

Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital



Newsletter | March 2011



Art for Ethiopia

The Hamlin Fistula® Relief and Aid Fund is delighted that this exciting, eclectic and colourful exhibition of well priced works by a variety of artists will be held at the Red Door Gallery, 24 Morris Street, Summer Hill NSW on Friday 1st to Sunday 3rd and Friday 8th to Sunday 10th April 2011. There will also be a small selection of crafts, including items from Ethiopia, for sale.

Cash and cheque payments only.

Gallery hours: 10am to 4pm or by appointment.

Enquiries: Jules Francois 9799 7830.

All proceeds from the Exhibition will assist the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital and the Hamlin College of Midwives.

DR HAMLIN'S LETTER

My Dear Friends in Australia

You have all been much in our thoughts and prayers as we hear of the terrible floods, cyclones, bush fires and sadly too, loss of precious lives, but what a wonderful spirit of comradeship and compassion has been evident in our country as we see and hear of all the help given to those in distress. And now the devastating earthquakes in New Zealand and Japan, with Japan also having such a terrifying tsunami. We have supporting trusts and friends in both these countries and our thoughts and prayers are with them too. Unfortunately our Medical Director, Professor Gordon Williams was in Christchurch at the time of the earthquake. He was meeting our Trustees and having a holiday in a country he has never visited before! He was fortunate to be with my cousins and so out of the city sightseeing on the day of the earthquake. However, his hotel in the city is so damaged that nobody is allowed into it. His passport and ticket may be buried in rubble and possibly other precious documents and belongings. The loss of life there is tragic and such a beautiful city reduced to rubble. My late husband went through the terrible Napier earthquake in the North Island in 1931, and his stories of this are brought back to me now as I read about Christchurch and Japan. I feel truly saddened and worried as we all are here – living in peace and sunshine in our beautiful hospital and garden!

A busy time at the Hospital

At present our Hospital is overflowing with many patients and in our waiting ward of 20 beds there are two women in many of the beds. After several fairly quiet months we are very busy. This may be because harvesting is now over and the men folk are able to travel with their women in search of a cure for their tragic injuries.

Other parts of the Hospital have had no quiet time, especially our Public Relations Officer, with so many visitors, some perhaps escaping from the cold weather in Europe and the USA. We have just farewelled a big group of Swedish Parliamentarians and this included some of our Swedish Trustees. They visited the Hospital one day and then to Desta Mender and the Midwifery College. Mark Bennett, our CEO, then took them all up to Bahir Dar to our Centre but mainly to see the new maternity wing at the General Hospital which they have financed. We have all been worried at the slow progress of this renovation and a little embarrassed that it has taken so long. However, all was well and even the equipment was there in the operating theatre and the delivery room. This will be the referral hospital for our midwives. In this large populous Province, the midwives will send to this new facility women who possibly will need a caesarean section, thus preventing a long labour, a still born baby and a vaginal fistula.

Mr Rudd's visit

Another visitor I must mention who honoured us by a visit was Mr Kevin Rudd, the Minister for Foreign Affairs in the Australian Government. He spent many hours with us and showed enormous interest in all he saw. He went to the Midwifery College which has received so much support from the Government of Australia and the Australian community. He also visited our Desta Mender village project.

We now have our own Australian Embassy here in Addis Ababa and I was privileged to sit next to Mr Rudd at a dinner our new Ambassador, Ms Lisa Filipetto gave one evening. We know her well from her previous visits to Ethiopia when she was in Kenya. It is great to at last have an Ambassador from Australia in Ethiopia where many Australian soldiers fought in World

War II to free the country from the Italian occupation, some of whom are buried here in a special cemetery.

Family Day

A few Saturdays ago we had our annual Family Day for the hospital staff and their families. We hold it at Desta Mender, an ideal place for such an outing. It was greatly enjoyed by everyone – starting at 10am with a few speeches in an area decorated with balloons, flowers and streamers and loud speakers. We had a small choir and band, including a huge Ethiopian drum and a drummer! There were small children running hither and thither in joyous excitement. Medals were given out for long service, lunch served on the lawn and games organised by our Sister Ruth. I watched the always popular 3-legged race, which ended hilariously! This enjoyable day was organised so efficiently by our Administrative Staff and ended with a bus ride back to the city.

US Visit

A few weeks ago I was in America with Mark Bennett, Jacqueline Bernhard, the Dean of our Midwifery College and Dr Fekade Ayenachew, the senior fistula surgeon running our Yigalem Fistula Hospital. We went to launch our new Hamlin Fistula USA Trust and meet our three Trustees and our talented and charming Secretary and Executive Officer, Sarah Klotz, who will be in charge of our small office. They are all wonderfully dedicated people and so enthusiastic about our aims.

In Washington we saw snow everywhere, in front of the White House it was indeed a picture. We attended two Prayer Breakfasts soon after we arrived – the first for Africa, where we met the Ethiopian Ambassador and many Ethiopians we knew. At the National Prayer Breakfast next morning we saw and heard the President of America make a great speech, followed by other speeches, Bible readings and prayers. It was a most moving experience. I was indeed touched especially hearing some of the wonderful prayers of past Presidents. These two breakfasts were a great start to our visit – which from then on was one of many meetings with others interested and working for women and children in all the developing countries of the World. It was encouraging for us to see how many now know of this once hidden tragedy of women afflicted with obstetric fistulae and that the World has woken up to their great need.

In New York we met some old friends including the chief



Photo courtesy of the Minister's office

Mr Rudd with some patients, Dr Hamlin and Professor Gordon Williams

reporter for the New York Times – Nicholas Kristof, just back from Cairo! We had a great day in New Jersey with 'Johnson and Johnson'. It was such a pleasure to see friends there who have been in Ethiopia. We spoke at a big gathering of staff and had a TV interview. They have been interested in our work for many years and help us.

Mark and I, with Brett O'Donnell (the Chairman of our new US Trust) flew to Chicago and back to New York in the one day. A brief interview, or rather a friendly talk, with Oprah Winfrey in Chicago made our short trip to that city of snow well worth the visit. Oprah was interested in all our regional Hospitals, and particularly the Midwifery College's prevention work.



Dr Hamlin with Oprah Winfrey, Mark Bennett and Brett O'Donnell

Medical news

Mark Bennett and some of our senior staff and doctors, spent time in West Africa in early December for meetings with the UNFPA and the ISOFS (International Society of Fistula Surgeons). At these meetings papers were read and discussions held about the problems we all face in Africa helping fistula sufferers, and the prevention and eventual eradication of obstetric fistula.

A part time laboratory technician, Demem Bekele returned from the UK recently, after a major operation on her right hip joint which was shattered by a soldier's bullet when she was only 3 years old. Her mother and father were killed at the same time! She has lived with us for some time and has succeeded through poverty, perseverance and pluck.

She was treated freely by a hospital in North London and the orthopaedic surgeon (who has given me two new hips) charged no fee, nor did the anaesthetist. So when the airlines heard about this generosity they gave Demem a free return air ticket!

Demem convalesced with my family in England and arrived



Demem is happy with her new hip

back at the Hospital a few days ago. She now walks with 2 legs the same length and free of pain. We are delighted and she is so grateful.

I also want to tell you about a Somali patient who came to us one month after her traumatic delivery with some of the worst fistula injuries I have seen. The whole of her bladder was destroyed because there was no one to help when she was in obstructed childbirth. Her rectum was also damaged, making her plight even worse. We have one Somali speaking Nurse Aide, so we can communicate through her. At last our patient is beginning to smile and to eat the Hospital's Ethiopian food which she finds rather strange compared to the food she is used to. She is slowly returning to some degree of happiness with all the loving care she receives from our staff. It is too soon to do any surgery for her but I will keep you informed.



Somali patient

I have just been seeing four new patients in Outpatients with some of the 3rd year midwifery students and teaching them how to examine a fistula patient. They are a most delightful and enthusiastic set of pupils. One day soon they will be out helping women in the remote countryside.

Now I send my love, my thanks for your interest and concern for us and for those we treat.

Catherine Hamlin

Dr E. Catherine Hamlin AC

Please accept the attached donation for the work of the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital through the **HAMLIN FISTULA® RELIEF & AID FUND**

Please post to PO Box 965 Wahroonga NSW 2076

Donations of over \$2 are allowable Income Tax Deductions.

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AN 'ORDINARY' MIRACLE

Rae and Winston Newman, who live in Canberra, spent 12 months in Addis Ababa during 2008–09 when Rae helped establish the Juniper Café at Desta Mender and Winston taught at the Bingham Academy, one of the schools in Addis Ababa. Here is Rae's story of Tirualem Mengistu who they met at the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital during their time in Ethiopia.

In December 2008, Mark Bennett, the Hospital's CEO, Ephrem Aklilu, the Manager of Desta Mender, a kitchen company representative and I were in Mark's office at the Addis Abba Fistula Hospital. We were there to sign the contract for the internal fixtures at the Juniper Café. During the meeting, Dr Hamlin came in, obviously upset. She said, "Mark, we have a very sick woman who we think will die. She is to have an operation in an hour's time and if she dies, Mark, we have to do something! She has five children, and we have to help those children. Her husband loves her very much. He is in tears; he doesn't know what he will do."

Dr Hamlin sat down and with all of us present, kitchen company representative and all, we prayed for Tirualem Mengistu, as we were told this was her name. We prayed for the skill of the doctors and for her survival.

Tirualem was brought from the northern regions by her husband. This is a very long journey of several days by bus. She was suffering from incontinence and chronic pain. It appears that she had an operation at a government provincial hospital and something had been pierced, causing the incontinence; but even worse, was the existence of a swab left inside her abdomen and discovered by an X-ray taken at the Fistula Hospital soon after she arrived.

We became very concerned for Tirualem as her condition was very poor after the operation. The Hospital staff sat with her and watched her blood pressure and for signs of deterioration. This went on for many days. One Sunday, Dr Hamlin was not at church. I phoned to see how she was and she said she had been up through the night with Tirualem.

In the middle of the next week, I went to the Hospital with roses from the garden at Bingham. I was shown to Tirualem's bed and, although she was weak, she smiled sweetly and nodded her head in a typically Ethiopian way, to express gratitude and pleasure.

Some weeks later, we picked more flowers and set off to visit again. This time we entered the large ward with many beds and wondered where Tirualem was. Suddenly a head popped up with a smiling face. There she was! She had recognised us. She was recovering well and once again she could only nod her head to express her joy.

More weeks passed and I returned to the Hospital because Dr Hamlin said Tirualem would be returning home. Her husband had come for her and I wanted to pass on to her some money that had been given from Australia. We took photographs to record this miracle of answered prayer, loving care and skilled medical practice.

Just another 'ordinary' miracle at the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital.



Dr Hamlin with Tirualem

FUND ACTIVITIES

Walk for Women

A Walk for Women is being organised by women at the St James Anglican Church in Turramurra, NSW. This is to raise awareness about obstetric fistula and to support the work of the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital and the Hamlin College of Midwives. It is to be held on Saturday 11 June 2011. For further details go to www.hamlinfistula.org.au/events.html





Lighting a Candle

The Fund is very grateful to a number of supporters who have recently organised several very successful community screenings of *Lighting A Candle*, the new documentary about the work of Dr Catherine Hamlin AC, the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital and the Hamlin College of Midwives. Recent screenings have been held at Avoca Beach, and in Canberra, Adelaide, Port Lincoln and Victor Harbour. If you would like to organise a screening in your local area please contact the Fund's office so that we can assist you with preparing for the event.

Screenings of *Lighting a Candle* are currently being planned in Melbourne, Brisbane and Wangaratta. Details of these screenings will be posted on our website as arrangements are finalised.

Lighting a Candle - on sale now!

Copies of the documentary in DVD format can now be purchased via our website or by completing and returning the detachable slip with your payment.

Would you like an email receipt?

If you would prefer to receive receipts by email then please include your email address when making a donation.

The Fund is happy to continue to mail out paper receipts to donors who prefer to receive receipts in this way.