

PAINTING A NEW WORLD

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Ethiopia, November 2008

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and Daniel Toutiras (PNMW Ambassadors)

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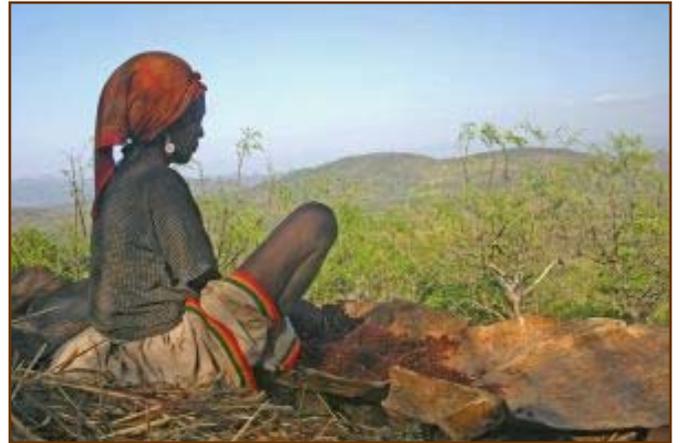
Selam, Ethiopia

With our hearts bursting with love, our spirit full of hope and our arms filled with generous gifts, we leave for Ethiopia on November 7, 2008.

We are excited to visit this country and to have the opportunity to present the PNMW Organization to a group of young Ethiopian artists.

Why did we choose Ethiopia? We chose this rich ethnic country for its authenticity, as it was never colonized, for the discovery of the people, for the adventure and for the beauty of its landscape. What we discovered initially is that the capital of Ethiopia is Addis Ababa (which means new flower).

It has a population of 72 million with a life expectancy of 50 years. The official language is *Amharic* with 290 languages and dialects with 50% Christians (protestants and orthodox).



The Ethiopian calendar is 7 years and 8 months younger than ours (ex. Sept. 11 is our Jan.1) and there is 5 hours difference in time (6:00 am Montreal EST = 1:00 am in Ethiopia). They explained that sunrise at 6:00 am is equivalent to the first hour of the day. So while we visited on November 2008, they were in March 2001.

With a great group of 10 adventurers we arrive in Addis. We meet Marcel our dynamic explorer guide and Samuel our local contact for PNMW.

Arrangements have been made to visit an art school during our travel in order to deliver PNMW art kits.

We begin the journey to the north with its monolithic churches and the majestic Simien Mountains. During the flight up north our Ethiopian flight attendant sang over the speakers "Aux Champs Élysés". It was very moving. When we arrive in Mekelé we meet our driver and are greeted with roses all over the mini bus and with beautiful Ethiopian scarves.

"Ethiopia has a population of 72 million with a life expectancy of 50 years."

Hawsien

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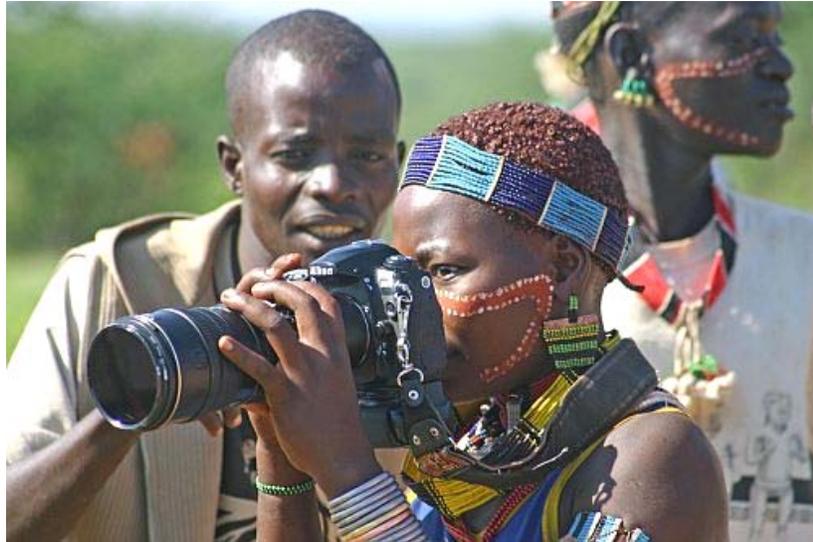
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Surrounded by hundreds of children in Hawsien, we decide to play a game of soccer.

We are no match for these young enthusiasts. The score is Ethiopia 3; Canada 1. After the game, they guide us while visiting their school. They are proud and curious to discuss with us. They are all ambitious and want to become doctors, teachers, pilots, engineers...

That evening we are invited to attend a somewhat different event. It is a funeral to commemorate the person who had died over 18 days ago. They serve us with a drink called 'Tej Honey drink'.

After our evening, we welcomed our bed to reminisce the events of the day. Our driver and friend, Balagourou, whom we affectionately nicknamed Babacoo, decided to give us Amharic names to represent us.

From now on my name would be 'Dumbelka', meaning 'Queen', and Daniel adopted the name 'Hailé', which means intelligent.

As we continue to travel and witness beautiful fields and canyons, we notice we are always surrounded by thousands of people travelling to and from schools or to markets.

If the boys are not in school they help in the fields and tend to the livestock. The young girls help in the kitchen, fetch water, gather wood and sell small items at the market.

For their younger siblings, it is not unusual to see a 5 year old with a 2 year old brother on her back.

“ ...They are all ambitious and want to become doctors, teachers, pilots, engineers... and photographers.....”

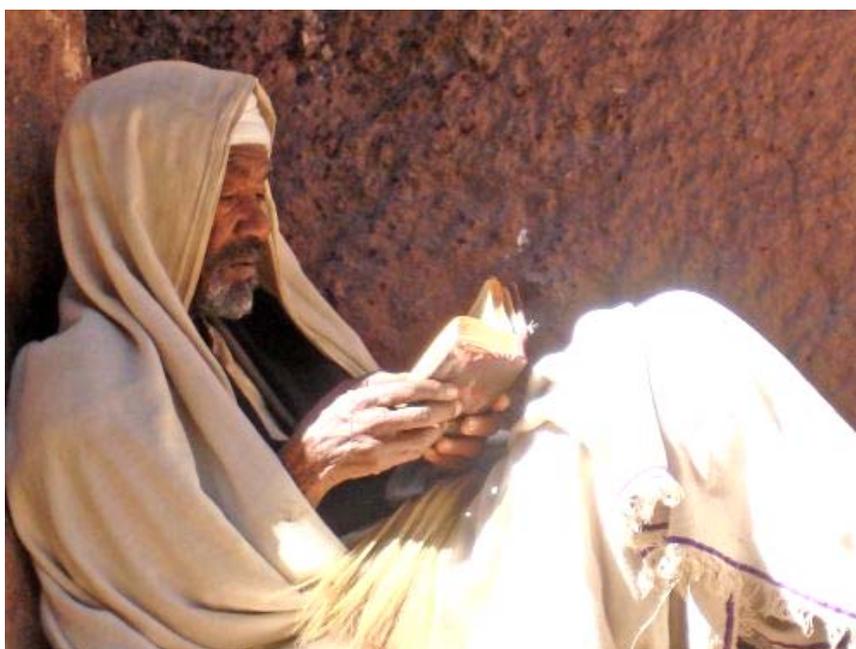
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Lalibela—New Jerusalem

Having arrived in Lalibela (New Jerusalem) we learn that a priest has died the day before. There is an important ceremony under a centenary tree to honour him. Lalibela is the country of the Wise men. Therefore many Christians choose Lalibela for pilgrimage. The atmosphere is legendary and the churches are breathtaking.

The next day we leave by plane for Gondar, a fortified city where sovereigns of the 17th to 19th century used to live. At the airport while waiting for the aircraft, we participate in a magical moment. We play volleyball and the Ethiopian security members and luggage attendants out-play us 15 to 7.



In the following days we will trek 3 days in the Simien National Park. We depart at an altitude of 3200m with a team of 8 mule guides, 4 assistant cooks, 1 main cook, 2 scouts and 1 guide. We go through a passage with a peak at 4070 m. We witness a Geladas baboons' migration crossing our path. We find the temperature dropping over the last day to 2 degrees. Luckily we have warm clothes with us and share extra with thankful people.

Following the trek we are relieved to have a more relaxing time at Lake Tana. We visited the falls of the Blue Nile which joins the White Nile at Khartoum in Sudan to form the majestic Nile.

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“.....Lalibela (New Jerusalem) is the country of the Wise men.....”

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Addis Ababa



Abyssinia Art School receives Art Kits from PNMW Ambassadors Linda Chatelain and Daniel Toutiras

Wednesday, November 19th we take a flight to Addis. Today we will go to the art school to present the PNMW art kits to young artists. Arriving at the Abyssinia Art School, we feel nervous and worried. How many students are there? Have the art kits arrived without being damaged? Will we make a good impression for PNMW? Holding our breath, we enter the classroom. There are 30–35 artists at work. They are making portraits of their neighbours or are drawing still-life arranged in the classroom.

A teacher without hands circulates among the students and explains that some drawings are deliberately disproportionate to show that differences exist, referring to his missing hands. We feel a little nervous because there seems to have been a misunderstanding; the teacher and the Director are not aware of the project.

Quickly we explain the objective of the PNMW Organization, and present the art kits. We left the responsibility to the teacher to select students who will receive the art kits, since we only have 15 kits with us.

Attentively, everyone listens as we take the time to deliver the presentation of the project. One young female student thanks us for offering them such a wonderful opportunity. Because there were no questions from the students we hoped that everyone understood what was required. The teacher reassured us that the students understood but they are timid and reserved by nature. The PNMW forms are left with the director to be completed and returned to PNMW. The director is extremely grateful and considers us as a gift from heaven.

“The director is extremely grateful and considers us a gift from heaven.”

Abyssinia Art School

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Addis Ababa (...continued)

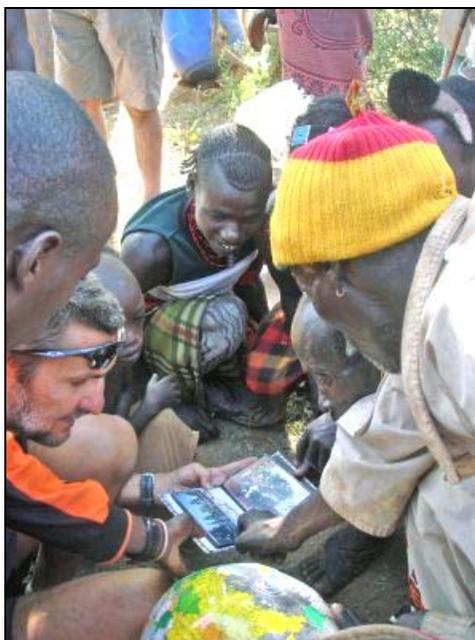
On leaving the school, a previous art student grabs our attention and invites us to visit his gallery. We enter the gallery and are excited to see that the artwork exhibited is unique and of high quality. It looks very promising for the future of art in Ethiopia, and of the PNMW project. Samuel, our contact from Explorateurs, has a surprise for us. We are going to dine in an Art Gallery. There are dynamic paintings everywhere. We leave excited, moved and relieved to have completed our mission as Ambassadors of PNMW.

Amesegüena-low (Thank you very much)

Lake Chamo

We continue our journey to one of the lakes of the Rift Valley, Lake Chamo. Travelling by boat we see flocks of pelicans, hippos and Nile crocodiles. We are met with the curiosity of the locals as we enter small villages. On our return we are surprised to attend a distribution of humanitarian aid by the U.S Aid. It all goes well, structured and complacent. In the valley we attend a ceremony called 'Oukouli' (transition to adulthood).

Women choose partners with whom to dance, to court and to charm. As a sign of courage women go through a whipping session. Their slashed backs are proof of their courage.



This ritual is very important. The novice men present themselves naked to the village. The women yell out cries while the sounds of the trumpets announce the arrival of young men. Another ritual called 'bull jumping' is when some of the men collect 10 bulls and line them up side by side. The novice men walk along the bulls back 4 times. When the 'dances of seduction' are completed and life becomes 'normal', we sat among the dancers and absorbed the unique ambience.

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The Mursi People.....

“... a determined, devoted teacher who, with very few resources, found ways to give his best to his young students.”

Our journey continues and we visit the Karo village. It was wonderful to visit the school and meet the teacher who gave us explanations about the school and the students.

I will forever remember this beautiful encounter of a determined, devoted teacher who, with very few resources, found ways to give his best to his young students.

The Mursi people are persistently approaching us and demanding that we take photos of them. They then ask for money for doing so. This was not the African people we recognize from our other trips.

The day did not end on a brighter note as we were attacked by “cannibals” —

hundreds of Tse- Tse flies
aaahhhh....

The last week we stopped at a clinic and a primary school in a small village to donate a variety of goods and supplies that we had brought with us from Montreal.

We end our holiday at Lake Langano; swimming, playing volleyball (to regain our previous defeat) and a BBQ dinner.

After a visit to the Mercado market, the farewell dinner was held in Addis in a traditional restaurant with an evening performance.

We say goodbye to our driver and ‘au revoir’ to Marcel.

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Au revoir

It is when we return to the many comforts of home that we remember all the beautiful encounters and we regret that it's already over. I try to find the words to express to friends how Ethiopia was but it is difficult. How do you translate the enormous Simien Mountains, the legendary Rift Valley, the discrete touches, the penetrating stares, the different customs and smells, the overall beauty of the landscape but most important the Ethiopian peopleand their smiles.

Ameseguena-low

To send your comments about this newsletter, or if you want to contact **Agnes Jorgensen** or **André Chatelain** regarding membership in PNMW, please [click here](#)

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