

October, 2006



The bonfire and dancing for the Ethiopian New Years celebration

Greetings Everyone,

We are having summer weather here and it is lovely. I returned from Ethiopia a week ago and today I will share some of what I wrote back to adoptive families in process, about what was happening there:

I lost my first working day when my flight arrived Thursday morning instead of Wednesday night because of bad weather in Chicago. I was rerouted though Rome which may sound exciting but the Rome airport in the evening for six hours is something I would have preferred to miss. By the time I got to Addis I needed to sleep and I didn't get much done that day.

Friday after a quick look at Layla and the kids, we went to KT orphanage. They had given us three babies earlier in the week and we wanted to give them some clothing as well as see some older children they wanted us to place. Unfortunately two of the babies are HIV positive and one actually died yesterday-they tend to give us babies when they are sick because they know we will provide good medical care for them.

The older children included a little girl and two darling 7 year old boys and one nine year old boy. We already have quite a few boys in that age range but we decided to take them all and hope for the best. We all piled into the car headed back to Layla. After lunch we gave out welcome bags to children who had been recently matched with families. It is always a thrill to watch the kids open these bags and get their first glimpse of pictures of their new families. I always wonder what they are thinking.

We had bags from the new family of Abnet and Netsanet. These children are favorites at Layla, Abnet especially is a bright boy, a leader and loved by everyone. The volunteers all asked to be called to be there. I am sure that the kids had an idea of what was coming when they were called to the office, knowing I was there. They put on the t-shirts the family had sent and Abnet laughed when

he saw the photo of his new dad asleep on the couch with the family pet. The children quickly gathered their new things together to go and show their friends. A crowd of friends had gathered outside the door and when the door opened the kids waiting outside began to cheer--it was so touching that they were happy for the two.

Yesterday I spent three hours working on video of the older Layla kids, those who have waited the longest for families. I spent quite a bit of time talking to each one, and had them each tell the story of what had brought them to Layla House. I think it is important for kids to keep talking about this and there were tears and hugs. Some very very sad stories. I was only completed video on about a third of the children before I was emotionally drained. I am constantly amazed by the strength of these kids who have lived through so much. One of the most touching was a girl whose mother is mentally ill and had done some terrible things. This child concluded that though her mother had many problems she still loved her and would like to visit her again before she leaves Ethiopia.

My friends Barb, the Layla Quilt maker and Mike who has been here before to help with construction are back at the volunteer house for six weeks. Barb is teaching English (ESL) to the staff that works with the children. They are thrilled, she is working with them in small groups and yesterday the ladies in the baby room were all practicing with each other. Barb said a couple of them do not write at all and one had tears in her eyes when Barb gave her a sheet to practice writing the alphabet, she was so excited about the opportunity to learn. We hope that giving them the ability to exchange greetings with visiting parents will help make the parents feel more welcome.

Mike is working on construction projects. He will be rebuilding the storage room which currently is just a tin building. The other project is more exciting, he is building what will become a computer lab so that we can start the kids learning about computers while they are here. With Nate involved this has become a workable plan. Soon we will need the computers and you will be hearing more about that.

I am also excited about a something we have long dreamed of. We are making plans to hire a full time doctor to be on staff to care for our kids. We received a large donation from one family that we hope is going to be adequate to renovate a small examining room and office for the doctor and Mike will be working on this as well. We believe that the donation will cover the salary for the doctor for the first year.

I'd like to mention a new book that I would like to have everyone read. **THERE IS NO ME WITHOUT YOU** is the story of the AIDS orphan crisis in Ethiopia by Melissa Faye Greene. Melissa and her husband had adopted two children through AAI and she has had articles published by the New York Times and Good House Keeping Magazine about adoption and Ethiopian orphans. This is a factual book but very readable. It is available now at book stores and many are

buying an extra copy to share with friends or to give as gifts. She is also doing book signings in many large cities, check www.thereisnomewithoutyou.com for dates.

Thanks for your help and for sharing our joy as good things happen for kids. More children than ever will be placed for adoption this year, the need can be overwhelming but as someone said “Adopting a child won’t change the world but it will change the world for that child.”

Merrily and Ted