

British author in search of Goan classmate

Panjim, April 12 – British author, Annette Allen, is looking for her classmates from her schooldays in Ethiopia. In fact, the search is the subject of her first non-fiction memoir: “An Ethiopian Odyssey”, that is helping to raise funds for WaterAid Ethiopia. It describes her 25,000 mile journey to find nine former classmates from Nazareth School for Girls, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where she studied from 1962 to 1964.

Among the girls Annette hopes to find – and write a second book about their lives – is a Goan, Celina Fernandes. She would be around 56 now, says Annette, and had a sister, Elizabeth and brother, David. She would like, if possible, to include Celina’s story and what happened to her in the intervening years in the book (but only if Celina agrees.) half of the royalties from the new book will go to peace projects across the world.

The only problem is, she hasn’t found Celina as yet. That’s why she contacted *Herald*, to see if we could help her find a long-lost classmate. Celina is mentioned in her first book as well, she remembers Celina fondly as a “tall graceful Indo-Portuguese girl from Goa.”

“Celina Fernandes,” she continues, “was the tallest among us. I imagined that she must have taken after her father in height, she often appeared anxious, her brows knitted together in bewilderment. She had a lilting accent, so typical of the Goan people, and unlike Sumitra Goyal – another classmate she’s in search of- she always let her longhair fall free like a curtain, with just a bow at the back.”

An Ethiopian classmate, Fanaye Saifou, told Annette while she was on her Ethiopian odyssey, that out of the class of 38 which Annette left in 1964, only 10 graduated in 1969; one of whom was Celina. Fanaye said she has persevered the graduation photo. Annette during her travels that Celina had returned to Goa. Now she’s determined to find her if she can.

Annette was inspired to take up this mission by a dream she had in April 2000 – that she had returned to Addis Ababa to provide water for the very poor. She was then asked to give a talk about the quest at the United Nations last year, to talk about this journey of deep faith. There is now a major international publisher interested. She has set up a company to channel half of the royalties from every book to help the poor. She says that she believes in hands up, not hand-outs, and her journey has helped her discover that dreams still touch hearts across the world. She is now looking for her remaining classmates, and hopes to include their lives in her second book.

The book has received many accolades. British Prime Minister Gordon Brown has written. “I very much admire your determination and commitment to the cause of poverty reduction. I hope that others are inspired by reading about your experiences.” Cape Town Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu said. “Thank you for sharing your dream with me. I read about it with great interest.” President of Ethiopia, Girma Wolde-Giorgis wrote: “I am happy to know that you were in Nazareth School with my daughter Hiruth. I am sure your book will be a success.”

If any reader recognises Celina in the photograph and knows anything about her, please contact me at *Herald* (Tel: 2433 665 8502, 222 4202, 2224460, 222 8083.) A school friend wants to renew ties with her.