

March 2006



Layla House Girls with Dresses from "Just Dolls of Washington"



Boys playing baseball at Layla House

Greetings everyone,

Last week I returned from my most recent trip to Ethiopia and in many ways it was an especially nice one. Court processing is moving quite smoothly for adoption cases and there were several families in Addis Ababa to receive their kids. The population at Layla House was down a bit because children have been adopted so quickly so we were able to take in more new children. And to make it extra special, my son Nate has made a commitment to volunteer for a year at Layla House. He is now there, has received his Ethiopian drivers license and was last seen teaching the kids to play baseball!

I met many special little ones who are being processed for our adoption programs. There is a sibling set of five children from another part of Ethiopia, whose names sounded very unusual now that I am used to the Amharic names. We accepted several youngsters who, when tested, were found to be HIV positive and since we are now finding families for HIV positive children we have added them into our adoption files. There was one very sad story of a ten year old orphan boy who I had met on my previous trip in December when he came to Layla with his older sister. At that time we had no space for them so I sent them away and told them to come back to see me when I returned. He came back alone. His older 12 year old sister had died.

One of my favorite moments was giving the welcome bag from his new adoptive family to Ephrem, the longest waiting child at Layla. He came to us with his younger sister who turned out to be HIV positive and she was sent to AHOPE. We listed Ephrem with AAI's available children for 2 1/2 years. In the past year we have included the fact that he has an HIV positive little sister at AHOPE who could possibly be adopted with him. A family in Oregon inquired and now they are both well into the adoption process. I am so happy that these two children will be together and I believe that this special family is very lucky as well.

It was my special pleasure to be able to take supplies lovingly given by individuals and groups who share our concern for children. On this trip I took

dresses for the little girls made by members of my doll club, school book bags made by members of my church, books for the Layla library given by several individuals and groups, shoes collected in a couple of different shoe drives, dozens of socks in response to a request that came from Ethiopia shortly before I left, and bottles and bottles of chewable vitamins which are always needed for these kids whose nutrition has not always been good. The kindness of people who respond when they become aware of the need always makes me feel humble to be a part of such an outpouring.

One of the big concerns facing our work has been the large number of older (9 to 12 years) children who have been at Layla House for many months and have not found families. AAI set a goal for 2006 to work to identify families to adopt these older children while finding new ways to better prepare and train the families to parent them. We are in the process of preparing summaries of information on each of these children to be distributed to various online adoption newsletters. Getting the word out about individual children will be one focus.

Further we believe that the cost of adopting prohibits some prospective families from adopting these older children. Often interested and qualified families already have several children and though they feel they could support another child they have trouble coming up with funds for the adoption costs. One of our adoptive mothers, Emma Dodge Hanson, came up with the idea of developing the GRACE Fund to provide grants to families to help with adoption fees for these older youngsters and other children with special needs. The GRACE Fund, which stands for "Giving Reduces Adoption Costs in Ethiopia", is now ready to begin considering grant applications. A committee was selected that will oversee the applications and the grants will be awarded on an individual basis and based on the needs of the family and the needs of the child. AAI's fund raising focus in 2006 will be to raise money for this project. We will be presenting you with lots of opportunities to help, including selling raffle tickets for the new Layla Quilt. A Layla Cook Book is in process which we hope will generate a profit and we will soon be ready to distribute the musical CD of Layla Kids singing their favorite songs.

I also want to mention the Voices of Layla DVD. This 20-minute program was filmed in Ethiopia by RoseMarie FitzSimons, friend of one of our adoptive families. It shows street scenes in Addis and has lots of pictures of the kids at Layla and Wanna. She interviews children at Layla and others involved in our work and she tells the story of what our work is about, including our sponsorship programs. The video is available by contacting Anne at the AAI office, email anneaai@olympus.net. RoseMarie has not charged for the DVD but she asks that each person receiving a copy make a donation to AAI. This video has been very useful for those who would like to present a program but feel a bit shy about speaking and has been very effectively used as a fund raiser for small and large groups.

The need is great and working together we are accomplishing a great deal,
helping child after child. Your support and encouragement is deeply appreciated.

Merrily and Ted