

SSAAP Quarterly Newsletter, Edition XXII

Ethiopian Edition: Summer 2017

For Holly (and Sia), beloved Board Member(s): Ethiopia was your idea. Thanks for pushing me.



Harari Market; Jugol, Ethiopia

“I want to be a poet, and I am working to make myself a seer. It is a question of reaching the unknown by the derangement of all the senses.”

~ Arthur Rimbaud, 1871 (age 17)

Ethiopia Project Assessment Trip

Mission: To take an Initial Assessment Trip to Ethiopia to observe, research, study, and learn whether or not Ethiopia is a suitable country for SSAAP to attempt to serve. To visit rural village areas in each quadrant of the country (North, East, South and West) and learn about the various tribes/ethnic and minority groups in the regions, and which groups are marginalized and whether or not SSAAP could serve them. In addition to assessing areas for water needs, SSAAP also assessed whether its school sponsorship, animal-rearing, women's empowerment, and income-generation initiatives could be applicable in Ethiopia as they have proved so successful in Zambia and Sierra Leone.



Ethiopia is the home of spices to Africa. They are sold cheaply and organically on the streets of nearly every Ethiopian town.

Water: It is safe to say that all of Ethiopia suffers from a water crisis.

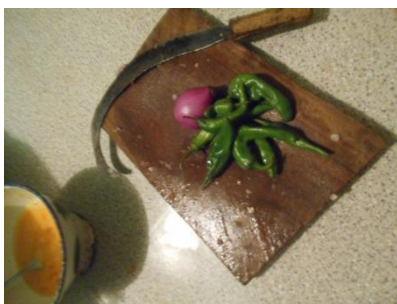


Shendi Village water crisis, 2017.

25% Community Contribution: SSAAP stays with local people in the regions/villages where we conduct assessment trips for various reasons: one being to assess where we choose to execute our projects. First, to learn more about the culture of the people we are staying with. Learning more about culture is a window into the success of any international overseas project. Second, we gain relationships with the local people from living with them at a local level. We understand their hardships differently than if we had lodged in a hotel. Our relationships are strengthened even through difficulties and then trust grows, minimizing the opportunity for theft of project resources and maximizing an alliance not only for the sake of the project, but also for SSAAP's overall mission of World Peace: spreading meaningful, deep, long-term friendships between people all over the world. Third, staying with local people in regions/villages where SSAAP works saves money for the project. The less money we use on administrative costs such as hotels, airline tickets, eating food at restaurants versus cooking at home, etc., the more funds SSAAP has for the projects themselves – which I know is the root of what we all want: donors, supporters, even me and SSAAP's Board of Directors. Overhead is a necessary evil of any nonprofit organization or business, but keeping overhead costs minimal is what SSAAP aims to do.



(Above): SSAAP-Ethiopia Site Assessment Visit #3, Shendi Village. We stayed with our friend Tilahun's mother. Tilahun brought us to the water site, explained the need for water (see Ethiopia Water Assessment attachment), and hosted us at his family home in Shendi Village. As a result, SSAAP has a very strong friendship with both Tilahun and his family, knows the local people more personally, and has a deeper tie with the people of Shendi Village.



I have always admired how self-sufficient and mature African children are. They do their chores with pride and humility. I am encouraging my daughter to learn from them how to cook, as well to follow in the example of her fellow African brothers and sisters who have not only taught her how to cook, clean, garden and wash clothes, but

also to do such tasks with pride. Such is a testament to how many kinds of education exist around the globe – formal and informal. I once met a 5-year old Zambian girl, Cawleen, who could catch, de-feather, cut into pieces, boil, then fry a village chicken. I am touched by the observation that every culture raises children who are efficient in what that culture requires them to be efficient in.

I have been deeply criticized for this by many educated people living in the urban cities of Lusaka, Addis Ababa, or Freetown for this aspect of SSAAP. Some educated Africans believe that charities or NGOs should be used as profit-making organizations for those who gain employment from them (i.e. themselves) and that if a substantial amount of money is not used on people's salaries, then the project is a 'waste'. In the end, I have learned that very few Africans are truly interested in helping the marginalized poor in their countries, and everything orbits around self-gain and helping oneself get ahead – even at the expense of others.

In the end, the sole reason for any charity project to be functioning in Africa ought to be to serve the most vulnerable members of the society, which SSAAP deems to be the rural, marginalized, undereducated poor. If the project is not helping this fraction of the population (which is the majority of the people), then the project is ineffective.



Deeply I recognize that SSAAP runs its projects and programs in various countries quite differently than most other NGOs/projects, and in fact I don't know any other projects that operate as we do. And at this point, I can claim I don't care if SSAAP is the only charity organization functioning on the whole of this continent that isn't out to serve only itself. I have told people, straight to their faces: "It doesn't matter to me if you understand our project, or if you understand me. I stopped believing that what you think of me matters long ago."

The fourth reason that SSAAP lodges at the local level is because lodging is an easy way that the community can give back their required 25% Community Contribution to the project. The mandatory 25% Community Contribution, either in-cash or in-kind, is yet another Peace Corps philosophy that even our Engineering Professor for the EWB-MSU clean water initiative is advocating for as part of a

business plan for future wells. Peace Corps/Engineering Professor from MSU/I believe that when the community contributes, they take ownership of a project – which makes it sustainable – versus receiving a free ‘hand-out’ in which the community has made no personal sacrifice therefore doesn’t really care about the project or the resource they have received.

EWB-MSU is now *requiring* that future water wells drilled through its Team are contributed to in cash, and some villages have already raised a few hundred dollars toward their water wells. It is very impressive, not only that the community is capable of helping itself but that our Engineering Professor would be so bold as to require this contribution. Like me, he sees the potential in Africa, and realizes that the people are quite far from ‘helpless’; that with education, resources channeled into things that will increase the sustainability of life for their communities can make a big difference.



Furthermore, as an extreme example, the community’s 25% contribution in Simwatachela has been in-kind, toward our house. The community funded 100% of the thatched roof, made with professional sturdy poles from Eucalyptus trees, grass, plastic, then more grass. The community also provided labor to rebuild the roof, the walls, and the cement floor. In total, SSAAP has funded less than \$200 of the house in the last 13 ½ years—money used towards cement floor, cement walls, paint for its front door, and monthly insecticide to keep mosquitoes, termites, and other pests away. The rest of the house, for the last 13 1/2 years, the community has provided (see below: SSAAP’s Simwatachela Headquarters, modest and perfect).



Additionally, SSAAP has never once paid for lodging in Sierra Leone. With each and every visit, our lodging has been provided through Grace Children’s Foundation (GCF), the local partner organization SSAAP works with there. SSAAP has funded many of GCF’s initiatives; in turn, GCF has given SSAAP a place to stay. As well, in Sierra Leone, Food & Fuel (F&F) is provided as part of the 25% Community Contribution to the project to visit the sites we serve in. Motorbike fuel from town (Moyamba or Port Loko) plus food while we are in the communities is provided to both SSAAP and GCF volunteers.

These are the kind of contributions that are necessary not only for partnership between beneficiary community and SSAAP, but the sustainability element that keeps the project flowing: the respect of giving as well as taking. SSAAP is not a funding agency and should not be thought of by the African people as an endless well of funds, but rather as a service they must assist in nurturing and protecting – just as I do – if they want SSAAP to continue to serve their communities in decades to come.



Outcome: SSAAP would be honored to help in Ethiopia, through whatever challenges might arise. The starvation and poverty rates, as well as the mass population, far exceed both Zambia and Sierra Leone.

Challenges with the water aspect of SSAAP: As all land in Ethiopia is owned by the government (different than in Zambia where the chief/headmen own the land and one must simply ask verbal permission to drill a borehole on the land from the headmen/chief/owners of the land, and Sierra Leone whereby the land is owned by the chief/Paramount Chief of the region, and one must simply ask verbal permission to dig a well on the land in their chiefdom), this might prove an obstacle to secure government permission to drill/dig water wells, with a lot of red tape attached. I have talked with many Ethiopians and some Westerners about the difficulties the government gives those who try to help its underprivileged citizens. If this is the case, and helping with water might take some years, perhaps SSAAP can begin with some animal-rearing programs (cattle, camel, donkeys) in the meantime, as well as school sponsorship (just like in Sierra Leone, the government pays school fees so the SSAAP sponsorship program would pay for the uniform and exercise books/pencils for students. Zambia is the only country SSAAP works in that the school fees are *not* paid for by the government).

Other obstacles with SSAAP working in Ethiopia: SSAAP refuses to help in Ethiopia at the expense of taking resources intended for either Zambia or Sierra Leone. In other words, SSAAP will raise resources specific to the Ethiopia program – which might take a number of years – but we will be patient. And if expansion of SSAAP to Ethiopia never includes water projects (although much-needed) due to the red tape from the government, SSAAP is committed to being both open-minded and open-hearted about the ways it *can*, as a small program with limited resources, help the poverty within the country – even if it is in small ways.

Ethiopia is also a massive country, the size of the whole southwest region of the USA. So it will be wisest for SSAAP to concentrate on one quadrant or two at the most of Ethiopia, I am told, rather than biting off more than it can chew (although I know as Americans it is part of our culture and upbringing to do this! I am guilty of it myself!!!, but am trying to stay focused.) So I am going to see what materializes for Ethiopia and which contacts I have met are the most serious and begin working with those who show the most promise for development. I am also going to apply to Engineers Without Borders in Denver, CO to see if any Team would like to pick up any of these water projects in Ethiopia and adopt them as their own.

Some of the other issues Ethiopia faces: the nation has, for lack of a better term, *hidden poverty*, or poverty that the government doesn't want exposed to the rest of the world– whether due to pride, corruption, or ignorance. Here is a sad example: one evening, my daughter and I were in Addis Ababa, the capital city, arriving home on a late bus. On the walk to our friend's house, we passed beneath an underpass. The ground was coated with homeless people, sleeping in the drizzling rain, on pieces of cardboard 'mattresses'. Children, women, men all huddled together on cardboard boxes on the sides of the filthy street was enough to make me cry. One child about Radiance's age made eye contact with her. I told Radi to observe this scene, to let it imprint her mind, as poverty – to me – doesn't get much worse than that extent of suffering. It is difficult to imagine how people actually survive this way.

This year (2017), according to the BBC, the UN's World Food Program (WFP) reports already 7.8 million people are affected by drought and will be left without food assistance. These people are starving and are entirely dependent upon government hand-outs for relief food as they come from parts of Ethiopia where there is a shortage of rain. However, the BBC reports that Ethiopian officials declared

the number of people starving at 1.7 million, and said that they would receive new help from donors or the government. The Ethiopian government aids each family (averaging 5 members) with a 50-kg bag of flour and a bottle of cooking oil, totaling approximately \$30 USD, per month. The government has announced that their funds for this program are finished, and they will no longer be able to give people flour and cooking oil every month, as the \$381 million USD that the government budgeted for the last two years will not extend into this year. Thus, these 7.8 million people are going to possibly (a) starve to death; (b) become ill; (c) lose their children due to starvation; (d) commit crimes in order to survive. Famine has already been declared in South Sudan, northeast Nigeria, Yemen and Somalia.

John Aylieff of the World Food Program (WFP) remarks that Ethiopia is in a 'dire situation', and John Graham of Save the Children, a large Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) echoes his sentiments.

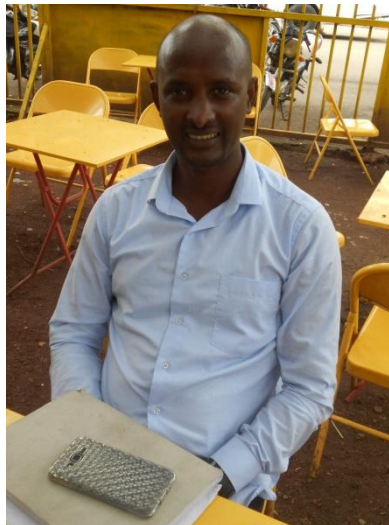


Podoconiosis affects more than one million people in Ethiopia. Patients experience severe social stigma, and depending upon the extremeness of the case, even after the swelling decreases will lose their toes – or – the toes will be permanently stuck together. Podoconiosis, different from Elephantiasis, is caused by long-term exposure to volcanic soil – the numbers of people exposed are excessively high due to walking barefoot, and a lack of shoes in the rural zones of Ethiopia. This man will most likely live with his toes on both feet stuck together for his life.

Benefits for SSAAP working in Ethiopia: As East Africa, specifically Ethiopia, is the 'pivot point' between Zambia and Sierra Leone for all inter-African flights, traveling to Ethiopia is free for SSAAP! This is a major perk: it is a country we can serve for free. As well, during our Assessment Trip to Ethiopia (1 April 2017 – 15 June 2017) we learned how to travel at the local level and how much things cost and had the benefit of making many contacts. Thanks to our dear friends who helped us move around their country and took us in as their own family members, we love you and cannot thank you enough. The cost of our Initial Assessment Trip, for my daughter and I for 2 ½ months in Ethiopia, cost less than \$400 USD. The money that was saved can be used to buy camels or sponsor students to school. Thank you specifically to Yilma for keeping us as your family in Addis Ababa and to Tilahun for doing

the same in Gondar, for letting us cook for ourselves and destroy your kitchens. We love you both and are so happy about the friendship between our children, which we hope will be lifelong.

Potential local partners for SSAAP in Ethiopia: SSAAP was lucky enough to stumble on a local organization known as RADO: Rehabilitation and Developmental Organization. RADO is Ethiopian-based, working in the two most destitute regions of the nation where there are a large number of refugees: Gambella Region in the west (large population of South Sudanese who are displaced due to the war), and Ethio-Somali Region in the east (large population of Somalians who are displaced due to the civil unrest in Somalia). SSAAP met with one RADO representative in Ethio-Somali Region (pictured below) and then with another RADO representative in Gambella. SSAAP prefers to work with local hosts such as CBOs (Community-Based Organization) in Sierra Leone [SSAAP works with Grace Children’s Foundation in Sierra Leone] and intends to do the same in Ethiopia. The CBO is registered under the government and SSAAP is then a donor hosted by the local CBO. RADO seems very enthusiastic to work with SSAAP, as SSAAP will fund some of its projects, create different activities for RADO under SSAAP’s mission and initiatives, and in-turn, RADO will help SSAAP gain access to the rural disadvantaged areas, which is exactly where SSAAP wants to be.



RADO representative from Ethio-Somali Region: Abenet Wondimu.



And so my final – and general – assessment on Ethiopia is this: the population is too high (>101 million) for the rainfall/precipitation needed in order to adequately feed the people. Unlike in India, where the nation is also heavily overpopulated, most Indians – no matter how remote or poverty-stricken – have enough food, because [unlike Ethiopia] India has rainwater harvesting systems to grow their rice, cultivate their crops, and have year-round food. Due to misuse of government funds, excessive corruption, and a regime that most people don't know whether or not is for or against them, no rainwater harvesting systems are in-place in Ethiopia.

Additionally, the 84+ ethnic groups living in the Ethiopian Empire are not united, and for this reason it is easier for their nation to crumble. *United we stand, divided we fall.* This is the case with any nation of the world, but in countries of the world on the brink of immediate disaster (Ethiopia is the 7th poorest country in the world, according to recent UNDP statistics), it is imperative not to resort to tribalism, which is unfortunately the issue that breaks Africa apart the most rapidly and drastically.

Ethiopians are very intelligent, very strong, hard-working, loving and kind people. I have faith that given a little, together with SSAAP we can do a lot ☺

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Future Ethiopia Project: Camel Rearing

The Camel Market in *Jalaba*, just outside of Babile, Harar District, Ethiopia was perhaps the most incredible thing I have ever seen in Africa. It inspired me to attempt to start a camel-rearing project in the Ethio-Somali Region of Ethiopia (East Ethiopia, near the Somali border).

The market is nestled in the hills outside Harar, and as if the backdrop weren't sensational enough, the sight of hundreds of camels all gathered together is something unusual and endearing – if you like camels (I do☺). The people were the kindest I met in Ethiopia: the Somalians, or the Ethio-Somalians (Ethiopians of Somali descent) – not to mention some of the most beautiful. The Somalians are typically a very marginalized group within Ethiopia; additionally, they tend to have darker skin than many of the other ethnic groups in Ethiopia, which adds to the segregation and marginalization of these very capable people.



The small rural village area of Babile hosts a camel market in Jalaba every week on Mondays and Thursdays.



The rearing, selling, and reproduction of camels provides locals of this region with animals in which to plow their fields, camel milk (which they drink daily), and camel meat (which they eat frequently).

Below, this Harari man cuts camel meat into pieces for both human and hyena consumption.



Costs for camels (in Ethiopian Birr and approximate equivalent USD):

- Large male: 24,000 Ethiopian Birr ~ \$889
- Large female: 20,000 Birr ~ \$741
- Smaller female: 8,000 Birr ~ \$296
- Baby: 3,000-4,000 Birr ~ \$111- \$148

A camel project in the future, purchasing one or two smaller females and one or two babies, may be feasible as a SSAAP endeavor in the Babile Village surrounding areas. Traditionally, SSAAP always starts its projects modestly, with small money, and lets the projects grow with the enthusiasm of the local people who have adopted them.



The Babile area of Ethiopia, some few hundred kilometers from the Somalian border and within ten kilometers of the Ethio-Somali region of Ethiopia, hosts a camel market every week (Monday and Thursday). If a trader does not sell his camel, then he waits for the next market day to come and tries then to sell his camel.



The makeshift structures the people sleep in, eat from, and live in while they wait in Jalaba for the next camel market day are pictured above.



"I loved the desert, burnt up orchids, musty shops, tepid drinks. I hung around the stinking alleys and, with eyes closed, I offered myself to the sun, god of fire."

~ Arthur Rimbaud, from: A Season in Hell: Aden to Abyssinia

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Future Project: Donkey Rearing



Animal projects are the best way to kill multiple birds with one stone ☺ Rearing animals helps with food production directly (through meat, eggs, yogurt, cheese, curd, milk; i.e. animal products humans can consume), as well as indirectly (through income-generation, as well through plowing fields). The animal-

rearing projects in the rural areas SSAAP serves is the primary way it helps to combat our primal enemy of starvation. Thus, SSAAP's animal projects are currently as follows:

Zambia:

Cattle-rearing (Simwatachela Chiefdom: Sibooli-B Village)

Chicken-rearing (Simwatachela Chiefdom: Sikalele Women's Club)

Goat-rearing (Simwatachela Chiefdom: SSAAP's Zambian Microloan Program)

Sierra Leone:

Poultry-rearing (Makoba Village, BKM Chiefdom, Port Loko)

Duck-rearing (Banthron Village, BKM Chiefdom, Port Loko)

Sheep-rearing/goat-rearing (Maisambo Village, BKM Chiefdom, Port Loko)

Fish-rearing (Future project, Port Loko District)

Pig-rearing (Future Project, Bombali District)

Ethiopia:

Donkey-rearing (Future project, Gambella/DembiDolo Region)

Camel-rearing (Future project, Ethio-Somali Region, Babile Village)

Chicken-rearing (Future project, SNNP Region, Adaammaa Village; DembiDolo Region, Simeero Village)

Bee-rearing/honey project (Future project, Gambella/DembiDolo Region, Shuffee Village)

Goat/sheep-rearing (Future project, Gambella/DembiDolo Region, Shuffee Village)

Ethiopian Animal-Rearing Projects (in Ethiopian Birr/USD conversion)

Sheep-rearing costs:

- Female sheep: 800 Birr ~ \$30 USD
- Male sheep: 1,000 Birr ~ \$37 USD
- Baby sheep: 300-400 Birr ~ \$11-\$15 USD

Goat-rearing costs:

- Female goat: 600 Birr ~ \$22 USD
- Male goat: 800 Birr ~ \$30 USD
- Baby goat: 300-400 Birr ~ \$11-\$15 USD

Chicken-rearing costs:

- Female chicken: 120 Birr ~ \$4 USD
- Male chicken: 200 Birr ~ \$7 USD

Donkey-rearing costs:

- Female donkey: 1,200 Birr ~ \$44 USD
- Male donkey: 1,500 Birr ~ \$56 USD
- Baby donkey: 750 Birr ~ \$28 USD

Horse-rearing costs:

- Female horse: 1,000 Birr ~ \$37 USD
- Male horse: 1,200 Birr ~ \$44 USD
- Baby horse: 500 Birr ~ \$19 USD

Cow-rearing costs:

- Female cow: 3,000 Birr ~ \$111 USD
- Male cow: *4,500-7,000 Birr ~ \$167-\$259 USD
- Baby donkey: 2,000 Birr ~ \$74 USD

***Please note that in farming season, the cost for the cow is higher because the farmers don't want to sell their animals (which they use for plowing fields). The cattle are cheaper when it is low-farming season and the people don't depend on these animals as much.**

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SSAAP Facebook Page

One of SSAAP's loyal supporters, as well as one of Heather's best friends from her Peace Corps days, is managing SSAAP's new Facebook page. The Facebook page is now up and running. Our Facebook wizard updates the Facebook page once or twice every week. Please, look at it, and we welcome your

feedback. And Carolyn, thank you so much! I am so thankful to you for doing this for SSAAP. We love you!

<https://www.facebook.com/ssaap.africa/>

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SSAAP Website

SSAAP's Secretary and one member of SSAAP's legal team are working together to update SSAAP's website. I apologize that there is either too much information, disorganized content, photos from when Radiance was 7 months old (she is now 7 ½! years old), and in general a lack of upkeep.

It is not an easy undertaking, and with all of the projects and the 2-3 African countries SSAAP serves, the website is a large job and I am very, very thankful to SSAAP's Secretary for volunteering to revise it. Please look forward to the changes and the updated website in the months to come.



I love you, Mom!

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SSAAP Accountability and Transparency

Thanks to SSAAP's Website Director, IRS reports for 2016 are now available on website – as are all reports to the IRS since SSAAP's commencement as a 501(c)3 organization in 2010. Please feel free to look at our reports online, www.ssaap.org, click the 'Transparency and Accountability' tab.

And, as always, thanks, Webmaster. I don't know what we'd do without you, Bestie.



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Ethiopia: The Camelot of Africa

I promised all the people of Ethiopia I met who insisted I should 'write home', so to speak, about the immense beauty of Ethiopia, rather than concentrate on its problems, as so much in the media over the past few decades has been negative about Ethiopia and has not reflected how much this country has to offer.



As it is difficult to take photos of all the beauty in Africa, I have decided to do my best but to remember everything intuitively with the heart.





Tree Tomb: The grave of Aw Ansar in Jugol, Harar, in which a *sobara* tree grew some 200+ years ago. The tomb is locked, except for twice in a day (6 a.m. and 4 p.m.) when a man (distant relative of Aw Ansar) comes to say a prayer, burn incense, and bless the spirit of the late Aw Ansar. Part of the tree was cut around where the man was buried approximately 400 years ago, making a little tree-house tomb.

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Hyena Celebration: I had some serious reservations about this, to say the least. ‘Hyena Celebration’, as the Harari people call it, is a tradition in their culture. The hyenas that live around the ancient walled city of Jugol are domesticated, and when the sun goes down they come around for raw camel meat. I was told, then reassured, and then hollered at for not trusting the local people that it would be safe not only for me to feed the hyenas (left), but then to allow my 7 ½ year old daughter to feed them as well (right). Ironically, both she and I left with the impression that the hyenas were really sweet: spotted wild dogs from the African bush. We were surprised that they were far more afraid of us than we were of them!

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Camel Milk: Buying camel milk from Harari women on the outskirts of Babile Village. Camel milk is thought to be a medicine, potent with antioxidants. The local people warned me that my first time drinking it, it would flush out the system and even dehydrate as it is so full of salt. Instead, it caused me to urinate excessively and the following day I felt healthier than I have for years. It was a cleansing. Sold!

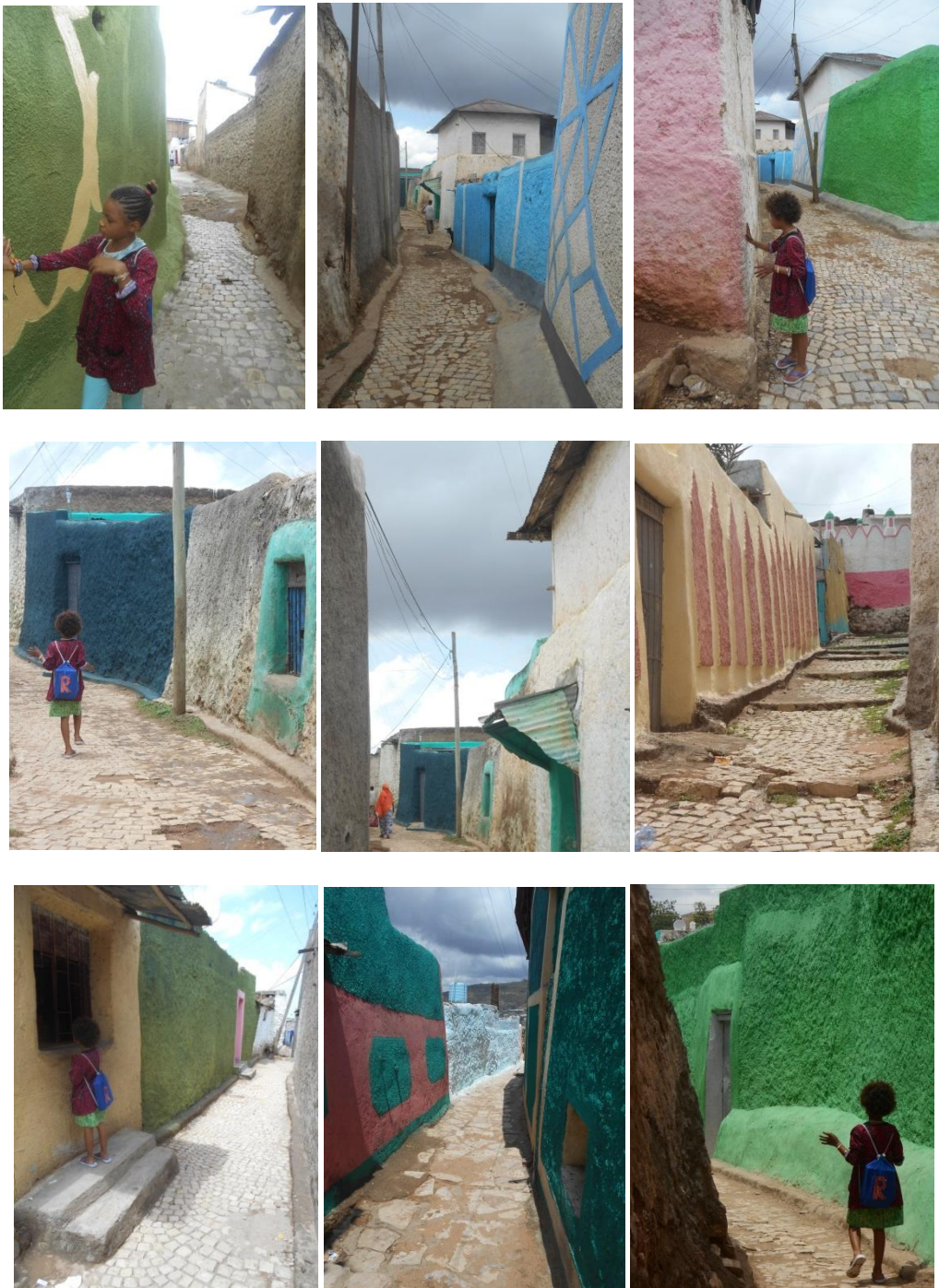


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Wildlife: Gelada baboons are found along the roadside, specifically around Awash National Park.



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Jugol: The ancient walled city called *Jugol* in Harar, Ethiopia. Jugol has five main gates in which to enter and inside the walled city are buildings painted in every color imaginable. Jugol is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Radiance and I spent five days there and I couldn't get enough of it; she had to finally yank me out when my camera broke from the 1200+ photos I took 😊

But certainly I am not the only person enchanted by this antediluvian labyrinth of spices, colors, and textures; Britain's Sir Richard Burton was the first foreigner to enter Jugol in 1855 and was captivated by it, followed by the French tradesman and merchant Arthur Rimbaud who moved there in 1880. The only place Rimbaud spent longer than three months of his life, he called Harar home and was inspired by its mystical embrace.



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Castles of Gondar: For some time (three centuries: between late 1200s and the early 1600s), Ethiopia had no fixed capital. Emperor Fasiledes founded Gondar in 1636 as the first capital of Ethiopia: City of Castles.



Eleven castles stand today.

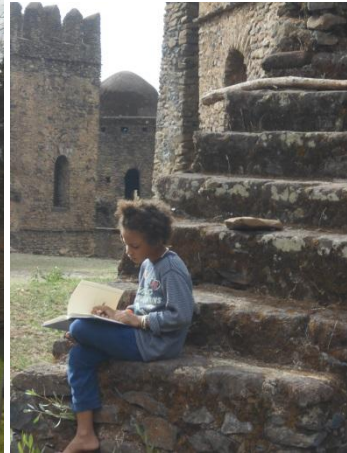


And, like everything else in Ethiopia, the castles of Gondar seem to clasp a magical, mystical, and mysterious embrace.



The castles were built from the 1630s to 1760s, and after 1760 fell into disuse and deteriorated.





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Harari Night Market: This is the only part of the Africa – or the world, rather – that I have ever seen that has a market at night, rather than during the day. In Harar, on Thursdays and Saturday nights (6 p.m. to 1:00 a.m., approximately) people come to sell their local produce, crafts, cloths, and animal products by candlelight or flashlight. Most of the market traffic runs along the outskirts of the two main Jugol gates. The market at night is a whole different atmosphere than during the day with the hot sun pelting its rays overhead.

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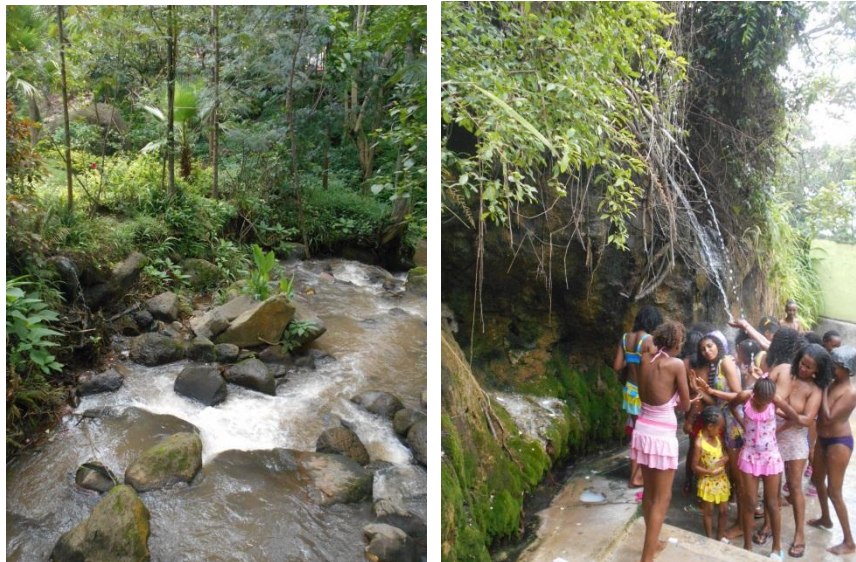
Feeding hawks: In the center of Jugol, there is a local butcher's shop which sells cow meat for 15 Birr (approx. 56 cents) which people use to feed the hawks that come around the butcher's shop. The hawks fly down from the sky and eat the meat right out of your hand.



It is both an incredible and an intangible feeling having one of these massive birds swoop down from the sky and peck a piece of meat from the palm of the hand.

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Wondo Genet: In Amheric, ‘genet’ means: “Heavenly Place.” Home of the Mineral Hot Springs just outside of Sashamene, the hot springs are surrounded by lush greenery, waterfalls, and indigenous trees which provide a spectacular place to take a heavenly bath.



Entry into the Mineral Hot Springs costs 25 Ethiopian Birr, just under \$1 USD, and children are free.

Located in the Central Rift Valley, the landscape surrounding Wondo Genet is breathtaking.



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Tis Abay: The Blue Nile Falls, which is birthed by the Blue Nile River. Blue Nile is longer, and larger, than the Nile that runs through Egypt. It is magnetic, and everything we saw surrounding the waterfall was like a hyperbolic example of itself. The water didn't just flow – it tumbled, the birds were outrageously beautiful (over 847 species of birds are indigenous to Ethiopia!), the wildflowers growing on the banks of the water were extraordinary...the list goes on and on.



We camped just above the Falls for only a few USD per night. Our tent was just above the waterfall (blue tent).



This is right next to where our tent was pitched. I could have lived there for the rest of my life, it was the rawest, most incredible Nature I have ever been exposed to. Radi (left), washes our clothes then does her homeschool on the rocks.



We intended to stay one night and ended up staying four nights; it was painful to leave. We went fishing in the morning, although we were told by the Ethiopians that Radi's way of fishing (i.e. with her bare hands, as all the kids do in Zambia) wouldn't work in the Blue Nile River!



We fetched our drinking water from a natural spring that was cut out of a hole in the rock in the rainforest just around the Falls. It was incredible.



We went swimming every morning. It was really cold, but then we felt purified for the rest of the day. A Holy bath, honestly.

We ate our meals on the banks of the Blue Nile. Really, this was the most fun I have had since I can remember.



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Rock-hewn churches of Lalibela: These structures are truly a work of art, hand-carved from stone over five hundred years ago.



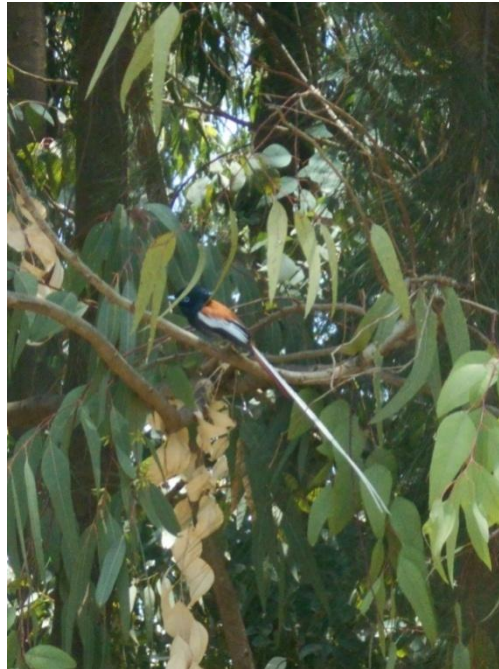
Also a UNESCO World Heritage Site, we chose to boycott the \$50 USD entry fee – insisting that the Eiffel Tower, the Grand Canyon, and even Victoria Falls – more famous tourist sites by far – don't even charge half this amount. We settled for enjoying the outside of the buildings, then asking a local Ethiopian friend to take our camera and snap photos inside (Ethiopians enter for free; tourists pay \$50. Even Ethiopian-born citizens who have lived a fraction of their lives abroad are forced to pay \$50. It is very corrupt, I believe, and for this reason Lalibela was probably our least-favorite site as the dark energy of mixing history and art with greed by taking advantage of the perceived wealth of tourists permeated the place). The entry fee a few years ago was approximately \$6 (150 Ethiopian Birr) but a new organization now controls the churches at Lalibela and decided to change the entry fee requirements.



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Birds: The most incredible birds live in Ethiopia, over 847 species. These photos were taken at Blue Nile Falls and in Gondar.





These Marabou Storks were found along the banks of Lake Hawassa: one of the five Rift Valley Lakes. There are 72 different bird species living around the Hawassa/Central Rift Valley area alone.

*



Rift Valley: The Rift Valley is separated into Central Rift Valley and Southern Rift Valley, all situated into the southern section of Ethiopia (Oromia Region and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State).



Untamed, raw and wild, the Rift Valley does not disappoint.



I was blown away not only by the vast expanse of the land, but also the magnitude of its beauty.



Twilight cattle-grazing.

*



Banana Art Gallery & Museum: The only Banana Museum in the world is located in Sashamene, Ethiopia.



Sashamene is home to Rastafarians from all over the world: Trinidad, Tobago, the Caribbean Islands, West Africa, and Ethiopia. Ras Hailu Teferi (above) has been making art from banana peels since he was twelve years old.

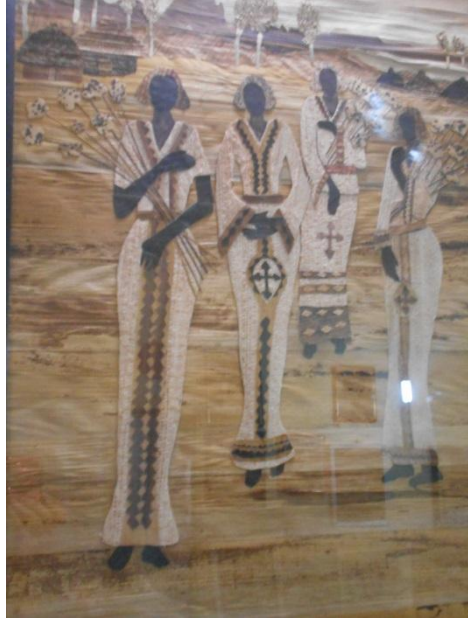


Each of his pieces is original, made from leaves of the banana tree.
The colors and textures vary with the age of the leaf.



Banana leaves, dried (above left and right). Ras Hailu Teferi's home, studio, workplace and museum are all under one roof (below).





His work received international acknowledgment when he took it to London; since, he has traveled through much of Africa, Europe and the Caribbean Islands exhibiting his work. While we were visiting his museum, he shared with me that he was obsessed with this art; that he dreamed of it at night, that in his sleep he continued working. He told me that when one's work combines with his/her spirit, then something divine occurs.



Deeply touched by the care Radiance took in copying much of his art into her sketchbook, he offered to teach her in a few years (when she is 12 or older): to take her to the fields where the banana plants are growing, to show her how to use the color gradients and textures to make art. He confided in me that none of his (4) children showed any interest in making art themselves, and that in his old age he fears he will die without anyone knowing how to make the art from the plant leaves. I explained to him that when Radi is older I intend to take her for travel to apprentice under various artists to learn more about which artistic materials and mediums speak to her, and to learn from the artistic wizards of the world – her father included. To an artist, creation of art is like oxygen; no different. SSAAP works with all forms of human survival: water and food (survival of the body), education and art (survival of the Soul).

*

So please, come visit! Visit these beautiful, historical and culturally-rich sites, and/or come work with SSAAP. Choose a project, work with the camel-rearing or donkey-rearing we intend to start, name your donkey or camel!, just come. You won't regret it 😊



Best fresh fish in the world: Lake Hawassa, Ethiopia. The fish is served in the restaurant right on the lake and costs less than \$3 for a huge white-meat fish, served with lime and spices.



*

“The company has opened a branch in the Harar, a region you can find on the map south-east of Abyssinia. Coffee, skins, arms are exported from there, in exchange for cotton fabrics and sundry goods. The climate is healthy and cool thanks to the altitude.

There are neither roads nor any other means of communication. One goes from Aden to the Harar first by sea, from Aden to Zeilah, a port on the African coast. From there on to the Harar on camelback for twenty days... Needless to say one can only go there armed, running the risk of losing one's life at the hands of the Gallas.”

~ Arthur Rimbaud, in a letter to relatives, 2 November 1880



Arthur Rimbaud's House: More stunning and interesting even than the National Museum in Hararis Arthur Rimbaud's house, the French poet. Rimbaud actually came to Africa and the Middle East in his early twenties for the purpose of trading (camels, silks, arms) as well as to escape life in Europe. A poet and visionary filled with wanderlust, his lover Verlaine once said that although Rimbaud committed many crimes and illegalities during his lifetime, they were all whisked away and forgotten by the beauty of Rimbaud's words.

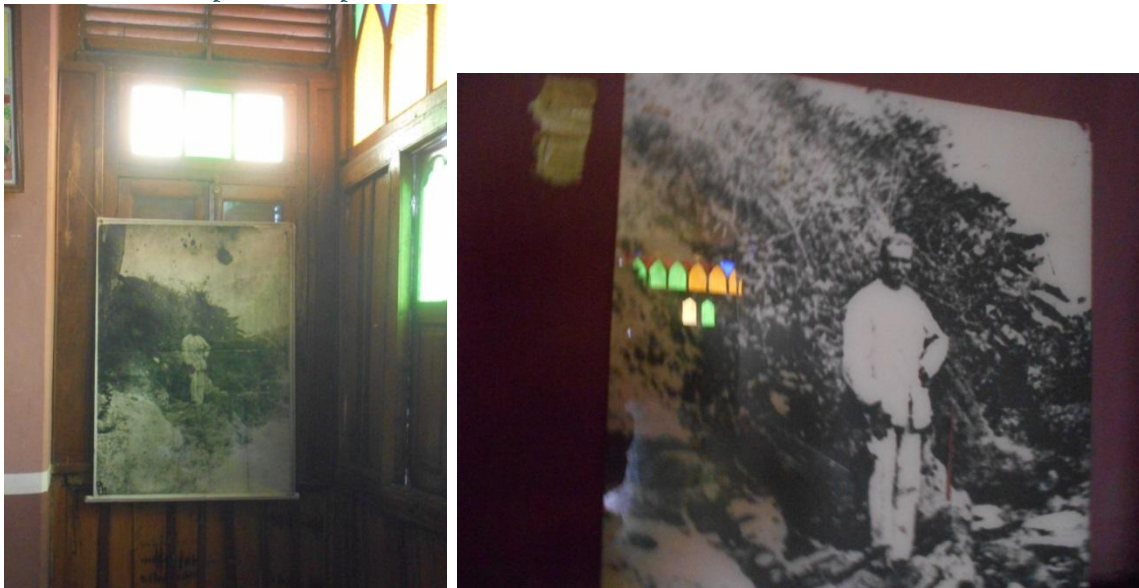


Rimbaud moved every few months of his life. He regarded living in the same place as a dead end, and constantly moved between Abyssinia (former Ethiopian Empire) to Aden (present-day Yemen), across the Red Sea and settled in Harar, entranced by the mysticism of the walled city of Jugol. His house in Harar is the only place he lived for longer than three months; he lived in Harar eleven years, adopting many of the ways of Sufism and claiming that Africa was the only place in the world, he said, he was set free.



My daughter and I concurred that he never really left his house in Harar, even after his death at age 37, and his spirit is strongest in his old bedroom (above left and center). The whole house carries a strong energy of him, and his chaotic consciousness. The curator of the museum and I discussed how even being inside his house seems to disturb the balance of the mind (previous page right).

A prophet and a madman, Rimbaud led a tortured, very misunderstood life – evident through his writing, which borderlines on insanity – his sufferings deepening when his lover Verlaine injures him badly in the wrist (1872), then shoots him (1873) after leaving his wife and child in France to be with Rimbaud. In Harar, Rimbaud was accused of being a spy when he embezzled arms across the Red Sea from Aden into Ethiopia for Emperor Menelik II.



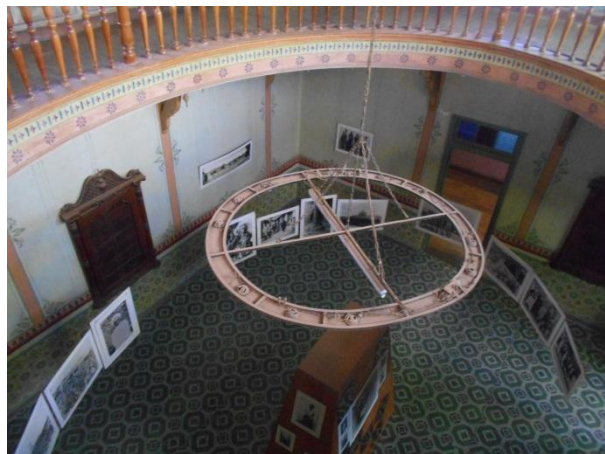
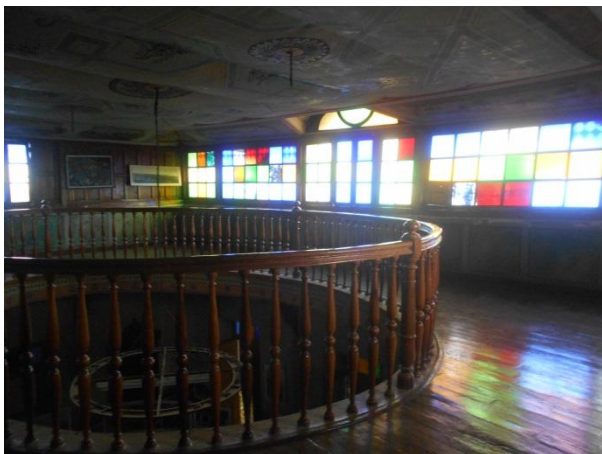
One of the eight photos he took in his life (above). This is a self-portrait; toward the end of his life, his skin had become dark, and he was almost unrecognizable to those who knew him in his youth. In this self-portrait, taken by him for his mother, he is patting his right thigh where he had already begun to experience moderate pain. He is touching his thigh in the photo so his mother, in France, will know there is something wrong with his leg when she sees the photo, as he has no communication with his family any longer (Rimbaud was the second-born child in a family of four, his father in the army and

away from home most of the time). He is attempting to communicate to his mother that his leg is causing him pain.

Eight years later, in February 1891 he experiences unbearable pain in his right leg; by mid-March he could no longer stand. He was taken to Zeilah (a port on the African coast), then Aden (now modern-day Yemen), on stretcher, and in May 1891 his right leg was amputated in Marseille, France due to gangrene.

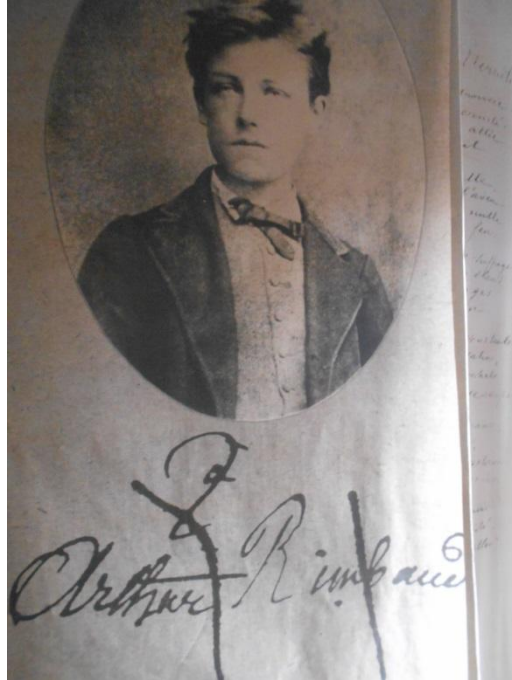


He died on 10 November in Marseille, France – age 37 years. On his death bed, he asked to be taken back to Abyssinia (former name for Ethiopian Empire), to the Red Sea and Aden. He wanted to be back in his home in Harar, he said.



“My day is done. I am leaving Europe. The sea air will burn my lungs. Lost climates will tan me. I will swim, trample the grass, hunt, and smoke especially. I will drink alcohol as strong as boiling metal – just as my dear ancestors did around their fires.”

~ Arthur Rimbaud, from: A Season in Hell / Bad Blood



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Ethiopian Hospitality

When the Nokia phone I have used all over the developing world since 2008 and which I bought in Sierra Leone for \$30 USD, super-glued together but still worked fabulously, was pick-pocketed from me in a little town between Dembi Dolo and Addis Ababa, along with our pocket money to reach our home base in Addis Ababa, I was sad and disappointed. One of the men working on the bus asked me, just a half hour outside the big capital city, what we would do without money or a phone to call our friends we stay with in Addis. I sighed and said simply to him: “Divine Intervention. The Universe got me into this; the Universe will get me out of it.” Quickly, the man working on the bus shuffled around through the aisles, the Amheric language barrier thick to my ears. Ten minutes later he handed me a stack of bills: dirty, wilted Ethiopian Birr, and said proudly: “Two hundred ninety-two Birr. So you can get home safely, okay? The people on the bus donated this to you and your baby.” I stood up, and in tears, thanked the people on the bus. It was one of the most endearing moments of my life. One old man, seated near us, spoke impeccable English, and asked me if we needed help from the bus station to get back to our home base in Addis. I accepted his offer, until the rain impaired our movement and so he invited us to his home. “I invite you... to be our first foreign guest.” He said it with such sweetness. I was touched. And not having many options left at this point, Radiance and I accepted his offer.

Less than two hours later, as I sat on a soft couch in his living room wearing a bathrobe, after the first hot bath we’d had maybe for seven months, enshrouded in the comfort of the home of a complete stranger who now felt like family, a plate of steaming French fries and vegetable rice in front of us, I realized I had been wrong.

I was wrong, and as is the case with all things in life, I misled myself; I believed my own lie. All this time, the last 2.5 months we had been in Ethiopia, I had been racking my brain on whether or not SSAAP was “qualified” to work in Ethiopia. In other words, whether or not our project was ‘good enough’ to be able to do this work, and do it successfully without depleting Zambia and Sierra Leone in the process.

You don’t need a Ph.D. or a certain skill set to help in Africa; you don’t need a bundle of money or prestigious contacts: you need a heart that forgives, a heart that perseveres. Africa isn’t serviced by *things* so much as with the magnitude that it can be served through recognition, acknowledgment, honor. Somehow, it took the loss of my phone to make me realize this. Can we learn anything in life without loss? Without heartbreak? I don’t think so; sometimes romantic heartbreak is the *least* of our pain. In the shedding of each snakeskin, every onion peel, deeper to the core we become; pain is a healthy side-effect of all birth – fortunately and unfortunately.

And so, in my new bathrobe, seated in the house of a man who actually worked for the World Bank, my daughter having her hair braided by his daughters, I made up my mind. SSAAP can work in Ethiopia the way it worked in Zambia when we first began in 2008 – one thing led to another, to another, to another... and after years of patience, we had our first well. Then we had three more wells, thank you Denver Rotary’s World Service Committee. Then the three wells grew exponentially, thank you Engineers Without Borders-Mississippi State University, specifically Dr. Dennis Truax, Laura and Duane Wilson. This type of progress certainly doesn’t happen overnight, especially not in Africa where everything is slow but sure. I believe in the philosophy my mother taught me: the right people will come to you with the right resources if your heart and intention is pure. Let SSAAP not depend upon government grants or Bill Gates’s Foundation; let us instead channel our energy into the hearts of those connected to us, to their commitment to this project.

The location of SSAAP’s projects is not random; it is very purposeful. We chose Zambia because it is my Peace Corps country, my home base in Africa, and because the people of Simwatachela *invited* me back after my Peace Corps service and even paid for my air ticket to return in hopes I would help them with their lack of water. Sierra Leone was given to SSAAP because of my daughter and my commitment to her people, and Ethiopia in East Africa is en-route between Southern and Western Africa.

I thank you for this opportunity not only to share my sentiments, but to try to do something in an effort, an attempt to help even a small group of people who don’t have clean water, or enough food, or an education that teaches them that they have basic rights to these things. As well, there is so much we can learn from Africa when our hearts are open to growth. I can speak for myself when I claim that there is nowhere in the world like African hospitality.

People will bend over backwards to ensure that you know they appreciate you have come to their country.



Our newfound friend who works for the World Bank (purple shirt) with his beautiful family: beside him his wife, two children, grandchild (pink hair bow), neighbor (left). I have heard people say that Africa is all just one big family. I guarantee this is true.

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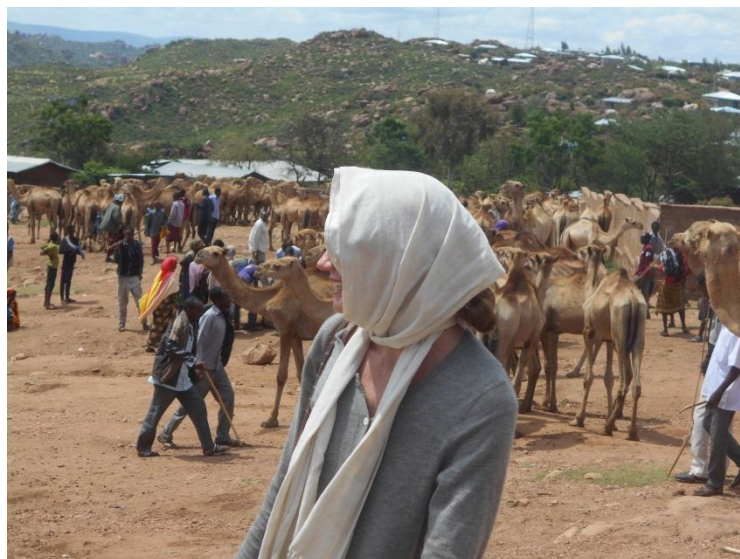
Closing Remarks



Mother of the Bride wearing traditional Ethiopian clothing, woven within the country.



I have discovered that everyone has a different idea of what happiness is; there is a universal and even a cultural idea of what *ought* to make us happy, but it isn't a recipe nor does it satisfy the deepest heart within most of us. Happiness is an individual craving; no one else can – or should – decide for us what it looks like. So, without judgment, happiness looks different to each and every one of us.



I also believe intelligence is individual; no two people on the planet have the same kind of intelligence, but *each* person on the planet has his own unique form of brilliance, given to her/him for an extremely specific purpose.

There is a metaphorical cable in our brains; a certain channel that connects the genius in each of our minds – our giftedness – back to the divine cosmos. And once that channel is discovered, there is no turning back.

Our sole responsibility is to discover within ourselves the channel connecting us back to the cosmic source, how to tap it and how to best use it. There is genius in all of us, where the 3% of our brains that we traditionally use becomes 300%, and we find peace and contentment with all things, most importantly the deepest truth within ourselves: cosmic truth, not relative truth.



SSAAP is a 501(c)3 organization created by local people and committed to serving the needs of the people.

We try to help wherever we can, and while we cannot promise to help with all the problems facing Zambia, Sierra Leone and potentially Ethiopia, we *can* promise to try our best...



Hail/snow storm outside of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; June 10, 2017.



... always, in all-ways, and to be open to the randomness of life where brilliance strikes and creation occurs.

*

Thank you for supporting our endeavor in respect for world culture, appreciation of art, commitment to water, food, and education for those who have not these lifeblood resources, and for valuing a project you may never see with your own eyes but believe in and trust nonetheless.

There is no greater loyalty.





*“It has been found again: what?
Eternity. It is the sea fled away with the sun.”*

~ Arthur Rimbaud, “Eternity”



All verbiage by Heather C. Cumming.



All photos taken by Radiance and Heather Cumming.



Thank you for your time, for reading and reflecting...