

The HERALD

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The Ethiopian Election

A bit of progress, a lot of uncertainty

by Barry Hillenbrand (Debre Marcos 63–65)

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FIGURING OUT WHO WON — and who lost — the May 15 election in Ethiopia has not been easy. What is sure is that the election took many twists and turns, some of them good, some of them bad — and many unexpected.

The pre-election period was filled with high hopes. Campaigning by the government party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), and the opposition groups including the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) and its ally, the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF), was spirited. "Never before in Ethiopian history has there been such an open debate in the country," said Tim Clarke, chief of a delegation of election observers sent from the European Union. "For people who have been here a long time, it's a miracle what is happening these days. Yes, there are deficiencies, but this is only the third election in the country's history." Large groups of foreign election observers came into Ethiopia. Then the government in a fit of nervousness, expelled several of them. After an uproar of complaints, the government relented and offered to re-admitt them. A senior member of the EU delegation quit in a huff.

In the closing days of the campaign at least 250,000 supporters of the opposition jammed Meskel Square in Addis and heard speakers demanding the end of 14 years in power of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. "What the people are saying today is, 'We want change,'" CUD president Hailu Shawel told the crowd. "We are going to win, I guarantee it." Not to be outdone, Meles's EPRDF attracted a crowd — some estimated it to be about 600,000 — to a rally at the same venue. More speeches and predictions of victory. The independent press, which blossomed during the election, covered it in detail.

While enthusiasm for the election was not as intense in the countryside as it was in the main cities and towns, more than 25 million of Ethiopia's 71 million people registered to vote. On election day the turn out was 90 per cent. Polling stations were overwhelmed and former President Jimmy Carter said that his group concluded that the poll was "as good as any we've seen." He said that "my impression is that the reported irregularities did not impede the ability of voters to express their view." Observers from the EU, which turned out an impressive force of observers, and from various African countries concurred.

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Both the opposition and the government parties were quick to claim victory before the ballots were even close to being counted. The opposition, which had only 12 seats in the outgoing Parliament, was buoyed by winning all 23 seats in Addis. Government party stars such as the mayor of Addis, Arkebe Orkubaye, and his deputy, Hilawe Yoseph, went down in flames. Also defeated were Education Minister Genet Zewdie, Capacity Building Minister Teferra Walwa and Revenue Minister Getachew Belay. The government claimed that returns in rural areas were going their way, but conceded that as many as a third of the seats could go to the opposition.


As the counting progressed — results were first promised on June 10 and then postponed again to July — charges of fraud in the tally began to surface. The opposition claimed the government had stopped counting and was making up results. Students began demonstrations and on June 8, the third day of protests, troops opened fire. At least 36 protesters and bystanders were killed in Addis. Strikes closed the city down. Arrests of politicians, students, journalists and activists followed. Opposition leader Hailu Shawel was placed under house arrest and other opposition figures detained.

Outside appeals ultimately cooled tempers. A letter signed by 22 ambassadors resident in Addis, many from nations which donate generously to food aid, called for restraint on all sides.

On June 10, two days after the shooting, the government and the opposition parties signed an agreement brokered by diplomats from the EU, the US and the African Union. The parties promised to avoid violence and confrontation. They also agreed to abide by decisions made by the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) in the disputed tallying process. The government agreed to begin releasing those detained. Irish, Swiss and American diplomats toured Addis' prison checking on those behind bars. It was a rare example of compromise in Ethiopian politics.

In mid-August, three months after the election, the National Election Board announced that its review of complaints about irregularities was complete. They awarded victories to Meles' ruling party, the EPRDF, in 296 seats. Since a majority of 264 is needed to form a new government, Meles announced that he would begin selecting a new cabinet. The Board affirmed that opposition parties and independent candidates won a total of 174 seats. Parties affiliated with the ruling EPRDF won another 20 seats. The Board ordered that new elections be held in August in 32 constituencies — or parts of constituencies — where the results could not be accurately determined. Also in August, voting for 23 seats took place for the first time in the remote areas of Somali state.

The opposition rejected the results announced by the Election Board. Hailu Shewal, chairman of the CUD, said "It is not rigging as some call it, it is simple burglary. The Meles' government has lost the election and we are not going to accept the results." The opposition will go to court. And talk of protests, strikes and a campaign of civil disobedience was heard around Addis. But leaders from the African Union, the EU and the US all urged calm and dialogue.

As the HERALD goes to press, the election process is still not completely resolved. But the good news is that for the first time Ethiopia stands the possibility of having a vigorous opposition with seats in Parliament. The ruling party is slowly realizing that they no longer have a monopoly on power and that the international community is watching developments closely. As Ambassador Clarke told Fortune Magazine in Addis: "The ruling party has to understand that they should be inclusive and take into account the opposition's views. And I will pass the message to the opposition parties that the international community will try to support everything they are doing to be integrated into the overall process." Stay tuned. A new—if uncertain—era of Ethiopian politics has begun. 

The Election

A prospective

David Shinn, a career foreign service officer, was US Ambassador to Ethiopia from 1996 to 1999. He is now a professor at George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs. Before all the results of the elections were announced, he answered some questions from *THE HERALD*.

Just how important was this election?

Potentially it has the ability to serve as a watershed in several thousand years of Ethiopia political history. If, in fact, the will of the people is exercised in this election in a transparent manner, it will be the first time ever that has happened. That has the potential for setting a precedent that will change the course of Ethiopian history.

What was good about this election?

This is the only election where you had at least an attempt to level the political playing field prior to the election so that opposition groups could express their views so openly. And if you listen to the international observers, you can say that the balloting itself seems to have taken place in a generally fair manner.

And the bad?

Things started to deteriorate after the balloting was over.

Were the results, as far as we know them, a surprise to the opposition?

I don't know if in their own minds the opposition was surprised or not with how well it did. But once it started getting indications that it was doing well in lots of areas it probably changed its position from simply accepting a significant minority in Parliament to one of deciding that they actually won a majority. And so they claimed victory before they knew definitively if they won.

And government?

In the case of the EDRPF, the government party, they were surprised by how well the opposition did. It's

only human nature that they felt rather threatened. They assumed they would win handily. The opposition's mass rally might have raised questions in some of their minds that this was going to be a very different kind of election than what they had expected.

Will we ever know who won?

I hope we do because it is so critical that the will of the people prevails however it turns out. The process that has been established which involves representatives of the National Electoral Board, the parties and at least one international observer from the African Union, the EU or the Carter Center offers the possibility that there could be final results that for the most part reflect the actual vote of the people.

What happens if the opposition gets more than a third of the seats in Parliament?

If you start with a base of 37% for the opposition — and it could be more — there is no question that it will enliven Parliament at the minimum. As I understand it, it takes only a third to propose and block certain kinds of legislation. That really does change the ballgame. Parliament is no longer a rubber stamp. It becomes a viable organization.

But will the opposition hold together?

That's up for debate. Once this is all over with and the results are accepted, you will see the development of differences and tensions among the opposition groups. For example, the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement, which has only 11 seats, has made clear that it wants the continuation of ethnic federalism, and that runs contrary to the Coalition for Unity and Democracy's position. The larger group, United Ethiopian Democratic Forces, has 56 seats and they have a mixture of views on ethnic federalism.

Has Prime Minister Meles, once the darling of the Americans and British leaders, been damaged by the election and its aftermath?

If this process ends with the belief by outsiders and Ethiopians that it reflects the will of the people and


that the adjudication process was conducted fairly, it leaves Meles in an extremely strengthened position. If the perception or the reality is that the will of the people has been exercised here and Meles' party ends up with a majority, no matter how thin, his position, especially in the international community, is strengthened. It may be weakened internally, but he is as much concerned about the international side as he is the domestic side.

Were the shootings, arrests and crackdown just more of the same old Ethiopian politics?

Yes, all that was reverting to usual form in Ethiopia. Both the excessive use of force when 36 people were killed in response to people throwing rocks and the follow-up arrests, which were in the thousands, are examples of reverting to a form going back several thousand years. Even if the opposition did encour-

age illegal demonstrations — and I don't know that they did — the government is, in the final analysis, responsible for maintaining security. And you don't shot people throwing stones at you.

But is there some hope in the agreement the two sides made on June 10 right after the shooting?

I think so. The June 10 agreement was an amazing agreement. I was astounded by it. Ethiopian society is not known for compromise and it comes hard for them. It is more difficult for them than most societies. That document demonstrated considerable amount of compromise which was, by and large, nurtured by the international community. Of course, holding to the agreement and implementing it is becoming difficult. You still have a lot of people, including journalists, still in detention. So we still have a long way to go. 



Queen of Sheba painting for sale

from Mary Schultz (Adu Ugri 65-67)

I am selling a Queen of Sheba painting, which belonged to my Dad who died recently. It is an oil painting, framed, no glass, excellent condition. It is a pictograph, 11 X 4 scenes, telling the story of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. I purchased this in 1965 in the market in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. I had it framed at Rochester Picture Framing in 1967. The overall size is approx 50" X 22.

\$200 is the minimum price I would consider. Buyer will pay shipping. I would like to sell this painting knowing that it has a good home. I would not like to sell it and find it resold for a higher price two weeks later. If it is sold through the RPCV group, I intend to donate the proceeds to one of the E&E RPCV Legacy projects.

Please contact me at mschultz@rochester.rr.com or 585-248-8343.

Back to Debre Marcos

by Clare Shea (Debre Marcos 65–67)

THEY SAY THAT YOU CAN ONLY go around once. But **Art Andersen** and I (Debre Marcos 65–67) strongly disagree. After numerous reunions with our former Debre Marcos students starting in 2003, we arranged a trip back to Debre Marcos for February 2005. The official excuse for the trip was to follow up on the distribution of a Books for Africa shipment of 35,000 books donated to DM schools. Unofficially, we just wanted to see Debre Marcos again.

And so we did. After a few days in Addis, we traveled north over still-under-construction roads with a driver and several former students. Nine hours and 220 kilometers later, our driver pulled into the newly-constructed three-story Shebelli Hotel in Debre Marcos. It was Sunday afternoon, about 4 pm. It was our first trip home in 37 years.

At first I had expected so many changes. But no. A lot was the same. The bright fragrance of eucalyptus hit me immediately. The aroma of freshly-roasted coffee beans wafted from the hotel's veranda. Dry season red-clay dust floated up as noisy herds of goats and sheep were guided home by barefoot youngsters in ragged *gabbis*. Women and young girls in printed cotton skirts and *shammas* carried plastic jars filled with water from the city well. Others lugged jars of cooking oil purchased from tiny *suks* in an expanded marketplace. Young men hung in groups in the town square waiting to go to feeders for their evening meal. Exactly the same scene, exactly the same time of day, as it was that Sunday forty years ago when I arrived in DM by plane and walked the graveled path to town wondering what the heck did I sign up for.

But our return to DM was different in so many ways. Art and I were accompanied by four former students: Wude Assaye, B.S.; Tirussew Teferra, Ph.D.; Adamu Mekonnen, Ph.D.; and Tekqwo Mogus, Certificate/Jimma Agriculture School. They were also coming home to Debre Marcos from Addis. Wude introduced us to waiting members of a committee from our old school, Negus Tekele Haimanot. Since



The main road in Debre Marcos. Note the satellite tower, paved road and power lines.

Photo by Art Andersen



The new classrooms at the DM primary school

Photo by Art Andersen

we were starving, we agreed to meet early the next day, and rushed to get dinner.

Ethiopians say Gojjam has the best *injera* because of the abundance and quality of teff. Hands down, that's true. It was forty years without the real stuff, that pungent, sweet, moist injera dripping with *doro wat* sauce. Dinner was a noisy feast followed by rounds of *tej* and *café machinata*. We were, at last, really home in Debre Marcos.

The new primary school

We re-grouped the next morning for a tightly-scripted and overloaded schedule. We visited NTHS primary school where we were shown eight recently-constructed classrooms funded by former NTHS students and a generous donation from **Charles McClellan** (Debre Marcos 67-70). In one of those classrooms, Art watched Special Education classes for blind and hearing-impaired students.

The new library

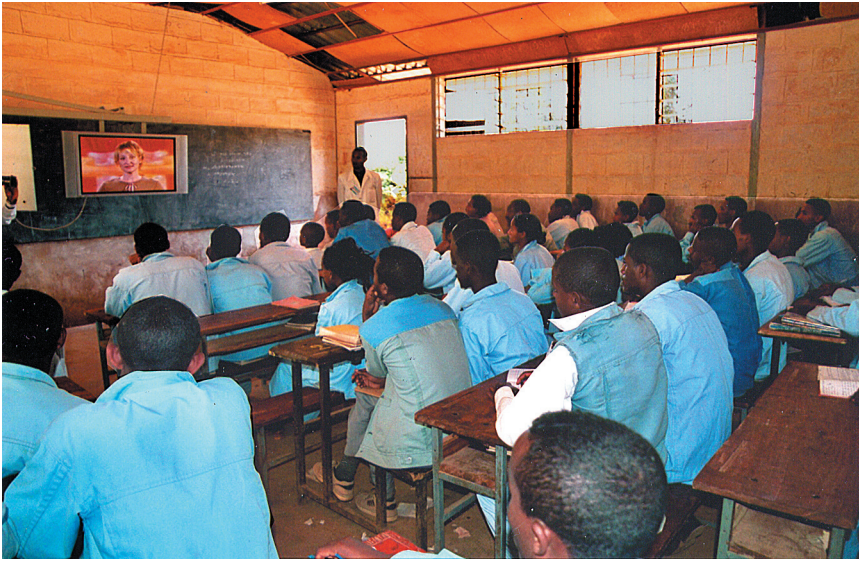
We were steered towards a light-filled, white *chica* building that stood on the location of three of our former seventh-grade classrooms. It was the school's library, furnished with rough hewn tables and benches. Shelves in the tall bookcases were neatly labeled in sections: science, mathematics, history, encyclopedias. The shy female librarian pointed out the thousands of books they had received from the shipment we helped arrange through Books for Africa. She accepted our donation of scores of laminated charts for English, math and science teachers.

The bell rang. It was the morning break time. As we left the library, thousands of teenagers poured out of the rundown classrooms dressed in their light blue NTHS uniforms. Our entourage was enveloped. Art spoke ragged Amharic as he took hundreds of shots with his Nikon. Wude pointed out her old classrooms to female students. Adamu cornered a few teens to chat. Tirusew button-holed the principal and assistant principal. I sat on a tuft of grass actually speaking some Amharic mixed with English. Tekewo loyally perched next to me interpreting what I said. The students were delightful and enthusiastic. They acted like the normal kids we all knew: poking each other, hanging on each others' shoulders. We were home.

The preparatory school

Break over we were quickly whisked to the NTHS preparatory school down the road. Once again everyone knew we were coming. The loud speaker announced in Amharic that we had been students and teachers at NTHS in 1965-67. This barren campus of the tenth and twelfth grade classrooms was in similar dilapidated condition. The teachers in crisp lab coats knew we were "helpers" from America and also that Tirusew was the Dean of the School of Education at Addis Ababa University. Many of the teachers here had been his former peers or his students at AAU. All teachers at the preparatory schools now have to have a university degree.

The atmosphere was slightly more serious for these college- or technical school-bound students. They wanted us to see their latest educational technology from the Ministry of Education. We were ushered into a classroom with a 42" Plasma TV screen. Some sixty plus students were squeezed together at the 25 or so desks to watch an hour long broadcast about chemistry produced by South Africa TV. Tirusew videotaped classrooms as we went. Here he was especially taken by the passivity of this college prep class during the TV lesson as well as the lack of text books to go along with the homework assign-



Tenth grade chemistry class viewing lecture from South Africa on a plasma TV. Note the dearth of books. Photo by Art Andersen

ments and diagrams referred to by the TV teacher. For now, the plasma TV program at NTHS is merely a pilot program using educational TV technology produced in South Africa. This trend is sweeping across Ethiopian and African high schools via satellite TV. (Learn more about it at www.memar.tv)

Then we visited a computer lab that had 12 or 13 PCs. They were turned on, but appeared only to have screen savers and little else loaded on them. We could find no internet connection in Debre Marcos. Maybe soon.

DM Teacher Training College

We were cheered up the next day as we listened to the principal of the new DM Teacher Training College talk about his ten acre campus with its three-story classroom buildings, brightly-painted dormitories, impressive stucco and glass library complete with reading rooms, study cubicles, polished tables and chairs. This campus was a far cry from the leaky, dank, poorly-equipped chicha classrooms we saw at NTHS.

He explained that the new TTC had just begun to accept students after a massive re-organization of colleges in the Amhara State. Two days later, I read in the *The Ethiopian Herald* that the Ministry of Education had just pledged to send a large number of Afar Students to the Debre Marcos TTC. The Afar are largely a nomadic Muslim ethnic group living

close to Tigray. Was I surprised? No. Why would I assume that these lovely dorms were for kids from nearby Gojam towns like Bure or Injabara? Politics in Ethiopia still confounds.

However, this emphasis on higher education was good news and would enable many rural students to continue their education without going to Addis.

Visiting the old neighborhood

Our formal school obligations done, our group dispersed. Art and I headed for our former neighborhood that Tekewo had scouted out. We turned off the main road onto the familiar deeply rutted red dusty path. Not much had changed. The same tiny 15'x15' tin-roofed, white-washed *chicabet* with Dutch blue shutters. It was still there after 40 rainy seasons. My former landlord and neighbor, Ato Shite, greeted me with a wide, toothy smile. His bright eyes teared and his leathery hands just wouldn't let go of mine. I imagine that I reminded him of better days. With Amhara pride this 75 year plus gentleman walked me around his new chicha home and its small garden of tomatoes, corn, and coffee.

He told us that he had lost all of his property in the days of the Derge. He leases his new lot. As I left Ato Shite at his gate, I spotted his nephew's shiny new Suzuki scooter just inside the front gate. I gestured that we should go for a ride to the marketplace. Ah, the old days of the "ye salem quad."

About goin' home

Each member of our group had many similar moments filled with nostalgia. We had delighted in the smells and tastes of Debre Marcos' culinary treats: siga tibs, doro wat, fresh injara, cold Fanta, warm café machimata, and seedless tella. We had shared laughs with long-ago friends. Most critically we had followed the books we secured with the help of friends and donors from Minneapolis to the hands of present day Debre Marcos students. And so maybe, just maybe, we are helping build a new nation.

But surely we proved that you can go home again. I hope you do so as well. 

Painting Ethiopia —

The Life and Work of Qes Adamu Tesfaw

Exhibit at the Fowler Museum of Cultural History
UCLA, Los Angeles, California; through September
2005

Reviewed by Suzanne Siegel (Addis Ababa 62-64)

MOST PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS returned from Ethiopia with a painting of the Queen of Sheba stuffed in their luggage as a souvenir. Those dashed-off serial-cartoon paintings followed a set formula and were ubiquitous in the marketplace. But how different those quaint oils are from the paintings of Qes Adamu Tesfaw which are currently on view at the UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History in Los Angeles. Qes Adamu, a former Coptic priest (*qes*, you'll recall, means priest), has created thousands of paintings combining traditional themes with his own individual style. His works are distinguished by brilliant colors, monumental scale and dynamic composition.

The exhibit fills three large galleries with thirty-five paintings produced over the last forty years. Handsomely mounted, the vivid paintings glow against the deep blue walls. The first gallery is



Trinity
circa 2000
44 x 100 cm, Private Collection

Don Cole

devoted to religious subjects. Included are three of Adamu's many versions of St. George slaying the dragon and powerful paintings of the Crucifixion and the Descent from the Cross. My two favorite paintings in this room are Adamu's visualization of the mystery of the Trinity and his St. Longinus. Painted in bright yellows (Adamu's favorite color) and reds, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit become a single three headed white haired figure, sharing four eyes, six hands and feet in perfect icon symmetry. In contrast, St. Longinus, a Roman soldier who was converted at the Crucifixion, is painted in muted grays and pastel tones. Horse and rider have reflecting profiles as Longinus turns to look back at Christ's cross on Golgotha. Barefooted, he wears the uniform of an Ethiopian soldier complete with pith helmet and animal hide shield.

While I was in this section of the exhibit, an Ethiopian woman was explaining the work on an informal tour. A tour-goer asked, "When did the artist live?" This is a tribute to Adamu's strategy in creating

antiquities for the tourist trade by distressing the canvas, as well as to his mastery of the centuries old Coptic tradition of representation.

The second gallery contains political and historical paintings spanning Ethiopian history from the myth of the Queen of Sheba to the 1991 overthrow of the Dergue. No cartoon format here. Adamu paints large scale versions of singular moments from the Sheba and Solomon story: Solomon and Sheba embracing, Solomon showing Sheba his treasure, and the Queen preparing to send the young Menelik to meet his father. I loved the crammed-with-detail renditions of the Battle of Adua hung in this gallery, including one of Empress Taitu holding a gun



Don Cole

Haile Selassie Receiving Queen Elizabeth

2001

100 x 151 cm, Collection of Neal and Elizabeth Sobania

and leading her army into battle with Menelik II following her. There is even a painting commemorating the 1965 visit by Queen Elizabeth to Haile Selassie.

Paintings in the third gallery were painted as recently as 2003 and address everyday issues such as AIDS, national unity, and recurring drought. One scene depicts a sheep market teeming with both sheep and buyers and sellers exchanging Maria

Theresa thalers. A 2001 painting of drought and famine is dominated by the backs of two elaborately dressed warriors standing in a desolate, landscape of leafless trees, starving cattle and emaciated people. According to Adamu, the colorfully patterned backs of the warriors represent the elders petitioning help for the people.

In this gallery is a 2003 painting of an aerial view of Addis Ababa. At the opening reception, I gathered around this painting with other people who had lived in Addis, locating landmarks: churches, buildings, roads and even the airport. This charming map painting seems a departure for Adamu whose work has revolved around representing the figures of religion, myth, history and everyday life that make up the story of Ethiopia.

Although Adamu was a Coptic clergyman, he recognizes the important role Muslims play in Ethiopian history and has begun painting them. "Muslims in Their Mosques," a more static composition, features bands of people across the canvas: two rows kneel in prayer, a group of pilgrims march in profile to a holy site, some perform ablutions, and turbaned heads peek over a wall. The mosque itself forms the top layer at the horizon. The colors are earth tones.

The "Adbar Coffee Ceremony" colorfully depicts an Ethiopian ritual that was unfamiliar to me. Malevolent spirits called Zar can cause mental and physical illnesses, and female mediums like the central veiled figure in this painting are called in to eliminate the spirit. When the spirit demands coffee, the medium must quickly drink it. Personally, I don't consider drinking coffee a bad way to earn a living. Her payment for the ritual, a sheep, is pictured at the bottom right of the painting. A good medium attracts a crowd including musicians who draw out the Spirit.

"Painting Ethiopia" was curated by Raymond Silverman, Professor of Art History and Afro-American and African Studies at the University of Michigan. Ethiopia Peace Corps Volunteer, **Neal Sobania** (Addis Ababa 68–72), Professor of History at Hope College, Holland, Michigan, contributed to the hand-

some catalog. At the opening day event Professor Silverman described his first visit to Qes Adamu Tesfaw's home in Addis in 1993. The exterior of the house was humble and ordinary, but when Silverman entered he was overwhelmed by walls covered with colorful murals. Adamu often whitewashes old murals away and paints new ones in their place.

Qes Adamu himself was at the opening discussing his life and work. Adamu, 72, had never traveled out of Ethiopia before and his trip to Los Angeles was the first time he had ever flown on an airplane. He told of the wonder he felt as a child when he saw the paintings in the Coptic Orthodox church of his town, Bichena in Gojam province. He thought angels must have painted them. But in fact, they were the creations of his uncle, a Coptic priest. The uncle taught Adamu the traditional methods of church painting.

Adamu spent long hours in churches, sketching out a project with charcoal, making his own paint-brushes, mixing egg tempera in paint, attaching fabric to the church walls with glue. He and his colleagues would paint from early morning until late at night, eating nothing and drinking only water. He was ordained a Coptic priest, but later left the priesthood and moved to Addis where he produced works for the tourist market. "Good paintings," he says, "tell a successful story." And at the Fowler exhibition there are many successful stories, many successful paintings.

Painting Ethiopia remains on view through September 18, 2005. The Fowler Museum on the UCLA campus is open Wednesday – Sunday, noon to 5 p.m. Admission is free. 310.825.4361 www.fowler.ucla.edu

The illustrated catalog, **Painting Ethiopia**, is available through University of Washington Press. 800.441.4115 or www.washington.edu/uwpress.

Images courtesy of the UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History. 

Book Review

“I Didn’t Do It for You”

How the World Betrayed a Small African Country

by Michela Wrong

Harper Collins

2005

432 pages

\$25.95

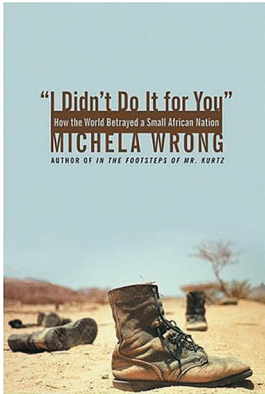
Reviewed by Leo Cecchini (Asmara 62–64)

The author could not have been more aptly named, Wrong. She starts from a straight forward question: how could Eritrea, the newest country in Africa, fail so miserably to lead Africa's promised Renaissance. How could a country with so much promise after its 30 years struggle for independence turn out so badly? Wrong's answer is that a steady stream of outside forces — the Turkish Sultanate, Italian imperialism, British occupation, American and Russian geopolitical maneuvering and, worse of all, Ethiopian rule — shaped the character and nature of the Eritrean people.

Wrong carefully documents the history of each successive foreign intervention with as much fact and fiction as any recorder is apt to do. One can quibble with specific instances cited and the weight of various personalities but, all in all, it is a good account of Eritrean history from the 19th Century, with some allusions to the millennia of history that came before.

But she errs when she attributes the ways of the Eritrean people to this relatively short period of history. One can question: do 150 years of history outweigh 3000 years? No doubt recent history has more to do with the way Eritreans act than does, say, the mystical relationship of Solomon and Sheba, but can you really argue that such a short period of history overcame a culture and identity that developed over millennia?

If I had no knowledge of Eritrea and its people I would assume that Wrong got it right. But I was in that first contingent of PCVs in Asmara and witnessed the start of the war for independence. I warned my students then that they would waste



much blood pursuing an effort that would ultimately fail to win independence. I was wrong. They did win independence, albeit at the cost of running the country into the ground. But then you cannot put a price on freedom. I learned that the poor of Africa are more interested in achieving their own version of their rightful destiny than they are in filling their bellies.

I was in Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1974 when the Emperor was arrested. I met in Addis Ababa with former students and the soccer players I coached in Asmara. They were doing very well living in the heart of their enemy, among the Ethiopians who were fighting to put down the Eritrean liberation struggle. They had high hopes for the new military regime that replaced Haile Selassie. They believed that the new regime would allow Eritrea independence or at least a loose confederation. A few months after I left the two countries, the top Eritrean general in the ruling Derge was assassinated and the Ethiopians sent several more divisions to Eritrea to put down the revolution. So much for the hopes of my students for Eritrean independence or autonomy.

In 1998 came the useless and deadly new war with Ethiopia. I went to the Eritrean Ambassador to the UN, who I had met previously and found to be open and friendly. I plead for peace. However, once again the lesson I had learned during my Peace Corps days became evident: national destiny was more important than a full belly. As a group, Ethiopia & Eritrea RPCVs tried to assist in bringing about a peaceful end to the war, an effort recognized by the US Institute of Peace and the National Peace Corps Association which gave us its Ruppe Award for our work.

The Eritreans should have learned a vital lesson in 1991 when they won their independence from Ethiopia. They succeeded because Ethiopia was locked in a brutal internal struggle, not because the Eritreans had prevailed through force of arms. When Ethiopia was back at full force it showed the Eritreans the reality of the numbers by pushing them out of their defenses on the border in early 1999 and then smashing through Eritrean fall back positions and

totally destroying the Eritrean army in May 2000. To prove the point, the cease-fire organized by the UN put UN peacekeepers in a demilitarized zone entirely on the Eritrean side of the contested border. No question, the terms of the cease-fire were dictated by Ethiopia since it had won this war.

I take the time and space to recount these personal observations about Eritrea in order to establish my ability to comment on the book. The question remains why do the Eritreans act the way they do? Why did they fight a war for independence against their ethnic brothers with whom they had been closely bonded for millennia? Why did the Ethiopians throw away the opportunity to come to a *modus vivendi* with Eritrea? Why did the newly independent Eritreans turn away foreign investors when, according to Wrong, they placed high value on the economic legacy of the Italian period? And ultimately, why did they come to fight a savage war with the same people with whom they had formed a close alliance to gain their independence?

For Wrong the answer is foreign meddling which in this context included the Ethiopians. I see it another way. In my estimation one has to first understand that there is really no difference between the Ethiopian and Eritrean peoples in their fundamental way of being. This nature, in my opinion, is the product of their geography. As the author reports in copious detail, these are lands of mountains, gorges, valleys, escarpments, and other physical barriers to movement and commerce. This, I believe, has determined the Eritrean — or Ethiopian — manner. The relative isolation of each group — be it hamlet, village, town or city — has ingrained in their being a mistrust of anyone from the other side of the mountain, much less those from further afield, like, for example, Peace Corps Volunteers, who show good intentions. The 1998 war was not the product of outside influences, but rather rooted in the character of the people developed over centuries of isolation.

While in Eritrea as a Peace Corps teacher I was sensitive to the frequent cry from Eritreans to “go back from where I came.” I assumed they meant for me, an American, to go back to the USA. But after

awhile I learned that they said it to each other and meant “go back to your side of the mountain.” This, not the impositions of outsiders, is what forms the Eritrean way of conducting oneself. No, Wrong got it wrong. The reason why Eritreans do what they do and why they threw away the promise of a brave new Africa was because it is in their nature and character honed by centuries of living in isolation from one another, much less the rest of the world.

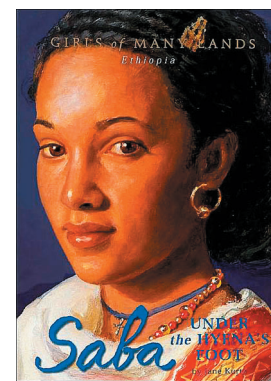
Editor’s note: Michela Wrong’s book has been widely reviewed by writers who generally found her right, not wrong. Wrong is a respected British journalist who has spent many years reporting from Africa. The reviewer in *Guardian* of London, Justin Hill, the author of *Ciao Asmara* wrote: “The story of Eritrea is well told in this thoroughly researched and detailed book. Perhaps most impressive is the list of interviewees that Wrong has tracked down. The range of voices serves to highlight the effect on individual people of decisions that were made thousands of miles away.” Wrong, some reviewers said, is especially good on history. *The New York Times* in a review praises the book, but notes that “She describes the rebels in adoring terms and does not seem to realize, in describing the outdoor ideological training sessions, that a similarly idyllic picture could be drawn of the Khmer Rouge in their days of struggle. It comes as a terrible shock to her when, as always in Eritrea, triumph very quickly gives way to tragedy.” The review continues: “Ms. Wrong, a scrupulous and honest writer, regroups. Subjecting herself and her fellow believers to some salutary criticism, she looks deeper into the insurgency for evidence of the evil that was to come, and she finds it.” **John Coyne** (Addis Ababa 62–64), who enjoyed the book, writes: “Michela Wrong has done the friends of Eritrea (and Ethiopia) a great service by pulling together in readable account the long tangled history of this wonderful land, while also casting a clear, cool eye on distance historical events and recent tragedies of both nations. The Peace Corps gets only passing reference in Wrong’s book. We’re lucky. Michela sums up the role of Kagnaw Station soldiers, for example, with a chapter entitled, ‘Blow Jobs, Bugging and

Beer.’ Think of what she could have done with us and Shriver’s famous description of service in the Peace Corps: ‘In, Up and Out.’”

Our suggestion: borrow the book from our library or buy it (the history alone is worth the price), and then decide for yourself who’s right and who’s wrong.

Other books about Ethiopia:

Not all the books about Ethiopia and Eritrea are for adults. On April 30, author Jane Kurtz was honored



at the 2005 Children’s African Book Awards Luncheon at the Library of Congress in Washington. Kurtz won the 2004 CABA honor prize for her book, **Saba, Under the Hyena’s Foot**, a story for teens about a 12-year old girl who is kidnapped along with her brother and taken

to the royal palace in Gondar where she learns about her royal past and gets entangled in a battle for the throne involving Emperor Yohannes II.

Kurtz is the daughter of a Presbyterian missionary who worked in Maji (near the southwest border with Sudan) in the 1950s and ’60s. She grew up in Maji and Addis. Ethiopia was in her blood, but she did not start writing about Ethiopia until the 1990s when she published **Fire on the Mountain**, a book based on a folk tale she recalls hearing as a child. “I found a voice in retelling the tales from my childhood in Ethiopia,” says Kurtz. And she found that kids loved reading about Africa. Her books are not without conflict and troubles. **Far Away Home** deals with Ethiopian immigration and in the words of a 12-year-old girl tells the trials a father experiences when he returns home. Her books have become popular among the Ethiopian expatriate community in the US. She has books for young readers and teens. A complete list can be found at www.JaneKurtz.com. 

Film Review

Mystery of the Nile

by Carol Beddo (Bahar Dar 64–66)

When I made a return visit to Bahar Dar in November 2003, I was lucky to get a room in the Ras Hotel's distant wing. The hotel was almost completely filled by a film crew making an Imax movie on the Blue Nile. I overheard a young, tired-looking, athletic woman say, "S---! I've been on the f---ing river all day! I'm exhausted. And I'm hungry. S---!"

I couldn't stop thinking, did she say on the river? No one goes on the river. Not the mighty Blue Nile. You just don't, and everyone knows that. We knew that when I was in Peace Corps in Bahar Dar in the mid-60s. We weren't even supposed to get our feet wet in Lake Tana for fear of shistosomiasis. And the river? Just add rapids, crocodiles, hippos, and *shifta* with AK47s. But here was this enormously large film crew with tons of high tech equipment, on the river, determined to film all 3,260 miles of the Blue Nile, from its Lake Tana source to its Mediterranean outlet. Of course, I thought they were totally nuts. And I still do.

I recently saw the four-star, 47-minute Imax film, *Mystery of the Nile*, here in San Jose at the Tech Museum, and I was right. They are nuts. Especially that adventurous soul who makes the entire 114 day journey in a kayak that looks to be about six feet long. This guy is the river leader, meaning he goes first. Imagine him lowering himself by rope, sitting in the kayak, down the face of Tissabay Falls. The crew helpfully compiled a list of the top hazards on the Nile: rapids, hippos, *shifta*, malaria and other illnesses, bureaucracy in Egypt. After seeing the film, I want to know why crocs didn't make the list.

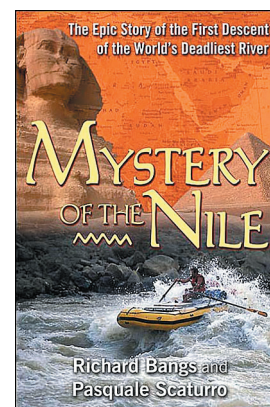
But despite all the madness involved in the making the film, I strongly recommend this film to all PCVs who had the good fortune to serve in Ethiopia or Eritrea. The Lake Tana shoreline, the river herself, the people in remote rural areas — everything — is spectacular and enormous in the Imax format. We know that the Nile does not course near Lallibela, but I can see why the film crew pretends that it

does. But an ancient Christian ceremony at Lallibela's St. George Church, filmed in glorious detail, is worth a little fact bending.

And, okay, while Ethiopia is, in our hearts, the main attraction, the landscape through Sudan and Egypt is also fascinating, as is the accompanying history lesson.

Check it out: www.NileFilm.com

Editor's note: Thanks to Wayne Charlie (Addis Ababa, Arba Minch, Sodo 66–68) for sending us materials about this film as well as about the book *Mystery of the Nile: The Epic Story of the First Descent of the World's Deadliest River* by Richard Bangs and Pasquale Scaturro [Putnam, 2005] that provides greater detail about the expedition. 🇪🇹🇪🇪





Ethiopia news

by Barry Hillenbrand

HEALTH

AIDS hotline ringing

Thousands of Ethiopians are taking advantage of a new toll-free telephone hotline to educate themselves about the dangers of HIV and AIDS. The service, known as "Wegen Aids Talkline," is free and has been receiving between 1,800 and 2,200 calls per day. "In Ethiopia, people wouldn't dare discuss the issue with friends or at home," said Gashaw Mengistu, the service coordinator.

Callers to the line can get information ranging from the location of HIV and AIDS testing centers to anti-retroviral drug treatments to the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of the deadly disease. The service, jointly funded by the United States and Ethiopia's AIDS Prevention and Control Office, employs about 20 counselors. Three other AIDS information hotlines exist in Ethiopia, but none of them is free.

Population continues to grow

The U.S. donated medical equipment worth US \$750,000 to 100 rural health centers in five regions across the country to help improve family planning and reproductive health. "The equipment donated to the Ministry of Health helps meet the reproductive health needs of Ethiopia," said a statement by the US embassy. "The rapid population growth in Ethiopia is a serious challenge to the development efforts of the nation." Experts contend that one of the causes of the country's annual food crises is runaway population growth.

Government authorities estimate that its population of 74 million will double in fewer than 25 years. According to the National Office of Population, Ethiopia has one of the highest rates of population growth in the world, estimated at 2.7 percent

per annum in 2003 with a total fertility rate of 5.9 children per woman. The country also suffers from one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, with 850 women out of 100,000 dying during childbirth.

Polio case reported

A two-year-old girl who has contracted polio in Ethiopia is another sign that the epidemic is spreading across Africa the World Health Organisation (WHO) says. Ethiopia is now the thirteenth previously polio-free African country to record an imported case. WHO officials say the crippling virus originated in northern Nigeria 18 months ago and has traveled east as far as Sudan and recently Saudi Arabia.

The case — the first in Ethiopia in four years — coincided with a mass immunization drive starting in April in 22 countries across the continent which aims to reach 100 million children under age five.

BUSINESS

Chinese investment

About 70 Chinese enterprises have received licenses to invest in Ethiopia. Ethiopia's Investment Commission is actively seeking to attract Chinese investments. The commission said that 18 Chinese enterprises are engaged in businesses including pharmaceuticals, infrastructure, iron, restaurants and manufacturing. Some 17 more firms are in the construction phase.

An agreement was signed between Ethiopia and China in 1998 to increase investment. The commission said Ethiopia benefits from Chinese investment when Ethiopian entrepreneurs work in partnership with their Chinese counterparts. Chinese technology is particularly suitable to Ethiopia and gener-

ates employment for thousands of people. Last year Ethiopia earned \$5 million from exporting hides and skin, tantalum, natural gum and coffee to China. And imports from China showed a marked growth amounting to \$257 million dollars.

Local gold trade legalized

Reuters reported that Ethiopia's central bank will start buying and selling locally mined gold. The goal is to combat the loss of more than 1,000 kg of gold smuggled across its borders each year. Small-scale mining in Ethiopia dates back centuries, but because of the lack of official marketing outlets tens of thousands of peasants who rely on mining for their livelihood tend to sell their product on the black market. Under new regulations published in April, a government trading board will purchase locally produced gold from traders at international prices and then sell the gold to goldware shops in the country.

New aircraft for EAL

Ethiopian Airlines signed a purchase agreement for five Boeing 787 jetliners to be delivered within three years. The airlines also purchased rights for five more. The deal, worth \$1.3bn at list prices, would make Ethiopian Airlines the first Africa-based operator of the new plane. The range of the 200- to 300-passenger aircraft makes it suitable for long services across Africa and to other parts of the world. Ethiopian Airlines presently operates an all-Boeing fleet of 737 and 767 planes.

Aviation agreement with US

And in May the United States and Ethiopia signed an Open Skies Aviation Agreement that allows full access to both markets for airlines from each country. The agreement, says US Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta " will allow Ethiopia to serve as a vital gateway into and from Africa, connecting travelers, trade and friendship across both sides of the Atlantic."

New Broad Band Service

The Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation (ETC) inaugurated the Broadband Internet Network in May. The service involves data, E-mail, web,

internet telephone, video conferencing, and TV as well as short message services.

Internet coffee sale

Ethiopian coffee producers sold coffee in an internet auction netting twice the usual price for their high grade coffee. According to the sponsor of the auction, Willem Boot, president of the auction sponsor, eCafe Foundation, Ethiopian coffee cooperatives netted a total of \$187,000 for 26 lots of washed and unwashed coffee. They sold it for an average of \$3.22 per pound which is more than the usual average of \$1.30. The highest bid in the auction was \$6.50 per pound for top-grade coffee from Yirgachefe. According to a Reuters report, four unions of 151 coffee cooperatives, with a total membership of 180,000 individual producers, participated in the auction with the hope of getting a better price for their product by selling it online.

Ethiopia is the largest coffee producer in Africa with annual production estimated between 250,000 and 300,000 tonnes, half of which is consumed locally. The country earned \$296.3 million by exporting 144,925 tonnes of coffee in the 11 months of the trading year July 2004–June 2005. Prices have recently begun to increase, but are still comparatively low. Washed coffee from Yirgachefe, Sidamo, Limu which was sold for \$0.78 to \$0.87 per pound previously now get around \$1.20 per pound. Unwashed coffee from Harar, Nekemte, Sidamo are also getting increased prices. A pound of unwashed coffee which got between \$0.60 to \$0.65 previously, now attracted \$0.90 and above. Still Ethiopian coffee producers are looking for a way to increased prices further. Internet auctions are small now, but might provide one tool to push prices up for hard pressed growers.

Locust attack

Ethiopia began aerial spraying of insecticide to fight swarms of mature desert locusts that may lay eggs, according to an AP report. The fear is the invasion of locust may spread. Some areas of the country are already under attack. "Some groups of locusts, most probably coming from Sudan, have flown into different localities in Tigray and

Amhara,” said Fikre Markos, the head of the crop protection department at Ethiopia’s agriculture ministry.

The locust infestation density was around 300,000 locusts a hectare (1 hectare = 2.47 acres) in the worst hit areas along the northern border regions with Sudan and Eritrea. Villagers reported seeing locust clouds 20 hectares wide. The mature locusts aren’t eating that much. They are mainly looking for a place to lay eggs.

Locusts resemble flying grasshoppers and eat their weight — about 2 grams — in crops every day. Swarms can number in the billions and travel 200 kilometers a day. Last year, a wave of locusts devastated crops and pastures in several western African countries, causing a famine that affected millions across Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Algeria and Morocco.

EDUCATION/CULTURE

Paintings returned from Britain

Two sacred paintings have been returned to Ethiopia 137 years after they were ripped out of a holy book by invading British troops. The paintings were among Ethiopian treasures looted by British troops and later locked up in British museums, royal palaces and private collections, *The Scotsman* reports.

The paintings were handed over to the Ethiopian embassy in London this week by a British lawyer who inherited them from his great uncle. The lawyer’s great uncle was an officer in the British force that captured Maqdala, the mountain capital of Emperor Tewodros. The monarch committed suicide to avoid falling into the hands of British troops in 1868. British troops and others in their company plundered illuminated religious manuscripts, gold crosses, precious crowns and royal cloth.

Experts said the two full-page works that were handed back to Ethiopia were torn out of a book of the Miracles of Jesus or Mary — both venerated volumes in the literature. The lawyer, who has asked to remain anonymous, told officials that he

decided to hand them over because his conscience and children pressed him to do so.

“We believe that this is an example that should be followed by all institutions that hold Ethiopian loot, among them the British Museum and the Queen’s library in Windsor Castle,” said Richard Pankhurst of the Association for the Return of the Maqdala Ethiopian Treasures. The British royal family holds six religious manuscripts which are said to be the finest examples of Ethiopian manuscripts anywhere in the world. By far the most valuable item is one of two copies of the *Kebra Negast* — or *Glory of Kings*, Ethiopia’s holy book — which is held in the British Library. The Ethiopian Church and government have also been exerting diplomatic pressure on Britain to return the items.

More money for education

The organization World Learning, Inc. of Brattleboro, Vermont, and the U.S. Agency for International Development’s Mission to Ethiopia signed a five-year, \$8.25 million grant agreement to expand the Basic Education Systems Overhaul Program in Ethiopia. The Overhaul Program is a \$80 million, six-year basic education program. The new grant will allow them to expand their efforts to two other regions in the country.

USAID’s Overhaul Program focuses on strengthening primary school education. The program will strengthen the relationship between the local community and the school system to promote education. It includes community outreach programs that promote gender equity through campaigns against abduction, childhood marriage and female circumcision. Additionally, the program strengthens the HIV/AIDS awareness efforts of school clubs. To date there are more than 1,500 schools involved in the community-school grants program.

Carol Bellamy became World Learning’s seventh president in May after completing ten years as head of UNICEF, the United Nations Children’s Fund. Bellamy was a Peace Corps Volunteer (Guatemala 63–65) and later was Director of the Peace Corps.

Wolf Leslau's manuscripts

Five elderly priests dressed in black cloaks entered the UCLA's Young Research Library in April raising crosses and murmuring prayers. They came to check a repository of illuminated manuscripts sacred to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Library officials didn't quite realize the extent of the treasures they had until University Librarian Gary E. Strong and Africana librarian Ruby Bell-Gam invited the five Ethiopian Orthodox priests to view the manuscripts in the library's collection. Most of the items were acquired with the help of Professor Emeritus Wolf Leslau, a scholar of Semitic languages and director of several Peace Corps Amharic programs. Elias Wondimu, an Ethiopian journalist and publisher, organized the visit by contacting the most important Ethiopian Orthodox priests in Los Angeles.

The priests were surprised to hear that UCLA had any Ethiopian manuscripts and they were impressed by what they found. Because the librarians couldn't read them, almost none of the Ethiopian manuscripts at the library had been catalogued. Indeed except those who have had religious education, few Ethiopians could read the Ge'ez used in most of the books.

The priests immediately identified materials that had gone unidentified for many decades. In religious texts, they found magical spells. They translated the dedication to a manuscript written by Emperor Haile Selassie, who gave it to UCLA during his visit in 1967.

As they left, the priests thanked UCLA librarians for preserving the manuscripts for future generations. "Today was like Columbus' so-called discovery of America," Elias said. "The Los Angeles Ethiopian community discovered their own manuscripts right in their own backyard."

Israel threatens to expel Ethiopians

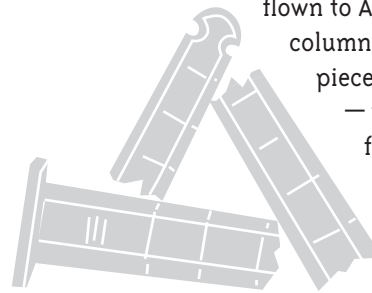
More than sixty Ethiopians who have languished in Israeli jails for more than a year are fearful that Israel will soon deport them back to Ethiopia where — they claim — they will suffer persecution. They are asking the Israeli courts to prevent their expulsion until they can find a country to accept them.

According to an article in *Haaretz*, some of the refugees snuck into Israel via Egypt and others entered on tourist or student visas. They requested to be accepted in Israel as refugees, but that was denied. They are now pressing to go to Canada and have filed petitions for asylum. That will take time, they were told, but in the meantime, new Ethiopian documents have been issued for them by the Ethiopian embassy. They fear Israel will forcibly deport them to Addis.

Axum Obelisk —

Delivered, but assembly is required

Could it be that the HERALD will have to retire its familiar art work of the obelisk at Axum? Possibly, but not quite yet. For years The HERALD has been reporting that the obelisk, taken from Ethiopia by the Italians in 1937, was about to be returned to Ethiopia. The Italians promised. Dates were set. But the obelisk remained in Rome's Piazza di Porta Capena. But in April the obelisk was finally loaded on an Russian-made Antonov 124, and flown to Axum. The 78-foot granite column had been cut into three pieces and required four flights — three for the obelisk, one for equipment — for its return journey. The weight was estimated as much as 200 tons, although no one seems to know for sure. Just as no



one knows exactly how old the column is: 1700 years? Or 2300? Everybody has a different number.

The planes carrying the obelisk were required to land precisely at dawn in Axum because of the thin air at the high altitude airport. Lack of navigational equipment made a night landing impossible. When the third and final piece of the stele arrived on April 25, thousands of people gathered in the early morning chill to welcome it. Ethiopian President Girma Wolde-Giorgis said that he had doubted he would live to see its return. He wiped tears away and said, "The obelisk belongs here." Prime Minister Meles Zenawi added: "I am very happy

and relieved that at last the obelisk is back. I think this will bring about a major change of attitude in those countries that have treasures that do not belong to them." He thanked Italian Prime Minister Carlos Berlusconi for his work in getting the stele returned. Italian ambassador Guido La Tella said. "This also marks an end of our colonial period."

But does it mean that the obelisk has been re-assembled and is now standing proud in Axum? No. Archeologists found that a vast pre-Christian royal necropolis laces the ground below where the obelisk had stood for centuries. The area might be too unstable to support the reconstruction of the monument and besides the tombs should be explored. So studies and debates are underway. No date has been set for the obelisk's re-erection. So more news of the obelisk is to come. Watch for the drawing of the Axum obelisk in the next issue of *THE HERALD*.

Of special interest on the Web

Adoption

Two moving stories about adopting Ethiopian children recently appeared.

One was in the *Washington Post* at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A36283-2005Feb18.html>

It tells of the trials of mothers suffering from AIDS trying find a place for their children in orphanages. Many of these women have been cast out by their families and live on the street by begging. Because of the AIDS crises, orphanages are crowded and can not accept new children.

The other was on the BBC web site at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/4315879.stm>

It tells of more and more Ethiopian children being adopted by parents in Europe and North America. The rules, according to the BBC, have been eased up recently. Indeed *People* magazine on July 25, 2005 tells the tale of an American woman who adopts an Ethiopian baby. And the *People* magazine website reports that Angelina Joli recently adopted an Ethiopia child.

Travel

Ethiopia and Eritrea are not exactly the hottest tourist spots in the world, but they surely continue to turn up in travel stories and have apparently become more popular than one might expect of countries that are known primarily for poverty, war and disease. A recent example of such coverage was in the *Washington Post*. See <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A18935-2005Apr1.html>

History and culture

The history of Ethiopia and Eritrea is often confusing and complicated. And when it intersects with the rest of the world, it become particularly convoluted. In an article that appeared in the web site of the *Addis Tribune*, Fikru Gebrekidane traces the development of the Rastafarians. It's an expert treatment. Fikru is author of a new book on the relationship of Ethiopia with the black diaspora. *THE HERALD* will review the book in a coming issue. The story on the Rastafarians can be found at <http://www.addistribune.com/Archives/2005/02/04-02-05/Who.htm>

Son of Haile Selassie?

He drives a cab. He's called Abebe. But he looks like the little old Emperor himself. Indeed he should, says Ato Abebe, whose friends call him "the Prince." Abebe claims that his mother was one of the Emperor's servants and the rest is, of course, a common — and fascinating — royal tale. For all the details see <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/11/international/africa/11haile.html>

Carter and Ethiopia

Critics say that President Jimmy Carter was not a great deal of help to Ethiopia during his time as president, but in recent years the Carter Center has worked hard at helping the blind and fighting disease. The Center is running a wide variety of projects, including playing a key role in the recent elections. Read the full story at: <http://www.carter-center.org/activities/printdoc.asp?countryID=31>



Eritrea news

by Barry Hillenbrand



No border dispute progress – only arms purchases

The border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea continues to simmer. But it has mostly been a war marked by volleys of accusations tossed back and forth. “The current situation is not sustainable,” Yemane Chebremeskel, the Director of the Office of President Isayas Afewerki told Reuters in Asmara in April. “Sooner or later, it is going to deteriorate. It is going to lead to war.” Eritrea is constantly warning that the conflict could boil over into war and accusing Ethiopia of sending troops on raids into Eritrean territory. When UN peacekeepers investigate the incidents they find, more often than not, that the clashes involved cattle rustlers. But they are concerned that any violence in the troubled border area could lead to an escalation in the conflict.

Neither side has shown much interest in coming to a final agreement. Ethiopian President Meles’ announced in November that he accepted “in principle” the border demarcation. This was a good move which was highly praised, but then Ethiopia turned around and deployed an extra 50,000 troops to the border area. Not a calming move.

Eritrean Foreign Minister Ali Said Abdella traveled to Moscow in April to meet with foreign ministry officials and for a more important visit with Mikhail Dmitriev, head of Federal Service of Military-Technical Cooperation. According to Russian wire service reports, the two sides agreed that the supply of Russian arms to Eritrea should be increased. The situation is paradoxical, says Kommersant.com, because Eritrea may be heading for more war with Ethiopia, another client of the Russian arms trade. Under a 1995 agreement, the Russians sold MiGs, military helicopters and 200 anti-aircraft shoulder-fired missiles to Eritrea before the war with Ethiopia. Moscow observed the UN arms embargo after the war began. But Russia resumed shipments in 2002 selling them two more MiGs and several

helicopters in 2004. Ethiopia too has been buying weapons from Russia, including 10 Mi-35 heavy lift military helicopters in 2003. Ethiopia’s foreign minister was in Moscow earlier this year trying to buy more military hardware.

US Navy stops in Massawa

Recent visitors to Ethiopia report seeing American military teams in full combat dress roaming in the most unlikely spots — and, just like the old days of Haile Selassie, not in very eager to engage in conversation with American strangers. But in Eritrea, the visit of US military personal was all out in the open and accompanied by brass bands and efforts at doing good works. The USS Juneau docked at the port of Massawa in February. On hand to greet the ship was Major General Haile Samuel, commander of Operation Zone 4, chief of staff of the Eritrean naval force, Brig. Gen. Fitsum Gebrehiwet, and other military commanders. The American Ambassador to Eritrea, Mr. Scott H. Delsi, was also there to welcome the ship on its two-day visit.

There were briefings on the usual topics: the ship and its activities, strengthening of bilateral relations of the two countries, and, of course, the fight against terrorism. The Eritrean navy chief of staff, Brig. Gen. Fitsum Gebrehiwet, said that Eritrea was ready to cooperate with the US naval force in maintaining peace and security in the Red Sea region and that it will continue its fight against terrorism.

About 30 crew members of the US naval ship toured Massawa and planted 400 mangrove trees, painted a public library in Tewalet and played a friendly match with the Eritrean navy’s football team. Unfortunately, no score was reported on the wires. The Juneau is only the second U.S. Navy ship to make a port visit in Eritrea since 1997. The first was the USS Hopper in October 2004.

Sudan Problems

Eritrean is having problems with another neighbor: Sudan. In April, Sudanese filed a complaint with the United Nations claiming that Eritrea was supporting rebel groups fighting against Sudan. Khartoum accused Eritrea of trying to destabilize Sudan by supporting rebel groups both in the East and Darfur region. According to a report on the Voice of America, Sudan's Foreign Affairs Minister Mustafa Osman Ismail, who was in the United States for meetings with senior U.S. and U.N. officials, took that opportunity to lodge a formal complaint with the United Nations against what he calls Eritrea's interference in Sudan's affairs.

"The complaint is that Eritrea is threatening the peace and tranquility of Sudan, and therefore they tried to put Sudan in a difficult position," said an aide to Minister Ismail.

Drought and food forecast

According to a UN report, Eritrea's five years of drought continues to cause a deteriorating food supply. Tensions with Ethiopia have not helped production. Nearly two thirds of Eritrea's 3.6 million population depend on food aid, and last year's harvest was less than half of the average for the past 12 years.

"Factors such as low production, inflation of market prices and insufficient food assistance being distributed, has further exhausted already overstretched coping mechanisms of the poor," said a U.N. report issued in June. The report said that cereal prices have increased between 50 and 100 percent, and high livestock prices were also making the food situation difficult.

"The no-war/no-peace environment has restricted micro- and macroeconomic activities, especially as smaller scale and petty trade have traditionally been at the core of the livelihoods of many farmers and pastoralists," the U.N. report said. "Many investment programs are postponed, and families are often missing their men folk as a result of conscription."

The report said that "approximately 40 percent of all young Eritrean children and an estimated

41 percent of all women are chronically malnourished."

Poor donor response to the UN humanitarian appeal for Eritrea has forced some UN agencies to slow down or stop their activities, said Damien Gugliermi, of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. He said that as of June, \$42 million dollars, representing about 27 percent of total requirements, had been received. In November 2004, the UN launched its 2005 humanitarian appeal for Eritrea asking donors for \$157 million, of which \$114 million was intended for food aid.

BUSINESS AND COMMERCE

The Economic outlook according to the IMF

The IMF issued a report on the Eritrean economy and the news was not good. The full report can be found on <http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pn/2005/pn0518.htm>.

The summary of conditions tells a familiar story: "Eritrea remains one of the poorest countries in the world, with a per capita GDP of about \$130 and a Human Development Index ranking of 156 out of 177 countries. More than half of the population lives on less than US\$1 per day and about one third lives in extreme poverty (i.e., less than 2,000 calories per day). The authorities have produced an Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and a national food security strategy, which together set out plans aimed at increasing rural incomes and raising productivity.

"The 1998–2000 border war with Ethiopia severely damaged the country's economic and social infrastructure and displaced over one-third of the population. Continued tensions over the border demarcation dispute with Ethiopia have resulted in Eritrea remaining in a heightened state of mobilization. The ongoing "no war/no peace" impasse could continue indefinitely, thereby delaying the demobilization program and a return to a peacetime economy. While committed over the long run to a return to market-based policies, the authorities

have increasingly resorted to an administrative-controls approach to economic management.

"The post-border war recovery has also been impaired by four consecutive years of recurrent drought. Domestic food production for 2004 is likely to cover only 17 percent of domestic demand, resulting in an estimated 1.7 million people (almost half the population) requiring humanitarian assistance. Malnutrition has increased in many parts of the country.

"There are encouraging signs, however, that the drought may be over. Macroeconomic imbalances have grown in recent years and overall performance has been weak. In 2003, real GDP growth is estimated to have rebounded to around 3 percent. At the same time, average inflation rose to 23 percent, owing to food and non-food shortages and demand pressures associated with the large government deficit."

The IMF made some suggestions to help improve the economy, but the outlook remains bleak.

Black market crackdown

Eritrea's government, facing a shortage of foreign exchange, cracked down on black market currency dealing in May, according Reuters. Offenders caught using foreign currency in Eritrea without permission will face two years in prison and a fine of two million nacfa, which is \$130,000 at official — not black market — rate. That's a hefty fine in the Red Sea state where average income is \$130.

The government faces serious shortages of hard currency due partly to a collapse of trade with Ethiopia and Sudan, and the fact that most foreign exchange transactions take place outside official channels, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Government officials say the shortages are due to generous fuel subsidies needed to protect the rural poor. The government announced fuel price rises of up to 25 percent due to high world oil prices.

In 2003, remittances from Eritreans abroad, many of whom are living in Europe and the United States, were worth an estimated 70 percent of Eritrea's

gross domestic product. In the same year, foreign reserves were equal to just two weeks worth of imports, according to the IMF. Eritrea's currency, the nacfa, is named after a guerrilla stronghold in its 30-year war of independence from Ethiopia.

There's gold — and zinc — in them hills after all

After all the mysterious trouble with its license to mine in Eritrea, Sunridge, a Canadian mining firm announced that two of an initial six drill holes designed to test geophysical targets on the Adi Nefas Gossan area, part of the Asmara Project in Eritrea, turned up good results. So all the effort in restoring the rights has paid off. One drill hole found higher grade zinc values than has previously been recognized on the property. And a second drill hole intersected a previously unknown copper supergene zone that also shows particularly high gold values.

Tourism push

Eritrea is working on attracting tourism. Despite some wonderful attractions — Asmara, the Red Sea coast to name but two examples — it won't be easy to get it on the usual African tourist route. Earlier this year the government opened a new 25-room hotel in Gelalo, which is tucked between the port towns of Massawa and Assab. A recent visitor said that "Visiting the region, a traveller has the impression of being in Ireland, then on Mongolia's steppes; grassy hills, savannas amidst acacia trees, ancient volcanoes and sprawling lava fields, all unevenly distributed." Eritrea last had a tourism boom in 1996 when some 137,000 tourists visited the country, but the war with Ethiopia and the present political situation has cut tourism to a dribble.

But there is hope. Keen-eyed **Gloria Curtis** (Asmara 63–65) notes that in the March 2005 issue of *Travel & Leisure*, page 32, a reader asks where to go in Africa that would be easy to travel on one's own. The first answer suggested was Asmara.

HEALTH

Malaria success

According to a World Bank report, Eritrea is a success story in controlling malaria. The Bank released

compelling statistics to support its claim. The number of people dying from malaria has dropped by between 55 to 65 percent since 1999. Mortality of children under five years of age dropped by 53 percent, while there was a 64 percent drop in the death rate for older children and adults.

"In 1991, our death toll among pregnant women from malaria was very high," Eritrea's Health Minister, Saleh Meky says. "Today, it is non-existent."

According to the World Bank, Eritrea used a range of proven strategies for malaria control. An important part of this is to reduce human contact with mosquitoes. Insecticide treated bed nets were distributed in high risk areas. More than 850,000 nets are being used in Eritrea with the numbers increasing as the project continues. The nets are either free or heavily subsidized. The nets are treated with a long lasting insecticide which stays potent for as long as five years before they have to be re-treated.

Community education projects have cut down on the amount of standing water in villages. Sparying continues, but at a lower and safer level as nets continue to be effective.

But says Chris Walker, the Bank's lead Health Specialist in East and Southern Africa: "The thing we have to guard against is that the malaria program doesn't become a victim of its own success — in the sense that because transmission rates are already relatively low by African standards, people can declare victory and move onto something else. That's a sure way to have a major resurgence of the problem."

Polio campaign

Eritrea launched a campaign in April to inoculate 500,000 children against polio. Although polio has not been recorded in Eritrea since 1997, cases have recently appeared in neighboring Ethiopia and Sudan. Some 23 countries are immunizing 100 million children in Africa, in order to contain the recent re-emergence of the disease on the continent, UNICEF said.


Solar power is being used to keep the vaccines cold as health workers distribute them to areas where electricity is scarce or non-existent. The sweltering heat in Eritrea would kill the vaccines if they were not kept cool. In the rural areas where roughly 80 percent of Eritrea's population lives, health workers fan out on foot or by camel and public transport to deliver the vaccine.

RELIGION

Religious struggles continue

One note of good news on the religious right front comes while several bad ones are still heard. The Seventh Day Adventists, who have suffered considerable problems with harassment and arrests, have completed the formalities of registering as a recognized religion in Eritrea. Three other Christian religions are registered officially with the government: Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Evangelical Lutheran groups.

But a worrying report came from the British group Christian Today which said that "since the beginning of 2005, at least 241 Christians have been arrested in six cities and towns across Eritrea. Many remain in custody in police stations, jails, military camps or even metal shipping containers, subjected to beatings, torture and cruel deprivations."

In an interview with the Agence France-Presse, Yemane Gebremeskel, director of Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki's office, said that "these accusations are groundless." He admitted that police do crack down on meetings of religious groups that are not registered. But people are usually released quickly and with warnings only. These accusations of abuse, said Yemane, "are part of a routine allegation due to a lack of knowledge or done in the interest of smearing this country. So-called human rights groups pick up anything on the Internet and give arbitrary figures. One cannot question the credentials of this country on religious rights and religious tolerance." 

Mission Accomplished The books arrive in Debre Marcos

by Clare Shea (Debre Marcos 65-67)

It took a village, or rather hundreds of tireless, generous, creative, problem-solving villagers, over 18 months to make

it happen. But finally early this year, 35,000 books arrived in Debre Marcos. Three groups specifically share the pride. First, Pat Plonski, and his team at the non-profit organization Books for Africa (www.BooksforAfrica.org) in Minneapolis who first gathered and then packed the 35,000 new/used texts books and library books and then negotiated a \$4500 matching grant from USAID for shipping costs.

Second, the tireless efforts started by our former DM students, Kebede, Tsegaye, Girma, Wude, Solomon, Tirusew, Alamerew, Ademe, and Wubishet who worked the system both here and there. They not only obtained the precious tax-free documents needed by BFA and USAID for shipping, but also identified a government-approved recipient to accept delivery and to fairly distribute the books to all the Debre Marcos schools.

Thirdly, Kebede and I were able to raise the required \$4,500 to qualify for the USAID grant from our families and friends including a few RPCVs who generously contributed to that first call for funds in November 2003.

After months of wrangling, the Ethiopian government through its Barhar Dar and Addis offices finally released the tax free documents and our BFA 40-foot container left port in early November 2004 arriving in Addis on New Years Eve. After paying the required \$80.00 warehouse fee/tax, Girma, Solomon, and Wude (now a surgeon, a public policy analyst, and executive for EAL respectively) greeted



Clare and Arthur with their students and the principal of the DM Teacher Training College

the book shipment at dawn on New Years Day. They accompanied the lorry to Debre Marcos, just in case it might get lost along the way. They witnessed the school principals accept and store the delivery, securing it in the high school's auditorium for latter distribution.

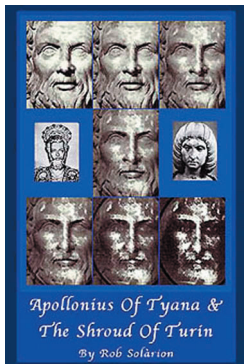
Lastly, to assist the principals, teachers and members of the DM school development committee, Arthur Anderson, Fran Williams Davidson and I began a second round of funding requests for the Debre Marcos Book Club. Through generous donations from our families, friends, and RPCVs, we were prepared to give the DM committee \$1000 in US cash and over \$1900 in teacher materials/charts/reference books for DM schools. In addition we donated a new **World Atlas** to the public library, medical books/ charts to the DM hospital staff, and over 17 calculators to math teachers at the Menelik School in Addis. Six weeks later, Arthur Andersen, whose enthusiasm and brilliant photographic skills made our return to DM a real joy, and I delivered those materials. We observed how the BFA books were being used by students in all 7 schools we visited. Art (nancyandarthur@msn.com) has captured our trip on CD with photos and Gojjame music. Marian Beil (mhbeil@rochester.rr.com) has copies of it available for loan.

Thank you to all who helped us in this project. Your funds were used wisely and well and went a long way to assist the educational needs of Ethiopian students and, perhaps, bring better days to the country. 🇪🇹 🇺🇸

Friends

> Sculptor **Peter Lipsitt** (Addis Ababa 65–67) had his work shown in the “Three/Three Hundred” exhibition in Brookline, Massachusetts. You can see his work at his website www.PeterLipsitt.com.

> In April **Clare Shea** (Debre Marcos 65–67) presented a display and demonstration of Ethiopian clothing, and books at the Friends of the Children’s Africana Book Awards Ceremony and High Tea at the Library of Congress



Some news from PeaceCorpsWriters.org

> Writing under the pseudonym Rob Solarian, **Robert Russell** (Masssawa 64–66) has published his second book entitled **Apollonius of Tyana and The Shroud of Turin**.

Rob describes the book this way: The Burial Shroud of “The Jesus Christ” was taken from Jerusalem to Edessa, Assyria, in about 50 CE by the disciple Thaddaeus. Finally in 1578, the Shroud was moved to Turin, Italy, where it has remained until the present day. This “holy relic” is currently on public display at St. John The Baptist Cathedral in Torino. The image on this Burial Shroud is that of Apollonius of Tyana, the “Mystery Man” of Christianity and “True Christ”!

The 552-page book, published by Authorhouse is available from Amazon for \$23.95.

> In September, 2004 playwright **Virginia Mekkelson** (Asmara 68–70) published a children’s book, **The Christmas Contest** writing under the name Virginia Gilbert. You can learn more about the book and what Virginia is doing these days at her website www.VirginiaMekkelson.com.

Her book can be purchased at Amazon for \$12.00.

> **Don Christians** (PC Staff/Ethiopia 67–69, Dominican Republic 1970–72), current host of “Turning Pages,” a weekly radio program on KWMR in Pt. Reyes Station, California, has a story in **California Oranges and Other True Life Stories** edited by Frances Lief Neer. The book was published by Trafford Publishing and can be purchased from the publisher at its website www.Trafford.com for \$22.66.

> **The Caddie Who Knew Ben Hogan**, by **John Coyne** (Addis Ababa 62–64), is the story of one summer afternoon in 1946 when Hogan changed the lives of a beautiful girl, a young golfing phenomenon, and the 14-year-old caddie who carried his bag. The novel will be published in the spring of 2006 by St. Martin’s Press.

> Peace Corps Writers published a fun article by **Dick Lipez** (Debre Marcos, Addis 62–64) in its July 2005 issue about the premier of the TV-movie treatment of his private-eye novel, **Third Man Out**. The piece is titled “Hey, I’m on TV!”

The movie will be shown in September and October on HereTV — a cable channel especially for gay and lesbian viewers.

> In the May issue of Peace Corps Writers, it was reported that **Laurel West Kessler** (Adi Teclesan 64–66) has had her second published piece included in *Portfolio North*, an anthology of northern California writers. “The Bride Wore Red” is about the 1993 wedding of a former student from Laurel’s Peace Corps service. Her first published piece, “Leaving Eritrea” (about being evacuated during the Eritrea’s border war with Ethiopia) appeared in the Fall 1998 edition of *WorldView*.

Laurie and husband, **Wayne**, are writing a book about the seven years they spent living in Eritrea.

Wanting to reconnect . . .

John W. Bruce (Addis Ababa 68–70) is seeking information about **Bill Ijams** (Maichew early ’70s). send info to Marian Beil at mhbeil@rochester.rr.com or 585/223-1155.

A son would like to hear from those who knew his father

My father, **Henry N. (“Hank”) Larom**, served in the Peace Corps in Asmara in 1968 and 69. His job was to go out for days at a time in a jeep visiting volunteers, coordinating their efforts, bringing them stuff etc. I would love to correspond with anyone who knew him then. He died a tragic death of lung

cancer at the young age of 48 when I was 16. Would like to know more about the father I never knew as an adult.



I would be very grateful if you could somehow get this request to the relevant former volunteers.

Thanks so much,

David Larom
1321 28th St.
San Diego, CA 92102
(619) 818-5965
dlarom@qualcomm.com

Deaths

> Don Schlenger (Woldiya 66–68) has written that **Jim Smith** (Aleta Wendo) died last year.

> Susan Coady (Felege Neway68–71) has written that **Barbara Van Meter** (Goba 1968–) has passed away.  

E&E RPCVs – news of the group

Please support our RPCV Legacy Program projects

Health books for rural communities, vocational education for at-risk young people living in Addis Ababa and Summer catch-up classes for secondary students in Borana are the three on-going projects that E&E RPCVs is sponsoring.

Read more about each of these projects at our website:

www.EthiopiaEritreaRPCVs.org/pages/eerpcv/legacypr/legpr.html

E&E RPCVs is a non-profit organization and donations for these projects are tax-deductible. To make a donation: Make your check payable to “E&E RPCVs,” and note on the memo line which project you are supporting.

Send your check to: E&E RPCVs, 4 Lodge Pole Road, Pittsford, NY 14534

RPCV Memorial

Those who wish to honor deceased RPCVs can now make a donation in her or his memory to one of the E&E RPCV Legacy Projects. We now have a list of donors on the web that includes a section of memorial donations.

List of donors to vocational training for children at risk project can be found at www.ethiopiaeritrearp-cvs.org/pages/eerpcv/legacypr/childrisksupp.html

List of donors to HIV/Book project are at www.ethiopiaeritrearp-cvs.org/pages/eerpcv/legacypr/hivbkpjctsupp.html

The next conference/reunion

Shortly after the 2004 Chicago RPCV Conference we began receiving queries about when the next one will be. The word out of the office of the National Peace Corps Association is that there will be a “small” conference in 2006 in Washington, D.C. to mark the 45th anniversary of the Peace Corps. No specific date has been announced. From the sounds of things there will be no workshops and only a limited number of other activities.

Regardless, ETHIOPIA & ERITREA RPCVs will certainly take advantage of the opportunity and will present activities for our group. We have not yet begun to make any specific plans, and would WELCOME volunteers to work with the Board on planning and execution!

If you would like to help, please contact Marian Beil at mhbeil@rochester.rr.com or 585/223-1155.

The Peace Corps Ethiopia Cookbook

[Addis Ababa: publisher unknown, 1968; 85 pages]

Who were the authors? Do you have a copy? Can we borrow it to photocopy? Any details about it would be appreciated. Contact Marian Beil - see above.



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Peace Corps Collection

(donate your letters,
journals, etc.)
John F. Kennedy Library
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Boston, MA 02125
617/929-4524

E&E RPCVs Library

Our library contains a wide variety of materials including books, vide os, and magazine articles of special interest to our members. All materials in the library can be borrowed at no cost by members of the group. Go to our website for a listing of the library contents — or if you are not online contact Librarian Hayward Allen, at 264 Garnsey Road, Pittsford, NY 14534, or 585/264-9162 to receive a printed list.

THE HERALD

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To those who have shared articles, ideas and efforts for this issue, *THE HERALD* wishes to thank them. They are greatly appreciated.

News summaries in *THE HERALD* were compiled and written from dozens of news stories forwarded to *THE HERALD* by Shlomo Bachrach, who gathers information about life on the Horn of Africa. Sources for the news summaries include: Addis Ababa Tribune; Africast.com; Afrol.com; Agence France-Presse (AFP) (www.afp.com); All Africa Global Media (allAfrica.com); Awate.com; Chicago Tribune; Daily Monitor of Addis Ababa; Associated Press; BBC; East African Standard; Eritrea New Agency; Ethiopian Government Information Services; International Herald Tribune Online (www.iht.com); JTA - Global Jewish news service; New York Times; ONLF.org; Panafrican News Agency; Shaebia.com; United Nations in Eritrea and Ethiopia; U.N. news service; U.N. Integrated Regional Information Network

(IRIN) www.irinnews.org; USAToday; Visafric; Washington Post; Wonchif; www.reliefweb.int. Sources for other articles include: the Peace Corps, the National Peace Corps Association; PeaceCorpsWriters.org.

If you would like to review a book, or submit an article to be considered for publication, it would be appreciated if it is submitted digitally — via email or on disk (labeled as to software and computer used and with a hard copy). Photo submissions are **enthusiastically** welcomed. They should be clear, with images large enough to be easily discerned. All photos will be returned.

Send all to:

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ETHIOPIA & ERITREA RPCVs

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Address _____

City, state, zip, country _____

E-mail address _____

Name when in the Peace Corps if different from above _____

Home phone _____ Home fax _____

Work phone _____ Work fax _____

Dates of Peace Corps—Ethiopia or Eritrea service _____ City/town of service _____

Group # _____ Training site _____ Type of program _____

Other Peace Corps service - as staff or Volunteer - and dates _____

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Make your check payable to:
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Please send to:
Ethiopia & Eritrea RPCVs
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Pittsford, NY 14534-4550

To join both organizations online —
Go to <https://secure.schoolyard.com/rpcv/howtojoin.cfm>
(Be sure to select E&E RPCVs as your
group choice.)

Does it say "Expired" above your name
in the address block?

If so, it's time to send in your \$15 fee to continue to receive *THE HERALD*, an award winning newsletter edited by retired *Time* magazine writer **Barry Hillenbrand** (Debre Marcos 63–65) and to continue to support other activities of Ethiopia & Eritrea RPCVs that include

- the RPCV Legacy Program projects —
 - "Borana Region Student Acceleration"
 - "HIV Books for Rural Communities"
 - "Vocational Training for Children at Risk"
- the great reunions we present at RPCV conferences.
- the website that has been so instrumental in helping RPCVs reconnect with friends and former students.

On the back of this page is a form to renew your affiliation with E&E RPCVs. Please continue your support of our efforts.

Ethiopia & Eritrea RPCVs

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