

January 2004



Dear Friends,

Time to reflect on the old year. We will remember 2003 as being the 20th anniversary of Adoption Advocates. The celebration, last summer with hundreds of families and children joined into families by adoption, was certainly a highlight. We have recorded 176 new adoptive placements this year, the greatest number in our history. Of those children, 90 came from Ethiopia. Many Washington State children from the foster care system also joined adoptive families as well as healthy children and children with special needs from China. Adoptions from Thailand continue and we recently had the first child arrive from Sierra Leone. So far our loyal staff is keeping up with the pace and I feel blessed to work with such good and hard working folks.

The work in Ethiopia has been sad in that so many orphan children are being left with few options when their parents die. The few we can take to place for adoption are the lucky ones. We are now caring for over 90 youngsters and more than half of them have already been identified by prospective adoptive parents and are in the adoption process. We are working with four other child caring organizations, taking their children into Layla House when we have space and helping find families for others. We now have two separate facilities, one for children five and under and one for school age children. They are located only a two minute walk apart so the older children visit to play with the babies and young children on a regular basis.

The Christmas party was held last week and children from both houses attended. The older children presented a Christmas drama, complete with a choir. Each child received a new Ethiopian outfit and an additional small gift. Each of our 59 Ethiopian staff members was given a gift certificate to the local supermarket, a place most have probably never been able to afford to visit.

This year we have collected over \$1000 for our project to buy shoes for the children. Each child has been taken to buy a new pair of shoes and there was always a stop for ice cream on the return. This week we were happy to share this experience with the children from one of the more needy orphanages we work with. Twenty-nine children from the Kebebe Tsehay orphanage were taken in two separate groups in the AAI van and fitted with new shoes. Of course, they enjoyed the ice cream treat as well. Sometimes I think our children look a bit shabby but when compared to children in other orphanages, they are well dressed indeed.

The architect is working on plans for the new Layla House, which will have several buildings on a compound large enough for all of our children to be together. Plans call for class rooms over the sleeping areas. This will be an improvement as our teachers are now called upon to teach in cramped and noisy classrooms. The main class is actually held in space behind a bookcase in the room which is also the sleeping room for the older girls. Once the drawings are complete we plan to approach the government about a donation of land for the facility.

We are always encouraged by the generosity of our many friends. There were several major fund raising efforts to benefit the Layla House Building Fund this fall and we have a healthy amount in the bank to start. Two people coordinated efforts to get a large donation of an expensive medicine to treat scabies. One person thought about children sleeping in the cold during the rainy season and approached Land's End about a donation of blankets. We have been able to ship enough blankets for nearly all of the beds of the big kids. Volunteers who have gone to Ethiopia have provided wonderful service this year. John filled in for Gail as administrator last summer, and Alison is a young woman who spent three months working with the children and now plans to return in January for another six months. Countless experts in many areas have made their knowledge available to us. Adoptive families have carried hundreds of pounds of needed supplies in their luggage, and we regularly receive boxes of the kinds of supplies we need.

We are grateful for your help and support, whatever form it may have taken. We could not have done what was necessary without the help of many. As we move into 2004, we are excited to be in a place where the need is great and the means are available to make a difference in many lives. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Merrily and Ted