

ETHIOPIAN EDUCATION FUND NEWSLETTER

DEAR FRIENDS OF THE ETHIOPIAN EDUCATION FUND,

I write this with Ethiopia fresh in my memory. My sister (and board member) Annie and I visited the students in November and were reminded once again how important the EEF is to the students, their families, and communities.

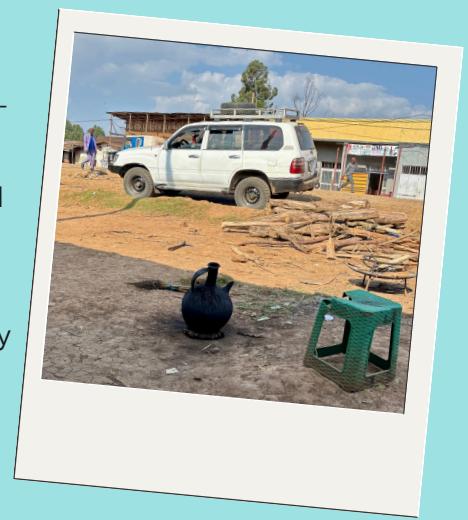
- *Stephanie*



THOUGHTS FROM ETHIOPIA

I was amazed at the changes in the past 3 years in Addis Ababa. So many new high-rises, new parks, new businesses. It is a beautiful city that embodies hope for the future. The Southern Region of Ethiopia is as different from Addis Ababa as New York City is from rural Mississippi. I love the 12-hours' drive to Kaffa Region and the town where our work is centered. Leaving Addis, the 8,000-foot fertile plains give way to rolling hills, deep river valleys, and then forested mountains. The EEF's work takes place in an area where wild coffee grows in the shade of tall trees in high elevation forests, where farmers eke out a living on small plots of land.

Each time I return to Kaffa it is a homecoming. Traveling and working with good friends Zelalem (EEF country director) & Bereket (advisor and driver), hugging long-time friend and EEF colleague Tigist and her children, meeting the shy new students at the high school, eating traditional meals with new and old friends, and of course drinking lots of small cups of delicious Kaffa coffee. Meeting with all the students, some we have known for years, some are new to us and the EEF program. Explaining to the new students that we will support them as long as they stay in school and pass their grade. The trip this year was sobering and joyful. The impact of 20 years of the Ethiopian Education Fund is so obvious in the faces of students. Giving someone hope has a way of doing that.



STEPS TOWARD A NEW ETHIOPIAN NON-PROFIT

The EEF board made the important decision last year to shift operations to local Ethiopians. During this trip we had many discussions with our current staff, our colleagues at the school, and with government officials to learn about the official process and make sure everyone is aligned with what happens next and the vision of success. We clarified our next steps and have full support of the community to start a local non-profit. Once the transition is complete, the US-based EEF will continue to fundraise to ensure students have the support they need and advise the nonprofit as board members.



THIS YEAR IS OUR 20TH ANNIVERSARY!

The EEF is able to support 50 students each year because of you. We could not do this without your support. We wish each of you could go to Ethiopia to see what a difference you make to these students! Please consider sending a check or monthly donation through your bank, mail, PayPal or Venmo or through the "Donate" page on our website: www.ethiopianeducationfund.org. Write to us with questions or comments!

And remember that our Ethiopian coffee from Olympic Crest Coffee can be purchased through us or at the Whidbey African Store at 830 SE Pioneer in Oak Harbor.



All our best,

Stephanie, Annie, Jeff, Azeb and Rochelle



ANNIE'S IMPRESSIONS

We greet the EEF students with the principal in his office. They come in as a group, each student greeting each adult in the proper way: right hands reach out, shake, and then each leans in to touch right shoulders. They say their names and then all are quiet out of respect. The adults speak as the students look attentively. Stephanie encourages them to keep studying with all their might and tells them how proud she is of their hard work. Zelalem and the Principal give a strong message, in Amharic, of the importance of education and effort. We end the gathering again with handshakes and shoulder bumps. Such bright faces let us adults know we are making a difference.

We met nearly all 50 EEF students and heard many stories: Endale walking 3 hours roundtrip to attend 7th grade, Lidet who started with us 9 years ago and is now in her 3rd year of Midwifery School, Meseret who is able to continue high school as a single mom, and Yewobdar an 11th grader feeling better after we facilitated her much needed tonsillectomy. Their faces and stories are the thank you we offer to our supporters!

-Annie

