

September 2005

Dear Friends,

There has been so much happening that I am afraid that this letter will take more than one page.

In August the bi-annual adoptive family gathering was held here in Port Angeles. There was a larger than ever crowd of families and children adopted from Bulgaria, India, China, Thailand, and Ethiopia as well as from here in the U.S. There were many teenagers. Kids who had known each other at Layla House in Ethiopia had an opportunity to reconnect. Weather in Port Angeles was perfect. The weekend included an interesting speaker discussing parenting ideas, dozens of crafts and activities for children, a puppet show that held everyone's attention, a tour of the new office, a traditional story and songs presented by a local Klallam Native American grandmother, a catered dinner, and a talent and fashion show featuring many beautiful children. The silent auction raised several thousand dollars for projects in China and Ethiopia. The drawing for the Layla House quilt was held in the evening. The winning ticket was sold by Susan, who also received the prize for selling the most tickets. The winner is from New York and a friend of Susan's. The prize to the child who sold the most tickets went to Anna from Cle Elum, Washington. Anna was adopted through AAI and has been quite a fund raiser for us, having organized bake sales in the past to raise money. Over \$15,000 was raised by the sale of quilt raffle tickets, and Barbara Patton, creator of the quilt, has promised a new one to raffle in 2006.

I traveled to Addis in late August. It was exciting to see the progress that had been made on the new Layla House. We are still hopeful that the new facility will be ready for the children to move in late October. The part of the work being done by an Ethiopian contractor is a little behind but he assures us it will be finished. The roof is going on the sleeping room area. The dining and activity room is even larger than I thought. The new library is nearly finished.

Mike, the volunteer who was supervising construction during August, has some interesting stories to tell. He says that every three days a load of 16 tons of large rocks (middle sized dog size) was delivered, and work would begin to break the large rocks into small ones which are used in mixing the cement. In the area where he was working cement was mixed on the ground using a shovel and hoe. The walls could only be built three blocks higher each day and the wall at the bottom of the compound along the river took many days to complete. On his last day Mike bought two sheep and his workers built a fire and cooked them and had a party right there on the work site. Once this job is finished most of these folks will again be unemployed, some for months, before they locate a new job. John will return to Ethiopia later this month to supervise the completion of the work and the grading and paving of the soccer field.

The promise of more space at the new Layla House has meant that we have perhaps taken in more new children than we should have. One of the saddest cases was an obviously ill mother who brought her three children to meet us when we went to one of the orphanages where we work. The three children were sparkling clean, a girl 9, girl 6, and a little boy, an active charmer about 3. The mother was weeping but saying that she knew she didn't have long to live and wanted very much for her children to have a good life with a loving family. We agreed to take the kids and asked if she would like to take them home for a few days to say good-bye. She declined, saying it would be easier for everyone to make this the final good-bye. After more hugs and tears she quietly slipped out the gate. Later I saw the children busy making new friends, but I am sure they will grieve for some time to come.

In the coming months there will be several fund raising activities in various locations. You are invited to participate!

Minneapolis/St. Paul: contact Dorothy. Sept 25th 2-4pm, Ethiopian lunch and fundraising. Merrily will attend. Families and friends invited.

Austin: Old Fashioned Ice Cream Social, Sunday October 23rd 3-6pm at the Shady Hollow Community Center. Tickets \$20 per family which includes one ice cream cone each.

We are moving into the final phases of construction of the new Layla House. We hope to have the money available to complete the project without interruption. If you planned to make a donation to this project but haven't quite gotten to it, NOW would be an excellent time. We recognize that there are many in need at this time and that those who give are being pulled in other directions. But please don't forget the children of Ethiopia!

Best wishes to all.

Merrily and Ted