

July 2007



Family Gathering 2007

Dear Friends,

We are still feeling the warm glow following the Family Gathering held in Port Angeles over the weekend. Over 450 attended, families came from many places. It was a thrill for me to see the Ethiopian kids again thriving in their new families, many of them I couldn't recognize. They were so excited to find old friends from Layla House and to make new friends. We rented the county fairgrounds for camping and the Friday night picnic. It was a perfect spot for the kids to play soccer and gather in groups while adults chatted and made new friends, too. Saturday was more structured with classes for adults and bowling, skating, and swimming for the kids.

A highlight took place on Friday afternoon when 15 families legalized the adoptions of their children in our county courthouse in one big ceremony. The judge had each family introduce the new family members and it was very



touching. The children who became American citizens at the moment of their adoption were each given an American flag. Clowns attended the celebration party following the ceremony -- and with balloons and cake it was a memorable event for all.



The ticket for the Quilt Raffle was drawn and the winner is from Texas. Over \$8000 was raised to help families who are experiencing difficulties in their adoptions, to provide extra counseling, evaluations, or whatever is needed to help make the adoption work better.

We were pleased that two officials from Thailand attended the event. Our program in Thailand is the oldest AAI program and we place about 20 Thai children each year, nearly all with special needs. As a result of this visit we are feeling optimistic that we will be offered more Thai children and Janelle and I will return to Thailand in September.



Since I wrote last, the home has been established in Ghana in the city of Accra. It is a five bedroom home with a very large living room which is being used as a dining room as well. Gail traveled there to help hire staff and set schedules and put policies in place, similar to what we have used in Ethiopia. We have a group of volunteers going for a few days in July to take supplies and work with the school program we are establishing for the younger children, thru grade 2. Ted and I will travel in August and I am looking forward to being there again. There are currently 6 children in residence. The compound is fenced and the children are enjoying the yard. We want to get a large part of the yard paved, it is very muddy when it rains and mosquitoes live in the grass and weeds. Our other need is for a generator. Power is often off in Accra, for hours or days, and a generator is needed to keep things functioning.



AAI was asked to help sponsor the African Children's Day in two cities outside of Addis in June. We agreed to contribute and when volunteers attended the festivities they found children wearing tee shirts with the AAI logo marching in a parade to the site of the program. The volunteers joined the parade which spread out over several blocks and grew as it went along. They couldn't understand the speeches of course but the theme was preventing the trafficking of children, sort of a buzz word in Ethiopia at the moment. These ceremonies were held in Sheshamone and Nazret where AAI maintains sponsorship program for orphan children who can live with guardians and remain in school.

We are delighted that Ivy has joined the staff in Ethiopia. She is an American who has worked for the past 20 years for a computer firm. She came to Ethiopia last winter for one month as a volunteer. She made an outstanding contribution and when she said she wanted to make a change in her life we offered her a one year contract. She will be at Layla interacting with the kids, staff, volunteers and teachers, keeping track of things and helping to keep everything running smoothly. Gail used to do this but has become so busy in recent months it was becoming impossible to do it all.



For some very good news, Tesfaye and Mahlet the siblings who had waited the longest at Layla House for an adoptive family, will be joining new parents in Alaska. We featured a picture of these two in this newsletter and last year in our calendar but it took a long time to find just the right family. They are so excited and they have seen so many other children leave Ethiopia. I kept telling them they would get their turn eventually but I think they had about given up on me.

I hope you are all enjoying the summer. I am taking some time off this week and next. I'll be traveling later in July and there will be a picnic in the Detroit area. If you live nearby and want details, we can send them to you. Also, if you would prefer to get the emailed version of this newsletter let us know that as well. We would be happy to save the postage but are also happy to keep mailing it to you if you prefer.

We are grateful for you, our supporters and sponsors. The needs are great and can seem overwhelming but then I get a kind message or unexpected donation from one of you and realize again that I am not in this alone, and working together we are making good things happen for some of the world's neediest kids.

Sincerely,

Merrily and Ted