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Volume 50 | Issue 1

Article 7

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2007

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## Recommended Citation

Shimazu Yee, Evelyn (2007) "The Beginnings of a Small Ethiopian, Organizational Leadership Library Collaborative," *The Christian Librarian*: Vol. 50 : Iss. 1 , Article 7.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/tcl/vol50/iss1/7>

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# The Beginnings of a Small Ethiopian

## Organizational Leadership Library Collaborative

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First published as "Library and Community Building in Ethiopia" in *Azusa Pacific University's APU Life*, Summer 2006 Volume 19, issue (2), pages 12-13.

### ABSTRACT

An Azusa Pacific University Reference Librarian describes the logistical, cultural, and spiritual aspects of a library building journey to Ethiopia which brought the means for a successful implementation of a new small academic library to hundreds of university students in the African country. Discusses the positive impact of the Christian global community on the university's global distributed learning programs, the academic program in Ethiopia included well-attended Organizational Leadership courses through the university's Operation Impact Program supported by the new library.

### The Christian Global Community and the Christian Librarian

*"Where there is no vision, people perish ..."*

*-Proverbs 29:18 KJV*

Azusa Pacific University's four cornerstones Christ, Scholarship, Community, and Service – serve as the guidepost for all university endeavors. University "community" begins with students, faculty, and staff, but the vision of community extends far beyond the boundaries of the campus. Mission minded members of APU's faculty travel regularly and teach in remote countries that span the globe. Students abroad may earn a Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership from APU through the Operation Impact (O.I.) Program, which delivers distributed learning programs around the world. More than 400 students in Ethiopia have enrolled in APU's Organizational Leadership courses. Undergraduate students attending classes on the Azusa campus also travel to remote locations around the world as part of their global education. Through the implementation of such programs and the building of a local small academic library for participating Ethiopian scholars, APU demonstrates that this university has a vision to make a difference in the global community.

### An International Project for Azusa Pacific University Libraries

A little over two short years ago, prior to my hire at APU, I would have never imagined that my first international trip for APU would take this librarian to the remote country of Ethiopia. I was not at all acquainted with the country, with the exception of the childhood recollection of Biblical accounts passed down through the ages about the legendary Ethiopian Eunuch.

Upon my appointment to Azusa Pacific University in 2004, I was quite impressed to hear about an Ethiopian book drive and library building project which our university

libraries had recently undertaken just a few months earlier, Dave Harmeyer, Chair of the Marshburn Memorial Library, began a book drive following an appeal from Badeg Bekele, Ed.D., visionary Ethiopian educator. As a former graduate student at APU, Dr. Bekele had a vision for an overseas library. This project also had the overwhelming support of APU's Vice Provost for Academic Affairs/Library Dean, Paul Gray, Ed.D. and Provost, Michael Whyte, Ph.D. Soon, I was assisting Dave Harmeyer with what eventually became our team's evaluation of nearly 20,000 donated volumes.

Within the months that followed, I was approached about the possibility of assuming the task of accompanying our donated book collections to the African country of my childhood Sunday School legend and to serve in the role of supervising librarian on a trip to Ethiopia to supervise the implementation of a new academic library. The library would support our Ethiopian Operation Impact (O.I.) students and traveling O.I. faculty. Evaluating books was one thing. But with many years of diverse work experience in libraries, I had the confidence that this would be logistically accomplished with some anticipatory pre-planning. However, traveling abroad, to a country that struggles with the basics of adequate clean water, food and shelter for its population, was an entirely different question. Flying to Ethiopia was not a part of this native Californian's vocabulary; not to mention, life plan.

### A Catalyst

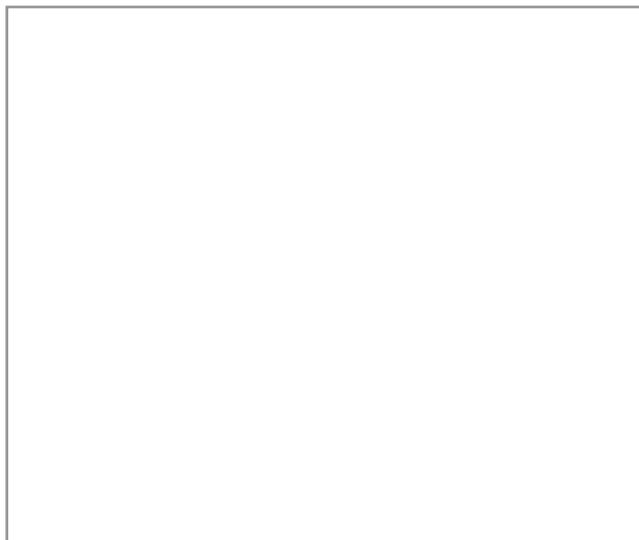
As weeks passed, I began to see God's hand working for this project. Dr. Grace Barnes, Ph.D., former O.I. professor and past director of the O.I. program, had been the APU catalyst for sending faculty to Ethiopia to teach in APU's Operation Impact Program, proved an inspiration. She shared with me her own experience of traveling to Ethiopia

from APU as one of the few women to do so. She explained how the library would support the Ethiopian nationals taking courses in organizational leadership. These students who once numbered just a handful, now totaled over 400. I became convinced that these students sorely needed a library. I asked myself, who amongst our library faculty could APU send? Who else had the experience building a small library from sparse resources, in all the various phases of library work? Who of our library faculty also did not have small children that needed their supervision and attention? Who automated that library hit by California's Proposition 13 tax initiative cutbacks in the 1980s from a manual system to an automated one with insufficient electrical outlets, little money and sparse staffing? It was obvious that God had handed me a challenge. But my fears and doubts persisted. I told myself that I was too old for this. I told myself that there is someone somewhere just as qualified. I told myself that women just did not take these types of risky trips abroad. I uttered to myself that because of my shortcomings such as weak eyesight, allergies, and my sensitivity to the sun, that I was not an ideal candidate. But in the end, it was evident that I could not use these excuses with God. After all, a librarian is called to service, a tenant of our profession. I was reminded that I was not only a librarian, I was a Christian librarian whose life, I finally realized, was prepared over a span of years, ideally for this need. God had brought me on this journey to this time and place in my life that would bring life-changing literature to many Ethiopian APU affiliate Christian and non-Christian students who otherwise would be without. I applied for my first passport, began scheduling my inoculations, placed extra orders for my prescriptions, and told God that I would go through with all his plans.

### Enthusiasm Grows

Enthusiasm for the project escalated in the weeks that passed. Ethiopia began to appear everywhere I looked. Even the non-Christian media seemed to contribute to the excitement as Ethiopia was suddenly featured in an extreme reality show. A popular actress decided to adopt an Ethiopian child. People I spoke

with had excitement in their voices when I spoke about my upcoming trip. Soon APU had donated computer CPUs, peripherals (such as printers) as well as book trucks, tools, and other supplies. Glenkirk Presbyterian Church in Glendora donated a substantial collection of books, almost an entire church library; the Azusa Public Library donated many titles. A San Diego widow donated more than 2,000



Students make use of the newly established library

Photo: Barbara Strother

titles from her husband's collection. Jerry Houser from the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in La Canada Flintridge, arranged for us to receive a donation of additional computers. Jerry also proved instrumental in advertising our need for titles and transporting hundreds of titles for the Ethiopia project. Our circulation department coordinator, Will Haskins, packed boxes and offered many hours of work from his student assistants. A combination of 15 library staff and faculty worked tirelessly in the Marshburn Inter-Library Loan office to assist Jillian Daffron from the Operation Impact Office in packing computers in styrofoam peanuts and bubble wrap. Drew Rushlow and his crew from APU's facilities management orchestrated the shrink wrapping of pallets of boxes and staged the loading of boxes. He supervised the forklift crew and the packing of sets of APU donated heavy metal shelving into a 40 ft. freight container on campus. A private donor paid more than \$3,000 to have the container shipped by slow boat to the port of Ereita, Africa, a Northeast African seaport as Ethiopia has no seaport and is land

locked. The library Dean's office provided 3 paid staff including Barbara Strother, former Library Assistant and my soon to be volunteer accompaniment to Ethiopia to help in the processing the thousands of books for the project.

### Providence

It was providence, I believe, that brought Barb Strother into the picture. Barb was a well-seasoned international traveler who had lived abroad in China. She eagerly mentioned to me

that she was fascinated with Ethiopia and would be willing to accompany me as a volunteer on the flight to Ethiopia but would stay only for approximately half of the duration (one week of the projected trip) and help out with whatever I needed. Through all of the excitement suddenly surfacing about Ethiopia in the general media and the Lord providing Barbara, I realized God's hand was moving me forward with His plans – beyond my doubts about trusting God.

As we purchased our tickets with funds that were also donated through APU,

the political climate in Ethiopia abruptly changed and would soon be the topic of U.S. newscasters' reports. An unusual outbreak of political violence came just before our planned departure in July of 2005. Following this came news that the building was not ready for us. The trip was postponed until January of 2006.

### When God Gives Lemons, Make Lemonade

Because of the postponement, more time was available to thoroughly develop full lesson plans for philosophical and technical instruction to the ESL (English as a Second Language)

Ethiopian library staff. Enhanced lesson handouts with Power Point presentations were prepared for technical training. I visited Little Ethiopia on the west side of Los Angeles and purchased a language book in beginning Amharac – Ethiopians' ancient language and one of the main languages still written and spoken there today.

### After the 16 Hour Flight

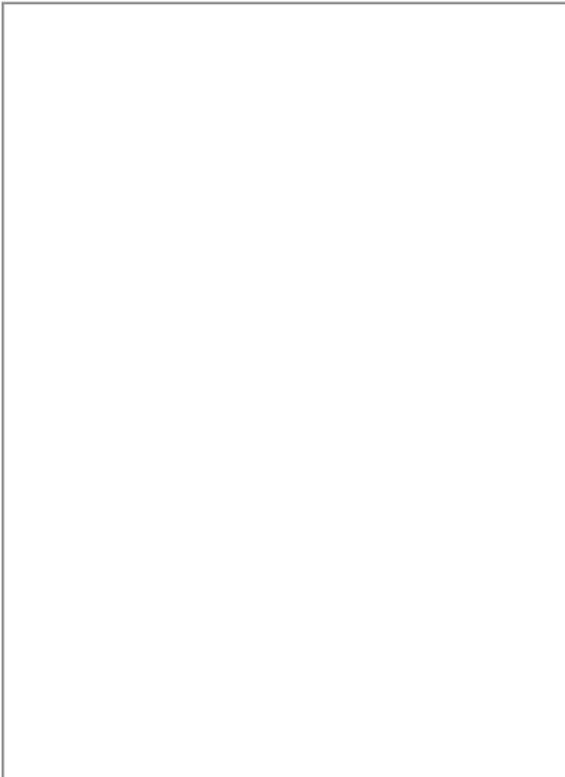
Once on our way, the flight took us from LAX to Chicago, to Frankfurt, to Sudan and then to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Upon arrival in Ethiopia, I fell in love with its people. The first person we met was Ephreim, from the Ethiopian based partnering organization, the International Leadership Institute, Dr. Bekele's sponsoring organization that strives to support programs to improve the lives of Ethiopians. Ephreim and his brother were my guardian angels who watched over me and enlightened my experience with their many colorful stories from their family and country histories. The Ethiopians I interacted with proved to be a cheerful, confident people.

Americans can learn much from our Ethiopian brothers and sisters who are descendants of a very noble, well-mannered, very God-honoring people. Because Ethiopians are in the Northeastern portion of Africa, much to my uninformed surprise, they had much in common culturally with the people of the East, Middle East, and the Mediterranean as warm and respectful greetings are held in great regard.

The Lion of Judah serves as the Ethiopian national symbol. Ethiopian people with their handsome chiseled features, large, dark, deep-set eyes, and an appearance similar to that of the Egyptians have golden complexions, and tend to be slim, I surmised, because most of them walk everywhere.

### Cultural Surprises

Ethiopians' printed writing was an entirely new text experience never before viewed by this librarian. Visually it had an uncanny resemblance to Hebrew and the respective vowel sounds of that language and some words I could recall from what limited familiarity



Evelyn Shimazu Yee (left) and friend in Ethiopia.

Photo: Barbara Strother

I have of the Indian and Japanese languages. Though I am not a semanticist, a curiosity that was discovered was that some Amharic words were pronounced identically to words in the Japanese language and even contained some remote related meaning. Ethiopia has some of the best authentic Italian style pizza which brings vivid and passionate conversation as to why this is. Italian Marxists left a bit of their Italian culture in Ethiopia during the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but took their socialist ideology with them when they left; which was responsible for the incarceration of many a Christian for their faith.

Ethiopians embrace, as most Eastern cultures, the attribute of hospitality. Ethiopians served the most delicious coffee this westerner has ever tasted in the most gracious of manner. Their coffee ceremonies and musical instruments were curiously nearly identical respectively to their Japanese counter-parts, the Japanese tea ceremony and the Japanese musical instruments: the koto, shakuhachi (flute) and shamisen. Although three generations removed from Japanese heritage, I knew enough to be able to recognize these commonalities. A real curiosity at first, but soon afterwards, this phenomenon became an eye-opening experience to the universality of how God created humankind and how we are all so intricately linked.

Ethiopia is the only African country that has never been colonized. The people I met – from the poorest person begging on the street to pharmacists and trades people – all spoke English.

Clearly, Ethiopia is a country of dichotomies. It was not unusual to find a small shop owner's make-shift sitting next to a high rise or a sheep herder taking his flock down the street to sell to the next fine Western quality restaurant. Ethiopia is where donkey caravans carrying peasant loads are often found passing parked late model Toyota SUVs on unpaved streets. These observations struck me hardest in the realization of how small our world has become. Although an African country 10,000 miles away from my homeland, Ethiopia is quickly adopting the music, clothing, products, services and commerce, strikingly familiar to our Western U.S.

## Christian Oppression

Ethiopia's people are a very proud and brave people. The older generation keep their history and heritage close to their hearts and worry about the future of their young people. Because any Ethiopian Christian suffered imprisonment for their faith in the 1970's through the 1990's under Marxism, all this is evident in their propensity to tell their history through war stories. Our host, Dr. Bekele was imprisoned during that time as were others that I had the opportunity to meet. Ethiopia is one of the oldest Christian nations. Currently, Ethiopia's population is a little over half Muslim and the other nearly half are Christian. Their national symbol, the Lion of Judah is a reminder of the remnant of Jewish immigrants who traveled to Ethiopia in biblical times. Legends have claimed that Ethiopia was the location of the final resting place of the ancient Arc of the Covenant.

## True Christian Community is Global

When Barbara departed for the U.S. a couple of days after our first week, I was ready to take on the rest of the project, not solo ... but, with many new Ethiopian Christian brothers and sisters and the Lord at my side. I am grateful for my Ethiopian hosts for watching over this inexperienced international traveler and proving to me what God continues to teach me – we are all one body in the Lord. I learned through the gracious hospitality of the Ethiopian people, God's orchestration of all the events of this project including the perfect timing of my involvement, that true APU Christian community extends beyond the tree-lined walkways of our East Campus, beyond the unique architectural lines that grace our West Campus. The APU Christian community is not defined by the borders of any city, county, state, or country. This intersection, this person-to-person connection, this vibrancy strives to reach places anywhere in the world where Christians globally reside.

*"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body."*

- I Corinthians 12:12 NIV †