

March, 2004



Dear Friends,

There is so much to tell you. I have just returned from my first trip to Ethiopia this year. The adoption process is generally going well and there were four families there getting ready to travel home with their newly adopted children. It is such a joy to watch the bonds begin to form between the new parents and children. There are misunderstandings, power struggles, and sometimes tantrums, but there are also smiles, cuddles, and fumbling attempts to communicate in unfamiliar languages and with gestures. It is a story I have witnessed so many times, but it never grows old.

We have received a number of new babies, the weather is colder this time of year and I think it is harder for struggling birth moms to keep and feed their babies. For the first time a tiny baby was actually left by the gate of our Wanna House. It was early morning and the staff was changing when they heard a sound coming from the bushes. There was a little girl about a week old. Such a sweet baby, and I hope that the mother knows that she will be raised by an adoptive parent that will love and care for her.

I had the first look at the plans for the new Layla House being drawn by an architect in Ethiopia. The plans call for a large compound with four buildings and lots of outdoor play space. The first building would house the babies and preschool age children with space for outdoor play and one classroom. Next is a large building with offices and classrooms on the second floor with bedrooms, sitting rooms, and bathing areas for small groups of girls on the main floor. Across from this building is a dining hall which can be used for TV and play

during rainy weather. There is a large kitchen area and sleeping, sitting and bathing areas for the boys. The fourth building has storage, a small workshop, and a covered rooftop area where clothing can be dried during the rainy season. We have an email group for those interested in keeping informed of the progress of this project especially those interested in fund raising. If you would like to be subscribed, please let me know.

When I left Addis we had four babies in the hospital. It is the time of year when many children have colds and illness seems to spread quickly. We are grateful that our fund to cover medical expenses is available. Two of the children had been referred from different orphanages, because they were sick and those orphanages had no funds for hospitalization. Do remember that the gift cards which can be given to commemorate a special occasion, are available from AAI and proceeds are used for the medical fund. They are \$25 and have a lovely photo of an Ethiopian child taken by Emma Dodge Hanson. These are also suitable to be given in memory when a death occurs.

On a personal note, early in January Ted's and my first born son, Tad, was killed in an auto accident. Tad was an attorney in Port Angeles and left two small children. We have received many expressions of caring and concern and are very grateful. It has been a time of reflection and some redirection for us. We are reminded that each day is a precious gift, that the time to pay attention to our personal relationships is now, and that our family and friends, our faith, and doing what we believe is important are areas where we want to continue to focus our energy.

On a happier note, two boys, brothers, who have been at Layla House for 2 years will finally join their adoptive family next week. These boys, Kibir and Zelalam, are such nice boys and were never pushy with me about finding a family for them. I took video of them so many times and began to dread having to ask them to do it again, when making new video of currently available children. Finally, their prayers were answered and they are being adopted by relatives of a family that adopted three children from us a couple of years ago. The children know each other and all are very excited.

We still struggle to find adoptive families for older boys, especially when there are brothers who need to be placed together. We are currently looking for families for ten sets of siblings. Ten single boys who are over the age of six years wait for families. Please pray with us for families for these kids.

Our store room is full, thanks to the adoptive families who have brought supplies with them as they have traveled in recent months. We are able to share clothing and other items with some of the orphanages we work with. Children use our supplies so quickly they need constant replenishing, however, and we are grateful to those of you who continue to provide supplies. Unless otherwise specified financial donations are being directed to the building fund. By the time I write

again, we should have some cost figures and time lines to share with you. Again, we thank you for your help and support.

Sincerely,

Merrily and Ted