

'How a dream led me back to Africa'

Annette Allen spent two years in Ethiopia as a child, 40 years ago. A committed Christian, she returned to the country after a dream in which she felt directed by God to help provide permanent clean water for the country's poorest citizens. She is writing a book, *An Ethiopian Odyssey*, about her experiences.

IN March 2004, for the first time for 40 years, I returned to Nazareth School for Girls, built on one of the many hills of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital. We had lived there from 1962 – 1964, when my father worked as chief testbed engineer for Ethiopian Airlines.

It was a very good school and was my introduction to living with many different cultures. There were seven different nationalities in my class and after my initial homesickness, I grew to love the country and the warmth and faith of the inhabitants.

The return began with a dream I had in April 2000, when I dreamt I was back in the foothills of Addis with two Ethiopian friends. The sun was beating down and we were talking about poverty and drought. Then, mid-conversation, I knelt down and rubbed the dry top soil between my fingers. I knew beyond doubt that I was there to help provide permanent clean water for Ethiopia's poor. With that thought, the dream faded. It was similar to other dreams I'd had since 1970, ones which I believe were sent from God.

After redundancy two years

later, I decided to work part-time whilst I made my dream come true. All I had to go on was my old school photo and the Christian names of the ladies on the reverse, so I couldn't go and search on the internet! I promised God that half of my earnings would go to the poor and I decided to use only faith in my dream, prayer, patience and perseverance. I also had to learn to forget all my beliefs and assumptions about life and people.

When I returned to Nazareth School, the headteacher looked at the photograph and said 'I have one of your classmates in the room behind us!' Out walked Marta Asrat, who was still there as school secretary. She pointed out that one of the ladies was the daughter of Ethiopia's current President, Girma Wolde-Giorgis. I met up with and interviewed Mary Asfaw Wossen, Emperor Haile Selassie's grand daughter and visited various WaterAid projects to see the need for permanent clean water.

I spent the last week of my stay in an orphanage run by Abebech Gobena, a very inspiring lady who helps the destitute through her orphanages, providing seed



A photo from the Nazareth School, taken in 1963. Annette is in the front row, third from right.

capital for new businesses, training courses and caring for HIV/AIDS sufferers. As a result, I decided to help provide some funding for her charity too. The final beneficiary is a Garden of Peace in Jerusalem, as I believe that until we have peace in the Holy Land, we can't have world peace.

My book begins in Jerusalem in 1915 with a little four year old Armenian boy, Avak Hagopian, lying in bed sobbing; he had lost his parents in the Armenian genocide, the first of the twentieth century. (It was the 90th anniversary on 24 April). He was the youngest of forty orphans later adopted by Emperor Haile Selassie in 1923 and grew up to become the crown jeweller. He was the father in law

of Silva, my Armenian classmate, who now lives in Los Angeles.

I have had great help from people of all faiths in many countries and especially from SS Peter and Paul in Buckingham. I was confirmed on 19 October, 20 years to the day when Michael Buerk broadcast about the great famine in northern Ethiopia which inspired Bob Geldof to create BandAid, and then LiveAid. The book is a message of hope to everyone in the world, and I do it willingly for the Lord.

Annette Allen lives in Buckingham with her husband, and son. She worships at SS Peter and Paul's church, Buckingham. The book will be published at Easter 2006. She can be contacted at annette@annetteallen.plus.com