

My trip to Ethiopia to visit our sponsored child.

On our arrival at the Addis Ababa airport there were soldiers carrying guns at all entrances to the building. When we got to our hotel, there were four soldiers with guns at the lower entrance to the grounds and one either side of the entrance to the foyer of the hotel. When I looked out of my window into the back garden area there was another soldier patrolling the grounds, plus two more guarding the swimming pool area.

Firstly we were taken to world vision headquarters and introduced to the manager Mohammed Kemble, who then introduced us to the 25 staff working in a very limited space. World vision runs a no frills operation in Addis Ababa. High security, 8 or 9ft high fences with all gates locked.

Mohammed the manager of world vision in addis ababa then accompanied us on our journey which was to take two days. Before we left Addis Ababa, bill and Mohammed bought two blankets at the markets for me to give to Mishame's parents. The driver of our 4 wheel drive was a very lean, 6 ft something strong looking body builder.

The first 200kms we travelled was on the main bitumen road heading south towards Kenya. Donkeys, goats, a few cows and the odd dog have right of way.

There were thousands of people walking along the roads coming and going for the whole trip. (no one can afford vehicles)the vehicles that you do see are tourists, tourist vans, taxi's, and transport trucks to Kenya. Every 20 or so kms there would be a township with shanty's or shacks either side of the road. On the whole 550 kilometer trip I only saw one cart drawn by a donkey, two bicycles and three single furrow ploughs each being pulled by two oxen. It seemed to me they are living like 2,000 yrs ago. Very very poor

It was 5 pm when we turned off the bitumen road at Hosiana township intending to reach base camp by night, but a phone call from the manager of the "Shonkola project" area said to stay the night at hosiana as it was too dangerous to travel at that time of day.

I was beginning to wonder where on earth we would stay when the driver turned down a road where there was a small quaint two storey hotel.

It was surrounded with a 10 feet high fence, trees and locked gates.

Probably used by tourists travelling from Addis Ababa to Kenya, which is a neighboring country.

The world vision men were accustomed to eating the type of food that was offered for tea, but bill and I had hard boiled eggs. Bill and I shared the only room available, woke up at 4am and were on our way to the "Shonkola" base camp at 6.30am

We travelled along 70 kms of the most dreadful roads you could imagine.

World vision, with the help of people from the villages has built three of the bridges we crossed which made our trip into this mountainous area possible.

Once we got to the "Shonkola base camp" we met the world vision project manager "Fitsum Teshome," an extremely nice man who provided us with breakfast. Although I think I only had a piece of bread.

The slab toilet was just a three inch hole in a slab of cracked cement with no such thing as toilet paper and no facilities for washing hands.

Fitsum Teshome the area manager then came with us in his 4 wheel drive on our mission to meet Mishame & her family.

The young men, who read our letters to the sponsored families and then reply to us on the family's behalf, also accompanied us.

We were taken to two schools that world vision had built with the help of the villagers.

One of them was still in the final stages before being ready for occupation.

The classrooms that they were using were made of mud and of course there is no glass for windows.

Only people who live within walking distance of any schools would be able to attend, as there is no transport.

It takes Mishame over 1 hour to walk to school, down a mountain and then several kms across a cow paddock and then to the other side of the village.

Mishame says she is going to learn English as soon as she is able.

There are between 80 and 90 children to a class and four children to a desk.

I would like to point out that our sponsorship money is put towards everything that world vision is doing to help the whole Shonkolla project area.

The one big advantage a sponsored child gets is to go to school.

World vision provides....schools....teachers....school supplies.... Blackboards.... Desks....cows.... Seeds.....poultry..... Hand tools. Fertiliser.... Bridges..... Roads..... Safe drinking water.

Bores are sunk and piped to more accessible locations.

Some community members are learning skills of carpentry which will help them earn a living or have something to trade.

There is very little paid work if any and definitely no unemployment benefits.

A health care centre for every 4.000 people,

So it is a long way to walk or get stretchered if you are very ill.

As far as I could see there was little or no money to buy.... Food..... Animals... jinkers... seeds... bicycles...vehicles of any sort or medicine.

There were no shops where Mishame lives; neither do they have electricity or gas.

World vision is providing awareness training on hiv/aids to as many people as possible trying to reduce the risk to children, family and the community.

They also support orphaned children with school materials and income generating activities such as a cow or ox and training.

Sponsored families in world vision are given seeds as they become available for small area crops or vegetable s.

The family that I sponsor has just received their first vegetable seeds, basic hand tools and fertiliser for planting as from Jan 2008.

They are thrilled about this and are looking forward to having the opportunity to grow vegetables very much.

They will soon be in a position to generate some income or trade as soon as their corn or beans or whatever sort of seeds they have grown. (hopefully)

We were told that many people just have one meal a day and chew on cane throughout the day.

The Shonkolla area development program has built up a large herd of cows which obviously gives the families lucky enough to have a cow some income generating opportunity, trading milk and related products for vegetables, corn, beans etc.

Bill was told that the cow comes inside the owner's mud hut to sleep every night with the family.

For the people who have chooks it would be the same income generating or trade opportunity with eggs, setting eggs and producing chickens and the occasional chicken stew.

All around Mishame's family's mud and cowdung round hut there are false banana trees.

They do not produce bananas but a type of bread is made from the big leaves being pounded into a green paste, yeast and spices added and I believe the process takes a fortnight to be ready to eat.

No doubt they make a batch every day to have a continuous supply.

Food is eaten with their fingers by tearing off a piece of injera (bread) to scoop up the food.

For many families out in the country, the staple food is injera (a flat spongy pancake sort of bread) made of teff flour and water.

Teff is unique to Ethiopia and is grown in the highlands.

This is eaten with (wat) which is a spicy stew.

It would be very rare that Mishame's family had any meat for their stew, so it would probably be lentils or ground split peas or any vegetables they may have access to day by day from their father maybe getting a little bit of work.

Some of the family members fetch water and others collect fire wood.

There are no toilets, just a small hole dug in the back yard.

Mishames village is on a plateau surrounded by beautiful mountains.

The world vision vehicles got bogged on the outskirts of the village so this resulted in us carrying the gifts and walking approx 8kms across a cow paddock and then up the slippery muddy mountain path.

In one of the little rivers we had to walk thru, some mothers were washing their babies; others were washing clothes and or themselves.

Mishame and her family came down to the base of the mountain to meet us in case it was too far for us being in our 70's to keep on walking thru all the mud and the climb back up the mountain.

I wanted to see where they lived after coming this far And so with Mishame having hold of one hand and not letting go for the rest of the day except for me to give out presents and her 16 yrs old brother leading me by the other hand.....we made it.

Mishame and two of her sisters had stickers on their faces and in their hair that I had sent them in my letters.

I had not realised that they wouldn't have a single book or piece of paper to put them on, so this gave them an excuse to use them.

Mishame also had her hair braided and was dressed up for the occasion to meet me; no shoes though, just mud squashing thru her toes.

Bill and I had a following of people from the village and her neighbors as we arrived at Mishame's mud and cowdung home.

They all started chanting a welcome which was lovely of them.

Whilst we were inside Mishames home, the one little window and back & front doors were full of villagers looking in and they were all fascinated by bill with the camera I think.

I have wonderful memories of warm, generous, lovely people who made it very clear how much they loved us coming and gave us big hugs and you could tell they were saying thank you for sponsoring Mishame, thereby giving her a chance to go to school and maybe a better future.

The father was holding all my letters rolled up in his hand, so I acknowledged that I had seen them.

In the middle of the round mud house, Mishame's family have a ring of stones on the ground which has a frame over it holding a piece of flattened galvanised iron which is what they cook on.

The girls of the family busied themselves lighting a little fire of sticks and cooking some corn for all of us.

Mishame's dad then poured us a cup of tea which we both enjoyed very much.

I think it may have been made at base camp and brought in a flask.

Bill had taken two soccer balls and one basketball as gifts.

He gave the basketball with a pump to Mishame's family and was giving the two soccer balls to the school.

I was overcome by a beautiful cane gift given to me by Mishames mother, which I will use and cherish for the rest of my life. Customs rang my home in Australia and said that this piece of cane furniture had arrived for me, and their valuation of it was \$1.

They said it would cost over \$100 to have it treated before release, and they went on to say they could destroy it for me if I wanted...

.many people walked down the mountain to say goodbye.

Mishame and her dad walked with me until we got back to where the 4 wheel drives were.

Mishame and her dad then came with us in the vehicles over to the other side of the village to Mishame's school.

Probably it was the only ride they have ever had in a vehicle and it will probably be the only ride in a vehicle they will ever have.

The headmaster came out to greet us and Mishame presented him with the two soccer balls as a gift to the school

We left after this presentation, deciding to try and do the 6 hour trip back to Addis Ababa that night. We got back at 10.30 pm

We left the school about 3-30pm. We hadn't had any lunch and not much breakfast, so at about 5pm when we stopped for tea at the same place that we had stayed at last night, those boiled eggs tasted beautiful.

I lost 3 kgs in the two weeks I was away, and I regret having put it all back on again.

Sponsoring Mishame and now meeting her and her family was so special

In conclusion I cannot speak highly enough of the world vision personnel and the work they do in Ethiopia, they were lovely people and bill and I thank them very much.

Thanking you for your interest

Mona Barnes