . . . Read the review and then read the book.

If non-fiction is more your cup of "shai," check out the review of *Prevail: The Inspiring Story of Ethiopia's Victory over Mussolini's Invasion, 1935-1941* by Jeff Pearce, published in November. The book is a fascinating account of Ethiopia's second defeat of the Italians.

Don't forget to "like" our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/120114451456889/>

Posted in [Editor's Note](#)

**2 Comments**

## **E&E RPCVs Group News**

Posted on [January 17, 2015](#) by [janetlee](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

# **Preserve and share your Peace Corps History at the Hoover Institution Library and Archives**

## **AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY**

by *Marian Haley Beil (Debre Berhan 1962-64)*

Issayas Tesfamariam, of the Hoover Institution Library and Archives at Stanford University, has contacted me as president of Ethiopia & Eritrea RPCVs to inform the group that it is soliciting materials from individuals who were Peace Corps Volunteers in Ethiopia and Eritrea during the 20th Century to add to their research collection. [The Hoover](#) is dedicated to documenting war, revolution, and peace in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries . . . and supports a vibrant community of scholars and a broad public interested in the meaning and role of history.



Issayas has written:

Hoover has an impressive collection on Africa including materials from top down (officials, gov't, etc.) to bottom up (reported by missionaries, etc.). We are continuing collecting more materials from the Horn of Africa region, hence the importance of your group Ethiopia & Eritrea RPCVs (Returned Peace Corps Volunteers).

Individual materials in the possession of your group would be a great addition to our collection. The periods between 1960s and 1970s and the 1990s are our priority.

The materials must be originals. The materials could be pictures, notes, postcards, posters, memorabilia, ephemera, pamphlets, correspondences and etc.

This is an incredibly exciting opportunity to be invited to participate in this project. I hope many of you RPCVs will avail yourselves of this wonderful opportunity to contribute your history as Peace Corps Volunteers in Ethiopia and Eritrea to the Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

We offer our immeasurable thanks to the Hoover Institution Library and Archives for this invitation to participate in recording some of the history of a great institution – the Peace Corps.

For details on how to share your history, click [donor-instructions](#) to download a printable .pdf information sheet.

Posted in [Uncategorized](#)  
Tagged [Hoover Institution Library](#)

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## Projects

Posted on [January 17, 2015](#) by [janetlee](#) | [1 comment](#)

# So That All May See

*Ashenda Brings a Community Together*

by **Brittany Franck (Mekelle 2011-13; PG Response/Mekelle 2014)**



Brittany with some of her students at the Ashenda celebration.

In Ethiopia, living with a disability is often extremely challenging. In some communities having a child with a disability results in rejection or ridicule and people with disabilities are stigmatized. Because of this, parents have kept their disabled

children hidden in their homes, keeping them away from school or community life. There is an increasing awareness in Ethiopia of the negative effect such practices can have, and efforts are being made at many levels, from bureaus to nongovernmental organizations, to encourage attitude change in communities. As an education PCV, I had the opportunity to be a part of this movement for change.

I was placed in a cluster of schools in Tigray, one of which was a boarding school for the blind. When I first came to the campus, most people in my community were unaware we had a boarding school for the blind in our neighborhood. The children stayed within the confines of the compound, and rarely, if ever, socialized with people from the surrounding community. Little by little I tried to hold events that would bring people from the community onto our campus, or bring our kids into the shared community spaces. We held play days at a local playground, inviting children from the neighborhood to join us in soccer matches and crafts projects. We collaborated with local hospitals and eye clinics to establish links for health care access for the children, and invited local dentists and medical students to offer dental screenings and cleanings in our makeshift clinic.

The female students, however, remained extremely shy, often staying in their dark bedrooms. When the time came to celebrate the cultural holiday [Ashenda](#), the girls asked me if there was a way they could participate. I was excited to work with them on this. Ashenda is an important cultural event in Tigray, when girls and women dress in colorful clothing and dance and sing throughout the town. The regional government also holds a program in Mekelle, the region's capital, on the first morning of the multi-day holiday and invites local groups to showcase their performances. In the past, women with disabilities were largely excluded from this event; the girls on our campus had never participated in it before.

I had been working with a woman named Genet from the Women with Disabilities Association of Tigray (WWDAT) and together we went into the community to gain support for including women with disabilities in the event. We approached the Regional Culture and Tourism Board, the agency in charge of the event, and requested the inclusion of our group in the program. The Bureau offered their support, donating some funds for girls' clothes and arranged stage time for the girl to perform. None of the girls owned cultural clothing, so through donations from the US and from our community, we purchased each girl a new dress and a pair of shoes. Since the school has no means of transportation, we weren't sure how to get the girls into town to get measured for their dresses. But, just in time, a local eye clinic offered us their bus to bring all of the students to town for eye exams, and the dressmaker came to the clinic and measured the girls while they waited. The women of the WWDAT made and donated all of the needed accessories and styled the girls' hair. We had a coffee ceremony while their hair was being styled, and they chatted in excited voices, feeling each other's hairstyles and new dresses. The campus had changed noticeably; all of the girls were finally outside of their bedrooms, filling the air with singing and the beating of their new drum while they danced around in a circle.



[Click for larger photo](#)

But Ashenda did not occur that year. Instead the day was the beginning of mourning the death of the Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. Genet and I went to the campus to offer our support to the girls. Amidst their words about the Prime Minister, one girl said that though they didn't actually participate in an Ashenda, they finally believed that one day they would.

And they did! My Peace Corps service had ended before Ashenda, but I received a photo of the girls dressed up and finally taking part in the Ashenda program! Genet had taken on the role of organizing their participation, and again the Culture and Tourism Bureau had offered their support.

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It is a year later, and I am back in Mekelle as a [Peace Corps Response Volunteer](#), working with the Health and Education Bureau to improve the condition of the school, including establishing a clinic, and recruiting and training a nurse.

When Ashenda approached, the girls were eager to start planning their program. Genet took the lead and garnered the support of the Regional Culture and Tourism Board again, and we were able to gain the support of the community again for shoes, a new drum as the old one had finally worn out from use (a great sign!). Our group grew to include 25 girls and women, including students from the School for the Blind, the School for the Deaf and members of WWDAT. What a joy it was to be there dancing with my sisters.



[Click for larger photo](#)

We have a great opportunity as PCVs to contribute to building an inclusive society. We often stand out as PCVs, and though this can have its disadvantages, it can also be a great gift. When I am at the hospital with a group of the children or playing soccer with them, people notice. They might be shy at first, but eventually, people will ask who I am and start talking to the kids or join us in a game. Often people ask me, how can the girls dance or how can the boys play soccer? In response, I invite them to join us, and often this encourages them to realize that the kids at our school are a lot like the kids in their family. Deeply held attitudes usually aren't changed by a short training or a daylong workshop, but they can be changed as people have the opportunity to interact with people with disabilities and question, within themselves, the attitudes they might have had. There aren't really measurable inputs and outcomes

to attitude change, at least not in the short-term. Over the past three years, Ashenda has shown us that change can happen. Instead of questioning whether they can participate in Ashenda, the girls at the Blind School start preparing as the time approaches, and the Culture and Tourism Bureau does not hesitate in offering support. Our group of girls and women has really grown. I trust that the Ashenda program will continue in the coming years, though finding the budget for transportation and clothing will remain a challenge. I hope though, that as the community's ideas towards these girls become more positive, this might become less of a challenge.

I am grateful to my community for the time and resources they have given to our projects, the knowledge they have shared with me, and for trusting me to work with them.



Posted in [RPCV Projects](#)  
Tagged [Ashenda](#), [blind students](#)

**1 Comment**

## Projects

Posted on [January 17, 2015](#) by [janetlee](#) | [4 comments](#)

# Why ebooks in Ethiopia? Why not?

by **Bill Graff, (Addis Ababa, Sodo 63-65)**

When my wife, Betty, and I heard that Utah was adopting “open” text and library books — ebooks “[made available online for free access, downloading, and use by anyone.](#)” we wondered: “Why not Ethiopia? Why not now?” We decided to find out.

Betty and I were married in Ethiopia during our Peace Corps service in the early sixties, and we have maintained our Ethiopian and Peace Corps contacts ever since. After our children were grown we began doing service projects for the schools in Sodo where we taught after we were married.

Our first project provided 300,000 new books divided among all 143 secondary schools in SNNRP (Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’ Region). The project received a great amount of attention. The U.S. Ambassador and the Ethiopian Prime Minister kicked off a celebration in Awasa when the books arrived. The Ethiopian President and the SNNRP Governor came to Sodo for a celebration after the books were distributed. The event received nationwide radio and television coverage. But that was the end of the good news.

We were disappointed with what we saw when we did an after-action visit a year later. Although the books delivered were excellent new books that any American high school would have liked to have had, they weren’t what was needed by the schools that received them. They were, therefore, abandoned by the schools. They were under used, unused, or just plain missing. We vowed never again.

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Parent, teachers and administrators agreement (Click for larger photo)

After a brief hiatus we began anew — this time with small, bottom-up book projects. We started with local volunteer teachers and parents at a single school. They selected the books needed by their school and we provided a grant to purchase them locally. These small projects were immensely successful. We put the right books in the right place at the right time. The books didn’t disappear — they were worn out by constant student use. The libraries typically extended their hours and loaned books to trusted students when the library was closed.

After a couple of decades of providing textbooks and library books for schools in Ethiopia we began to question the wisdom of continuing to provide printed books. Printed books are expensive, wear out quickly with heavy use, or become obsolete. As we were observing how fast the books were wearing out we heard about the ebook project in Utah.



Click for larger photo

**As a result, our new project was born — ebooks.**

Sodo Preparatory High School was the first school we approached. We selected the school because we already had credibility there by doing previous printed book projects. This is also the school where we taught

after being married in Ethiopia. The reception for the idea was very cool at first, but all that changed after school and district officials visited a nearby university and saw ebooks in action.

### And a partnership was born.

The school provided the Internet connection, the university provided the installation, the district provided ongoing support and Betty and I provided the money to buy servers and routers on the local market and we all went to work. AND it worked.



Computer room. (Click for larger photo.)

The teachers, students, and parents now have a first class campus-wide WiFi network, an ebook server and access to the Internet. The ebook server contains all official Ministry of Education textbooks and over 200 ebooks recommended by the local university for future college freshmen to read. They have all the books they said they needed.

The school has doubled the number of hard wired computers; all students and staff with smart phones are using it, and we provided ten tablets and smart phones to get usage started. These are shared by the teaching staff. This project is beyond our fondest dreams. Sodo Preparatory High School is now more

advanced than the state of Utah as far as ebooks are concerned. Now we have new dreams.



Teacher with tablet. (Click for larger photo.)

Our next project: Provide a grant to the local university to use open source software on locally assembled servers to provide the same services. We will buy the parts. If successful this could reduce the costs of the servers from \$7,000 to under \$1,000. Wish us luck!

Posted in [RPCV Projects](#)

Tagged [Bill & Betty Graff](#), [ebooks](#)

**4 Comments**

## E&E RPCVs Group News

Posted on [January 17, 2015](#) by [eerpcv](#) | [3 comments](#)

### Gloria Curtis retires from E&ERPCVs board

**Gloria Gieseke Curtis** (Asmara 1963-65) has retired from the Board of Ethiopia & Eritrea RPCVs effective December 31st. Gloria was among the very first of our group to volunteer to serve on the Board many years ago, and her enthusiastic efforts in support of our many activities and projects have been invaluable.

Thank you, Gloria!



Gloria in her Ethiopian t-shirt at a recent board meeting

In tribute to Gloria's penchant for storytelling we share the following from her:

**My Hat is Higher Than Your Hat**

During the school year of 1964-65, Queen Elizabeth of Great Britain, along with Prince Phillip, came to visit the Emperor, Haile Selassie, in Ethiopia. She visited several sites, and ended up in Asmara to a very warm welcome. Because of security concerns, the original plan was to parade down the main street in a closed car. However, because of the excitement to see the queen, plus the beautiful weather, a Cadillac convertible was borrowed from an officer at the U.S. Military Base — Kagnew. Now, as a side story, that base was such a secret that it officially did not exist.

This part is second hand information from Kagnew people to Peace Corps Volunteers, but I did witness the end result and my photos will verify the facts.

The queen arrived at Kagnew wearing a bright blue suit and a matching small cloche-style hat with a little net over the front of her hair. The Emperor was dressed in his military finest with medals and ribbons hanging all over. A square, sofa-type cushion was provided for him to sit on in the back seat of the car. Then an assistant came up with a slightly higher cushion for the Queen. An aide handed the Emperor his military officer's hat, and a lady-in-waiting to the Queen removed her beehive-style, chiffon-wrapped hat and positioned it on the Queen's head. And then the parade headed for the main street where PCVs and others were standing taking photos.



Q.E.D.

From all reports, the Queen and the Emperor maintained a very good relationship for many years. Before our PCV group left the country, a main street leading up to the Haile Selassie Secondary School was renamed Queen Elizabeth II Avenue in her honor.

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## **Would you like to join the E&E RPCVs Board of Directors?**

With the resignation of Gloria, the current board members would like to invite RPCVs who have served in Ethiopia or Eritrea to apply to serve on the board. Most of our business is carried on via email. Occasional meetings have been held around the country in conjunction with reunions or NPCA conferences. As a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization our topics of discussion mainly pertain to the RPCV Legacy Program, finances and planning for group gatherings.

Write to the Board at [eerpcv@gmail.com](mailto:eerpcv@gmail.com) if you are interested.



Posted in [E&E RPCVs Group News](#)

**3 Comments**

Tagged [call for board members](#), [curtis](#), [queen](#)

## RPCV Legacy Program

Posted on January 17, 2015 by [janetlee](#) | [1 comment](#)

# WATER FOR ETHIOPIAN VEGETABLE GARDENS

*An incredibly quick success!*

In early October the Board of E&E RPCVs voted to approve the following proposal for a new RPCV Legacy Program project championed by Linda Harbaugh Hillman (Gondar, 67-68) and John Hillman (Gondar, 66-68):

### Water for Ethiopian Vegetable Gardens

to be implemented by the Kossoye Development Program (KDP) in conjunction with the Faculty of Agriculture (FOA), Department of Horticulture (DOH), at the Meles Zenawi Campus of the University of Gondar in Tseda, Amhara Regional State.

The \$7,500 to be raised for this project will be used to construct a surface water collection facility (SWCF) on the new Teda campus of the University of Gondar that will serve as part of a demonstration garden to show how fruits and vegetables can be grown, prepared and eaten to improve nutrition among farming families in the region. The SWFC will consist of a system of terraces and drainage ditches that allow water to be stored in a concrete cistern during the short/minor (February-March) and long/major (May-September) rains to irrigate fields during the dry season. A 10-acre hillside will be terraced, and drainage ditches and a cistern will be constructed.



KDP and the University conducted nutrition research which found that malnutrition of the families in the Region was 52%, leading to stunting in children. Cultivation of t'eff and animal husbandry practices require at least three hectares for a family to eat for a year. However, the family diet lacks all the nutrients necessary for well-being. Consequently, KDP launched a horticultural seed distribution activity among schools in the region. After demonstrating how to cultivate and cook the fruits and vegetables, the family adoption rate soared to 50%. KDP anticipates that even greater adoption rates will be achieved as the children in families that are growing these fruits and vegetables on less than one hectare experience growth in accordance with international standards and as statistics on stunting decline.

Establishing the SWFC will have many benefits:

- Demonstrate a model for water harvesting that can be used by local farmers and schools.
- Provide a real-life laboratory for horticulture majors who will be the horticulture extension agents of the future.
- Enhance the nutrition and well-being of all family members.
- Produce a more food-secure population.

AS TIMING IS CRITICAL IN THIS PROJECT (TO BE ABLE TO HARVEST THE SHORT RAINS IN FEBRUARY/MARCH), YOUR TIMELY CONTRIBUTION IS NEEDED.

Here it is, the end of December, and because of Linda and John's vigorous fundraising campaign, they have reached and surpassed their goal to raise \$7,500.00 for this well-designed (no pun intended) project, and the campaign is now closed with plenty of time to build the SWFC before the *tinnish zenab*. Many thanks to the donors — friends of Linda and John, and RPCVs — and most especially, thanks to Linda and John.

Posted in [RPCV Legacy Program](#)

**1 Comment**

Tagged [John Hillman](#), [Kossoye Development Program](#), [Linda Harbaugh Hillman](#)

## RPCV Legacy Program

Posted on [January 17, 2015](#) by [janetlee](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

# New RPCV Legacy Program project: “ETHIOPIA READS IN SNNPR”

*An extension of support begun in 2008 by E&E RPCVs*

*by Nancy Horn (Addis Ababa 66-68, VII Utah)*

The non-profit organization [Ethiopia Reads](#) (ER) has promoted literacy, a reading culture and best practices in reading instruction in Ethiopia since 2003. Over the years, ER has founded over 60 libraries in every region of the country, founded five school programs, and led dozens of trainings among hundreds of library and school professionals in Ethiopia.

E&E RPCVS has supported through its RPCV Legacy Program the establishment and development of ER's Awassa Reading Center (ARC) in the regional capital of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) with the project “Ethiopia Reads in Awassa” championed by Lois Shoemaker. With a new project — “Ethiopia Reads in SNNPR” — that I am championing, the scope of activities of the initial ER Legacy Program project will be expanded.



map - Wikipedia

ER has had a strong presence in SNNPR since 2006, founding to date more than a dozen community libraries and three school libraries in that region, while also piloting several forms of rural outreach. Early experiments in encouraging literacy included the Donkey Mobile Libraries. More recently these have been redesigned as the Horse-Powered Literacy (HPL) program that reaches deep into rural *kebeles*. The Awassa Reading Center is comprised of a children's community library serving hundreds of children in the city, and is the central locus for ER literacy programming and training for the region. This expansion project, Ethiopia Reads in SNNPR, seeks to enlarge the Center's activities at a cost of \$9,800, implementing the following three strategies over the next year:

1. **Collection Expansion / Improvement** – The wear and tear, particularly on reference books and local-language story books originally deposited in 2006, have given rise to a need for their replacement. An Atlanta-based NGO is currently

collecting these types of books for ARC, but supplemental funding for shipping is needed. The cost is estimated to be \$2,000.

. . . Additionally, the general collection needs to be expanded to include picture books and early-grade story books both locally and from the US to bring more very young readers into the ARC. The cost is estimated to be \$2,000.

2. **Southern Schools Officer (SSO)** – In November, ER hired a program manager based in the Awassa ARC to oversee and expand ER’s regional outreach. For this new staff member to be effective, computer equipment and office furniture is needed, as well as one year’s portion of the SSO’s salary. The cost of these inputs has been estimated at \$3,500.
3. **Outreach** – Presently the Center serves children in the community as a library and study hall. ER would like to expand the use of the library to include adding reading circles, activities for the youngest children, mothers’ reading circles and family literacy classes; partnering with local schools and NGOs in activities; and offering mobile activities staged in schools and *kebele* youth centers. Costs involved in this expansion are estimated at \$2,300.

The project will run for one year (December 2014 to December 2015) with reporting on progress and on use of funds will take place after mid-term (July 2015) and at the end of the project (January 2016), and I shall share reports after submission.

### ***E&ERPCVs SEEKS YOUR SUPPORT FOR THE ETHIOPIA READS LEGACY PROJECT***

All contributions should be sent to: ***E&ERPCVs, c/o Beil, 492 Staten Avenue, Apt. 1003, Oakland, CA 94610-4908***. Contributions can also be made through: ***PayPal by going to <https://eandeherald.com/rpcv-legacy-program> and then clicking on PayPal for the “Ethiopia Reads in SNNPR” project.*** Contributions to E&ERPCV Legacy Projects are all tax-deductible in the US.

**PLEASE CONSIDER MAKING YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS TODAY!**

Posted in [RPCV Legacy Program](#)  
Tagged [Ethiopia Reads](#), [SNNPR](#)

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