

THE ETHIOPIAN BEE

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Ethiopian Children's Book Week!

The start of April is an important time of year for young readers the world over. The great storyteller Hans Christian Andersen was born on April 02, 1805, and now that day is globally recognized as International Children's Book Day, a day dedicated to the celebration of children's literature. Beginning from this April 2004 and on, the young readers of Ethiopia will be celebrating as well.

During the first week of April, EBCEF hosted the first ever of what will be an annual event, the Ethiopian Children's Book Week celebration, with various activities being held throughout the week designed to promote literacy and also create an excitement for reading and the opportunities that go hand in hand.



Tent libraries were set up in Meskel Square, in the center of Ethiopia's capital city, Addis Ababa. This allowed young readers from all over the city to come and see what the library has to offer. Inside of the tent libraries there were areas designated for the children to read and do arts and crafts with resources provided by the organization. The area was open starting on April 01 until April 07, and saw many visitors during this time. Whether it was young people coming to read on buses from school or on their own, families to demonstrate the importance of reading to the young ones, or adults coming to show their support for the activities and learn more about the Library, the staff was pleased with the turnout throughout the week.



All told the first Ethiopian Children's Book Week was a great success, and the organization's only regret is that as a small organization under a tight budget we were only able to do so much. We are extremely proud, however, to have taken the first steps in getting the wheels in motion in anticipation that, with the help of other concerned individuals who understand the importance of establishing a reading culture, the project will gain momentum every year until it has become a citywide and even countrywide event. Although the ultimate challenge is to make the day to celebrate books and reading everyday, it is always nice to have a little special reminder, and from this April on for the children of Ethiopia this

reminder will be known as the Ethiopian Children's Book Week.

Children's Book Walk: March to Parliament

Around eight o'clock on the morning of April 04 the area inside of the compound surrounding the Shola Children's Library was covered with children. The children were anxiously waiting for the bus to come and pick them up to take them to Meskel Square, the starting point for the Children's Book Walk. An estimated 400 kids showed up that morning to show their support and enthusiasm for the book week. The ending point of the book walk was to be the Parliament building, where a petition signed by 1,040 Ethiopian children was to be handed over to the government, in hopes of having the first week of April recognized by the Ethiopian government as the official Ethiopian Children's Book Week.



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Armed with Ethiopian flags, banners, and wooden signs covered in pro-literacy slogans, the children began flooding across the streets of Addis Ababa on their way to Parliament. Once at the building, the children stood at the gates, chanting and waving their signs in the air while representatives of EBCEF went in to lobby for the recognition of the children's book week. Inside the office of the Executive Secretary of the House of Representatives, representatives of EBCEF explained about the organization and the goals behind holding an annual book week for the children of Ethiopia, talking over the drone of their chants from outside. Two children from the crowd were invited in to hand over the petition, signed by their peers, in support of the establishment of the book week.

From now on--in Ethiopia as in other places around the world--this time of the year will become increasingly synonymous with children's literature and the importance of reading.

EBCEF 1st Anniversary Celebration

On April 03, 2004 friends and supporters of EBCEF gathered at the library compound to celebrate the libraries first birthday. The compound, which is the site of a free access children's library as well as other activities for the neighborhood kids, was opened in April of 2003, and has seen just shy of 40,000 pairs of feet enter through the gate to use the facility in its inaugural year of operation.

The visitors had the opportunity to tour the compound, and receive an introduction to the activities and resources provided by the Center. Many of the guests who were visiting the Center for the first time commented on the size of the compound. The ECBC is one of three libraries of its kind in Addis Ababa, the other two, however, are considerably smaller. Many people also commented that they were unaware that so many projects went on at the Center, and they were impressed by the wide range of books that were available for the kids as well as the



range of activities that were held at the compound for the kids to get involved in.



The compound contains two tent libraries (one is pictured below left, decorated for the day's festivities), and 3 indoor reading rooms. The library houses approximately 15,000 books covering a broad range of topics, and can accommodate up to 126 children at a time. Shola Children's Library, the new name for the library, was announced during a speech delivered by Ato Yohannes Gebregeorgis, the organization's founder, on the past, present, and future of EBCEF. A brand new sign bearing the library's new name was also constructed and unveiled out on the main road in celebration of the day.

There were also many other activities that took place throughout the day. For the past few weeks children and staff alike have been staying after hours at



the Center to practice for the day's events. One group of children performed traditional Ethiopian songs with the words changed to be about books and reading. Two children who use the Center often also read stories to the guests. Beyza, pictured above right, read a children's story in Amharic, and Adeesu (shown on the title page) read a story in English. Another group put on a theater performance of the traditional Ethiopian tale "Silly Mamma," which has been retold by Ato Yohannes and printed in English and Amharic, the proceeds of which go towards the running of the Center. Children also painted canvas fences that were erected in the compound for the celebration with various themes centered around books and reading, (shown at the right). Mrs. Carla Kehler, a strong supporter and friend of EBCEF, also delivered a speech praising the organization for the accomplishments during the past year in the face of numerous hardships.

The 1st Anniversary Celebration of the Library was a great success, and EBCEF would like to extend its thanks to everyone who came to show their support for the organization. We would also like to thank everyone who has worked so hard over the past year to make the amazing accomplishments we have witnessed possible, and we hope that as we get prepared to celebrate our second birthday this time next April we have as much to celebrate as this year.

EBCEF Under the Lens

During the third week in February, EBCEF excitedly opened its doors to welcome Chris Stover-Brown, a volunteer from Wichita, KS, to the crew. Chris first learned about EBCEF during 2002 when the organization's founder, Ato Yohannes Gebregeorgis, was visiting a Wichita-based non-profit organization called Trees for Life, at which Chris had worked as a volunteer. He later heard more about EBCEF when co-founder Jane Kurtz gave a presentation at Trees for Life several months later. Chris also got to know current volunteers Rebekah and Erin when they were in Wichita doing work at Trees for Life for a background in teaching and promoting computer literacy programs. When he decided he wanted to do some volunteer work in Africa, he got in touch with Jane and arranged the logistics to make the flight over to Addis Ababa.

Chris is a professional freelance videographer based in central Kansas who has come over to make a video documentary about ECBC and the kids in the surrounding neighborhoods who most frequent the Center. The purpose of the video is not only to help EBCEF visually tell the story of the organization, but also to create understanding and appreciation for the current situation in the country through a glimpse into the everyday life of the kids from the low-income part of town where the library is located.

For the past couple of weeks Chris has been busy shooting video at the Library, the neighborhood school from which most of the ECBC visitors come, and the surrounding community. Chris has been met with a warm welcome from the members of the community, and has really appreciated the communal nature that is so strong throughout the culture. Whether he is having coffee in the home of a family that sends their children to the library, sharing lunch with the family that owns the small shop beside the library or returning the favor by helping to peel the day's shipment of onions, he said he can't help but to think about how much every culture could learn from one another.

Chris was also pleasantly surprised to learn that the library was used for things other than reading. Having chosen an artistic profession as his field of work, he was excited to get the chance to meet a boy who uses the books at the Center to develop his passion for drawing, both with the pictures in the books and also specific art instruction books found at the Library. "Reading is infinitely important, but it is great to see that the Center is also being used to promote the children's overall development with art and drama classes that would otherwise not be available to them."

The video, which is expected to be finished sometime in June, will be available. For more information on how to acquire a copy please email us at ebcef@telecom.net.et.

A Cultural Celebration

During these times when globalization and enchantment with Western culture are making their way to every corner of the world, the dilemma of how to keep the individual cultures of the world alive and unforgotten is more pressing than ever. According to the article "Lost Tribes, Lost Knowledge" in the September 23 issue of Time magazine, M.I.T. linguist Ken Hale claims that of the world's 6,000 languages, 3,000 are doomed to become extinct with the next generation because no children speak them. He also estimates that only 300 languages around the world have a secure future. The issue of how to preserve disappearing cultures has no easy answer, although recent realizations about the usefulness of indigenous knowledge and the looming danger of losing large amounts of the world's cultural variety in a very short time has led to increased efforts to preserve what otherwise will soon be lost and unrecoverable. EBCEF's dream of publishing books in various Ethiopian languages is a great example of one path toward this goal.

The visual arts are among the most useful tools used to gain insight into cultures. Art exemplifies the individuality and beauty of the culture, and it serves as a source of pride and conveying knowledge that has been gained through generations of trial and error. This is especially important with Western influence spreading throughout the world faster than ever, and the willingness with which new generations trade in the traditional for the popular--for example, trading in traditional instruments such as the karaar and the masinko, for synthesizers and guitars. Some art forms only need one missing link to be forgotten.

As we continue on through this age of technology, it becomes more and more important that we find the balance between the old and the new, and escape the idea that traditional ways are outdated and useless and should unquestioningly be traded in for their modern counterparts. Whether it is capturing the moral of a story passed down for generations in literature or traditional theater, capturing the beauty of traditional dress in a painting, or celebrating life through traditional music and dance, the sense of pride that these different mediums bring will help insure that instead of turning away from their culture the generations to follow will embrace it, and swear to never let go.

By Jonathan Goering, volunteer at the book center

Art at ECBC

There are many activities that go on around the Center that assist in the development of well-rounded, creative young minds. Every Saturday morning a theater class is held at the compound, taught by a volunteer student from the University, giving the children the opportunity to express their creativity through the performance arts. EBCEF has also hosted a handful of art days in which local artists volunteer their time to help instruct the kids in experimenting with the visual arts. There are also art instruction books in the library, which are an excellent resource for the young artists to learn techniques such as shading and perspective. One boy, for example, uses the instruction books at the library as a resource for his artwork and also uses the pictures in different books to find all kinds of subjects for his drawings. He says they have art classes in the school, but that it is just drawing, and they aren't taught new skills. This is why he finds the books at the library so helpful, is they actually teach him how to draw. The library also houses numerous books featuring art from around the world, providing the children with a look at art from many different cultures. Unfortunately, it is extremely difficult for the kids to get the supplies to really pursue their interests, and although the library provides the kids with the limited supplies we have, it is an area with a lot of room for growth.



EBCEF News and Notes

Recently the children received a treat, as three guest storytellers came in to the Center to read books to the kids. The children, who are taught English in school, rarely get the chance to hear it outside of the classrooms, and such opportunities are wonderful for the kids to get experience putting their skills to use. The classes that are offered at the colleges, as well as some of the classes in Primary/Secondary School such as biology, physics, and chemistry are taught in English, and it is a huge advantage to the students to have these kinds of opportunities to further advance their English. The volunteer storytellers come to the Center around the time when the kids get out of school and read for about an hour until the gates to the Center close at 4:30. The joy that the children get from the experience is obvious, and we would like to thank the volunteers, Kevin, Megan, and Susan for donating their time.



Last February, children's book author Jane Kurtz, who is also the co-founder of EBCEF made a visit to Addis Ababa en route to the Middle East, where she was headed to speak about her experiences as an author, as well as growing up in Ethiopia. On Feb 06 she was the guest speaker at a fundraiser for EBCEF, held at the International Community School. She says, "During the last few years, I've done a great deal of speaking at schools and conferences all across the U.S. and in Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya, and the Middle East, but it's always particularly special to be at the International Community School, where I was a visiting author in 1997 and again in 2002. Everywhere I go, I talk about the importance of reading and quote Yohannes who says, 'Books change lives.' This time, my focus was on the effort to put books into the hands of Ethiopian children, the hardest project I've been involved in since becoming a published



author--but also in many ways the most exciting.” We would like to extend a special thanks to Jane, as well as all the other volunteers who donated their time to make the event a success.

EBCEF recently was able to purchase the first in what is hoped to be an ever-growing collection of tent libraries, to be operated by the Center. The goal is that by using these tent libraries it will be possible to provide access to materials and resources offered by the Library to more and more children around the city. Like the school in the neighborhood of the Library, many of the schools around the city are without a library in their compound, especially in the low-income neighborhoods. Coupled with an almost complete lack of free-access libraries, especially ones geared towards children, this makes it nearly impossible for countless children to even hold a book other than a textbook in their hands. The tent libraries are relatively lightweight and affordable ways to provide these children with resources that they otherwise wouldn't have any access to whatsoever. The purchase of the first tent library was made possible through a generous donation by Jesse Long, and was used during the book week to house the books and other materials for the children to use throughout the week (shown at the right).



In the middle of March 2004, EBCEF sadly waved goodbye to Rebekah Goering and Erin Kurtz, two of the volunteers who came from the States to donate their time to the library, as they boarded the plane back to America. Rebekah, the daughter of co-founder Jane Kurtz, and Erin, her niece, have continued to help out from the States, working to gather support for the organization. Recently, Rebekah appeared in an interview concerning EBCEF and the need to promote literacy in Ethiopia for a local television station, which aired during the evening news. Although the girls will be greatly missed here, it is great to know that the organization has lifelong friends and supporters in many different parts of the world. So again, we would like to extend a very special thanks to the girls for giving their time and energy toward the success of the organization.

EBCEF Would Like To Thank:

- **Addis Ababa Interest Group** – for inviting EBCEF to speak on Mar 05 at the Hilton Hotel
- **Bonnie Cameron & Brenda Johnson** – tireless volunteers at the First Presbyterian Church for behind-the-scenes work of all kinds
- **Carla Kehler** – for organizing the Feb 06 EBCEF fundraiser, and providing a table for EBCEF during the IWC bazaar
- **Ceres Busa** – for 686 birr from a sale of books and cookies at the Ambassador's wives bazaar at the US embassy
- **Chris Stover-Brown** – for volunteering his time to make a video documentary for EBCEF
- **Dawn Bryan** – for volunteering at the fundraiser
- **Elizabeth Gatland** – (penname Elizabeth Wein) for donating copies of her books to the Library
- **Erica Berchtold** – for bringing art supplies for the Center over with her on her flight from the States
- **ICS** – for their donation of books, office furniture, and allowing us to use the library for the Feb 06 fundraiser
- **Jane Kurtz** – for speaking at the Feb 06 fundraiser as well as various other places during her visit to Addis
- **Jesse Long** – for volunteering at the fundraiser and donating 10% of his picture sales (800 USD) to EBCEF, used to purchase the tent library
- **Grace Ruth** – for donating books to the library
- **Kathy Marshall** – for donating the delicious food for the Feb 06 fundraiser
- **Kevin, Megan, and Susan** – for volunteering their time to read to the kids at the library
- **Malcolm Clark & Azeb Gessesse** – for book week fundraising
- **National Presbyterian Women's Organization** – for giving EBCEF its first grant that allowed us to open its doors
- **Rebekah Fletcher** – for designing the poster for and volunteering during the Feb 06 fundraiser
- **Rebekah Goering & Erin Kurtz** – for all of their help over the last five months
- **Sherry Whiteside** – for inviting EBCEF to speak to a group of women at home

Since this list of thank you notes is undoubtedly incomplete, EBCEF would like to extend its thanks to everyone who has helped to make the dreams of the organization into realities. Without the help of people such as yourselves none of this would be possible, so again thank you.

Directions to the Shola Children's Library, ECBC

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The Shola Children's Library, inside of the ECBC compound is located just west off of Debre Zeyitt Road, in the Lancia area. Heading south down Debre Zeyitt from the Meskel Square, look for the sign for Shola Children's Library on the right hand side of the road, just before you reach the Global Hotel. (The Marie Stopes clinic is also along the same road as the library). The ECBC compound is on the right hand side, with a big brown gate and a sign on the gate. If you have any questions or would like to get in touch with the staff at EBCEF please don't hesitate to contact us:

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