

## DIASPORA

# AN ETHIOPIAN ODYSSEY: An English Woman's Search for Old Friends

By: Annette Allen

**I**t started with a dream that I was back in the foothills of Addis with some of my Ethiopian friends, feeling the dry topsoil and understanding I was there to help provide water. I awoke from that dream not knowing how to achieve this assignment, yet realizing all the same that it was significant.

Once long ago, I had resided in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. My father had been working for Ethiopian Airlines as Chief Testbed Engineer, and I had attended Nazareth girls' school from 1962 to 1964. My last class at Nazareth was grade 6A.

I never returned to the country after we left, and I was very sad to learn about the ensuing "Red Terror" period. This was not the Ethiopia I recognized — the famine, the terror; what I personally associated with Ethiopia was quite different. I remembered friendship, politeness, great faith in God, the mountains and the Rift Valley; the tribal customs, the luminous colors worn by women, and a sense of people progressing together and helping each other.

In August 2003, two years after I had this dream about Ethiopian drought, I was made redundant from a very good job and decided to simply work part-time whilst making my dream come true. I commenced writing my first

book on multiculturalism, reflecting on my friendships and experiences at Nazareth School in Ethiopia.

My book weaves the story of the people I met along the way — the men and women who willingly stepped forward to help me on this quest. The journey thus far has proven to be a blessing; in just eight short months I was able to make contact and reunite with six of my former classmates. My friend Marta Asrat, still at Nazareth, serves as the school secretary. I have rediscovered colleagues such as Mary Asfaw Wossen, Emperor Haile Selassie's grand daughter; Fanaye Saifou, who now lives in Cologne; Silva Derentz, in Los Angeles; and Celina Fernandes, in Lisbon. Sadly, I also learned that our classmate

Hiruth Girma passed away in 1978, but I have found her sister Ghennet and am now working closely with her.

I am still searching for the rest of my former classmates from Nazareth School, whom I last saw in July 1964. I would like to include all their stories in my book, entitled *An Ethiopian Odyssey*, which I hope to complete by the end of 2005. In particular, I am keen to reconnect with former students Kathy Miller, Phoebe Khalil, and Sumitra Goyal. I have recently heard that quite a few of my classmates now reside in the United States and would graciously accept any assistance offered to help me locate my old friends; I intend to make a journey to the U.S. in February 2005 to work towards our reunion.



Nazareth School, 1963. If you know any of the persons depicted in this photograph, please contact [a.allen@netcamuk.co.uk](mailto:a.allen@netcamuk.co.uk).