

March 14, 2009

Letter number 11

Dear family and friends,

Lora and I returned to the US one week ago, following the advice of my cardiologist in Addis Ababa. In the week since then, my heart has responded well to the lower altitude. It has returned to normal size and the measurements of its pumping efficiency are even better now than they were before we left the states. Nevertheless, the valve that was transplanted in 2001 continues to fail, and it is likely that I will face valve-replacement surgery soon.

We will not return to Ethiopia.

We have been blessed (again!) by being welcomed to the Furlough Home at the Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary during this time of transition, as well as by the outpouring of support we have received from congregations and individuals all across the country. Your prayers and emails and cards lift us and remind us that we are not alone, and the hand-knit prayer shawl from Wisconsin is around my shoulders as I write this letter. Thank you all! You are a blessing during this time of uncertainty.

We try to get used to driving again (“The streets are so empty here!”) and shopping. (“Look at all the food!”) I walk slowly along the little creek below the seminary, hoping to photograph some ducks or some daffodils or some leaf buds. The sunlight off the water is dazzling. I rest halfway up the hill on the way back home. I feel vulnerable.

After seven months in Addis Ababa, we were just starting to be comfortable in the language, just starting to develop relationships of depth, just starting to be of service. And now we have suddenly left. There’s not much to count: a few basic phrases in Amharic, a single workshop for teachers, some classroom dialogues to help kids say ‘th.’ What sense can we make of such a ‘mission interrupted?’

The answer is deeper than any need to justify ourselves. Did we change the world? Well, no. But we accepted God’s invitation to respond to the needs of our brothers and sisters, as best we could. It is a tremendous gift to be welcomed into a new culture, seemingly alien, and then discover we are still part of the love of Christ, which reaches across all boundaries. We have given up trying to keep score of what we accomplished, and instead simply witness to the kindness that we have been granted from others, including you. We have given up counting what we give, like people traditionally do in Lent, and instead rest quietly in what we have received, in the hope of Easter.

Sometimes we’re asked to give up more than chocolate.

Bethel Mekane Yesus School has a protocol for choosing scholarship students, of course, and it includes committee deliberations and careful, documented conversations with the family. But on our last day in Ethiopia, out of time to complete paperwork, Ato Teferi (our school principal) simply called one ninth grade student out of class. He knew that one of her parents had recently died and that the family was in financial trouble. He brought her to meet Lora and me, explained to her that one of our supporting churches in Montana had committed to paying her school fees for the next four years, and then asked me to take her picture to send back to the US. The poor kid was blown away by this sudden gift, this guarantee of graduation, this promise of an unexpected future. I took her picture anyway, and you can see that she's trying not to cry (see next page).

Sometimes we are given more than colored eggs. And sometimes, we have the opportunity to share those gifts.

Please know that the work continues. There are scholarships still needed for girls whose families have encountered setbacks, magazine subscriptions still needed for the library, crayons and art supplies still needed for new kindergartens.

We have asked World Mission to prioritize our positions in Ethiopia and actively recruit new co-workers to take our places. Perhaps you know of someone who will answer this call. Perhaps that someone is you. For now, during our period of medical leave, Lora and I ask you to continue your support of us, both in prayer and in finances. There will come a time when the future is clearer, both for us and for the PC(USA) mission in Ethiopia, and at that time you will have, of course, plenty of options for continued support.

In the meantime, we hope that the joy of Easter will call you out of your regular routines and overwhelm you with abundance, with astonishing and powerful new futures, with sudden and unexpected joy. We wish you springtime and dazzling new life. And we hope that you will pray the same for us.

Love and peace,

Bruce and Lora Whearty  
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This letter, along with an accompanying photo, will soon be posted to our webpage at [www.pcusa.org/missionconnections/profiles/wheartyb](http://www.pcusa.org/missionconnections/profiles/wheartyb) You can visit our photo album from that page, as well as browse old letters.

We love to receive email at [blwhearty@gmail.com](mailto:blwhearty@gmail.com) but because we have no easy internet connection at home, please do not send us photos, attachments, or e-greeting cards. Thanks!

