

# The HERALD

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## Yet Another War

### Ethiopia sends troops into Somalia

By Barry Hillenbrand (*Debre Markos 63–65*)

**F**OR YEARS ETHIOPIA NERVOUSLY WATCHED the goings-on across the border in Somalia. After all, Somalia was potential trouble. For decades the Somalis claimed that the Ogaden region of Ethiopia was a part of their homeland, which, they maintained, was unjustly ceded to Ethiopia in the aftermath of World War II. In 1977 Ethiopia and Somalia fought a bloody two-year war over that desert area. Ethiopia prevailed at great cost. A treaty with Somalia in 1988 helped calm the tension and firmly returned the Ogaden to Ethiopian control. But only after Somalia descended into anarchy in 1991 did the Somali-watchers in Addis rest a bit easier. A weak and chaotic Somalia, lacking any sort of formal central government and beset by squabbling warlords and clan chiefs, was unlikely to send an army to reclaim the Ogaden.

But in June 2006, all that changed dramatically. A new force, the Islamic Courts Union, took control of Mogadishu. Soldiers from the Islamic Courts chased the warlords — some who were part of the “anti-terrorist alliance” financed quietly by the Americans — out of town. For the first time in years, the city was free of roadblocks and lawlessness. According to a U.N. study, the Islamic Courts established something of an efficient system of taxation

and some basic social welfare programs. Businesses began to flourish again. People luxuriated in a bit of law and order.

At the same time, the Islamic Courts, basically a loose confederation of armed clerics, began imposing strict Islamic regulations: cinemas were closed. Smoking and alcohol — and the Somali’s beloved khat — were banned. Just how radical and monolithic these new Islamists were was open to debate. The Americans worried that the Islamic Courts would turn into the Taliban of Africa. The leaders of the Islamic Courts denied that they intended to force any type of draconian government on the country. They said they had no links with al-Qaeda or international terrorism. But Osama bin Laden, in one of his tape-recorded messages, backed the new bosses in Mogadishu and encouraged right-thinking Muslims to join the jihad in Somalia. A top Islamic Courts leader, Hassan Dahir Aweys, was high on America’s most-wanted list of terrorists and two other senior members of the group were wanted by the United States for involvement in the 1998 bombing of its embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

The Ethiopians watched with increased nervousness as forces from the Islamic Courts began sweeping

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**On February 23, The New York Times ran a long article under a two-column, double-deck headline on the top right-hand corner of the paper (a sure sign of high importance) describing America military operations in Ethiopia and Somalia. Much of the Times material had been reported elsewhere, but the report newly revealed that U.S. Special Operations forces operated on the ground in Somalia, that the Americans closely cooperated with the Ethiopian military in executing its incursion into Somalia, and that U.S. AC-130 gunships flew from Ethiopian air fields when they raided suspected al-Qaeda sites in Somalia. Interesting stuff. Check out NYTimes.com for the full treatment.**

across the country imposing their control over town after town. To make matters worse, the Islamic Courts had the backing of Eritrea, which was sending arms and some soldiers in support of the new Islamic government. So, in reply, Addis began to quietly send forces into Somalia to back the Transitional Federal Government (T.F.G.), a pathetically weak government formed in 2006 with the backing of the United Nations, the European Union and the United States in hopes of rescuing Somalia from its anarchy. The T.F.G. was confined to the small town of Baidoa and had almost no utility aside from vainly trying to engage the clan warlords in peace talks.

The Islamic Courts — and many Somalis — were enraged that the hated Ethiopians had entered their country. “We say that Ethiopian intervention in Somalia will never be accepted,” said Islamic Courts leader Hassan Dahir Aweys. “We call on Ethiopia to withdraw its forces from Somalia, otherwise be ready for full-scale war.” In December the Islamic Courts began to send troops toward the Ethiopian border and the town of Tiye glow, which is about 90 miles north-east of Baidoa and on the main road from Ethiopia. “We will go to all border towns in our country to deprive our enemy [Ethiopia] of a route to enter into our country,” said Aweys.

When the Islamic Courts troops began to move on Baidoa and reached the outskirts of the town with a two pronged attacking front, the Ethiopians replied with massive force, sending in more troops, tanks, helicopter gunships and jet fighters. It was an uneven fight. The heavily-armed and highly trained Ethiopian army cut down the lightly armed — albeit enthusiastic — young fighters of the Islamic

Courts. Ethiopian forces and troops from the T.F.G. began moving quickly on Mogadishu. Resistance melted away. Islamic Courts fighters, many of them teenagers, discarded their uniforms and weapons and melted into the bush. Top officials of the Islamic Courts fled south toward the Kenyan border which was closed down to prevent their escape. American war ships patrolled the seacoast in search of terrorist suspects. U.S. gunships attacked what the Americans claimed was a hide-out for terrorists. According to some sources U.S. Special Forces troops landed in southern Somalia to check whether the attacks had killed the high-value terrorist suspects the Americans were chasing.

The Ethiopian troops moved into Mogadishu and installed the T.F.G. There was only token opposition. Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi had promised that it would take only a week or two to drive out the Islamic Courts — and he was proven right. But as soon as the Ethiopians completed their sweep to the south of the country in pursuit of the last formal vestiges of the Islamic Courts, Meles announced that his forces would soon begin to withdraw. The Ethiopians knew that their soldiers were not really welcome in Somalia. Soon after Ethiopian troops entered Mogadishu, demonstra-

tions and small-arms attacks against them began. The Ethiopians, it seems, have no intention of staying in Somalia and letting it become their Iraq. Within days of their arrival, some Ethiopian units piled back into their trucks and began heading home.

Prime Minister Meles told Reuters in an interview on January 27 “we are reducing troop numbers by about a third. That process should be completed” by the end of January.



ETHIOPIANS OUT!: Somali demonstrators on the move



QUICK VICTORY: Ethiopian soldiers celebrate on the road to Mogadishu

Meles said he hoped to withdraw the rest of his troops, estimated to number between 5,000 and 10,000, "within weeks." When Reuters asked Meles if he was confident that could be done, he said: "Yes, because as far as our own mission is concerned it has been completed as far as supporting the Transitional Government." He

said Ethiopian troops would continue backing the new Somali government "as long as we can sustain it but we cannot sustain it indefinitely, obviously, and therefore we can only assist to the extent of our capabilities."

Will the newly installed Transitional Government

of Somalia survive the withdrawal of Ethiopian forces? No one knows. The leaders and fighters of the Islamic Courts may reemerge from the bush. The new government even with Ethiopian help had little success in their attempts to disarm the clan warlords, and so the clan bosses may once again try to impose their rule over their particular patch of territory. That's a sure recipe for a return to anarchy. The United Nations Security Council passed a resolution supporting the new government and calling on the African Union to send in an 8,000-member peacekeeping force. The African Union agreed. Uganda, Malawi and Nigeria have pledged troops, while South Africa and Rwanda have declined to participate. But how long it will take to deploy the A.U. force remains a question. And can the new Transitional Government manage to hang on that long?

For their part, the Ethiopians are still nervously watching Somalia, now from both sides of the border. 🇪🇹🇸🇴

## SHLOMO'S VIEW

# Unanswered Questions

## Ethiopia won a quick victory, but dangers persist

By Shlomo Bachrach (Staff 66-68)

**E**VEN THE INTERNET, with its speed and flexibility, was unable to keep up with the events in the Horn of Africa for the past several months. By the time a Reuters story was posted, the BBC or someone else trumped it with a new development. Newspapers were generally forced to rely on unavoidably second-hand wire service accounts of half-understood events in progress. The next day, these stories, often based on rumor, errors or fabrications, were corrected and updated. When reporters finally reached Mogadishu, they filed some good stories,

but they had little access or understanding of what was happening in the rest of the country. But now in late January, the pace of events has slowed enough to risk a tentative summary of the present situation that might be worth reading by the time this reaches you.

A major obstacle to following events in the Horn is that the participants constantly mislead the media by making claims they know to be false and by denying reports they know to be true, or at least



true enough to make the denials themselves false. Manipulation of information was never a bigger strategic weapon than it has been in the Horn for the past year.



KEEPING WATCH: Ethiopian troops patrol Mogadishu

Ethiopia, for example, said that it had no troops inside Somalia other than a few hundred trainers helping the Somali Transitional Federal Government (T.F.G.) build up its army. It turned out, of course, that Ethiopia at that time was building up a substantial force. Early arrivals established bases for the troops and weapons

that followed. Ethiopia's swift and powerful response to the attack by Islamic Courts Union would otherwise have been impossible.

The Islamic Courts denied any intention of attacking Baidoa until they foolishly did so. Still unknown is why they gave Ethiopia the excuse to invade that Addis so eagerly sought. Did the Islamic Courts really believe that Ethiopia only had trainers in Somalia? They would have been the only ones who believed that. Had the Islamic Courts shown patience, they might still be in power today.

### The Eritrea factor

Eritrea played a large, but mostly unseen, role in the recent crisis. A U.N. report said Eritrea was an arms supplier to the Islamic Courts. Eritrea denies these charges, but the specificity of the U.N. report seems to ring true. The U.N. also said that there were several thousand Eritrean troops in Somalia, which Asmara also denied. After the fighting subsided, Prime Minister Meles said that only small numbers of Eritreans, numbering in the hundreds, not thousands, helped the Islamic Courts with logistics and planning but did not actually fight. A handful of Eritreans apparently acting on their own were caught fleeing into Kenya. Since Eritrea and

Somalia have no common border, the movement of large army units and weapons would be hard to conceal. This raises a question about the reliability of some of the U.N. reports

At the same time as the Somalia crisis was developing, Eritrea was active on the Eritrea/Ethiopia border, moving some 1,500 troops and a dozen or more tanks into the demilitarized zone. Asmara at first denied this, then claimed that the troops were there for "agricultural" reasons. The new Secretary General of the U.N, warned that the 600-mile long zone on the Eritrean side of the border was becoming a staging area for another war.

Is this growing threat from Eritrea the real reason Ethiopia withdrew its troops from Somalia? Would Eritrea attack and risk the kind of retaliation that Ethiopia delivered in Somalia? The Eritrean army may be a match for the Ethiopians in a limited engagement, but Eritrea should have learned from the 1998–2000 war that Ethiopia is simply too big to handle in an extended struggle. Ethiopia has a population of 75 million versus Eritrea's 4 million. In a war, Asmara might suffer the fate of Mogadishu. And this time Ethiopia would probably not hesitate to take the port of Assab and gain direct access to the sea. Ethiopia might actually welcome an Eritrean incursion.

### Why leave now?

Meles claims that Ethiopia is withdrawing its troops because they are too expensive to keep in Somalia. The entire venture must have been hugely expensive, but it's hard not to believe that the United States, given the extent of its concern and involvement in the region, isn't picking up much of the bill. The extra cost of leaving Ethiopian troops in Somalia for a few more months surely would not matter much to the Americans.

So Ethiopia's decision to withdraw must have other explanations. One may be Eritrea's buildup on the border. Another is that Ethiopia's support is a poison pill for the Transitional Government struggling to take control of Mogadishu. No Somali government that depends on the hated Ethiopians for its survival can win public backing. It may be

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too late for Abdullahi Yusuf, the T.F.G. President, to win over the Somali people since he came to power in 2004 through Ethiopia's support, and still holds power today for the same reason.

Ethiopia may be anxious to withdraw because its troops have become targets of attacks by assailants assumed to be acting on behalf of the Islamic Courts. The Islamists have promised a guerilla war until the Ethiopians are evicted and the Transitional Government overthrown.

### Not quite back in the game

The United States became prominent once again in Somalia last year when the CIA's amateurish efforts failed to stop the Islamic Courts from taking over Mogadishu. In the following months America's clandestine activities grew. But U.S. air attacks on Somali territory at the end of January probably destroyed any hope that America can play a serious diplomatic role in Somalia in the near future. The United States defended the attacks by claiming they were chasing al-Qaeda participants in the bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Somalis from all factions and clans were

unconvinced and angered. Others in Africa also condemned the American air attack. Though some in the U.S. government opposed the attacks, the U.S. militarists seem to have won out. The United States apparently gained almost nothing in return. In recent weeks the Americans can't even persuade the Transitional Gov-

ernment to accept reconciliation with moderate Islamists, who are essential to any resolution in Mogadishu. Apparently the Americans now have influence only with Ethiopia.


The biggest unknown in the coming weeks is whether an African Union-arranged peacekeep-

ing force can be formed and put in place before the Ethiopians leave. Troops have been tentatively promised, but there are not enough of them, their term and rules of engagement are not clearly agreed and their arrival dates uncertain. Until they arrive, the fate of Mogadishu will be determined by Ethiopia's troops. As long as they remain, the Transitional Government, the frail bunch that was unable to defend Baidoa without help, can survive. If the Ethiopians go, the T.F.G. is probably finished.

If AU troops replace the Ethiopians, will they use enough force and risk their lives to stop the warlords from running amok once more? Even if the Ethiopians remain in Mogadishu and a few other towns and cities, would they rein in the clan-based warlords? And would they have the resources to patrol the rural areas also? Some warlords have already resumed their gangster behavior that the Islamic Courts had ended.

And what about the Islamic Courts? Some warn that the moderate Moslems have abandoned them, leaving control to hard-core fundamentalists. The whereabouts of the fundamentalist leadership is unknown. Are they a spent force? It is impossible to tell, but given the wealth of their foreign supporters, there is no reason to assume that. The Islamic Courts may recruit non-Somali jihadists to fight a guerilla war and raise the level of violence. If the warlords resume their nasty habits, the Islamic Courts could once again be welcomed. Some Somalis may again decide that fundamentalism is a price worth paying to stop the gangsters from owning the streets.

The Somali war has been transformed into a severe policing problem, but it could soon become a serious battle between Islamists and a weak government propped up by unpopular outsiders. Ethiopia is taking some casualties as it looks to exit. And Eritrea might take out its frustration at having backed the wrong side by instigating a reckless provocation on the border.

Many questions remain about the Horn. As answers materialize, expect equally difficult questions to appear. 



BEFORE THE BACKLASH: Soldiers patrol the deserted streets



# Ethiopia news

Compiled by Barry Hillenbrand (Debre Marcos 63–65)

## Mengistu gets life after long trial

Reuters reports that the Ethiopian courts spared former dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam from the death penalty. Instead a panel of judges sentenced him to life in prison for genocide during his brutal 17-year reign. But Mengistu, now nearing 70, is unlikely to serve any prison time. He is living in exile in Zimbabwe and the government there has repeatedly said that it would not extradite him.



SENTENCED: Former Prime Minister Mengistu Haile Mariam

After a 12-year trial, Mengistu, along with others who served in his regime, were found guilty in absentia in December 2006 of killing thousands of people during his years in power. "Considering the age of the accused and the state of their health, the court has rejected the prosecution's call for the death penalty and passed life imprisonment," a panel of judges told the court in Addis Ababa. "The court also decided that passing the death sentence on people who are aged and suffering from sickness could not be considered as jurisprudence but rather as a vendetta."

Mengistu fled to Zimbabwe in 1991 after he was toppled by guerrillas led by now Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. Seventy-three others stood trial in Addis Ababa in the case with Mengistu, including former Prime Minister Fikre Selassie Wogderesse and former Vice-President Fissiha Desta. All but one were found guilty. Fourteen of the accused have died since proceedings began in 1992, while 25, including Mengistu, are in exile. According to the Ethiopian court ruling, Mengistu's government directly killed more than 2,000 people, including 60 top officials, ministers and royal family members executed by firing squad. About 2,400 people were tortured, the court said.

## New U.S. Ambassador

President George W. Bush nominated Donald Y. Yamamoto to be the new American Ambassador to

Ethiopia. Ambassador Yamamoto, a career Foreign Service Officer, had served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of African Affairs. Prior to this, he served as Ambassador to the Republic of Djibouti. Earlier in his career, he served as Deputy Director of the Office of East African Affairs. Ambassador Yamamoto received his bachelor's and master's degrees from Columbia University.

Yamamoto told the Senate confirmation panel that at a time when the United States was pressed to furnish troops for the global war on terror, Ethiopia is "a full participant in the President's East Africa Counter-Terrorism Initiative, and works closely with the United States and other partners in the region to fight terrorism." After his Senate confirmation, Yamamoto arrived in Addis in time to manage the crisis of the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia, including the U.S. air strike against alleged terrorists in southern Somalia.

## Continuing Christian-Moslem clashes

More battles between Christians and Moslem were reported toward year's end. AFP quoted police sources confirming reports from the Islamic Affairs Supreme Council of Ethiopia that nine Muslims were killed and numerous houses burned in several days of violence that erupted near the town of Jimma following the annual Meskel festival.

In May, Moslem youth in the eastern town of Jijiga stoned the homes and businesses of Christians after taking offense at what they said was the desecration of the Koran. Ethiopian Orthodox officials have expressed concern about increasing tension between Christians and Muslims. "This is a worrisome situation for us," one official told local reporters. "These things never used to happen, but they seem to be starting now."

**China's new and expanding role in Africa is analyzed by Jacques deLisle, director of the Asia program at Philadelphia's Foreign Policy Research Institute. His article, "Into Africa: China's Quest for Resources and Influence," can be found if you rummage around [www.fpri.org](http://www.fpri.org). You'll also find an interesting article on Somalia by an ex-CIA station chief.**

### **Defections in the air**

It almost had a Cold War feeling to it. Suddenly defectors, asylum seekers, turncoats were fleeing Ethiopia and making news with their declarations of discontent against the government of Meles Zenawi. A few of the more prominent:

- Wolde-Michael Meshesha, a vice chairman of the 10-member inquiry panel appointed by the government to investigate the unrest following the 2005 election fled to Europe and accused the government of trying to suppress the results of the probe. Wolde-Michael told the press that Ethiopian security forces fatally shot, beat or strangled 193 people protesting election fraud last year, triple the earlier official death toll. The government immediately denied the charges and other panel members, still in Ethiopia, said that Wolde-Michael was only presenting part of the picture.
- Alemayehu Zemedkun, who was head of the Civil Affairs Department with the title of Deputy Assistant Attorney General, requested asylum in the United States. He claimed he was pressured by the government to pursue the trial of opposition leaders. "I have been ordered by the government to institute charges on CUDP leaders," said Alemayehu speaking of the main opposition coalition. Arguing that there was no evidence against the opposition leaders, Alemayehu said he had written a report to the government trying to convince them to abandon the effort, but that he failed.
- Teshale Aberra, Ethiopia's most senior judge, left the country following threats and "continued harassment" from the government. In an interview with the BBC, Teshale, who is president of the Supreme Court, accused the government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of killing its critics but managing to avoid international blame. He also said the government was planning to appoint new, loyalist judges throughout the system.
- Brigadier General Hailu Gonfa and Colonel Gemechu Ayana, both commanders in the Eighth Mechanized Division, defected to the Oromo Liberation Front. This follows a report a month earlier that

another general, Brigadier General Kemal Geltu, also went over to the Eritrea-backed O.L.F. Ethiopian officials denied any knowledge of the reports.

- Twelve young Ethiopians who went to South Korea for a ceremony honoring Ethiopian victims of the Korean War walked into the immigration office in Seoul and asked for political asylum. They cited the "dictatorship" of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. A Korean official said that the young people, "who were all born in the 1980s, are in our custody. We will interview them to see if there are due political reasons [for asylum] or if they came here to make money like other illegal foreigners." South Korea is often inhospitable to foreigners, aside from North Koreans, seeking asylum.

### **Chinese Peace Corps**

Fifty young volunteers departed from Beijing for Ethiopia in October. The People's Daily reported that the volunteers would provide services in the areas of Chinese language teaching, medical health, rural construction, industrial techniques, and cultural development. This is the largest aid foreign delegation since the program was launched in 2005. All members hold a bachelor's degree or higher, and the average age of the volunteers is 27.

In recent years China has been hyperactive in Africa, sending trade missions and offering assistance. High-level visits to Africa, including Ethiopia and Eritrea, by Chinese officials are common. Aid money usually precedes the visits.

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## **TOURISM**

### **A grand tour for Lucy**

The 3.2 million-year-old Lucy skeleton unearthed in Ethiopia in 1974 will go on display for the first time in the United States. A team from the Museum of Natural Science in Houston, Texas, spent four years negotiating the U.S. tour, which will start in Houston in September. "Ethiopia's rich cultural heritage, and the vibrant country that it is today, is one of the best kept secrets in the world," said Joel Bartsch, director of the Houston Museum, in announcing the tour of the famed bones. Lucy is sel-



dom on display, even in Ethiopia. The bones shown in the Lucy exhibition at the Ethiopian Natural History Museum in Addis Ababa are replicas. The real remains are usually locked in a vault. They have been on display only twice in Addis. The Houston Museum said that after a stop in Houston the bones would travel on to Washington, New York, Denver

and Chicago. Six other U.S. cities may be on the tour, which will last six years. Traveling with Lucy will be 190 other fossils, artifacts and relics.

But soon after the announcement officials at two major U.S. museums said that the bones should not be moved

and they will not show them. Rick Potts, the director of the Smithsonian's Human Origins Program and an influential paleoanthropologist, said that Lucy is too fragile to travel. He said the Ethiopian artifacts would not come to the Smithsonian. Potts, who has led major excavations in East Africa for more than 25 years, said fossils should be moved from their vaults "only under the most compelling scientific reasons." He keeps a cast of Lucy in his laboratory at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. A spokesman for the American Museum of Natural History in New York also said that museum would not accept the fossilized remains.

Neil Shubin, provost of the Field Museum in Chicago, told the Washington Post that the museum's officials hadn't discussed the possibility of exhibiting Lucy on the planned tour. "This is a hot potato because there are a lot of issues institutions have to confront. These are rare fossils, very fragile, and they can be damaged or lost," he said. Shubin said that aversion to Lucy's being moved "would be front and center" in the museum's discussion whether to display the bones.

### Visit Ethiopia

Culture and Tourism minister Mohamed Dirir an-

nounced a program to make Ethiopia a leading tourist destination in Sub-Saharan Africa by 2020. Though the number of foreign tourists visiting Ethiopia and earnings from the industry doubled over the last decade, the industry still accounts for a meager 2 percent of the national GDP. In 2005 Ethiopia hosted 227,398 tourists compared to 184,077 the previous year. The country posted \$134.5 million in tourist revenues in 2005, an increase of \$20.2 million over 2004.

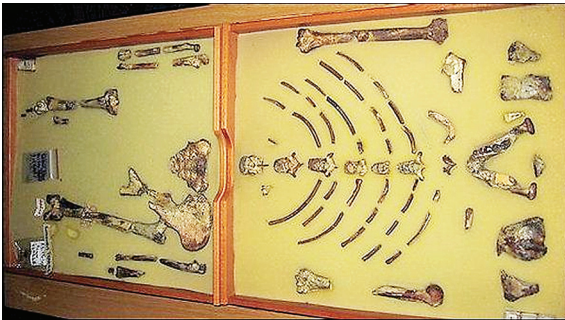
But Ethiopia can do better, said Mohamed Dirir. As part of the program, the government has drafted legislation that would upgrade Ethiopia's Hotel and Tourism Institute and also set out a new tourism investment code. "A major priority area will be the elimination of supply barriers in the hotel, transport and tour operator sectors," Mohamed Dirir said. A key part of the program is increasing Ethiopia visibility through promotion. The unusual step of sending "Lucy," the world's most famous — and oldest — human fossil on a tour of the United States is part of a "Know-Ethiopia" scheme. Officials hope that the fossils, kept at the National Museum in Addis Ababa, will entice tourists to come to spend their time and money in the country where modern human beings began to develop.

### Oromia, a new Disneyland

Abadula Gemedra, the chief of the Oromia State, and Ahmed Hilal Al Falahi, the CEO of Indus Investment, a United Arab Emirates company, signed an agreement in January to construct a \$1.47 billion "Tourist City" in Oromia. The new project will to boost development in the region and employ about 12,000 people, according to the announcement. This will be Ethiopia's first theme park and will be constructed on 38,197 hectares of land in the Abiyata Shalla area. The city will include an airport, a school, a business centre and hotels. Ethiopia provided various incentives to encourage the project. The company will begin construction immediately.

### Obama comes calling

Some visitors are not waiting for Ethiopia's tourism promotion or a new "tourist city." In September 2006, U.S. Senator — and presidential candidate — Barack Obama visited a sprawling tent camp



ROAD SHOW: Backup set of Lucy's bones on display in Addis

**"This is a hot potato because there are a lot of issues institutions have to confront. These are rare fossils, very fragile, and they can be damaged or lost."**



ALL SMILES: Presidential candidate Barack Obama visiting a tent city near Dira Dawa

near Dira Dawa set up for people displaced by the devastating floods which hit Ethiopia this past summer.

Flash floods ripped through Dira Dawa killing more than 600 people and displacing tens of thousands of others. U.S. naval engineers, who are part of the anti-terror Combined Joint Task Force for the Horn of Africa

based in neighboring Djibouti, set up 60 enormous canvas tents that housed 2,700 people. The tents were furnished with straw mats and basic necessities. Obama said, "The next order of business is to make sure these families are taken care of. But this shows what kind of role the U.S. military can play." Obama was on a five nation Africa tour when he made the stop in Ethiopia.

### Shhh. Quiet. They're working . . .

The silence we hear out of Axum in recent months is deafening and somewhat disheartening. Maybe it's understandable because of all the problems the country is facing, but surely some good news is always welcome. So far. None. This is very suspicious. In July, Awad Elhassan, the United Nations Educational, Science and

Cultural Organization's representative in Ethiopia told Reuters "everything needed to re-erect the obelisk including funding and technical experts are ready. But re-erection will have to wait until the end of the rainy season which goes up to the end of September." The rains were heavy this year. But as

far as anyone can tell the three pieces of the 24-meter obelisk are still lying in metal shipping cradles in a field with more than 120 other similar funeral monuments.

## HEALTH NEWS

### Diarrhea spreads

In April of 2006 Ethiopia declared an outbreak of acute watery diarrhea. More than 20,000 people were infected and at least 200 died. "The outbreak is reported in five regions and in Addis Ababa," said a U.N. report. The eastern and southern parts of the country were ravaged by floods that claimed at least 647 lives and displaced thousands. The floods led the Ethiopian Red Cross to fear that this situation could exacerbate the epidemic and lead to a full-scale outbreak of cholera. In January aid agencies said that at least 570 people have died in Ethiopia during what they said may be a cholera outbreak.

But Ethiopia's health ministry is resisting pressure to declare it an emergency, despite evidence that the epidemic is sweeping the country. Officials continue describing it as acute watery diarrhea. A spokesperson for one aid agency said the government would not declare it was cholera because of the damage it could cause to the Ethiopian economy by stopping cross-border trade and closing markets. International agencies working in the country say 52,500 people have been infected with cholera. "It needs to be declared an emergency because unless it is, the appropriate measures will not be taken. We need extra resources," said an aid worker.

## BUSINESS/ECONOMY

### Coffee wars

The Ethiopian government is in the midst of a complicated and at times cantankerous campaign to claim trademark control over the names of three of its most famous coffee names: Sidamo, Harar and Yirgacheffe. In March 2005 Ethiopia filed an application with the United States Patent and Trademark Office to register the names. Starbucks also had



SLOW BUT SURE: Parts of the Axum obelisk being loaded aboard a giant air-freighter for flight home





HARAR OR SIDAMO?: Preparing for a coffee ceremony

an application pending using the word Sidamo in a trademark. From that point the issue got tied up in the nuances of intellectual property rights law — and the emotions surrounding the drive to secure fair compensation for the impoverished farmers who grow the beans.

The Trademark Office denied Ethiopia's application for a trademark for Sidamao and Harer, but granted it for Yirgacheffe. Ethiopia is appealing the decision. Starbucks withdrew its application for a trademark, but the National Coffee Association, of which Starbucks is a member, filed an objection to Ethiopia's petition. Then Oxfam and a number of other groups entered the fray charging Starbucks with trying to deprive Ethiopian farmers of

getting a fair price for their coffee. "Trademarking coffee names would help level the playing field in international trade and allow coffee farmers to trade on more equal terms with their suppliers," said Phil Bloomer, director of campaigns at Oxfam.

"Starbucks has tied the hands of Ethiopian farmers who produce world-famous coffees, but who are prevented from taking full advantage of this to help work themselves out of poverty." The attack on Starbucks was taken up by the British press, which loves nothing more than a battle involving charges of brutishness against a big American corporation. Oddly, aside from ads taken out by Oxfam in *The New York Times* and by Starbucks in reply, the controversy has not been covered extensively in the United States.

Starbucks claims that it does a great deal to make sure that coffee farmers get a fair price for their beans. Starbucks' purchase of Ethiopian coffee is a very small percentage of the country's total coffee exports. The company says it pays

about 23 percent above market prices for the coffee — and does so proudly because it is the right thing to do and is good for business. Starbucks has made investments in programs to help coffee farmers,

including, according to one source, a \$150,000 grant given to Oxfam for work with Ethiopian coffee growers in 2004. Starbucks claims it conforms with C.A.F.E. (Coffee and Farmer Equity Practices), a set of socially responsible coffee buying guidelines. About 60 percent of all the coffee Starbucks buys comes with certificates explaining how much the farmers received for the beans.

Starbucks says it favors a certification program like the ones used for Napa wine, Florida orange juice, Washington apples and coffees like Jamaican and Kona. But Ethiopia wants to own and control the trademarks that it says will earn higher prices for the coffee. Starbucks CEO Jim Donald met with Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi to discuss the issue in November 2006, but no resolution was found. The controversy continues. (Full disclosure: *THE HERALD*'s Shlomo Bachrach is doing consulting work with the Ethiopians on the trademark issue. He was not involved in the preparation of this item.)

### World Bank grant, with strings attached

After a period in the deep freeze as a result of the political upheaval that followed the election in 2005, Ethiopia is once again receiving aid from international donors. In January the World Bank announced a \$175 million grant to help lower risks of serious food shortage and famine. The design of the program is interesting. Perhaps controversial. Worried that direct distribution of food aid was creating chronic dependency, the World Bank devised a program that supports large-scale public works initiatives which, in turn, pay wages to able-bodied citizens who are suffering from famine or, as the World Bank puts it, "food-insecurity."

Here's how the World Bank explains it: "To boost the productivity of small scale agriculture in targeted areas, the jobs program has supported a massive effort of environmental restoration. Some of the tangible results: more than 250,000 kilometers of terraces; 20,000 ponds and 2,000 springs; 17 million newly planted trees and the construction and maintenance of 10,000 kilometers of rural roads. By replacing food aid with jobs and cash payments, the program helps stimulate rural economies while also addressing some of the underlying causes of



ONLY THE BEST: Worker separating coffee beans for export



**In a sign that Israel is taking steps to cap the number of future Ethiopian immigrants, Israel's Interior Ministry has begun delivering rejection notices to Ethiopian petitioners deemed ineligible for re-settlement in Israel. Since 2004, Israel has been bringing 300 Ethiopian immigrants to Israel each month from among a pool of several thousand Ethiopian refugee petitioners. The mid-February change marks the first time Israeli officials have issued a substantial number of denial notices. In Addis, members of 385 Ethiopian families whose immigration applications were denied responded angrily to mail couriers delivering the rejection notices.**

food insecurity.” Said Ishac Diwan, the World Bank Country Director for Ethiopia, “The first phase of Program has dramatically lowered dependence on emergency food aid; instead, we’re supporting targeted populations through predictable transfers for productive investments, which represent a first real opportunity to bring about lasting change by addressing some of the root causes of food insecurity.” Translation: the salaries paid people who work on road construction will buy them food and materials for farming.

### **Encouraging development stats**

The World Bank’s Africa Development Indicators: 2006 Report ([www.worldbank.org/afr/adiz2006](http://www.worldbank.org/afr/adiz2006)) singles out Ethiopia for praise in a few key areas and gave the country a high overall rating. Progress has been made on education and the economy. Health has also made some improvements, but not as dramatic. For example, Ethiopia has shown considerable improvement in education. In 1991 only 27 percent of Ethiopian children attended school. By 2004, the gross enrollment rate was up to 77 percent. By the end of 2006, school enrollment reached 85 percent.

Ethiopia’s Gross National Product posted a rate of growth of about 9 percent for the past three years and is on course to pushing this into double figures in the coming few years, according to the World Bank report. Only 16 African countries showed a GNP growth above 4.5 per cent.

That said, other indexes show that Ethiopia (and Eritrea) are far down the tables of indicators of human poverty. The UNDP’s 2006 Human Development Report for 2005 shows Ethiopia in 170th place of 177 nations rated. Eritrea is 157.

### **China: the new cell phone guy**

In November, Ethiopia signed a \$2.4 billion agreement with three Chinese companies to upgrade and expand telecommunication services. The contract will provide for a three-year expansion program increasing the number of mobile phones to 7 million from 1.5 million today. The fixed telephone network will grow from one million to 4 million.

### **Sticking with Boeing – for now**

Ethiopian Airlines put on hold negotiations with the European Consortium on acquiring the A350 and A380 Airbus. For decades, Ethiopian Airlines operated a fleet of Boeings for long-range flights, but in 2005 EAL started a study on a fleet diversification program and began holding talks with officials of Airbus on procurement of jets. But Cirma Wake, the CEO of EAL, told the Addis Reporter that recent reports about the defects discovered in A350 and A380 aircraft during test flights compelled the airline to suspend the talks. “The manufacturer is to redesign the aircraft. If they come up with a commendable aircraft we will resume the talks,” Cirma said.

### **Weeds for profit**

The government is planning to commercially exploit a plant only grown in Ethiopia and considered by many farmers to be a bothersome weed. The plant, vernonia, is grown in the valleys of eastern Ethiopia. The government signed an agreement with Venique Biotech, a British firm, to produce and market vernonia as a commercial chemical product. The plant has shiny black seeds that can be pressed to give oil that is a source of epoxy compounds usually produced from petrochemicals.

Two businessmen from the firm linked up with their Ethiopian colleagues to test grow vernonia in Ethiopia and are now ready to develop the plant as a commercial oil-seed crop. The oil provides a base for the manufacture of paints, plastics and adhesives. One of the businessmen, Paul McClory, said, “Vernonia has the potential to become the industrial soya bean of the 21st century.”

The deal took place under the auspices of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity’s Access and Benefit Sharing Agreement. The deal would benefit hundreds of local farmers who would be paid to grow vernonia on land that was too poor to produce good food crops and would, therefore, not diminish Ethiopia’s ability to feed itself by taking up valuable crop land.

**How did Jere Longman discover our email addresses? Well, actually he come across our group on the Web and emailed Marian Beil with his request for information on Bekoji. She forwarded the message to those in our database who served in Bekoji and have working email addresses on file. Mystery solved; database secure. The Longman article appeared in The New York Times on February 1, 2007 under the headline, "One of the World's Poorest Countries Is Rich in Distance Runners." You can find the story on the Web at <http://nytimes.com/>, although you may have to register and pay to access it. After all, someone has to pay to send sports reporters to Ethiopia.**

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## THE SPORTS PAGE

### Could it be the water?

Most of us are perversely fond of our adopted hometowns in Ethiopia/Eritrea where we spent a rainy season or two slip-sliding away in the *chika*. But unless we served in Addis or Asmara, not many people outside of other E&E RPCVs have ever heard of those obscure places we served. So it was a bit unusual when, in January, a number of E&E RPCVs got an inquiring email asking them to share their memories of Bekoji, a smallish town some 55 km down a dirt road from Assella in the Arsi region. The email was written by Jere Longman, a legendary New York Times reporter who specializes in Olympic sports. He explained that he was putting together an article on "the three sisters named Dibaba from Bekoji, a village that has produced a handful of the world's greatest female distance runners." Longman said that he had "been to Ethiopia twice to write about its magnificent runners, and had been as far south as Assella, but had not made it to Bekoji." He wanted to get a feel for Bekoji. Tirunesh Dibaba, one of those Bekoji women, had just set a world record in the women's 5,000 meters at the Boston Indoor Games, in an astonishing 14 minutes 27.42 seconds, shattering her own record by more than 5 seconds and winning her an extra \$25,000 for the effort. Tirunesh was about to race in the 3000 meters in the Melrose Games in New York City.

As Longman would write in his article, "this is the beginning of an expectant year in which [Tirunesh Dibaba] plans to attempt outdoor world records at 5,000 and 10,000 meters, events in which Dibaba is an early favorite for the 2007 world track and field championships in Osaka, Japan, and the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing. At 21, Dibaba and her countrywoman Meseret Defar, the world outdoor record-holder and the 2004 Olympic champion in the 5,000, are the latest female track sensations from Ethiopia. At the 2005 world track and field championships in Helsinki, Finland, Dibaba became the first woman to win the 5,000 and the 10,000 as Ethiopia swept all six available medals. At the 2004 Athens Olympics, Ethiopian women took four of the six available medals in the two events. Defar won

the 5,000 in Athens while Dibaba finished third. Dibaba's older sister, Ejegayehou, won a silver medal in the 10,000."

Longman was intrigued with the fact that the Dibaba sisters were from Bekoji, as was their cousin Derartu Tulu, who took first in the 10,000 meters at the 1992 Olympic Games becoming the first black African woman to ever win an Olympic gold medal. And besides this now famous trio, a whole troupe of Ethiopian women runners passed through from Bekoji on their way to international track fame. Longman wanted to know what made Bekoji special — and a number of RPCVs who served there were more than eager to offer opinions.

**Kay Warren**, who worked in Bekoji in 1964–1966, wrote Longman that "we were told that the altitude was above 10,000 feet. Although I can't verify that, I do know that the road climbed out of Assella through softly rounded hills that looked much like the coast range between Santa Barbara and Salinas. Seen from afar, the small farming community sprawled among eucalyptus trees along the road as it skirted counterclockwise around the shoulder of one of the highest hills. It was very beautiful. The school was built of stone, four rooms, a porch and an office, and was in the middle of a large field where the teachers led the kids in various sports. Almost all of the children lived in the surrounding farmlands and had to walk long distances every day. Beyond [the town] were only deep-cut ruts radiating into the countryside. Once a week, farmers walked up to four hours each way to bring grains, vegetables, animals and other products to market. The farmers, the townspeople, our students and the other teachers dressed the same as they did in Assella, but I must mention that they were much more friendly and gracious."

**Russell Deihl**, who worked in Bekoji ten years later, was also struck by the beauty of the setting and the easy charm of the people. He emailed Longman that Bekoji was "really a beautiful place. There is a high point in town where you can go and see the vast expanses of valley and the several high peaks that surround the town. Bekoji itself is at a fairly high elevation and I can attest to the endurance it



BEKOJI BLURR: Tirunesh Dibaba (r.) on her way to a world indoor record in the women's 5,000 meters in Boston  
(C. J. Gunther for *The New York Times*)

**E**thiopia's five-time world cross country champion Kenenisa Bekele may reconsider his decision to give up the event and compete in the world championships in Kenya in March. Kenenisa had announced he would quit the distance running after winning his fifth consecutive World title in Fukuoka last year, equalling the achievement of Kenya's Paul Tergat. Kenenisa said he wished to pave the way for other young Ethiopian athletes. But his Dutch manager Jos Hermens said the 23-year-old running phenomenon might return if he was selected for the team by Ethiopian running officials.

requires to hike up those peaks even at 24 years old and in good shape! If you wanted to go anywhere past Bekoji, it was primarily by foot (unless you had enough money to have a horse), so it was pretty much accepted that you walked (or ran) a lot to get somewhere. The air was pure, the water and food were good and there was relatively little sickness."

**Dan Close** (Bekoji 66–68) spoke with Longman on the phone and then sent him the first three pages of his novel which is about two brothers from Bekoji who in 1895 head north on separate journeys to join Emperor Menelik at the battle of Adawa. The first sentence of the book reads: "Girma ran like the wind." And like the Dibaba sister the boys have many adventures and great success.

In his article, Longman wrote that "the Dibaba sisters, Tulu and many other star runners come from Bekoji, a rural town in the southern highlands, which has become the country's agricultural and athletic breadbasket. The paved road south from Addis Ababa ends after 100 miles near the village of Assela, the hometown of Haile Gebrselassie, widely considered the greatest distance runner. From there, four-wheel-drive vehicles are needed to navigate the next 30 gravel, potholed miles to Bekoji, situated on a plateau at approximately 10,000 feet surrounded by wheat fields."


Longman continued his story: "Internet and cellphone service are not yet available in Bekoji, Tirunesh Dibaba said, but the town is as fertile for growing runners as it is for producing grain. Roba, the 1996 Olympic marathon champion, and Keneni-

sa Bekele, the men's world-record holder at 5,000 and 10,000 meters, also come from Bekoji. The climate is temperate and the altitude enhances oxygen-carrying capacity. Running is the transportation of everyday existence for many youngsters — for hauling water, for gathering firewood, for traveling to market, for going to and from school.

And the diet of Ethiopia's runners relies heavily on teff, an easily absorbed millet rich in protein, iron and calcium.

"The Dibaba sisters grew up in a tukul. Their parents, subsistence farmers, raised cattle and sheep, and grew wheat and barley. The family had no electricity. Ejegayehou, 24, remembers going to a local hotel to watch Tulu, her cousin, win the 10,000 at the Barcelona Olympics."

Longman says the Dibaba sisters live in Addis now. Tirunesh Dibaba tools around town "in a BMW 750 and earns about \$500,000 a year in prize, bonus and endorsement money." She shares a house with her sister and they have built a house for their parents in Bekoji, where a teenage sister, Genzebe, is already a top regional cross-country runner.

Longman writes that Genzebe is among the approximately 25 runners in Bekoji who received some small support from a youth sports club. Sentayehu Eshetu, a devoted youth coach in Bekoji, has a keen eye for developing young talent. While only two dozen youngsters are officially in the youth club, up to 200 more attend training sessions, many without shoes. About half of the runners affiliated with the Bekoji youth club are girls. Longman writes that when a New York-based foundation, A Running Start, which donated money to build five new classrooms at Bekoji Primary School, handed out running shoes last June, one girl who did not receive a pair told one of the American donors bluntly, "You will regret this when I become the next Tirunesh Dibaba." No doubt. 



# Some notes on Psychiatry in Ethiopia

Remarkable progress, but enormous challenges remain

By E. Fuller Torrey, M.D. (Staff 64–66)

**I**N 1964, WHEN I ARRIVED IN ETHIOPIA, psychiatry was in a primitive condition. There were no Ethiopian psychiatrists. The single hospital, Amanuel Hospital located in the heart of the Mercato, was staffed by a Yugoslav psychiatrist and had virtually no medication. The only treatment available was electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), and then only when the ECT machine was functioning. In regional jails, I observed numerous psychotic individuals with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder who had never been treated; if aggressive, they were kept in iron shackles.



TEMPERAMENT CHECK: Torrey in Addis with famed staff-nurtured lion cubs in 1965

During the 1970s and 1980s, several Ethiopian physicians were sent abroad for psychiatric training, but the majority did not return. Thus, there are today significantly more Ethiopian psychiatrists in the United States or the United Kingdom than there are in Ethiopia. During those years, Cuban and Eastern European psychiatrists provided most of the care in Ethiopia itself.

With the fall of the Derg, things began to change in

the 1990s. A small group of dedicated Ethiopian psychiatrists returned to Addis to begin improving Amanuel Hospital and teaching medical students. These individuals have been the core around which the present system is built. Over the past decade, the transformation of the system has been remarkable. Amanuel Hospital has been almost completely rebuilt into a respectable facility. Medications and laboratory tests are readily available. The Department of Psychiatry at Addis Ababa University not only provides teaching to medical students but also graduated its first class of seven psychiatric residents in 2006. In so doing, it doubled the number Ethiopian psychiatrists in the country.

Most of the credit for what has been a remarkable improvement goes to the handful of Ethiopian psychiatrists who have worked together to make it happen. They have also had assistance from outside. The Department of Psychiatry at the University of Toronto has sent teachers for three months each year to assist with the training of the residents. Dr. Lars Jacobsson, a prominent psychiatrist at the University of Umea in Sweden and once a doctor at the mission hospital in Lekempt, has provided several Ethiopian psychiatrists with the opportunity to get research training and PhDs. Dr. Tedla Giorgis, a psychologist who works for the District of Columbia Department of Mental Health, has organized several expatriate Ethiopian mental health professionals



CHECKUP AND SHOTS: Torrey, with relaxed guards, on a visit to a village down the Blue Nile Gorge in Welega where he and six PCVs did a health survey and administered smallpox vaccinations in 1966

to return periodically to Ethiopia to help with the teaching and to support the program financially.

My own modest contribution has been to direct some funds to Ethiopia from the research organization with which I am connected. I have revisited the country five times in the last ten years. We have supported several research projects, including a community psychiatric survey in Butajira, south of Addis, that was among the largest and best surveys ever carried out. The Ethiopian psychiatrists have published over twenty professional papers in recent

years and are now generally known as the best researchers in Africa. We also contributed \$10,000 to set up an outpatient pharmacy at Amanuel Hospital. The pharmacy has become the most popular pharmacy in the Mercato area, and its profits have been used to improve the hospital's buildings.

The next steps are underway, but enormous challenges remain. Keeping psychiatrists is an ongoing problem; in Addis they earn less than \$5,000 per year, while those who emigrate can earn at least twenty times that much. Getting psychiatrists to work in the provinces is also an ongoing challenge.

An additional development in the past year that is hopeful has been the development of a family group, the Ethiopian Mental Health Association. Because of ongoing stigma, most families are reluctant to acknowledge that they have a mentally ill family member. A handful of families have organized themselves, given radio broadcasts about mental illness, and are preparing literature for public distribution. They are working closely with the Ethiopian psychiatrists to move the country forward. 🇪🇹🇻🇪

# Eritrea news



Compiled by Barry Hillenbrand (Debre Marcos 63–65)

**Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki claimed that the Islamic Courts were not a movement of some "new Islamic philosophy but a choice the people made to establish a united Somalia."**

## **Eritrea & Somalia**

Working on the well-established principle that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," the Eritrean government was an early and firm supporter of the Islamic Courts regime that came out of nowhere to take control of Somalia. Asmara's thinking was that a new strong government in Mogadishu would divert Addis' attention and resources away from the border conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia. If things went badly for Ethiopia in Somalia, the Ethiopians might even have to settle the Eritrean border dispute to Asmara's liking.

From the beginning, accusations flew that Eritrea was sending weapons and men in support of the new regime in Somalia in defiance of a United Nations arms ban. In July 2006 a mysterious plane landed in Mogadishu. "Eritrea has brought weapons to Mogadishu by airplane to support the Islamists," Salad Ali Jelle, the deputy information minister for the Transitional Government told Reuters. The Islamic Courts government denied the charge. But they blocked the area near the airport to stop residents from snooping around the plane where they might have stumbled over guns and explosives. An Islamic Courts official told Reuters that the plane had brought "small sewing machines, which were a gift from a friendly country,"

Officials from the African Union claimed that three ships with 1,500 Eritrean troops docked in the Somali ports of Warshika and Merka to support the Islamic Courts. After the offensive began, Ethiopia showed off Eritrean identity cards they said they found on bodies of fighters for the Islamic Courts. Asmara said that Ethiopia had forged the cards to stir up trouble.

The Prime Minister of the Transitional Government, Ali Mohamed Gedi, said, "We know that in the

past several years foreign fighters in favor of jihad have strongly intervened in our country and been trained in Eritrea."

With a sense of irony, Gedi, who called in the Ethiopians, the most hated foreigners in Somalia, added, "What needs to be fought against is the foreign fighters who are coming into our country."

When the government of the Islamic Courts collapsed and its troops scattered, Eritrea was as surprised as anyone. But they quickly regained their poise and accused the Americans of being behind the campaign. Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki claimed that the Islamic Courts were not a movement of some "new Islamic philosophy but a choice the people made to establish a united Somalia." Isaias said that the Americans and Ethiopians wanted to destroy the emerging Islamic government and resorted to "different ploys to drag back the Somalis to the previously existing instability." The war in Somalia had been "unleashed by those forces that stood against the emergence of a united Somalia." He further claimed that the Ethiopian "invasion of Somalia is not spontaneous but a long time and well organized plan initiated by the Washington administration."

## **Meanwhile, on the border**

To the surprise of nearly everyone, Eritrea has not taken advantage of Ethiopia's pre-occupation with Somalia to cause major problems along the disputed border between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The United Nations reported that in October Eritrea moved 1,500 troops, tanks, artillery and air defense systems into the buffer zone in what the Security Council called a major violation of the cease-fire. Ethiopia deployed 21 artillery pieces and several mortars in the zone around the same time. In December and January hundreds of Eritrean soldiers



have been seen moving in the buffer zone, and skirmishes have broken out between the two sides, but major battles did not take place. The United Nations has also complained that Eritrea expelled and arrested its staff and imposed restrictions on patrols of the border area. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon said in a report that five U.N. staff members were held by Eritrea in January. Ban added that given the precarious security situation in neighboring Somalia, if fighting between Ethiopia

and Eritrea resumes it could destabilize the entire region. "The potential for this situation to deteriorate further or even to lead to renewed hostilities is real, especially if it is allowed to continue indefinitely," Ban said.

So basically the standoff continues, with both sides acting troublesome. Ethiopia

has refused to implement an April 2002 ruling by an international commission that awarded the key town of Badme to Eritrea. Eritrea, annoyed with the United Nations for refusing to force Ethiopia to comply with the commission's decisions, has been making life difficult for U.N. peacekeeping operations. Asmara has placed restrictions on U.N. helicopter flights on its side of a buffer zone separating the two countries. The U.N. Security Council signaled its unhappiness by cutting the peacekeeping force operating along the border to 1,700 from its current 2,300. Some African states worry that too few peacekeepers could risk a new flare-up along the border. But with the United Nations and the African Union scrambling to mount a peacekeeping force to Somalia, the Ethiopia-Eritrea border issue seems less pressing for the moment.

### **Isaias meets with Italian Prime Minister**

In December, Eritrea's president Isaias Afewerki traveled to Italy on a private visit. He met with Italian prime minister Romano Prodi. According

to the official Italian report on the meeting, Prodi "expressed his concern about the current political situation in Eritrea which has prompted the government in Asmara to adopt increasingly rigid stances which may prove damaging to Italy's legitimate interests." Translation: the Italians are still annoyed with Eritrean treatment of Italians and Italian business interests. For some time Italy and Eritrea have had quarrels about a number of issues including real estate titles, work permits for the Italian citizens living in Eritrea and authorizations for Italian charity organizations interested in working in Eritrea. Prodi, according to the official report on the meeting, said that any improvement in bilateral relations between the two countries would depend upon Eritrea's moving from words to action. The conversation ended with an exchange of views on the major crises currently threatening the Horn of Africa. Prodi said that he hoped that the ruling made by the Commission on Borders will be quickly enforced to settle the dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

### **More travels**

President Isaias Afewerki made a two-day working visit to Egypt. He had been invited by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to meet in Sharm-Asheik. The talks focused on trade, fisheries and culture, as well as on the Somali issue. According to the official communiqué, Egypt highly commended President Isaias' efforts in promoting peace and stability in East Sudan. President Mubarak expressed conviction that such a patient endeavor would also continue towards resolving the Darfur issue.

### **Two more foreign charities expelled**

Eritrea ordered two more international charities to leave the country, adding to a long list of foreign organizations it has expelled in the last year, according to Reuters. The Asmara government had already ordered out USAID and at least eleven other international aid agencies in the past year. The International Rescue Committee and Samaritans' Purse both received letters in early November telling them to leave Eritrea that month. The letter said, "We kindly notify you that your operational and work permits would not be valid



BLUE HELMETS: U.N. peace-keeping troops patrol the border

as of November 15.” Both charities have operations in neighboring eastern Sudan. Asmara said since it had brokered a peace deal last month between Khartoum and eastern Sudanese rebels, there was no longer any need for the organizations to operate in Eritrea.

### **Locusts strike agriculture**

A U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report says that an outbreak of locusts along the central Red Sea coast of Eritrea is potentially dangerous to crops in the Horn of Africa. Recent heavy rainfalls and an increase in vegetation in the region have allowed adults locusts to lay eggs and small groups of young locusts to form. Four survey teams are monitoring the areas, and seven teams treated more than 4,000 hectares in December. The locust is a species of short-horned grasshopper that can either form part of a swarm of adults, or become a wingless nymph.

The swarms, which travel up to 130 km a day, can spread out to several hundred kilometers in length, posing a serious threat to agriculture. According to the FAO, locusts regularly cross the Red Sea, a distance of 300 km. A swarm can hold up to 80 million locust adults per square kilometer, and is capable of destroying a crop field in seconds. A small swarm can eat as much food in a day as 2,500 people. The FAO is trying to control locust outbreaks using a natural fungus that infects locust hoppers, causing them to stop feeding and die in one to three weeks.

### **Christian gospel singer released**

Helen Berhane, a well-known singer at the unregistered Rema Church, was released from detainment according to reports by the BBC and Amnesty International. Berhane was among about 2,000 members of illegal Evangelical church groups who Amnesty says have been arrested in recent years. Reports by Amnesty say that she was beaten in an effort to make her recant her faith. Eritrea formally recognizes four religions: Orthodox Christian, the Catholic and Lutheran Churches and Islam. More than 90% of Eritreans belong to one of these four recognized religions. But those who practice unrecognized religions have been subject to prosecution.

**“We understand that she’s at her home, or her family home. Of course we’ve had no contact with her because that’s extremely risky for somebody who’s just released from prison.”**


Berhane had just released a cassette of gospel music when she was arrested in Asmara on 13 May 2004. According to Amnesty, she was jailed at Mai Serwa military camp where many prisoners, including Berhane, are held in metal shipping containers that become swelteringly hot during the day and freezing cold at night.

Amnesty International’s researcher for the Horn of Africa, Martin Hill, told the BBC that he was delighted Helen Berhane had been freed. “She’s not in good health but at least she’s released.” Amnesty International says Berhane is confined to a wheelchair because of injuries to her legs and feet. “We understand that she’s at her home, or her family home. Of course we’ve had no contact with her because that’s extremely risky for somebody who’s just released from prison,” Mr. Hill added.

But the Eritrean information minister Ali Abdu denied any knowledge of Ms Berhane’s case and her reported release. He attacked Amnesty instead. “Who is accountable for them and who has given them the right to be the global police of this world?” Mr. Abdu told the AFP news agency. “I am not saying it is a lie. What I am saying is that if these people like to make such statements then let them enjoy it, but we do not even give them recognition.”

### **Parents of conscripts arrested**

Amnesty International claimed that the Eritrean government arrested over 500 relatives, mostly parents, of young men and women who have either deserted the army or avoided conscription. The arrests took place around Asmara in a sweep that started in early December. None of those arrested has been charged with a criminal offence or taken before a court.

The authorities demanded that the detainees must either produce the missing conscripts or pay a fine of 50,000 nafka (approximately \$1,200). Relatives who fail to do so will be forced to serve six months in the army in place of their missing family member, according to the report from Amnesty International. The government dismissed the claims. 

## BOOK REVIEWS

### The Texture of Dreams

By Fasil Yitbarek

Nyala Publishing, 2005  
308 pages; \$15.95 (paperback)  
available from [www.nyalapublishing.com](http://www.nyalapublishing.com)

Reviewed by John C. Schafer  
(Debre Markos 63–65)

**F**ASIL YITBAREK'S NOVEL *The Texture of Dreams* chronicles the experiences of a young Ethiopian man who comes to New York City when he is twenty-six. The situations and people that the main character, Yosef, encounters in the Big Apple and environs are vividly and believably drawn. This novel reads like an only slightly fictionalized autobiography, which may in fact be what it is, but whether fact or fiction the story the author tells is a moving one. It is also very funny in places. Tales of immigrants and exiles sometimes become too sentimental, at least for Western readers, as their authors become overwhelmed by nostalgia for the country they have left behind. Fasil Yitbarek, however, casts a clear eye on both Ethiopia and America. At times one expects sentimentality but then comes a humorous scene, or a realistic and uncompromising appraisal of the loneliness of life in America, or a heartrending portrait of someone from Dessie, his hometown, like the one of Yimur, the village shoemaker who lived alone and once gave Yosef a soccer ball for being a good student but died after being beaten by village hooligans.

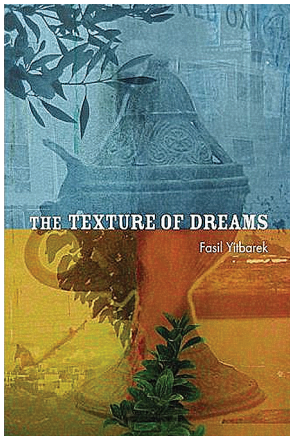
Yosef comes to New York after the fall of the Mengistu regime. The new rulers loosened restrictions and granted passports easily, the problem was obtaining a visa, but Yosef, who has a degree in English literature from a university in Addis Ababa, gets a six-month visitor's visa to the United States after a short interview with a woman at the U.S. Embassy. It takes him five months to get a job but he finally lands one teaching immigrants, mostly Russians, at a refugee resettlement agency. Peace

Corps Volunteers trained, as was my group (Ethiopia II), in the Audio-Lingual Method of teaching English as a second language will appreciate Yosef's frustration with this boring approach. He also has to endure visits by hard-nosed supervisors. In one scene he explains the word "exception" by referring to a female supervisor's long hair, which was much longer than that of his female students. The class explodes in laughter, irritating his supervisor. Only later does he learn that "hair" is a vulgar Russian term for penis.

Yosef rents a room in a house owned by Mrs. Hanson, a lonely woman whose second husband had died six years before Yosef moved in. Having lost custody of the two children she had with her first husband, she is distanced from them and so is pretty much alone in the world. There is mutual suspicion in the beginning but gradually Yosef and Mrs. Hanson become friends. Their developing friendship is an important part of this novel, more important than Yosef's relationship with Helen, the beautiful daughter of a black man from Guyana, and a woman of Irish American descent. Yosef falls for Helen when he meets her in a Bilingual Education class and has to wait and hope they will become more than just good friends.

Yosef and Mrs. Hanson help each other in times of trouble. She reminds him of home and the mothers he knew in his native Dessie, mothers like Ayalnesh whose image "is seared into [his] mind's eye like some blazing phantasmal statue of motherhood." Ayalnesh's first child, born prematurely, died soon after birth and her second is retarded. When her husband abandons them she survives by doing other people's laundry, all the while fighting off young brats who amuse themselves by putting dead flies in her retarded son's mouth. Yosef knows all about sad mothers in his native Ethiopia. By befriending Mrs. Hanson he learns that even in America, this "true Mecca of opulence," there are people living lives of quiet desperation.

When the author has Yosef recount his dreams and memories, he evokes Ethiopia in a way that all readers, but especially PCVs who served there, will appreciate. Yosef remembers a woman named Firu,





**Apocalyptic vision, ancient faith, and the world of immigrant America collide in a dream Yosef describes toward the end of his story.**

a wood gatherer, who, bent down with an impossibly heavy load, looked like “an ant carrying a dead cockroach.” He remembers lying in bed watching people coming to market on the street by his home: “I see wiry men with sun-scorched skin and good-looking women with their hair braided in tight cornrows. . . . I hear the thud and knock of sticks pummeling donkey flesh and bones, and the soft murmur of my father’s baritone as he intones Ge’ez words from the book of parchment. I smell the dung, dust and squalor of the road mixed with the aroma of buttered lamb stew and the acrid smoke of burning firewood from my mother’s kitchen.”

Biblical echoes and themes enrich *The Texture of Dreams*. Yosef compares himself to his namesake, concluding that while “he hasn’t risen to the summit of fame, power and glory like Joseph in Pharaoh’s kingdom,” he “gets by alright” in America, having found “a measure of his aspirations: peace, freedom, opportunities and a respite from financial worries.” Suffering from a bout of “faithlessness” as Mrs. Hanson sinks into death, he remembers a trip with his father on Easter Eve to the ancient church of St. George in the village of Ligo. After being caught up in a “rapture that is more than he can bear,” he concludes that there must be a God out there somewhere keeping the universe in order.

Apocalyptic vision, ancient faith, and the world of immigrant America collide in a dream Yosef describes toward the end of his story. An Ethiopian holy man clad in a robe of camel’s hair predicts a plague will scourge the land but he, Yosef, will receive a message bearing the key to survival. Later on the way to buy some antacids he finds a slip of paper with a message written in a strange language. When he sees one of his students writing a note in this same script (Georgian), he has her translate the message. It turns out to be a “corny love letter,” a message from a lovesick Georgian man named Lasha who pines for his former lover who has left him to come to America. He takes the incident as a “sobering rebuke,” a warning that one shouldn’t expect Providence “to divulge the secrets of my tomorrow.”

Some of the dialogue in this novel is unnatural, more like speechifying than the way people actually converse, but this is a minor blemish in what is a fine work. *The Texture of Dreams* is finally about hopes and dreams colliding with the stubborn realities and uncertainties of everyday life. In this sense, it is a novel anyone would enjoy. For RPCVs from Ethiopia it will have some special pleasures.

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## **Shinega’s Village: Scenes of Ethiopian Life**

by Sahle Sellassie Bihane Mariyam  
Illustrations by Li Gelpke

University of California Press, Berkeley, 1964  
Available online from various book dealers such as Alibris.com and even Amazon.com

*Reviewed, with a bit of a memoir added, by Kathleen Moore (Indibir 64–66)*

**T**he year 1964 was a big one for me. I graduated from college, joined the Peace Corps and trained at UCLA to teach English in Ethiopia. I knew nothing about Ethiopia or about teaching, but I could speak English and that was enough for the Peace Corps back then.

The year 1964 was also an important year for Sahle Sellassie Bihane Mariyam, a Chaha Guragi, who was then a graduate student at UCLA. That year Wolf Leslau asked him to write a book about the daily life of the Guragi in the Chaha dialect. Chaha has no written alphabet so Sahle Sellassie used the Amharic alphabet for his Chaha words. Leslau used the book in his linguistic research, but Sahle Sellassie freely translated it into English for publication by the University of California Press as *Shinega’s Village*. Sahle Sellassie says that he had no intention of writing for the public. Let alone for the Western public. The book, he says, could have been more sophisticated had he written in English or Amharic but then the spirit of the book would have been lost. I, for one, am glad it he did not try for more sophistication. I spent my two-year Peace

**A GURAGI LALA SONG:**

**Listen, all you girls!**  
**Girls, spread the news!**  
**The disease of today**  
**Is what is called**  
**education.**  
**Since education came**  
**We are all old maids!**  
**The boys have left us.**  
**The earth is untilled!**  
**Education today**  
**Is no better than death!**

Corps service in Indibir, a Guragi village just like the one Sahle Sellassie described in his story, and the only one that had a secondary school in 1964. The Guragi way of life might seem unsophisticated by Western standards, but living there I found it to be a complex society with a depth I never did completely uncover. *Shinega's Village* gives me a second chance to know the Guragi people.

Shinega's story begins in a village called Wardena in 1936, the same year Sahle was born. Shinega's father, Bala, is a moderately wealthy man who owns two tukels, many cattle and a mule. His independent-minded mother is called Kerwage. Since the couple's first child was a daughter, they are happy to have a son because they believe that sons stay at home and take care of aged parents. When Kerwage's friend sends her six-year-old son off to school in Indibir, Kerwage vows that she will never allow their son to go to school. She says: "Parents make their sons strangers by sending them to school." And it is worse if they go to Addis Ababa for secondary school and college. "Addis Ababa is like a sea. Everyone who goes there is swallowed up."

I wonder how many Guragi mothers thought we Peace Corps Volunteers were teaching their children to leave home and never return. But even if it meant leaving home, boys saw education as a means of survival in a country with not enough land and few jobs. How many times did a student who failed to pass to the next grade tell us, "But Madam, I will starve if I do not have education."

Sahle Sellassie makes us aware of class struggle in Ethiopia through dialog about land ownership. Shinega meets a poor man who complains that the land in his village is not his father's and cannot be his own: "I can never have enough money to buy it even if the landlord will sell it." Although Bala was wealthy enough to pay his rent and land tax, he, too, could not own the land he lived on unless the *dedjatch* chose to sell it. Sahle Sellassie lets us know his opinion of the feudal landlord when he has the child Shinega ask his father what makes the *dedjatch* so fat? "The *dedjatch* does not have to sweat the way we do. He doesn't have to jerk a plow

or swing a sickle. He never has to walk far. That's why he is fat," Bala tells his son.

Women and girls are as much a part of Shinega's story as the men. Young girls, who did not attend school in the time of Shinega's youth, had their own reason for disliking the boom in education. Singing at a wedding, the village girls added new verses to the *lala* song: "Listen, all you girls! . . . Girls, spread the news! . . . The disease of today . . . Is what is called education. . . . Since education came . . . We are all old maids! . . . The boys have left us . . . The earth is untilled! . . . Education today . . . Is no better than death!"

At thirteen, Shinega is still wearing just a long shirt and he desperately wants trousers. He earns his own money to buy his first pair but then begs his father for more. "You are wrapped up like an ear of corn in your pants and now you want more clothes?" Shinega's father refuses, so the teenager becomes a trader, buying goods in Welkite, the nearest town on the paved road to Addis Ababa, and selling them for a profit in his village. Later, on his first trip to Addis Ababa, intending to become a serious merchant, Shinega is surprised to see everyone wearing shoes. He doesn't get his first pair until his wedding day and then takes them off because they hurt.

Sahle Sellasse shows life changing for Guragi villagers through his secondary character, Degemu, the boy who was sent to the Mission school in Indibir. As Kerwage predicted, he has not returned home to visit his mother. Degemu might be speaking for the author when he tells Shinega that he plans to go abroad to study. "I am searching for something," he says, "and maybe will never return." When Shinega tries to convince Degemu to visit his mother during the Meskel celebration, Degemu describes his distaste for village life: "To sleep on straw instead of in an iron bed! No radio and no newspaper. One just sits and listens to the nonsense and stories of the old folks. There isn't even a bar one can visit when one feels like it. On top of everything, there's no electricity and the smoke from the fire stings your eyes." Which is how I remember Indibir in 1964. When Degemu asks

**Wolf Leslau said Ethiopia “has not contributed any original literary documents to world literature.” Perhaps, but the works of Sahle Sellassie are an encouraging first step.**

Shinega, “So how is the village?” Shinega replies: “Just as you left it. Nothing has changed.” And so that’s how I found Indibir when I returned to visit in 1993.

Like his character, Degemu, Sahle Sellassie attended the Indibir school for three years before the school’s founder, Abba Francois, got him transferred to Teferi Mekonnin School in Addis Ababa, “where the best students went.” Sahle Sellassie’s father died when he was in tenth grade, making him, as the oldest boy, the head of his family and responsible for his mother and siblings. He was going to quit school to take care of the family farm and cattle but was encouraged by Abba Francois to continue his education. Abba Francois was responsible for getting the Ministry of Education to create a secondary school in Indibir and securing Peace Corps Volunteers to teach there. He was a great friend to all the PCVs in Indibir.

Sahle Sellassie graduated from University College in 1959. The Vice Minister of Education denied his request for a scholarship to study political science abroad, but ultimately Wolf Leslau got him a scholarship to the United States where he received an MA in political science. Back home, the Ethiopian government offered him only the salary of a person with a BA degree and would not honor his MA, so he went to work for the Wonji sugar company that offered him a higher salary.

He continued his writings, in both English and Amharic, despite problems with various governments. His second book was a love story written in Amharic, *Wettat Yifredew*, but government censors required changes and it was not popular. He wrote his next book, *The Afersata*, in English, hoping to avoid the frustrating censorship. Heinemann published it in England in 1969, as was *The Warrior King*, (1974) a historical novel about Emperor Tewodros’ rise to power. *Firebrands*, his most successful book, deals with the three years prior to the 1974 revolution, and was published by Longman in 1979. It was not allowed to be sold in Ethiopia. In 1983, his Amharic translation of a short version of *A Tale of Two Cities* was published by the Ethiopian Book Center. He wrote his next book, *Bassha Qitaw*,

in English but then was convinced to publish it in Amharic. After making the changes required by the censors, the book was printed but still not released for sale until more changes were made. In 1987, Sahle Sellassie’s Amharic translation, *Immiyyu*, of Pearl S. Buck’s *The Mother* was published by the government printers. Wolf Leslau said Ethiopia “has not contributed any original literary documents to world literature.” Perhaps, but the works of Sahle Sellassie are an encouraging first step.

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## **Heart of Fire: From Child Soldier to Soul Singer**

By Senait Mehari

Translated from the German by Christine Lo

Profile Books, London, 2006

254 pages: £9.99

Presently available only in the UK, but can be easily purchased via Amazon.co.uk

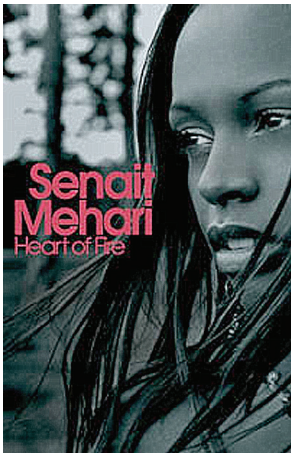
*Reviewed by Judith Nordblom Alger  
(Asmara 63–65)*

**T**his best-seller in Germany is a page-turner that tells the story of Senait Mehari, her strong spirit and her sense of right and wrong. It also provides an insight into the role of women in Eritrea, and by telling of her experiences as a child-soldier in the struggle of the Eritreans against the Ethiopians, we see how children are used in warfare.

Senait’s life is a life of hardship and abuse. When she was born in about 1974, she was left in a suitcase by her mentally-ill mother. A neighbor discovered her and sent her to two unpleasant orphanages in Asmara. Her paternal grandparents took her in for a few years until her father demanded her back. At about age 6, her father sent her and her two older half-sisters to be trained as soldiers with the Eritrean Liberation Front. This lasted for 3 years until her Uncle Haile rescued the three children and brought them to Khartoum. Senait’s father again demanded they be sent to him, this time in Germany. Just short of 15, she walked out on her father in Hamburg.



In the orphanages, Senait was always singled out because of her darker-than-average skin color. During the times with her father she was continually beaten. Often she thought he would kill her. Had it not been for the loving experiences with her grandparents and Uncle Haile, she says, she might not have made it. Her “heart of fire” helped her survive.



The treatment of girls in Eritrea challenged her strong sense of fairness and justice. When her father demanded Senait be sent to him neither her grandparents nor Uncle Haile challenged him even though they knew about his violence. A father has absolute authority. “It was an accepted fact that girls had to be beaten more than boys,” she says. Even her kind Uncle Haile beat her, although at least he always told her why. In the ELF army, boys and girls were treated as equals in each unit, but “girls were worth less than boys.” Some very tough females became officers, but she knew only one who reached the highest ranks.

Many young men in the army raped the girls without compunction or punishment yet discussing a girl’s resulting pregnancy was taboo.

Senait devotes one hundred pages to her life in the ELF army. In the early years of the ELF, young people were trained as soldiers and were educated to be leaders of a new Eritrea. The group was idealistic, and the standards of behavior were high. But by the time Senait joined, the ELF was fighting for survival against the more powerful Eritrean People’s Liberation Front. Senait never understood why one group of Eritreans fought another and even why Eritreans fought Ethiopians. “We all look alike,” she said.

The desperate situation for a desperate army called for desperate behavior. At the age of 6 she was trained to use a Kalashnikov that she could barely hold. Hunger continually overwhelmed the band as they moved from waterhole to waterhole in Western Eritrea. The soldiers would eat handfuls of earth. The one pleasant thing Senait remembered from those years was the singing of the soldiers. A girl named Eden had a beautiful voice. Senait resolved that one day she would try to sing like her.

And so she does. Senait today is a popular vocalist in Germany. Her style is a mix of rhythm and blues, pop, and African rhythms with German lyrics. But she also works with charitable organizations to prevent the abuse of children in armies. “No Eritrean abroad is proud to have been a soldier,” she writes. “They realize how terrible it was for them to have been forced to fight so young.”

Senait says that writing about her life has given her peace and freedom, and that she hopes that her account will help others who are living with similar horrible experiences. It would have been easy to dwell on the pain and suffering of her life, but she has written about how these issues need to be addressed. There is great sadness here, but she is trying to give strength.

One of her CDs, titled “Mein Weg,” [My Way] is available online. Do read the book if you can, and let’s hope it will be published soon in the U.S.

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## BOOK NOTES

### **A childhood In Ethiopia**

Like many Peace Corps Volunteers, Tim Bascom spent time in the 1960s in small towns in the rural areas of Ethiopia. But Bascom was the young son of a missionary doctor. In a new book, *Chameleon Days*, published by Houghton Mifflin, Bascom paints an interesting portrait of his childhood in places like Soddo. There is not a lot that is very new or particularly insightful in this book for those of us who spent our own time exploring the back roads of Ethiopia. But Bascom does write well and does, at times, bring back familiar images.

### **Ethiopia In pictures**

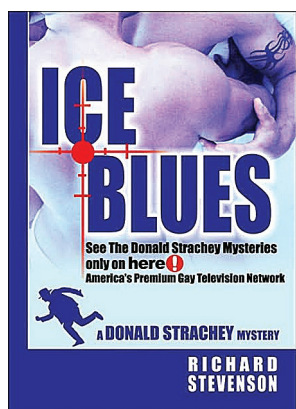
When we buy on the Web, we often end up with something we don’t quite expect. Recently Amazon.com featured what seemed to be a promising picture book about Ethiopia published — or so the web site claimed — in May 2006. Wow, new views of the new Ethiopia, we thought. But it turns out that *Journey Through Ethiopia* (\$31.00, Camerapix Publishers International, Nairobi) was first published in 1997. This book is dated. The pictures of Addis Ababa really seem strange. Not only are

the cars amazingly old-fashioned even considering Ethiopia's propensity for keeping cars running for years as moving museum pieces, but the city, beautifully photographed, is curiously relaxed and under-populated. Where are the trendy young people? Where is the crush of people? The picture of the Addis train station looks like something out of an idyllically Italian postcard from the 1940s.

But wait. Before deciding to send the book back to Amazon, there's more to see. And it's impressive. Some of the wonderful pictures, like those fabulous angels looking down from the ceiling mural of Gondar's Debre Birhan Selassie Church, are as fresh as when the murals were painted several centuries ago. Photographer Mohamed Amin and writer Duncan Willets have also taken themselves to parts of Ethiopia beyond the usually Amhara highland and discovered an Ethiopia that is a revelation to those of us who spent too much time in Shewa, Welo, Welega or Gojjam. There are the nomads on the edge of the Danakil desert. They have photographed the birds and wildlife of the Rift Valley, making it look a bit like Kenya, which is not surprising since Amin is a Kenyan and one of Africa's most famous photographers. So if you are looking for a book to take you back in time and space — rather than up close and personal with Ethiopia of the 21st century — this is a book for you. In a unique way, it places Ethiopia in Africa. So stop worrying about the date on the copyright page.

### Dick Lipez's Books

Haworth Press announced that the entire series of the critically acclaimed Strachey gay mystery novels will be re-issued. The books will be released in conjunction with the Here! Television network's Donald Strachey Mystery productions. Author of the series is Richard Stevenson, better known to us as **Dick Lipez** (Debre Markos 1962–64). The first of the TV series, "Third Man Out," is available on DVD. The next production, based on the novel *Ice Blues*, will air early in 2007. Three of the books in the reissued series were in bookstores before Christmas. The five remaining books will follow.



### Two good Peace Corps reads

A note from John Coyne (Addis Ababa 62-64), the amazingly energetic editor of [www.PeaceCorpsWriters.org](http://www.PeaceCorpsWriters.org) and author of the best selling novel *The Caddie Who Knew Ben Hogan*, reminds us of one of the most compelling books about the Peace Corps experience, Phil Weiss's *American Taboo*. The book is a fascinating, but deeply troubling, account of a murder of a PCV in Tonga. Now John tell us of another book about the tragedy:

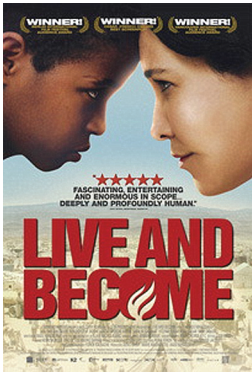
It has taken Jan Worth (Tonga 1976-78) 30+ years but finally she has written her novel of the October 14, 1976 murder on the island of Tonga of the PCV, Deborah Gardner. You might have read Phil Weiss's haunting non-fiction account, *American Taboo*, and now Jan, who lived through that tragedy, has used the same murder in her novel *Night Blind*, just out from iUniverse. Check out: [www.janworth.com](http://www.janworth.com).

### The fabulous Peace Corps book locker

Coyne's and Marian Haley Beil's Peace Corps Writer's web site also has a wonderful story about one of our colleagues who put together the Peace Corps book locker. We reproduce it here, with their kind permission.

For a short period of time in the very first years of the Peace Corps all Peace Corps Volunteers were given book lockers by the agency. The lockers were to be left behind in schools, villages, and towns where they served. There is some mystery of who first thought to give PCVs these lockers and one rumor has it that the idea came from Sarge Shriver's wife, Eunice. It is believed that the first locker was put together by a young Foreign Service officer. A second selection was done in 1964. **Jack Prebis** (Gondar, Addis 62–64) was responsible for the 3rd edition of the Peace Corps locker that was assembled in the fall and winter of 1965. Here is Jack's recollection of that job and the famous Peace Corps book locker:

Developing the Peace Corps book locker was the best job I ever had. As sometimes happens with fun jobs, this one fell in my lap. Returning in 1964 from my secondary school teaching stint in Ethiopia,



**“Live and Become” follows an Ethiopian Christian boy who was secreted aboard a plane during Operation Moses, the rescue movement to immigrate Ethiopian Jews to Israel. Adopted by a Jewish family in Tel Aviv, Schlomo must adjust to his new world and hide his non-Jewish background. While I love hilarious popular movies as much as any other teen, here was a powerful story teaching self-acceptance and unconditional love while using amazing actors to make it so real. I’d never thought deeply about the themes a movie conveys and tried applying them to my life until I saw “Live and Become.”**

**Julia Peck, 13  
Washington**

**— Nomination in the  
Washington Post for great  
movies of all time**

I headed to Our Nation’s Capital, hoping to land stateside Peace Corps work. Back in those days, the Peace Corps was fresh, freewheeling and unbureaucratic, shot through with idealists. Thanks in part to the five-year rule; it still remains staffed with idealists.

To my good fortune, as I was being interviewed — was it by fifteen people? — the person who had begun work on “the book locker” was heading back to Chile on staff. My biology major and chemistry minor seemed perfect for the unexpected vacancy. After dispatching a mile-high stack of unanswered mail from publishers wanting to donate their remaindered titles (we already had a warehouse full of books totally unsuited to host country needs, aspiration and mores), I got down to my major function — feet on desk — reviewing paperbacks for inclusion in the next book locker.

What power! Aside from deciding what Volunteers and their friends would be reading over the next few years, with 4,000 footlockers to fill with 250 books each, I soon learned I wielded some influence. It was tough resisting the offers of free trips to New York City and attendant free lunches. But I learned quickly that publishers often were happy to do press runs of hardback or out of print titles if they had a guaranteed 4,000-book sale. With that bit of knowledge, I obtained such titles as *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *Blossoms in the Dust*.

I also learned that my English Literature major friends had something concrete to offer. They were more than happy to help review contemporary titles and offer suggestions on the classics — with never a consensus on either. But eventually, I developed a good mix of fiction (over half the books) and other sections like “American Studies” and “African — or LA or NANESA, depending on the destination — Studies.” Debated along the way: Was Henry Ford a suitable example of American industrialization and the free enterprise system? (More or less). Or, would Ayn Rand stimulate depression and early terminations? (One couldn’t be too careful.)

I had not anticipated clearance hurdles tossed up by the State Department and USIA. After some


concessions on their part over a few titles, there remained two objections: *No Exit* and *Catch 22*. Finally, I agreed that we didn’t need to export the Communist line, but contended that *Catch 22*, in spite of depicting the U.S. military in a less-than-complimentary light, likely would not get wide distribution among host country nationals, but would be good escape reading on quiet nights. And so it was.

### **Not a book**

Quite an amazingly good film began showing at the Avalon Theater in Washington, DC, in December and ran through February. Entitled “Va, vis et deviens” in French and “Live and Become” in English, the film is directed by Radu Mihaileanu, a Romanian who works in France. The dialogue is — get this — in Amharic, Hebrew & French with English subtitles for those sad few who may lack fluency in one of them.

The film starts in the Ethiopian famine of the mid-1980s when a mother conspires to place her seven-year-old non-Jewish son with a group of Falashas, or Beta Israel as they are now known, bound for Israel as part of “Operation Moses.” Her parting words to her child are that he should never tell anyone his true identity. And so, the child, now called Schlomo, grows up pretending to be both Jewish and an orphan in modern Israel. He embraces Judaism and Western values but also feels the sting of racism.

The Washington Post noted that “the movie charts the political troubles of Ethiopian Jews in Israel, Schlomo’s bid to find his mother, his evolution as a Hebrew scholar, his confused self-identity and, somewhere in there, President Clinton’s historic meeting with Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat. It’s a lot to digest and, after a time, feels overextended. But in the end, *what* the movie is talking about and who’s on screen transcend the storytelling.”

The film won awards at several film festivals including Berlin and Shanghai and has clearly won the hearts of surprisingly large audiences in Washington, where it is now showing at a second theater. But we are told that there are very few prints of the film, which may limit its distribution. 



# A YEAR OF FOND REUNIONS

## RPCVs meet in Seattle and Washington, DC

**Nothing beats a Peace Corps reunion for fun, nostalgia, and stimulation. Soon those first-time attendees are saying: "I should have gone to one of these before."**

It's a story you hear all the time from RPCVs who attend a Peace Corps reunion for the first time. They're walking to the room where the meeting of RPCVs is scheduled to be held, and they notice all the people with grey hair and sensible shoes. A few have canes. There's a walker. They think: this must be a mistake. This is supposed to be a Peace Corps meeting. Remember Peace Corps? Vim, vigor, ten-hour bus rides to Dessie, hikes up and down the Blue Nile Gorge. Flexibility was the byword. What are all these stiff old people doing here? Then they realize that their own hair — or what's left of it — is grey. And that they're puffing from the walk up the stairs. And that it's been 40 years, more or less, since they got off the plane in Addis. And then they do the numbers: John F. Kennedy, were he alive today, would be a few months short of 90.

But once this jarring realization of relentlessly advancing age passes, nothing beats a Peace Corps reunion for fun, nostalgia, and stimulation. Soon those first-time attendees are saying: "I should have gone to one of these before." And so it was during the summer of 2006. E&E RPCVs had a number of chances to experience the particular pleasures of a Peace Corps reunion. Peace Corps celebrated its 45th anniversary in 2006 with a series of mini-events in cities around the country, but by the time September rolled around and it was time to mark the occasion in Washington, not much was put on the official Peace Corps agenda. And even our mother ship, the NPCA, scheduled precious little beyond an annual general meeting and a group leaders meeting.

But that did not stop Ethiopia & Eritrea RPCVs president **Marian Haley Beil** (Debre Berhan 62-64), **C.J. Smith Castagnaro** (Harar 64-66, Debre Zeit 67-69) and a few equally energetic helpers from organizing our own reunion for a weekend in September when the NPCA was scheduling a few activities in Washington. In addition to the general meeting of E&E RPCVs, several training groups — Ethiopia I, IV and VII — decided they would hold their own mini-

reunions at the same time. And earlier in the summer, on the other side of the country, the Ethiopia II training group met in Seattle for a get-together.

More than 70 RPCVs, with spouses, friends, children and even some grandchildren descended on the Harrington Hotel in Washington in September. The Harrington, designated by E&E RPCVs as the meeting hotel, had that worn-around-the-edges feel that made it seem quintessentially Peace Corps. Folks felt quite at home. On the first night, people milled around the meeting room set aside for us, renewing friendships. Some went to an early dinner at Dukem Restaurant on U Street so that they could attend a reading at Candida's World of Books by Peace Corps writer Tony D'Souza whose new novel, *Whiteman*, has been well received.

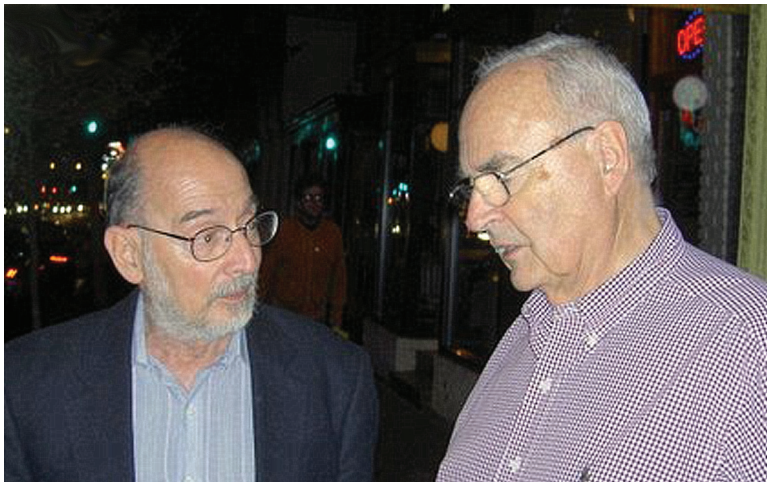
### Reconnecting with old friends

That first night also saw some mini-reunions of training groups. Ethiopia IV, for example. As C.J. Smith Castagnaro tells it:

"Ethiopia IV trained at UCLA in Fall 1964 and arrived in Addis Ababa in January, 1965. The last time some of us saw each other was at our termination conference in July 1966. Since last year was the 40th anniversary of that last meeting, I sent out a letter to all for whom we had addresses, suggesting a reunion at the Peace Corps 45th anniversary conference in Washington, DC. I was pleased at the response. After meeting up at the Harrington we decided to eat *ingera* and *wat* at the Dukem Restaurant. Those present were **Virginia McArthur**, **Bill Herron**, **Cinna Coon**, **Paul Mifsud**, **Natalie Garrett**, **Phil LeBel** and wife **Danielle**, **Penne Rude Scott** and myself. **Mike Lund** made a brief appearance. Paul presented each of us with a copy of our old training mug book. The food, drink and conversation were excellent. The next day we were joined by **Claire Pied-Hailu** and **Gus Linton**."

On the second day of the reunion, the whole group met at the Harrington. Former Peace Corps staffers **Ted Vestal** and **Shlomo Bachrach** (who is also *HERALD* contributing editor) put on their own version of the MacNeil/Lehrer Report. They updated us on the politics and economics of Ethiopia and Eritrea. Both had paid recent visits to Ethiopia. They were disturbed by the crackdowns on the opposition parties, which followed what had been a relatively free election. Hopes that Prime Minister Meles Zenawi would bring a new era of democracy seem to be fading. Shlomo expressed worry about problems Ethiopia was having with Somalia. And, of course, the problems, as Shlomo predicted, turned worse.

At the general meeting, various group members spoke about projects they have been working on in Ethiopia. And at the afternoon session, tape recorders were handed out and we recorded Peace Corps stories for a project aimed at preserving something of a history of our times.



CATCHING UP: Shlomo Bachrach (left) and Harris Wofford at the Saturday night dinner at the Roha Restaurant  
(Photo by Lois Shoemaker)

### **Injera and wat for 90, please**

In the evening it was back to U Street for a dinner at Roha Restaurant. The turnout was so great that the tables were jammed together giving the effect of some hip salsa club in Miami. "Far too many people to meet a fire warden's approval," said **Peggy Drury** (Jimma, Dire Dawa, Asmara 62–64). Fortunately neither fire nor warden materialized,

and some of the overflow crowd, including former Country Director **Harris Wofford**, found less cramped tables downstairs. The crush of people was an indication that E&E RPCVs were as eager as ever to renew old friendships. Attendance at the reunion went beyond expectations. Nearly everyone seemed to agree that E&E should certainly do it all over again — although clearly in a dining room with a bit more space. Plans for another meeting are under discussion. Proposals are most welcome.

The Ethiopia IV group continued their reunion after the Roha meal. Recalls C.J. Smith Castagnaro:

"After the dinner on Saturday, some of us gathered in the hotel meeting room to continue our wonderful conversation, toasting each other and Peace Corps with bottles of champagne. We all agreed that another reunion should be planned soon, perhaps in 2008. Suggestions for a location and date are welcome from all E&E members. They can be sent to me (cjsmithc@earthlink.net) or to Marian. The joy expressed at our reunion proved again that the PC bond of friendship will always be there. Our positive experiences in Ethiopia and Eritrea made us care about the countries and for each other."

**Don Schlenger** (Woldiya 66–68) writes that

"The Ethiopia VIIs who trained at what was what we affectionately called the Gulag (Utah and Shiprock) had a long weekend of catching up, schmoozing at the Itegue (Harrington) Hotel, having an Ethiopian meal at Dukem and with the entire group of Ethiopian RPCVs at Roha, My wife Jackie and I survived three straight nights of Ethiopian food since we got to Washington a day earlier. There were six of us from the Utah group and we kind of continued conversations that had begun in 1966 and thereby acknowledged how blessed we were to have been able to serve and marveled at each other's accomplishments since the time we shared together when we were young, committed, adventurous, and fearless."

>>>



ASMARA MAFIA: Ethiopia I's (from left) Steve Chesebrough, Peter Leofanti, Janet Capozzi, Ty Vignone, Lois Shoemaker, Karen Chesebrough, Ray Capozzi and Leo Cecchini

Adds **Charles Wood Jewett Jr.** (Agaro, Addis 66–69):

"In 2006 I marked the 40th college reunion of my class of 1966, and in May I got to see my old PC/Washington boss Mark Gearan, president of my alma mater Hobart College. Part of the reunion in Washington was tough. For the first time, I met **Penne Scott** (Agaro 64–66) who had been a PCV in my town ahead of me. We talked about the recent death of her husband **Mark Scott** (Agaro 64–66), who I knew later as staff person in Addis and then in other government posts in DC. I also caught up with old friends from my group, including **Jean Withrow**, and other friends from Peace Corps Washington days."

The Ethiopia I training group had their own mini-reunion on Sunday at their long-ago training ground, Georgetown University. Writes **Leo Cecchini** (Asmara 62–64):

"Harris Wofford, Peace Corps Ethiopia's first country director, joined us for a brief chat early then left for another engagement. The rest of us, maybe a dozen counting companions, took a tour of the campus led by a current student. We gave the appropriate sighs about the "old days" and the "gosh by gollies" about the new changes to the school. The tour ended with a great breakfast in the faculty dining room overlooking

the Potomac River. For the rest of my group Washington was a great place to train since many had never seen it and others had never seen it in such detail. However, since I was born and raised in DC it held little drama for me. But still, I enjoy the reunions since they allow me a chance to see the people with whom I shared a great adventure. Sure, we are all older, but the spirit and inner person that led us to take up the challenge are still there."

## Chasing memories in Seattle

*In August 2006, the Ethiopia II training group, under the highly efficient chairmanship of **Ed Lynch** (Nazareth 63–65), assembled in Seattle for a weekend of reminiscences and friendships renewed.*

**Phil Damon** (Addis 63–65) wrote the following recollection of that weekend:

It's hard to imagine any reunion rivaling the Peace Corps when it comes to those bittersweet feelings of renewed love for fellows from the past and loss for the way things used to be. Certainly gatherers of other kinds know the pleasure of convening with the sharers of their youth, as well as the ache of nostalgia for past times rich with hope and promise. Yet how much of that hope was for a promise infinitely greater than one's own personal ambitions? And how many other reunions invoke the memory of a world whose future promise — whose hope for peace — still appeared to lie within





FORTY-THREE YEARS SINCE UCLA; Ethiopia II training group assemble lakeside in Seattle in August 2006.

(Photo by Nga Hillenbrand)

humanity's grasp? These were just a few of the thoughts that crossed my mind during the get-together in Seattle of a bunch of us Ethiopia IIs.

There were several dozen of us, in fact, many with spouses, and most of us came from thousands of miles away. Almost all of us, over forty years since our youthful days as PCVs, described ourselves as "retired," to one degree or another, from a fascinating range of careers in service professions domestic and overseas. To be sure, all of us are wiser and more interesting as human beings than we ever were back in the day, yet it was that romantic vision we once shared of a better world which launched us on experiential paths that brought us all the way back around to Seattle.

It helped to have the blown-up UCLA group shot **John Lesch** has kept intact for us all these years, and copies of the '63 yearbook with our fledgling bios and photos. The same headshots adorned the nametags **Gloria Gieseke Curtis** and husband **Don** produced for us, and what a contrast they made with the living faces above them. We've acquired, after all, four decades of visible character since then. Yet as I gazed into the weathered countenances of the sharers of my youthful adventure in hope and promise, well, it was as great a reassurance that our mutual dream remains alive as I could hope to find in these trying times. The flesh is definitely weaker, but the spirit remains as willing as ever.

It was this irrepressible collective spirit that made the weekend such a joy to be a part of. Smartly organized by **Ed Lynch** from clear across the country, our activities were festive and informative, while making the best of being in the northwest, where the Ethiopian diaspora is very much in evidence. For starters, we dined Friday evening on injera and wat at Assimba, one of the city's numerous E&E restaurants, where a love-fest of reminiscence took place before, during and after the feast.

Saturday morning we met at a classroom in the UW School of Social Work, which **Barry Hillenbrand** had obtained with the help of Nancy Amidei, an RPCV from Nigeria, and the ensuing program was an ironic mix: unsettling yet heartening, somber yet hilarious. **John Kulczycki** opened with a report on his inspiring "Children at Risk" RPCV Legacy Program project, which was followed by a reading of the list of our deceased fellow Ethiopia IIs and



INJERA & WAT: The opening dinner in Seattle

(Photo by Nga Hillenbrand)

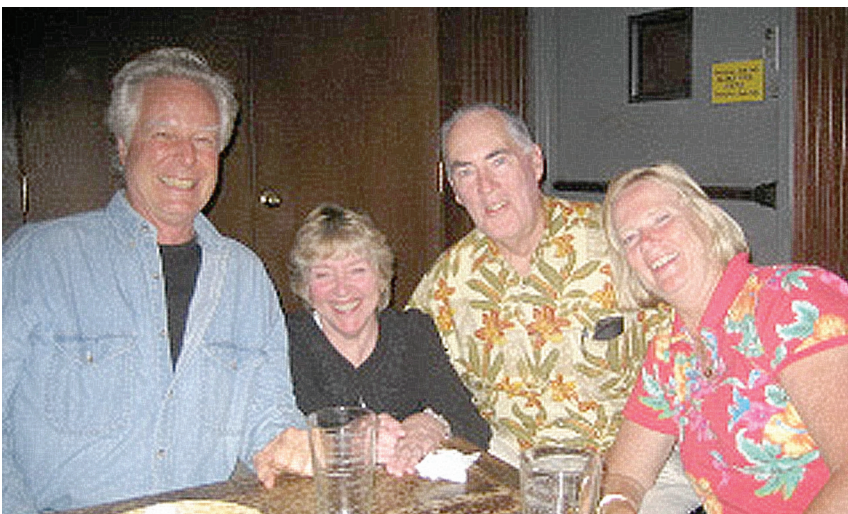




REMEMBERING WHEN: Judy Smith, Marilyn Lesch, John Lesch and Shirley Ellingson pondering old photos at the picnic at Lake Washington



TEJ BET: Ed Orser, Bob Matthai and John Kulczycki discussing the next round of beers



EASY SMILES: Bob Albritton, Kattie Schultze, Ed Lynch, and Aud Lynch pose for yet another commemorative photo

a long moment of retrospective silence. We were then addressed by Michael Negusse, of the Eritrean Liberation Movement, and Shakespeare Feyissa, a human rights attorney, both residing in Seattle. Together with John's data on the mind-boggling numbers of street children in Addis, the picture these two painted of conditions in the African Horn — though not entirely new to any of us — put the story of the years since 1963 into forlorn perspective. As I gazed around the room at my brothers and sisters from the sixties, I recalled that other universally shared epiphanic irony: was it Ethiopia that benefited from our presence there, or was it the other way around?

The morning came to a rousing finale with a memory-lane slide show **Doug Worthington** (Lekempte 63–65) assembled from the collected photos of many of us, and our attention was brought gratefully back to the way all of us once were. Later we gathered at Mathews Beach Park on Lake Washington, a picturesque spot for a picnic of grilled salmon burgers, hot dogs, and various salads. I was moved by the quality of conversation that afternoon — politically, philosophically and spiritually — and I remarked later to my wife that I'd never felt so proud of being in a group of people as I felt that afternoon. We hadn't ended up changing the world, but we'd grown immensely from the experience. What more could we ask of ourselves?

That evening we reveled nostalgia-free at a micro-brewery just a few blocks from the University Inn, where most of us were staying, and on Sunday morning most of us made the trip north of the city to **Shirley Ellingson's** home, for a lavish brunch and a showing of Daniel Beraki's film "Darkness in the Light." In Tigrina and set in Seattle, the film brought the weekend to a fitting conclusion, in its depiction of an Eritrean family's generational conflicts as it struggles to adapt to the American culture. Turnabout seems to be the main constant of history. Indeed, it is our curse and our blessing to be children of history. Can there be any better learning ground for this, than as a member of the Peace Corps family?



# E&E RPCVs – news of the group

## Please donate

E&E RPCVs is a non-profit corporation and all donations to our projects are tax deductible.

All donations go directly to the recipient organizations. E&E RPCVs does not withhold any monies for operating costs.

To donate to any of these projects use the form on page 39.

If you would like to make a donation in honor of someone, please just let us know. They will be notified directly, and noted at our website.

## To donate online

Use the secure e-philanthropy site "Network for Good" which charges a 4.75% tax-deductible fee for credit card transactions, which you can add or deduct from your donation, to cover costs.

Go to

[EthiopiaEritreaRPCVs.org](http://EthiopiaEritreaRPCVs.org)

and click on the blue and white button labeled "Donate Now through Network for Good."

Be sure to indicate which project you wish to support.

## RPCV Legacy Program projects

We urge you to support the on-going efforts of ETHIOPIA & ERITREA RPCVs in promoting projects that foster sustainable economic development, relieve poverty and improve the quality of life in Ethiopia and Eritrea. Donations to our RPCV Legacy Program projects will do just that.

## E&E RPCVs makes donations

During 2006, the Board of Directors voted to donate \$1,000 from its operating funds to each of the four existing RPCV Legacy Program projects.

## Fundraising assistance

**Bob Matthai** (Addis, Gondar 63–65) has generously volunteered to assist E&E RPCVs in enhancing our fundraising abilities, and expanding our programs. Now retired, Bob spent the last 40 years working in the not-for-profit sector as staff, administrator, CEO, and consultant on planning, fundraising and governance. Bob is already hard at work on improving our on-line presentation of the RPCV Legacy Program projects. We thank him for sharing his knowledge and wisdom.

## A report on the projects:

### Girls' Advisory Committees

*Championed by Nancy Horn (Addis Ababa 66–68) and CJ Smith Castagnaro (Harrar 64–66, Debre Zeit 67–69)*

Nancy Horn wrote:

To all of you who made a donation to support the Girls' Advisory Committees (GACS) in Ethiopia, I offer my heartfelt thanks. Donations for the project are no longer being accepted because the project will end in April, and, because of your generous donations, we exceeded our \$6,000 goal by \$600.

GACs are school committees made up of teachers, community members and parents that help girls address many of the issues they face in their lives as they try to continue their schooling: early

marriage, poverty, biased teaching, low self-esteem and female genital cutting.

This project provided thirty dollars each to GACs at 220 schools in several regions of Ethiopia to aid them in their efforts.

I hope to be going to Ethiopia some time in 2007 and will visit with some of the GACs that have received the funding in order to determine the difference your contributions have made. Look for my report in the next HERALD. Many thanks once again.

### Vocational Training for Children at Risk

*Championed by John Kulczycki (Debre Zeit 63–65), and Scott Morgan (Debre Zeit 64–66)*

This RPCV Legacy Program project supports vocational training for 30 sexually exploited youths, mostly girls between the ages of 15 and 18 living in Addis Ababa. The goal is to provide them with a means to achieve economic independence in legitimate professions.

The project's partner is an Ethiopian NGO, Children Aid—Ethiopia (CHAD-ET) [[www.chad-et.org.et](http://www.chad-et.org.et)], that delivers services for children including some who are in their mid- to late-teens, who live in difficult circumstances.

### Donors of note

In addition to the many individual donors to our project, we have received support from two groups during 2006. Earlier in the year, Sabina Campbell, a Spanish teacher at Communications High School in Wall, New Jersey and advisor to the school's Multicultural Club, contacted us to ask if the Club could adopt our project. The Club, she explained, is made up of "amazing students, full of curiosity and desire to improve this planet." And what better way to improve the planet than by raising money for students in Ethiopia. Club members organized and prepared multicultural breakfasts every Wednesday morning at 7am with a menu that included: Belgian waffles, French toast, Italian sausages, Southern hash browns, "McGuapos" (sausage, egg, and cheese sandwiches), "Mc Meatless" (without the sausage), "Burrito Bonito" (tortillas with bacon, egg, and cheese), and of course, Spanish omelet. In addition



they dedicated their annual Multicultural Festival to the project, and raised even more money. In the end the Club members sent a check for \$1900 to support the vocational training of young people in Ethiopia that is making a difference in Ethiopia — and improving the planet.

In August at a reunion in Seattle, Ethiopia II RPCVs (1963–65) made a substantial contribution to the project.

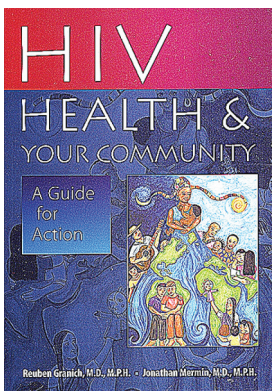
#### **The students who have received training so far**

Two of the four girls who completed their training in food preparation are employed, and two are doing apprenticeships at a four star hotel in Addis Ababa. A boy in auto mechanics is still in training. We are working on developing a pilot project to assist the eleven girls who completed their training in cosmetology to achieve financial independence, and could use some help in contacting groups like the Lions, Rotarians or the Hilton Corporation that could assist our trainees in finding internships or permanent employment in Addis Ababa.

#### **HIV Books for 200 Communities**

*Championed by Marian Haley Beil (Debre Berhan 62–64)*

Health care workers and educators in more than 70 communities in Ethiopia and Eritrea have already received *HIV Health and Your Community* and a variety of other community health books published by the Hesperian Foundation thanks to the generous donations of RPCVs from Ethiopia and Eritrea. Since the beginning of the project in 2004, we have donated more than \$16,400 to this effort that seeks to assist health care workers in communities across these two countries deal with HIV/AIDS as well as many other health related issues such as basic care, dental care, mid-wifery, deaf and blind children, sanitation and water security.



#### **Borana Student Advancement**

*Championed by Fuller Torrey (staff: 64–66)*

This project's goal is to increase enrollment and retention of disadvantaged students, particularly girls, in southern Ethiopia, by funding projects of the Ethiopian NGO Mega Vision Developmental As-

sociation. During the summer months the association provides advancement courses for students to enable them to compete on the national level. Additionally the project provides funds to girls to make it possible for them to attend school full-time. This year 60 girls will receive this assistance.

### **Documenting the Difference**

During our reunion in Washington in September, 2006, Ethiopia & Eritrea RPCVs began a project to leave a record of how their Peace Corps experiences had changed their lives. At one of our meetings, returned Volunteers were grouped according to their years of service and asked a set of questions. The answers were tape recorded. The questions were:

- 1) How did your Peace Corps experience change your professional life?
- 2) How did your Peace Corps experience change your personal life?
- 3) How has your Peace Corps experience affected the way you view your world, shaped your interests, concerns, and actions?
- 4) If you have been back to Ethiopia/Eritrea since your term of service, what was the purpose of the visit? When did it take place? Tell us about what you did and what differences you observed.

Project manager **Nancy Horn** (Addis 66–68) reports that "we had about 50 people recording, and **Penne Scott** (Agaro 64–66) is busy transcribing these. We also received a number of written stories and they will be included in the collection. E&E RPCVs intends to either develop a publication from these stories or deposit them with the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, or both. But we need your assistance. We'd like to get more responses. We need YOUR answers to these questions. We need your story." Write Nancy at [horn.n@worldnet.att.net](mailto:horn.n@worldnet.att.net). Send her your 2-5 page story, or request that she send you a tape recorder to use to record your story. She will make sure it is preserved. Says Nancy: "Please join us in highlighting the Ethiopia and Eritrea Peace Corps experience on this, the eve of Peace Corps returning to Ethiopia." 📧📧

# Peace Corps news

## Peace Corps to return to Ethiopia

In September 2006 Acting Director Jody Olsen announced in Washington that Peace Corps will be returning to Ethiopia. The last PCVs to serve in Ethiopia were withdrawn in 1999. The new Peace Corps/Ethiopia program is scheduled to start in 2007. Approximately 40 Volunteers will be recruited. They will train in country after a short staging orientation in the United States. They will spend 27 months in-country, including the 90 day training program. They are scheduled to leave for Ethiopia in early September, 2007. The initial group of Volunteers will be working in health and HIV/AIDS education and prevention. It's possible that the program will expand into other sectors in the coming years.

The new Ethiopia PCVs will work closely with the Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief that is managed by the Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator. The Peace Corps is currently active in 9 of the 15 Emergency Plan countries and more than 2,600 Peace Corps Volunteers are working in HIV/AIDS programs.

"We are excited that we have found a way to return to Ethiopia, a program that has had a long standing history of warmly accepting Volunteers into local communities," said Jody Olsen. "Our hope is that the Ethiopia program becomes a model for the accomplishments that Peace Corps Volunteers demonstrate in the health field around the world." The Ethiopia program was one of the first Peace Corps projects, originally opening in 1962. From 1962-77 and 1995-99, Ethiopia hosted approximately 2,500 Volunteers. Over the years, the primary focus was on education, although there were projects in health and agriculture.

### College credit for Peace Corps work


Peace Corps Volunteers who have two-year college degrees will be able to earn a bachelor's degree while they're serving overseas under a new agreement between Peace Corps and Metropolitan State University in St. Paul. "It's a relationship made in heaven," said Daniel Abebe, dean of Metro State's First College, which will house the new program.

Abebe knows a bit about Peace Corps. Abebe is Ethiopian and received part of his education in Debre Markos where his brother, Nardos Abebe, was the head master for a number of years. **Clare Shea** (Debre Markos 64-66) knew Nardos when she was teaching in Markos. Daniel recalls that he had several Peace Corps teachers at Negus Telehamonot School in Debre Markos. Clare met Daniel when she was arranging a shipment of books for Ethiopia in 2003, and he was on the board of Books for Africa, and was helpful in securing the books for the shipment.

Peace Corps says that more than 80 percent of the Peace Corps' roughly 7,800 Volunteers already have a bachelor's degree. Peace Corps already has agreements with a number of colleges that allow those students to work on master's degrees while the PCVs serve overseas. But Peace Corps is eager to recruit more community college graduates, partly because those schools are more racially diverse than four-year colleges. The opportunity to work on a four-year degree during their Peace Corps service and get credit for some of their volunteer activities could be an additional lure in recruiting those Volunteers.

### Looking for Country Directors

David Liner, Acting Chief of Staff/Operations at Peace Corps, issued a special plea this past summer for candidates for Country Director positions. At the present time, about 80% of the Country Directors are RPCVs and over 40% are former Peace Corps staff members. Liner asked that anyone interested in applying can forward their name and contact information to Mike Mikolaitis (mmikolaitis@peacecorps.gov) at Peace Corps' Office of Overseas Executive Selection and Support.

Additional information about being a Country Director is available on the Peace Corps website ([www.peacecorps.gov/cd](http://www.peacecorps.gov/cd)). Information about benefits can also be found on the web site. The wages are surely better than those of a PCV. The current salary range for a Country Director is \$74,148 to \$118,967. 

**From 1962-77 and 1995-99, Ethiopia hosted approximately 2,500 Volunteers.**

**The wages are surely better than those of a PCV. The current salary range for a Country Director is between \$74,148 to \$118,967.**

# Friends

## Reunions

For groups considering reunions in 2007, **Bob Mat-thai** (Addis, Gondar 63–65) offers the following somewhat arcane, but possibly useful, information: September 11, 2007 will be the celebration of the new Ethiopian millennium, the year 2,000 A.D. in the Ethiopian calendar. Instead of calling it Y2K as we did for our Geogorian-calendar-based millennium, perhaps we could call this E2K for “Ethiopia 2000.”

But to make things more interesting, there does seem to be some debate about the exact date. The Ethiopian Embassy in Washington says the date is September 11, while a couple of web sites say the date is September 12. The difference may have something to do with a leap year, which may — or may not — occur at that time. As the actual day approaches a consensus may develop or the exact date will start to appear on those dual calendars that show both Western and Ethiopian dates.

In any case, one E&E group that will be meeting around the time of the new millennium is the Ethiopia II training group which is planning to get together in Belfast, Maine on the weekend of September 21st. They considered meeting the weekend of September 14th, closer to the E2K, but decided that was too astrologically chancy. The local coordinator is **Roger Sprague** who can be reached at [Roggiea@midmaine.com](mailto:Roggiea@midmaine.com). Roger is looking for volunteers for the organizing committee. Comfort Inn (800-303-5098) has been targeted as the main host hotel and is offering discounts at the magic mention of the Peace Corps re-union. Boat trips are being considered. And the search for a local provider of injera and lobster wat has begun.

## Making the trip back

**Diane Schroeder** (Indiber 65-67) writes: “Does everyone know you can bring 100 pounds of luggage (and 40 pounds more for a fee of \$25) into Ethiopia? I hope when RPCVs go back to visit they will take school supplies. **Alexander Morton** (Addis Ababa 65-67) and I returned to Addis Ababa during precisely the same week we had arrived 39

years earlier. After a long drive dodging potholes we got back to Indiber. School was already out, but we found the school. The principal came out to greet us. When I identified myself, he rattled off the names of the other PCVs who had been at the school at the time I taught there. Back then, he told us, he had been a 5th grader. None of us taught the lower grades, but those little guys knew us. What an affirmation!”

## Pictures from the trip back

We all have pictures from our time in Ethiopia/Eritrea, and those of us who have recently attended re-unions know what pleasure they bring and memories they evoke when we haul them out and show them again. Anyone who has recently returned to Ethiopia or Eritrea knows that not a great deal has changed, except that there are more people and the country feels so much more crowded. One advantage of a trip back now is that cameras are so much better. You don’t have to worry about film melting in the sun. You can check the digital pictures as you take them and then — best of all — you get to post them on line for everyone to see.

**Almaz Sullivan** (Aleta Wendo 96–98) recently took a trip back and posted the pictures she took on Flickr.com. They are amazing pictures and for those of us who have not been back recently they truly bring it all back. Check the pictures out at: [http://www.flickr.com/gp/85001831\\_Noo/kp2Yza](http://www.flickr.com/gp/85001831_Noo/kp2Yza)

The best way to enjoy them is to activate the slideshow mode, put on some Ethiopian music and pretend you are on the bus to Dira Dawa again.

## John Garamedi Wins

**John Garamedi** (Metu 66–68), with the support of a considerable number of E&E RPCVs who contributed money to his campaign and did some grass roots work, won the race for Lt. Governor of California. He received 3,320,186 votes, a margin more than 4 per cent over his nearest rival.

In his inaugural speech, Garamedi tipped his hat to his experience as a PCV: “Our Peace Corps experience in Africa many years ago taught Patti and me

**The search for a local provider of injera and lobster wat has begun.**



that we must row our small boat of hope against what appear to be overwhelming odds. If our effort could create one wave for peace and justice in this world, that wave might reach far and on some distant shore bring hope.”

## Letters Home From Peace Corps

*Peace Corps Writers editor John Coyne (Addis Ababa 62–64) and E&E RPCVs President and publisher of Peace Corps Writers Marian Haley Beil (Debre Berhan 62–64) have come up with yet another new project. They have agreed to co-edit a collection of Peace Corps letters to be published as part of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Peace Corps. Here is an outline of the project they have sent out:*

*Letters Home From Peace Corps will be one way for RPCVs to preserve the history of the Peace Corps. We believe that personal correspondence offers a valuable insight into the experience we all shared. Letters and emails to family and friends are treasured documents that we must save. Your letters home tell a story, and with this book, we hope to preserve your story — as expressed in your own words — for posterity. We ask you to share them with us.*

While we prefer to use previously unpublished material, we will consider letters or emails that have already appeared in local newspapers, self-published books, or family web sites. In selecting a letter to send us, ask yourself whether the reader would find the letter intriguing? Dramatic? Humorous? Historic? Insightful? If you can answer yes to one of these, send it. We will select the very best letters that tell the story of the Peace Corps since its beginnings in 1961. Your letters can be about any aspect of the Peace Corps experience: Making the Decision to Join, Training, Peace Corps Service, Friends, HCNs, Family Visits, After the Peace Corps, Life as an RPCV, Returning to the Host Country.

Send us NO MORE THAN THREE of your best letters or emails. Select letters that mean the most to you and tell a story. Send a legible photocopy or typed transcript. If we have trouble reading your handwriting, your letter will not be considered for

publication. Please do not send original letters. We cannot return anything sent to us.

The documents can be mailed to:

Marian Haley Beil  
4 Lodge Pole Road  
Pittsford, New York 14534

Emails can be sent to [jpcoyne@cnr.edu](mailto:jpcoyne@cnr.edu). Use the Subject Line: “Letters Home From the Peace Corps”

Please also include information about yourself — your phone number, email address, mailing address, where and when you served, any other important personal or background details, and who was the recipient of the letter.

We look forward to hearing from you.

## Water Purification Project

**Jim Boyston** (Addis Ababa 62–64) writes that he will “be going to East Africa and Ethiopia in early 2007 to review deliveries of equipment to new Rural Health Centers and the Teaching Hospital in the Jimma district.” He will also be checking for possible locations for demonstration village/community water purification projects. Jim is enthusiastic about a product called SilverDYNE®, a silver compound which can be used to purify water. Jim notes that “the availability of pure, good tasting and germ-free water is one of the major essential needs of developing countries.” He would like to find RPCVs who might be interested this new approach to water purification, and would be happy to respond directly to them with more details. We look forward to hearing from him when he returns from his travels. His email is [seamus32@yahoo.com](mailto:seamus32@yahoo.com)

## Deaths

>> *THE HERALD* has learned of the passing of two RPCVs. No other details were available:

**Robert Piper** (Asmara 1964–66, 67)

**Delores Diggs** (Addis Ababa 1964–66)

>> We also read that **H. Donald Wilson** (Country Director 64–66) died of a heart attack in his

**Letters and emails to family and friends are treasured documents that we must save. Your letters home tell a story, and with this book, we hope to preserve your story — as expressed in your own words — for posterity.**



Don Wilson welcomes the Ethiopia VIs 9/1965

**My knees weakened, my palms dripped. As my turn came, I curtsied and gave my four-line speech: "Your country is beautiful. I like to work in Ethiopia. I am a teacher. I am pleased to meet you, Your Highness." All present tense: subject, verb, object. I tried not to giggle from nerves or to sweat down the front of my dress.**

home in Maryland on November 12, 2006. His daughter Edie Wilson said that he "passed away at home in his study, very quickly and unexpectedly, but peacefully. . . . Some of you will laugh to know that he died in front of his computer doubtless ready to send a note to one of you, but we hasten to add that he had just come back from seeing a good movie and sharing a Chinese meal with my mother and good friends. He was engaged in life in every way right up to the last moment: in politics, business, gardening, swimming, singing, and in supporting all of us and many of you in every way he could. He lived a long and full life, and would have been 83 this month. There is little to regret and much to remember, and we all know that this passing was a blessing, for his time had come."

Wilson's obituary in the New York Times noted that he was managing partner at Arthur D. Little, the management consulting firm, in the late 1960s when he wrote the plan for what later became Lexis-Nexis, the early computerized system for retrieving information. Indeed it was nearly the last sentence of the obituary before the Times noted that Wilson "took a leave from Arthur D. Little in 1964, when he was appointed by R. Sargent Shriver as a Peace Corps director in Ethiopia." The Washington Post wrote that Wilson ran Peace Corps 700-person program in Ethiopia in 1964, and that "later joked he became known as 'Icebox Henry' for taking away volunteers' refrigerators to make them live as the locals did."

>> Also, in November 2006, the news reached us that **Wolf Leslau**, the famed Semetic language scholar who oversaw Amharic language instruction for several groups of Ethiopia-bound PCVs at UCLA died. Leslau's lectures on Amharic verb forms, delivered with energy and enthusiasm, were unforgettable, even if the complexities of verbs did not always stick with us.

**Dannie Russell** (Addis 63-65) recalls putting the lessons learned from Leslau to work when she visited the Imperial Palace in Addis along with other

PCVs to meet the Emperor. Writes Russell: "A small group of twenty-five Westerners walked through the reception line. I practiced a short Amharic speech. I learned all those words in language instruction, but now, the only sentence I remembered admonished, 'The goat goes through the gate.'

"My nerves took over. What was protocol? Should I curtsy? Bow? Give a firm handshake or a limp-wrist knuckle-up? My knees weakened, my palms dripped. As my turn came, I curtsied and gave my four-line speech: 'Your country is beautiful. I like to work in Ethiopia. I am a teacher. I am pleased to meet you, Your Highness.'

"All present tense: subject, verb, object. I tried not to giggle from nerves or to sweat down the front of my dress.

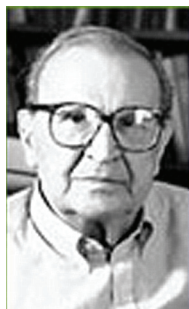
"What a tiny, slight man Haile Sellassie was, unlike other large African leaders who suffer from too much opulence. Kindly, he made no corrections at my attempt at the language and while still wondering at the success or failure of my faltering speech, the curtains of the reception room sundered and out walked waiters with trays of champagne and hors d'oeuvres."

Some months later, writes Russell, she was once again reminded of the words of that basic sentence pattern. "When Tamene, one of my older students, came back from his village one weekend, he brought a goat; a beautiful white goat. Hmm. He went home to see his ill father and came back with a goat. For me. At last, I could use the brilliant Amharic I learned at UCLA, 'The goat goes through the gate.'"

A few PCVs took Leslau's tuition and ran with it. Through the gate and far beyond. **Grover Hudson** (Yirgalem 63-65) continued his work in Amharic and languages, ultimately getting a Ph.D. in linguistics from UCLA. As a professor of linguistics at Michigan State University, Hudson produced a great deal of research on Ethiopian languages. He directed TESL and Amharic training programs for later Peace Corps groups. Among Hudson's many papers and articles is a 1983 paper presented to the 14th Annual Conference on African Linguistics

entitled "The principled grammar of Amharic verb stems." Leslau, our old mentor, whom Hudson frequently saw over the years, would have been proud that some one really understood those verbs.

*Hudson wrote an appreciation of Leslau for the HERALD.*



Wolf Leslau

### **Wolf Leslau, 1916-2006**

*By Grover Hudson*

Volunteers of the Ethiopia/Eritrea II, III and IV (and possibly others) who trained at UCLA, may well remember Professor Wolf Leslau. A European scholar-teacher of formal and academic bearing only slightly moderated by 20 years in southern California, he supervised Amharic language instruction of their programs. Leslau trained the instructors, who were Ethiopian students from various campuses around the US and who ordinarily had no experience of language teaching. As Amharic was taught at UCLA in the summer of 1963, Leslau would lecture on grammar to the entire trainee group. He had complete fluency in English, his third language, and only the slightest trace of a Polish accent. Then he would break the trainees down into small classes of about ten, taught by Amharic speakers.

Leslau also presented evening lectures on Ethiopian cultures and the peoples whose languages he had studied since the 1940s, as a student of Semitic linguistics in Paris. He told us about his travels by mule into Gurage country, and how he had discovered one of the last elderly speakers of the Gafat language, only to find his value as a language informant severely limited by absence of his front teeth. He warned us that our students would often speak languages other than Amharic, and he encouraged us to respect and study those local languages. His lectures were enriched by Ethiopian folk stories he had collected, photos he had taken, and music he had recorded.

Born in Poland, he studied in Vienna, and then went on to the Sorbonne in Paris. He fled France in 1940 when the Nazis arrived. He came to the US and taught at Brandeis before moving west to UCLA in 1953. He sponsored and taught several of the first generation of Ethiopian students of modern linguistics, who went home to establish the study of

Ethiopian linguistics at Haile Sellassie I University (which become Addis Ababa University after 1975).

The Peace Corps training opportunity was a stimulus for Leslau to write his *Amharic Language Textbook*, which PC trainees used in various draft forms until its publication in 1965, and his *Concise Amharic Dictionary* (1976), which, like the textbook, is still commonly used by college students of the language, at least by serious students who, like PC trainees, are prepared to work at the language for several hours a day.

When the Ethiopia II trainees arrived at UCLA in June of 1963 (Ethiopia I had trained at Georgetown), Leslau was an internationally known scholar of Semitic linguistics and probably the world's leading scholar of Ethiopian languages. He was already the author of several books and hundreds of articles. He taught PC trainees more or less as if we were graduate students of Semitic linguistics. We suffered, but many of us learned well. Leslau would go on to deepen his specialization in Ethiopian studies, and write foundational works including his *English-Amharic Context Dictionary* (2003 pages, in 1973), *Etymological Dictionary of Gurage* (Ethiopic), 3 volumes (1979), *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez* (1987), with his student Thomas Kane the *Amharic Cultural Reader* (2001), and his *Reference Grammar of Amharic* (1995). He received many awards, including the Haile Selassie Award for Ethiopian Studies in 1965. In his 80s, he learned to use the MacIntosh computer and mastered the special intricacies necessary in those days to use Amharic and other Semitic language fonts.

Professor Leslau died on November 18, four days after his 100th birthday, having continued to research and write almost until that day. When he died he was hard at work on the Gogot language, and had published a grammar of the Ethiopian Mesqan language in 2004, when he was 98. Certainly those of us whom Leslau taught can be helped as our own retirements begin, by the lesson of Leslau's love of work and the steady and regular work schedule which he continued long into his retirement: at the desk by 8, work until 12, lunch and maybe a nap, but back to the desk from 2 to 6 pm. 📖📚

**Leslau taught PC trainees more or less as if we were graduate students of Semitic linguistics. We suffered, but many of us learned well.**



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We'd like to thank those who volunteered articles, ideas and effort for this issue of *THE HERALD*. We especially appreciate the work of the book reviewers who carried a particularly heavy load and of those who replied cheerfully to our requests to write some lines for the various roundup stories we featured this issue. It made our work lighter and the issue so much more interesting.

The news summaries in *THE HERALD* were written from dozens of items forwarded to *THE HERALD* by Shlomo Bachrach, who culls news stories about Ethiopia and Eritrea from many sources and sends them out to a long list of interested parties, including many RPCVs. He can be contacted at: [shlomo@eastafrica-forum.net](mailto:shlomo@eastafrica-forum.net)

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## Please send articles

*THE HERALD* is most eager to receive submissions. Our pages are open to all. Have you recently re-visited Ethiopia or Eritrea? Have you made contact with former students or friends from Peace Corps days? Have you come across interesting articles, books, exhibitions that you think the rest of us would like to know about? Have you had some new thoughts about your Peace Corps service? About Ethiopia or Eritrea? About teaching and development? All these would make wonderful articles for *THE HERALD*. We also enthusiastically welcome photo submissions.

Send ideas, submissions, suggestions, or even cranky letters-to-the-editor to:

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- the RPCV Legacy Program projects
- the great reunions we organize.
- the website that has been so instrumental in helping RPCVs reconnect with friends and former students.

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

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