

The Herald

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

MONTHLY ARCHIVES: SEPTEMBER 2015

Editor's note

Posted on [September 2, 2015](#) by [janetlee](#) | [1 comment](#)

Janet Lee (Emdeber 1974-76)

Hurricane Katrina, ten years later

It is hard to believe that this much time has elapsed. Ten years ago, my son was conducting field work for his dissertation topic on Katrina. As a very recent graduate of Loyola New Orleans, he knew the city inside and out, biking from one ward to another. I had many opportunities to visit and volunteer in the aftermath and my own personal guide to show me sites seen by few others. I am pleased to say that the American Library Association was the first major convention to return to the Big Easy, bringing much needed revenue to a city highly dependent on convention and tourist trade. Anderson Cooper was one of the featured keynote presenters.

Naturally, my son and I both felt a need to return to the Crescent City to attend the many commemorative events on this 10th anniversary. We were in good company: Obama, Bush, Clinton and, of course, Anderson Cooper. However, who would think that a trip to New Orleans would have so many Ethiopian connections:

As I disembarked the shuttle from the parking lot to the terminal at DIA in Denver, I thanked the Ethiopian driver. Shimelis' eyes lit up to hear Amharic spoken.

I walked through the busy concourse and stopped and greeted the young woman behind the counter in Amharic as I ordered a pastry. Rahel and I joked back and forth. "Do you get to speak Amharic often?" she asked. "Every time I am at the airport," I replied.

We arrived at New Orleans' Louis Armstrong International Airport and hailed a cab. "Teshome, *in det neh?*" I asked. He looked at me in the mirror and grinned. "You know Amharic!"

Air Force One was parked on the tarmac, President Obama having arrived just a few hours earlier. We talked about Obama's recent trip to Ethiopia, the first sitting U.S. President to do so. Yes, it was exciting, but many Ethiopians were upset about his "democratically elected" remark.



“Never in my six years in New Orleans have I met someone who has been to Ethiopia.” He was from Nazret (now known as Adama). He leapt from the cab when we arrived at the hotel and shook my hand, still grinning ear to ear. I am sure he was still grinning when he arrived at the cab stand later that afternoon.

Somehow I happened upon one of the two Ethiopian restaurants in New Orleans, and I saw an aged Ethiopian flag raised high in the [Second Line](#) by a Rasta near the Arena, Bill Clinton speaking inside.

Oh, Ethiopia!

But back to the task at hand.

It was with great disappointment, but not a surprise really, when the Board of the Ethiopian and Eritrean Returned Peace Corps Volunteers received the resignation of Marian Haley Beil (Debre Berhan 1962-64) as President after oh so many years. I am at a total loss for words. Fortunately, former editor Barry Hillenbrand (Debre Marcos 1963-65) is not, and he has written both a tribute to Marian and a challenge to the membership to step up and not let this grand organization falter.

On a much happier note, Berhane Daba, president and founder of Ethiopian Women with Disabilities Association received the Harris Wofford Global Citizen Award during the National Peace Corps Association conference in Berkeley, CA. Mary Bruckenstein (Addis Ababa 1968-70) was at her side when she was a very young girl and was at her side as she received this very prestigious award. Mary recounts the exciting event and the days leading up to it. Congratulations to both Mary and Berhane. You make us very proud.

Earlier in this introduction, I mentioned seeing Air Force one at a distance. Forrest Copeland, the Peace Corps/Ethiopia Volunteer Leader for Communications and Outreach, has written a blog about his and other Volunteer's experiences surrounding the visit of President Obama to Ethiopia, and how he ALMOST met Obama. Forrest is a third-year Volunteer assigned to the Peace Corps office in Addis Ababa, with a previous stint in Abi Adi, Tigray from 2012 to 2014.

We know that our experiences in the Peace Corps were profound. These experiences influenced our job choices, whom we hired, and perhaps even whom we married. But how many of us think about how much they affected our children? Christopher Tombari, an RPCV from Mongolia, had an opportunity with Aurora (CO) Sister Cities to journey to Ethiopia where his parents, Carol Sue Tarbox Tombari (Dessie 1967-68) and Marty Tombari (Gidole 1966-68), were Peace Corps Volunteers. As he likes to say, “I wouldn't be alive if it weren't for Ethiopia.” What an adventure to go back in time and see where your parents met!

Our newest board member, Karen Preskey Glover (Agaro 2007-09), regales us with her experiences of finding Ethiopian food in Fargo, ND, but more importantly writes of her work in Agaro creating a Mothers' Support Group for Women with HIV/AIDS. Be sure to check out her video demonstrating a traditional coffee ceremony.

I unexpectedly was copied into an email from Dwight Sullivan (Yergalem, Dodola 70-72) about a library that he was helping to construct in Axum, Ethiopia. Little did he know that I have been supporting this library for a couple of years, but in much different fashion, I as a librarian and he as an engineer. He is not all bricks and mortar, but is interested in showcasing local artists in the great reading room. Interested in joining him? I know I am.

Finally, my favorite, book reviews. When I first discovered that James McCann's (Burie 1973-75) latest book, *The Historical Ecology of Malaria in Ethiopia* was published, I picked it up with a bit of trepidation. No book with 'historical', 'ecology', and 'malaria' in the title would be typical bedside reading. I am so pleased I made the effort. I found it to be quite enjoyable and informative and plan to read his other books. Check out the review for the names of those titles.

To echo Barry's initial plea, please consider joining the Board of the E&E RPCVs. We really aren't as cantankerous as Barry makes out.

And don't forget to "like" us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/eerpcv/>

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1 Comment

E&E RPCVs Group News

Posted on [September 2, 2015](#) by [janetlee](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

Say it isn't so: Marian Beil steps down as E&E RPCV President.

Sorry, it is so, and action is required.

by **Barry Hillenbrand (Debre Marcos 1963-65),**
Board member of the E&E RPCVs

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE announcements that we all knew would come sooner or later, but when it did come, we still were a bit shocked and very disappointed. In June, Marian Haley Beil (Debre Berhan 1962-64), who founded E&E RPCVs and has served tirelessly as its president, treasurer, database manager, and website and blog designer/manager, for nearly 25 years; and as editor and publisher of the print "Herald," designer and lay out person for the online "Herald," and manager of our Facebook page for some of those years, announced that she was stepping down.

It's hard to think of the E&E RPCVs without Marian at its head. It's a bit like the Yankees without Jeter. Or "The Daily Show" without Jon Stewart. There hasn't been much that has been done by E&E RPCV over the years that happened without Marian's



Marian slings chika with a Habitat for Humanity build in Debre Berhan, 2010

direction, and hard work. “Marian is E&E RPCVs,” says Leo Cecchini (Asmara 1962-64), a long time E&E RPCV Board member. “The organization and the person are one.”

But as Marian explained in her letter of resignation to the Board, recent unpleasant encounters with some overly demanding RPCVs had disheartened her. “I’m a volunteer. [The effort] has required a huge amount of work, and I wasn’t interested in taking any shit.” So after all those years of volunteer work on behalf of E&E RPCVs — and putting up with a fair amount of grief from fellow RPCVs who can be a quarrelsome bunch — Marian decided it was time to call it a day.

Marian being Marian, is not completely cutting her ties with the RPCV community. She will continue to the layout, proofreading and photo editing for the HERALD, a publication she regards as the glue of the organization.

Marian’s decision comes at a pivotal moment in the history of the E&E RPCVs. It’s time for generational change. In the last year or so, three members of the Board — all having served as PCVs during the 1960s — have stepped down leaving unfilled vacancies. They are: Nancy Horn (Addis 1966-68), who had ably managed the RPCV Legacy Program — a cornerstone of our current efforts — for some years, and Don and Jackie Schlenger (Woldiya 1966-68). Calls for younger RPCVs to join the Board and take over the leadership of the organization have been heard by only one RPCV from groups serving from 1995 to 1999, and from the newest groups that began serving in 2007 — Karen Glover Preskey (Agaro 2007-09). The Board membership has declined as well.

So the Board wishes to renew its efforts to recruit some new members – and indeed find a person who might serve as President of the group. In short, we need volunteers. Below you’ll find details of how to volunteer for the Board. This is an opportunity for RPCVs to help the group fulfill the Third Goal of Peace Corps to bring the Peace Corps experience back home, and continue to nurture the wonderful relationships with our fellow RPCVs, former students and host-country co-workers and friends.

Getting things going

Which is precisely what Marian has done for all these years. Marian Haley was a math teacher in Debre Bahan in that first group of PCVs who went to Ethiopia in 1962. When she returned to the U.S. she worked at Peace Corps headquarters from 1965 to 1969, and taught in the training program of Ethiopia IV.

In 1968 she married Donald Beil, an RPCV from Somalia, and ultimately moved to Rochester, NY, raised a family, became a fiber artist – and tended her beloved garden.

Like many of us, she kept in contact with her old friends from Ethiopia. In 1986 stacks of information were collected at a reunion of Ethiopia RPCVs held in Washington D.C.: addresses, biographical material, lists of PCVs. “I had an early Mac,” explains Marian, a computer geek before the term was coined, “so I took the material and started a database. I began tracking down people. I collected old mug books. It just kind of grew.”

Today much of that data base is on line at eerpcv.org and allows anyone to trace old PCVs. Marian has collected other material that is not on line, but is invaluable in running the group. She’s good at keeping secrets: while working for Peace Corps staff in Washington she had access to all PC’s personal files. No Snowden leaker she, not then, not now. Her work assembling Ethiopia/Eritrea records was a labor of love involving long hours of largely unappreciated work.

In 1990 she joined the board of the National Peace Corps Association and with a group of friends launched an Ethiopia country-of-service group of RPCVs which she named — not without controversy considering that the Eritrean insurgency was at a full boil — Ethiopia and Eritrea RPCVs.

Ultimately she became president. She did it all: for many years she produced the HERALD by herself. She organized conferences for Ethiopia and Eritrea RPCVs, juggling room reservations, cajoling speakers to talk for free, hauling soft drinks (and not-so-soft drinks) to the hospitality room. All the while dealing with dissension within the E&E community. RPCVs can be difficult. Dueling with RPCVs rather makes the Iran nuclear negotiations look simple. Marian is John Kerry, but with a nicer smile and a cheery laugh.

Marian's E&E RPCV

E&E RRPV prospered under Marian. It had its fingers in many pies. In its early days before the Internet, says Marian, “The HERALD had the only complete compilation of Ethiopian news available.” They read and clipped it at the State Department. There were conferences/reunions every few years in places like Los Angeles, Washington DC, and Chicago. Thanks to the database and “The Herald” for promotion of these events, our group regularly has had the largest attendance of any other country-of-service RPCV groups at national conferences.

Says Dane Smith (Asmara 1963-65), a former president of the National Peace Corps Association, “Marian [was] the determined and steady leader who, with the support of a few others, forged E & E RPCVs into one of the strongest and most influential country of service groups.”

One of a number of E&E RPCVs projects

Over the years, says Marian, “People come up to me saying: ‘I have a good idea for you.’” They wanted the group to do some kind of project in Ethiopia or Eritrea. Thus began the E&E RPCVs’ [RPCV Legacy Program](#) designed to assist *those* people to make their ideas a reality. Working with an attorney, she got E&E RPCV designated a 501(c)3 organization by the IRS, and established the Legacy Program so that now RPCVs with the good ideas can manage their project, promote it with the group, fund it and get support — with critical tax deductions — under the guise of the E&E RPCV.

Not directly related to the E&E RPCVs, but in its spirit, she and John Coyne (Addis 1962-64) started a program to promote and encourage Peace Corps writers, and there are many, some famous, many not so much. John, as editor and she as published, began producing the “Peace Corps Writers” newsletter in 1989, which morphed into the blog [Peace Corps Worldwide](#). In addition she has managed the [Peace Corps Writers imprint](#) that has published more than 50 books by Peace Corps writers.

A call for action

Everybody remembers the Super Volunteers in our group, those high achieving folks who mastered Amharic irregular verbs, and set up a community health center while teaching 40 hours a week. Well, says John Coyne, who has worked with Marian for years, “Marian is certainly one of Peace Corps greatest Super RPCVs.”

Now all that Super RPCV good work — The HERALD, the Legacy program, the data base, the conferences, the bonds among all of us who have served in Ethiopia and Eritrea — is in jeopardy.

A new group of people is needed to take over E&E RPCV, or it may simply fade away into the forgotten corners of the Internet and boxes of yellowing memorabilia.

The Board wishes to renew its efforts to recruit some new members. Ultimately we need a person — possibly a team of two or three (replacing Marian is a big job) — to serve as President of the group and move it on, and someone to manage the RPCV Legacy Program.

Anyone interested in serving on the Board of E&E RPCV, please electronically raise your hand by sending an email to Leo Cecchini, vice president of the Board, at leo@cecchini.org.

We all thank you.

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

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Friends

Posted on [September 2, 2015](#) by [janetlee](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

Berhane Daba Recipient of the 2015 Harris Wofford Global Citizen Award

Like A Dream

Editor's note:

On June 6, 2015, Ethiopian Berhane Daba was awarded National Peace Corps Association's Harris Wofford Global Citizen Award at the NPCA conference in Berkeley, CA. [The Harris Wofford Global Citizen Award](#) "honors an outstanding global leader who grew up in a country where Peace Corps Volunteers served, whose life was influenced by the Peace Corps, and whose career contributed significantly to their nation and the world in ways that reflect shared values in human dignity and economic, social, and political development. It is the highest honor bestowed upon a global leader by the National Peace Corps Association."

Berhane Daba is president and founder of Ethiopian Women with Disabilities National Association (EWDNA). At a young age she was stricken with polio, left to fend for herself, and ultimately placed at the Princess Tsehay Hospital in Addis Ababa where she was cared for by Peace Corps Volunteer and nurse, Mary Myers-Bruckenstein. These two formed a bond that has lasted a lifetime and Mary was by Berhane's side when she received this prestigious award. The award was first granted in 2011 on the 50th anniversary celebration of the Peace Corps. It is named in honor of the Harris Wofford, former U.S. Senator, special assistant to U.S. President John F. Kennedy, and first Peace Corps Country Director in Ethiopia.

Mary Bruckenstein (Addis Ababa, 1968-70) has graciously submitted the following reflection on the events in Berkeley.



BERHANE DABA IN CALIFORNIA: LIKE A DREAM

by Mary Bruckenstein (Addis Ababa 1968-70)

I arrived in San Francisco after flying from JFK with Bette Bass (Assella 1966-69). As soon as we were ensconced in our taxi and making our way to Berkeley, the cell phone began to play. NPCA (National Peace Corps Association) was on schedule, checking on us. We were quickly registered for the conference and met with NPCA staff. After a brief tour of the Berkeley campus, we ducked into an open-air roadside restaurant for dinner while planning our trip back to the airport to meet Berhane Daba, the honoree of the 2015 Harris Wofford Global Citizen Award, later that evening.

NPCA staff drove Bette and me to the airport to await the arrival of Berhane's plane, with traditional yellow Meskal Daisies, (Meskal, the finding of the True Cross) in hand. Berhane was last to deplane. After many hugs and kisses, we settled in to await the arrival of her luggage — NO LUGGAGE. We returned to The Durant Hotel in Berkeley with thoughts of wardrobe rearrangements in our heads as our *habashaw libs* (Ethiopian National dresses) were in the luggage that was now promised to arrive on tomorrow's flight. We were exhausted having come from different time zones and went off to bed with Friday's itinerary in hand.



Berhane with David Arnold.
Bette and Mary wait in the background.

Friday was beautiful day. Everyone we met was both gracious and accommodating. The weather could not have been more beautiful. We were met by NPCA staff and taken to Berkeley to attend meetings, to be filmed for the documentary, "Towering Task: a Peace Corps Documentary," and for Berhane to be interviewed by David Arnold (Asbe Tefari 1964-66) of Voice of America.

Following a quick bite in the cafeteria, we proceeded to the Ethiopian Update run by Ethiopia & Eritrea Returned Peace Corps Volunteers President Marian Haley Beil (Debre Berhan 1962-64). As part of the program Berhane and I had the opportunity to talk informally to the assembled RPCVs. Later in the program Lee Gallery (Dire Dawa 1964-66), volunteer coordinator of the Gratis Books program at the non-profit [Hesperian Health Guides](#), spoke about the guides and presented a copy of their *A Health Handbook for Women with Disabilities* to Berhane — with a promise to ship an entire carton of the books to Berhane's organization in Addis Ababa.

Following the meeting, we secured transportation and went off to an Ethiopian restaurant in Oakland for a meal of doro wat with the Ethiopian and Eritrean RPCVs.

We returned to the Durant Hotel to await the arrival of the luggage containing the dresses that Berhane had made for Bette and me in Addis when she was informed that she was the winner of the Global Citizen Award, way back in February. The luggage did arrive very late that night. Everyone retired to their beds as tomorrow would be a busy day with an early arousal time.

Saturday dawned warm and dry. We had breakfast brought up to Berhane's room and pried open the suitcases to see our habashaw libs. We nervously tried them on and they fit each of us like a glove. We were so filled with excitement and expectations. It was like getting a bride ready for her wedding.

We took a taxi to the Assembly Hall, where we met Patti Garamendi (Metu 1966-68) and Carrie Hessler-Radelet, Peace Corps Director. After the General Assembly meeting, we had lunch with other honored guests, and then proceeded to Woodley Hall.

The three of us sat in the back of the auditorium, where there was seating for wheelchair-bound people. Surreal feelings filled us as we waited in solidarity with all the attendees, everyone having the same philosophy, to help others.

The Sargent Shriver Award for Distinguished Humanitarian Service was presented to **Ralph Bolton** (Peru 1962 —1965) and then they announced the Harris Wofford Global Citizen Award. We rose and Bette pushed Berhane upward towards the stage. You could hear a pin drop, the audience was so silent. Then as we neared the stage the entire audience rose to honor Berhane.

The Award was presented and Berhane stood at the podium and [delivered her wonderful speech](#) to all gathered before her about her work and journey to this moment. The auditorium filled with the sound of the African trill. Marian presented Meskal daisies to Berhane (sign of joy) on behalf of Ethiopia & Eritrea RPCVs; and all too quickly we were out on the lawn enjoying a reception with the [bell tower](#) witnessing this special time.



Berhane and Mary in their *habashaw libs*. [Click for larger photo.](#)



Berhane with her award, flowers from E&E RPCVs and the bell tower behind her.

We took a moment to take a breath and then prepared for a whirl-wind week in Washington, DC to visit NGOs and Congressional offices, and attend a special luncheon with Harris Wofford, and a reception hosted by E&E RPCVs at the home of a friend of two of our Volunteers that was attended again by Harris as well as Ethiopia and Eritrea RPCVs who live in the Washington area.



Berhane and Harris at the E&E RPCVs reception

Like a Dream



Acknowledgements

It seems a dream. When you reach the top of the mountain, all the work and angst you put into it melts away.

This special time in our lives was a blur of activity and beautiful people to guide us every step of the way.

Firstly, it was only with the help of Bette Bass, a dear friend to both Berhane and me and an RPCV from Ethiopia, that all the daily details of this busy time were accomplished in a timely manner.

There were support and guidance from all the NPCA department Heads, from Glen Blumhorst and Anne Baker who were always present, to Jayne Booker and Jonathan Pearson, and Erica Bauman, who physically transported us and put up with our confusion and sometimes lagging behind, to friends and family who came together to rejoice in everything, we were able to make it from June 4th to June 12th.

The days of NGO visits and Congressional tours opened doors for us to inspire us further in goal accomplishments.

Even now, Berhane and I, each back in our respective homes, continue to marvel at how far reaching her work is now recognized.

Berhane and I are so honored by NPCA and the world. We smile with our hearts as she continues onward in her work to make Ethiopian Women with Disabilities an internationally recognized Association and to lift all women with disabilities.

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Tagged [Berhane Daba](#), [Bette Bass](#), [Harris Wofford Global Citizen Award](#), [Mary Myers-Bruckenstein](#), [NPCA](#)

PCVs in Ethiopia

Posted on [September 2, 2015](#) by [janetlee](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

President Barack Obama's Historic Visit to Ethiopia

by [Janet Lee \(Emdeber 1974-76\)](#)

There was great excitement in the air for us in the U.S. with ties to Ethiopia and for our Ethiopian brothers and sisters in witnessing President Barack Obama's visit to Ethiopia in late June. This was the first time that a sitting President visited Ethiopia and it was met with great fanfare. The purpose of the two-country visit to Kenya and Ethiopia was to attend the 2015 Global Entrepreneurship Summit and to meet with leaders from government, business and citizen groups. The President met with Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, held a meeting on South Sudan and counter terrorism issues with representatives of Kenya, Sudan, Ethiopia, the African Union, and Uganda; attended a State Dinner with Prime Minister Hailemariam; and [spoke at the African Union](#).



President Obama speaks at the African Union Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, July 28,

2015 – White House video – CLICK to view

During his visit, he toured Faffa Foods in Addis Ababa; partook *buna* in a traditional coffee ceremony; was treated to traditional dancing; and met “Lucy,” the 3.2 million year old hominid, locally known as “Dinknesh.”

[Ambassador Patricia Haslach “got down”](#) dancing to traditional music at the State Dinner.

For anyone who has lived or visited Ethiopia in the past six to eight years, the presence of Barack Obama is difficult to miss. Children sport Obama t-shirts and Obama internet cafes, bars, and business centers can be found in every kebele, village, and town.

One thing that was noticeably missing during this visit was the presence of Peace Corps Volunteers, Ethiopia having one of the largest, if not the largest program in the world. Yes, Peace Corps did get a “shout-out” in the toast [remarks by both Prime Minister Hailemariam and President Obama](#), but it did not get a seat at the table, not want for trying.

Forrest Copeland, the Peace Corps Volunteer Leader for Communications and Outreach, has written a blog about his and other Volunteer’s experiences surrounding the visit of President Obama to Ethiopia. Forrest is a third-year Volunteer assigned to the Peace Corps office in Addis Ababa, with a previous stint in Abi Adi, Tigray from 2012 to 2014. To keep the integrity of the blog and his photos, we refer you to [“My Story about NOT Meeting Obama”](#) Read on and enjoy!



[Click for the story](#)

Thanks to Forrest Copeland for his firsthand account of this historic event.

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Journeys

Posted on [September 2, 2015](#) by [janettlee](#) | [3 comments](#)

What Goes Around Comes Around

Ethiopia Through the Eyes of the Son of Peace Corps Volunteers

by **Christopher Tombari** — son of **Marty Tombari (Gidole 66-68)** and **Carol Sue Tarbox (Dessie 67-68)**

I LOOK OUT THE WINDOW on the sun rising through the early-morning mist as our Ethiopian Airlines flight descends toward Addis Ababa International Airport, and I think, “Some kind of karmic wheel has come full circle.” I recall being told by each of my parents that they experienced a similar misty — but perhaps more mysterious and foreboding — introduction to the “Land of 13 Months of Sunshine” almost fifty years ago.



I’m arriving in the country where my parents met. I have to say that I wouldn’t be alive if it weren’t for Ethiopia . . . I think I’ll have to mention that at some point!



Carol Sue Tarbox Tombari (3rd from rt), Marty Tombari (2nd from rt.)

When my parents, Marty Tombari and Carol Sue Tarbox, entered the Peace Corps in 1966 and 1967 to volunteer in Ethiopia, marriage was not the motivation. Rather, they were inspired by President Kennedy’s call for Americans to work toward the greater good through peaceful means. Certainly those two individuals could not have foreseen that they would find each other, and that their first-born son would follow their Peace Corps path almost thirty years later.

Growing up, my first understanding of Ethiopia revolved around dramatic stories of the jungle, flooded rivers, abandoned Range Rovers, strange and unsettling food, and a backpack permanently pierced by the fangs of an unseen snake one pitch-black night

in the jungle. Dad spun tales of his work in the village of Gidole (near Arba Minch) in a sensational fashion designed to entertain his young son.

Thus, I was not motivated to join Peace Corps at an early age.

As I grew up and heard more about my parents' actual work, I started to pay attention. My father organized community development projects, and my mother taught EFL in Dessie. The details of their projects, especially teaching, sparked my interest. Within two months after graduating from college, I was on my way to Mongolia where, for two years, I taught English and trained former Russian language instructors to become EFL teachers as a Peace Corps Volunteer. I also took my 12-string guitar, which I left behind when I returned home, and joined a small local band.

Now that karmic wheel has come around. Here I am, almost twenty years after my PC service in Mongolia, traveling to Ethiopia — the site of my parents' PC experiences.

So how does the son of returned Peace Corps/Ethiopia Volunteers, and an RPCV himself, come to travel to the country where his parents met? I am part of an official delegation from the city of Aurora, Colorado, visiting our Sister City, Adama (known to my parents as Nazret). I am the only one in the 19-person delegation who is neither affiliated with the city government nor an Ethiopian ex-pat. My job as Department Chair of the College Preparatory ESL program at the Community College of Aurora means, in a sense, that I represent the educational interests of the city.



I quickly learn that traveling in an official delegation is the antithesis of the Peace Corps experience. We get the celebrity treatment and travel in a five-vehicle caravan, complete with TV camera crew — a far cry from the *garis* my parents hailed back in their time. Moreover, we are not there to “teach a man to fish” — our hosts want investment.

What is reminiscent of my Peace Corps experience, however, is that in this short time, I am working my tail off to make a respectful impression — this time, by mastering polite phrases and greetings in Oromo. My efforts, including correct pronunciation and inflection of “oh, really?” elicit sympathetic smiles and laughter, whether from elementary students or village elders. The mayor of Adama encourages our delegation to call Adama our “second home.” And that line about giving the country of Ethiopia credit for my existence — it goes over very well in speeches and other formal introductions.



[click for full size](#)

I've heard it time and time again: “Africa changes you.” But it's not just Africa; it happened to me in Mongolia as well. Any place where you connect with people is a place that changes you. You feel like you belong in a place and with people you didn't even know existed a few short days earlier. At the invitation of our hosts at a cultural banquet I borrow a guitar from a member of a local band, and accompany our delegation as it leads a crowd of Ethiopians in an exuberant rendition of “This Land Is Your Land.”

After a whirlwind six days, we return to the Addis Ababa airport for our return flight on a luxurious Ethiopian Airlines Dreamliner. I look forward to the genuinely “friendly” skies of Ethiopian Airlines and think that airline companies in the U.S. could learn a thing or two about customer care.

Then I spy workers restoring an old DC-10. It looks just like the one that formed the backdrop in an old family photo featuring my much younger-looking parents. I capture the moment with my smart phone and message my mom: “Hey, isn’t that the Vomit Comet?”

Full circle.



Did you ride on this plane? Click for larger photo.

Posted in [Journeys](#)

3 Comments

Tagged [Carol Sue Tarbox](#), [Christopher Tombari](#), [Marty Tombari](#)

Reminiscences

Posted on [September 2, 2015](#) by [janetlee](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

Mothers’ Support Group for women with HIV/AIDS

by [Karen Preskey Glover \(Agaro 2007–09\)](#)

I recently felt the great joy of learning that an Ethiopian restaurant had just been opened in my very own Fargo, ND. This meant that I no longer had to wait six months to a year between my trips to Minneapolis to enjoy my fill of *injera*, *tibs*, *shiro*, and *miser wot*. (I **know** I could make it at home, but it’s just never the same!) So, upon the discovery of Habesha Cuisine Restaurant, I wasted no time in visiting and spamming my Facebook friends with this information so as to ensure it stays in business.

I received some good-natured ribbing from an acquaintance of mine, wondering what my obsession with Ethiopia and Habesha was all about. It was then that I realized, 5 years out, not everyone I know is aware of this huge part of my life. I served in Agaro, Ethiopia (about an hour from Jimma in Oromya) from 2007 to 2009 as an HIV/AIDS Community Outreach Advisor. Sometimes it really is hard to believe it has been that long ago already. I am still intermittently homesick for Ethiopia and have been reminiscing a lot since my has-it-really-been-five-years discovery.



I was part of the first group of PCVs to return to Ethiopia after a ten-year absence. When I arrived in Agaro, I realized just how much work was cut out for me. Of course, we were told all about the importance of integration

and all that jazz. But what none of my cohort realized, was that since we weren't teachers, no one at our respective sites really understood why we were there! So I spent a lot of that first year drinking *buna*, taking Orominya language lessons, socializing with the health center staff, and getting to know my neighbors.

Along the way, I managed to pick up some small projects. I worked with mobile HIV testing drives, helped consolidate statistics about HIV testing at the health center, and got involved with the Agaro Secondary School's Girls' Club where I facilitated English language and Life Skills lessons.

I also coordinated communication, via Peace Corps' Coverdell Worldwide Schools program, between the Girls' Club and an elementary school classroom in Louisiana where a friend was a Teach for America volunteer. The girls really enjoyed seeing what school was like in the US. They also loved practicing their English and sharing Ethiopian culture with the American students by creating a [video introducing a traditional coffee ceremony](#).



CLICK to go to video

We also sent my friend's classroom a CD of Ethiopian music videos that I'm told they adored. She says that on days when the kids were particularly rowdy, she would turn on those videos, and they channeled their energy through dancing to the music.

Finally, in my second year I found my primary project in creating a Mothers' Support Group for Women with HIV/AIDS. With the help of the Agaro Health Center staff, Mothers2Mothers, and a Peace Corps Partnership grant, we were able to train two nurses to coordinate the program and five women as peer mentors. The mentors supported the prenatal clinic by encouraging new mothers to get tested. They also offered immediate support and counseling in our private office in the event of a positive HIV result.

The energy, joy, and passion of those five women was inspiring. They held weekly support group meetings where they provided education, support, and time for socialization. By the time I left Agaro, they didn't seem to need me anymore. Really, I don't think they ever needed me beyond that of me helping to get the resources together. It was **their** project. And I think that's the way Peace Corps should work.



Karen Preskey Glover with Mothers Support Group for Women with HIV/AIDS

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Projects

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AXUM LIBRARY AND COMMUNITY CENTER

by [Dwight Sullivan \(Yergalem, Dodola 70-72\)](#)

IN DECEMBER 2011, I had an opportunity to return to Ethiopia to provide engineering and architectural advice for a project being spearheaded by my former Peace Corps language/culture trainer, Tsehaye Teferra, with whom my good friend and fellow RPCV Bob Gausman (Bodditti 70-72) had reconnected me.



Dr. Tsehaye is the President and Founder of the Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC) in Washington, DC, which was established primarily to provide refugee services and micro-lending in DC, Denver, Chicago, and Las Vegas.

A “project of the heart” for Dr. Tsehaye was to refurbish the dilapidated former Governor’s Palace in Axum that was being used as the town library. It contained about 2,000 books, and had seating and study tables for about 70 people. Although the building had served its purpose well for many years, with Axum’s current population of over 40,000 the library was too small and had become inadequate in many ways. I concluded that the time had come to build a more modern library and recommended the construction of a new library that could provide

expanded services to the community. Although this initial visit was only two weeks, I was hooked, and I hope to hook the reader into joining me on a great adventure and a great project. Since 2011 a new library and community center, adjacent to the existing library, has been under construction, and I have been fortunate to have been part of this project, nearly from the ground up. This building is a 3-story, 24,000-square-foot, multi-function facility. It will contain:

- Reading rooms including the Grand Reading Room with a 28 feet high ceiling.



The Great Reading Room looking toward the entrance.

- A computer room (In the last year I have noticed a significant improvement in Internet service. Of course there are days on end when the it is down, and then times when the power is out.)
- A 125-seat auditorium with stepped seating.
- A separate 2,000-square-foot section for a Children's Library with proportional furniture.
- An Ethiopia and Africa book room.
- Several study rooms. (The existing adjacent small library is primarily used by high school students for group study.)
- Four classrooms for adult education.
- Small and large meeting rooms or additional study rooms.
- An Exhibition Room for local artists and craftsmen to display and sell their objects on a rotating basis.
- Internal handicap ramps and an elevator.

Project funding, for construction and operation of the new library has been provided mostly by contributions from ex-patriate Ethiopians living in the US. This is positive for the project in that there is significant buy-in from the Ethiopian community. However it is also negative in that funding is sporadic with no consistent source of support. The building is now 50% constructed.



Entrance area looking up to the Great Reading Room.
Note the female hod carriers.

Already completed are:

- Rough concrete floors,
- the roof,
- exterior concrete block walls (blocks made on-site),



Newly installed façade, June 2015

- 60% of the interior walls,
- some wiring, and some plumbing,
- the front exterior facade cladding of stone from a local quarry

and the building's 105 windows have been manufactured, and are ready to be shipped from Dubai. We have a considerable amount of material on site to fit out the library portion of the building in addition to the existing library materials: a considerable number of illustrated books (in English) for the children's library; 2½ sea containers of books, tables, chairs, and shelving; and over 3,000 additional books in the ECDC building that will be shipped to Axum, perhaps early next year. However, at present, we do not have material to furnish the classrooms, the auditorium, the children's library, or the exhibit room.

Art Display Program One element of the project that I am leading is an art display program. This will consist of:

- A display of various stand-alone paintings (or carvings, painted pots, etc.) depicting significant events in Ethiopia's history. This could begin at "Lucy"! stretch to the latest revolution.
- Large scale photos from the Smithsonian.
- A painting of the 1868 Battle of Magdala with the British. This is painted on a 1.2 meter linen covered wood frame and is now temporarily hung in the existing library.



A painting tentatively placed on the parapet wall. [CLICK](#) for detail

- A second painting, by the same artist of the Italian WW II period in Axum. This is painted on goat skin and is also temporarily hanging in the existing library.



Painting of historical scene on goat skin temporarily hanging in existing library.
CLICK for detail.

- A third object-de-art, by a different artist will soon be completed. It will be a 1.0 meter square stone carving of the two brother Axumite period kings.
- I am in preliminary discussions with yet another artist for a painting of the more recent Derg Red Terror and Revolution period. This will be painted on a very large cow skin for dramatic impact.
- Another art element will be a mural painted onto the just completed parapet/railing wall circulating around the Great Reading Room, sort of a WPA concept. This painting would be contained within a space some 10 feet to 14 feet above the floor level. The painting theme would be of everyday modern life in and around Axum, covering both indoor and outdoor activity. The painted faces will be recognizable by the people of Axum.
- Adopt-A-Painting program: With photos of the completed art, I plan, with ECDC, to start an Adopt-A-Painting program.
- There would then be an Axum Art Committee primarily of Axumites established to oversee the art aspects of the program. Ethiopia has many talented artisans and a great history to explore.

My travels back to Ethiopia have been extraordinary and rewarding. This project has been a labor of love (with a few bumps in the road . . . Ah, Ethiopia). I know that I am part of something that will truly make a difference. Please contact me if you are interested in being part of something grand: dwight48@aol.com

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