Alliances, Partnerships and an Ethiopian Journey: The Story of Mekelle's Children's Library

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Keywords: Ethiopia; children's libraries; Segenat Children and Youth Library; Yohannes Gebregeorgis; Mekelle; KOHA; Regis University

Introduction

"Everything in war is simple, but the simplest thing is difficult."[1] Throughout my five months in Mekelle, Ethiopia in 2010, I frequently found myself substituting the word "war" with the word "Ethiopia." *Everything in Ethiopia is simple, but the simplest thing is very difficult.* Ethiopia, despite all its beauty and optimism, is a very difficult country in which to work and in which to live. In an August 2010 article written about the dedication of the Segenat Children and Youth Library, Leonard Kniffel described the "grinding poverty" in the city of Mekelle.[2] Mekelle is a growing city with a somewhat reliable electrical grid and a somewhat stable water supply and is modern by any measure in comparison to the villages and hamlets in the region.

Sharing a cup of tea is simple—once a charcoal fire is lit and if one had the foresight to collect water from the standpipe during the brief interludes when the water was flowing. The same can be said with setting up the Segenat Children and Youth Library in the city of Mekelle, Tigray Region, Ethiopia. (Photo 1) It was very simple, but oh so very difficult. Never once though did I feel that it was hopeless. Every day I experienced a people that were very hopeful and searching for ways to better themselves and their families. And every day I knew that we

were supported by so many people, especially librarians and educators in Colorado and across the world.

The Journey Unfolds

This journey, and it most aptly can be described as a journey, began more than 35 years ago when I first went to Ethiopia as a Peace Corps Volunteer. I was idealistic, naïve, and assigned to a small village in the south where I taught seventh grade English, the medium of instruction for upper grades and the third language for all of my students. Years later I tell others that not a day has gone by that I have not thought about Ethiopia, such was the impact of the country and people on my life.

Fast forward thirty years and I had an opportunity to meet Yohannes Gebregeorgis, a native of Ethiopia who fled his native land as a political refugee, took asylum in the U.S., and completed an undergraduate degree in English at the State University of New York (SUNY) Buffalo and then a Masters in Library Science at the University of Texas at Austin. Throughout his career, Yohannes has overseen the development of over 45 school library partnerships across Ethiopia, three public children's libraries, seven Donkey Mobile Libraries (Photo 2) and a number of portable libraries. (Photo 3) Yohannes has achieved international fame

for these endeavors including a 2008 Top 10 CNN Hero award, a Presidential Citation for International Innovation by the American Library Association (ALA) in 2008, delivered the President's Keynote Address at the American Library Association Mid-Winter conference in Boston in January 2010, and was awarded an Honorary Doctorate for his achievements by Regis University in Denver, Colorado in May 2010. At the 2001 ALA annual conference in New Orleans this summer, he will be awarded Honorary Membership to ALA, the highest award bestowed on an individual by ALA.

While in Denver to serve as a keynote speaker at the Colorado Association of Libraries conference in Denver in November 2008, he graciously agreed to a number of presentations at Regis University; the most significant proved to be a Regis University Radio interview with Dr. Thomas Hooyman, a professor of Medical Ethics. Tragically, Dr. Hooyman was killed in a motor vehicle accident a week later and Yohannes vowed to build a library in his memory. In less than a year, we raised the funds to establish a school library in his name and I was invited to participate in the training of library assistants, the organization of the library, and the dedication. (Photo 4)

During this visit in August 2009, I made a point to connect with current Peace Corps Volunteers in Mekelle and they would prove to be instrumental in the development of the new library project, soon to be named the "Segenat Children and Youth Library".[3] (Photo 5) It was at that time that the City of Mekelle offered to Yohannes the use, lease free, of a large, free-standing building to house a children's library. The offer was too good to refuse and quickly we all set in motion elements of the project that best matched our talents and abilities. The three Volunteers proceeded to draft and then solicit funding for a Peace Corps Partnership Grant. I applied for and was granted a sabbatical leave from Regis University in Denver to focus on training, organizing, and managing the library staff and the collection. Yohannes worked with the city on let-

ters of understanding and the physical transfer of the property for the use of the library. Together, Yohannes and I worked on fundraising and public awareness. He enlisted the support of the Volunteers for the needed manpower to unpack boxes of books and plan for the configuration of the collection and services. Libraries and librarians across the State of Colorado donated over 10,000 books and volunteers from Regis University helped me sort, cull, and inventory the final 8,000 books that were shipped. The Regis volunteers contributed at least 200 hours of time during their lunch hours, Saturdays, and "Mission leave" made available by the University. Yohannes contracted a gifted carpenter to build and set up shelving, tables and chairs, and at my specific request, a reading nook with tiered seating to be used for story hours and other activities. (Photo 6)

New Technology

I also investigated the feasibility of an online public access catalog. I conducted a literature search and spoke with a number of colleagues about possible open source software products. It needed to be inexpensive (hopefully free), easy to manage, and be capable of multiple scripts including Amharic and Tigrigna. All indicators pointed me to KOHA. I contacted the Director of Libraries at Addis Ababa University (AAU), with whom I had been in correspondence for several years about the open source product that AAU was using. When he mentioned KOHA, that sealed the deal. In further exploration, I discovered that a number of small libraries in Colorado had implemented KOHA as well. I made contact with the Fremont County Library in Florence, Colorado and the Dacono Public Library in Dacono. Although other libraries in Colorado also used KOHA, they had an intermediary firm manage the software, an option that would be impractical for us in Ethiopia and beyond our budget. Both Kieran Hixon at Fremont, Amy Bruno at Dacono, and John Twigg from Regis University's IT department were very knowledgeable, helped with software, and gave practical

tips about basic needs. They downloaded and configured the KOHA software on a donated laptop, walked me through the basic functions, and I was on my way.

Sabbatical Opportunity

I returned to Ethiopia in July 2010 to begin my sabbatical stay and was overwhelmed by the progress achieved by Yohannes, his staff, and the Volunteers since I was there in 2009. The extensive floor plan was carefully divided into reading and study areas by strategic placement of shelving separating the preschool and early grades from the more studious needs of high school students. (Photo 7) The reading nook faced an alcove that supplied ample lighting as well as a semi-enclosed space for story hours, arts and crafts, and other activities. It later proved to be one of the more popular spaces in the library.

We quickly made introductions as I tried to associate names with faces and positions: Birhan, Bisrat, Adom, Enda, Enzesh, Meheret, Selam. The library assistants had at least a tenth grade education and one had an additional two years at a technical college. Each earned around 600 Birr, the equivalent of $37.50 U.S., per month with the others earning much less. Yohannes also hired three student assistants who were scheduled for ten hours per week, but enjoyed being together so much that they often were there considerably longer. It is a rarity that students are hired in such jobs, but with these opportunities they gain very valuable experience and hopefully will continue on in the library profession. One of the students lives in Debri, a two-hour walk from the library. This worked well during the summer, but was more difficult once school started. Fortunately, Yohannes also had a library at the school in Debri which allowed the student to work at that school library during the week and at the Segenat on Saturdays.

Mechanics of Library Set-Up

The first major step was organizing the books on the shelves. (Photo 8) Because many of the titles were withdrawn from other libraries, they were already classified and had spine labels. Despite the fact that the students and the library assistants were working primarily in a third language and had little to no library experience, they took to this task with great enthusiasm. As they clustered together in pairs or threes, I could hear them call out loud, "B, B, B" and I waited expectantly for someone to call out, "Bingo." In addition to having an organized collection for users, this gave the assistants an opportunity to slowly become familiar with the collection itself, to distinguish between juvenile fiction and picture stories, between fiction and non-fiction, and between general materials and reference.

Once the collection was sufficiently organized, it was time to classify the remainder of the titles, which was extensive. This would prove challenging because of the limits of third language capabilities and because of the unfamiliarity of western surnames. The library also lacked electricity for the first six weeks of the training, and needed basic supplies were almost nonexistent. Although I cannot read Amharic, we spoke primarily in Amharic because I speak no Tigrigna and they were reluctant to speak English once they learned we could communicate in Amharic.

The majority of the books came from one public library in the United States, thus predetermined the basic classification scheme. We used "JPS" and the author's surname for the picture books, "JF" and the author's surname for chapter books, and "J" and the appropriate Dewey classification number for the non-fiction. We did not have a Dewey classification manual until much later in the process so we worked from an outline I found online and a comparison of existing classified books on the shelves, essentially using the shelves as a shelflist. But even this proved challenging as the schedules were in English, and at times a very technical English. There were definitions that even I needed to verify in a dictionary on occasion.

It didn't take long for the assistants to differentiate between the picture books and chapter books, but western surnames was a concept that gave them headaches, and me as well. Ethiopians use a given name when naming a child, usually one that reflects a circumstance: Genet (Heaven), Tirunesh (You are good), Gebremariam (the Servant of Mary). The child takes the father's given name as well as the grandfather's given name for further identification. Thus a female child would be called Regat (given name) Yohannes (father's given name) Gebresellasie (grandfather's given name). Her brother might be called Girmay (given name) Yohannes (father's given name) Gebresellasie (grandfather's given name). It wasn't sufficient to state that they should always use the last name as the surname because that did not take into account hyphenated surnames, or names that began with "von" or "van" or "el" or "la." There was also great confusion between authors and illustrators; size of the font was not necessarily an indicator of authorship. Occasionally, I would find a publisher confused as an author. Even more confusion occurred if a full name was in the title as in "Ramona Quimby" by Beverly Cleary. But with patience none of this proved insurmountable.

The next step was to print labels. Although stationery stores were everywhere, they lacked many common supplies, let alone library-specific materials. The quality of many of the supplies was also suspect: tape that stuck to itself but not much of anything else, scissors that were not sharp, and markers that dried out within days of purchase. I had brought my laptop with me and fortunately it had a good working battery, all the more essential since there was no electricity in the building. I was able to create a template for label production in Word and the students enjoyed inputting the data, transferring it to a flash drive, and then walking it over to a business center with electricity for printing on sheets of paper. Computer viruses were rampant, and with all the file sharing, I was fortunate not to have my laptop implode until two days prior to my re-

turn to the U.S. The labels were trimmed and adhered with the aforementioned cheap, plastic tape. The students became quite skilled at spotting typographical errors that were then redone. I had brought two very good pairs of scissors with me and discovered that soon, the gardener was using them as well. I put a stop to that and purchased a cheaper pair for his use alone. Property is communal with everyone sharing pens, a ruler, a calculator, or a pair of scissors. I had the only flash drive in the building and it was difficult to refuse to share it when payroll was on the line. Until we were able to secure electricity to the building, my laptop was the only computer available for any number of projects.

Approaching Dedication

In the meantime, others were working on getting power and water to the building, planting trees, providing signage in English and Tigrigna, moving a massive amount of rubble, constructing a Donkey Mobile Library, purchasing books in Amharic and Tigrigna, framing photos and artwork, preparing for the dedication, and planning children's book week. Computers were purchased with the Peace Corps Partnership Grant, but not installed until electricity was run to the building, which was shortly before the dedication. Time would tell whether we would be able to network the computers and determine the feasibility of the KOHA online catalog.

Prior to the dedication, two librarians and an educator from the U.S., Erin Meyer, Student Outreach Librarian and Research Center Coordinator at the University of Denver; Dr. Maria Briones, English Faculty at the Sharjah Higher College of Technology, Dubai, UAE; Athena Michael, Academic Library representative at John Wiley & Sons, Inc., joined Yohannes, Tewolde Tesfay, Head of the Science Library at Mekelle University, and me in a three-day training session for the Segenat Children and Youth Library staff as well as library assistants at three nearby school libraries, Myliham, Debri, and Fre Se-wat. Tewolde Tesfay pro-

vided detailed training in cataloging and classification. He also translated the presentations by the international librarians into Tigrigna. Erin Meyer provided in depth coverage of various reference tools and user services. The trainees learned the difference between directional questions, quick reference, and more extensive reference questions. Erin also spoke about child development and how to use different children's books for each of the various stages of development. Athena Michael, a former children's librarian, kept trainees engaged with storytelling, puppet making, flannel boards, and a variety of arts and crafts. After a hands-on session in which they made puppets, each group read and acted out the characters and roles while reading a story aloud.

The Dedication

The Segenat Children and Youth Library officially opened on August 20th, 2010 to an audience of more than 400 well-wishers, including dignitaries such as Rwandan Ambassador to Ethiopia, Professor Joseph Nsengimana; Abraha Kiros, Special Education Advisor to the President of the Regional Government of Tigray; Dr. Solomon Inqui, retired statesman and author; and Ato Teklawoyni, representing the City of Mekelle. There was a ribbon cutting, formal speeches, a coffee ceremony, and since it was scheduled to occur during the Ashenda Festival, spontaneous dancing. The Ashenda Festival is a girl's holiday that celebrates the end of the rainy season and the coming of the New Year. (Photo 9) In addition to the dignitaries, the previously mentioned trainers were in attendance, as well as a large contingent of Peace Corps Volunteers from the northern region and from the Peace Corps Administration in Addis Ababa. Over 3,000 copies of Yohannes' book, *Tirhas Celebrates Ashenda: An Ethiopian Girl's Festival*, were distributed to attendees, and later to Ashenda girls who visited the library in the days following the dedication. *Tirhas Celebrates Ashenda* was dedicated to the memory of Dr. Thomas Hooyman and was funded by the Cherry Creek Rotary Club in Denver, Colo-

rado. (Photo 10) We received great press including Leonard Kniffel from *American Libraries* and Girmay Gebru from the Voice of America, as well as coverage by Ethiopian TV.

The Segenat Library Becomes Operational

The children came to the library in droves, a welcomed sign reflecting the need for the library. All new children registered upon entering to the library by presenting their given name, father's given name, their grade in school, and the name of their school, since no one had a specific street address. (Photo 11) Later we started collecting the name of their Kebelle (neighborhood) since some students did not go to school near their homes. This information will be instrumental in selecting the locations of further branch libraries in the future. Returning students merely checked in and confirmed their information, which was recorded on a general tally as well as on a specific user card. Since there was no detection system, book bags were left at the registration desk, although students could retain a single exercise book and a writing device. All students were physically searched before they left the library by either a female employee or a male guard. They all seemed to take this in stride, most likely because everyone is searched before going into a public or governmental building such as a post office, bank, or office.

The toilets presented a unique set of problems because they were probably the only public toilets in the city. For whatever reason, when the water was supplied to the building, it only went as far as a standpipe near the building. The cleaners or guards needed to bring water into the building by bucket and pour the water into large barrels outside of the individual stalls. Water pitchers were provided to flush the western style toilets. Toilet paper was not supplied, but if carried individually and used, it was deposited in a trash container in the stall. Periodically the city would turn off water to an entire Kebelle for days at a time, and if staff had not filled the barrels, no one would

have access to water and therefore to the toilets. We soon discovered that some of the boys were using the water for bathing and shampooing their hair, consuming the little precious water that we had. Despite the obvious need to perform such personal functions, this was not one of the services that the library could provide at that time and so the toilets were locked, but could be used with permission.

We also had many of the same problems that librarians have the world over: children mis-shelving their own books, noise levels, or the occasional writing on tables. While the bad news was that the shelved books were out of order, the good news was that students were really using the books. These issues were somewhat resolved by careful placement of signs in the local language, by monitoring the area, and with periodic shelf reading. It was very gratifying to see the library assistants working as a team and solving problems as they arose. But most of all it was gratifying to see the children really using the library as a place to study, read, and do research.

Online Catalog Development

Following the dedication, the next major challenge was automating the library now that the library had electricity. It was time to take a deep breath and then determine the feasibility of implementing an online catalog. Although my desire to have computers in libraries in Ethiopia had been scoffed at, I wanted to prove my skeptics wrong. I was comfortable with the KOHA software, but knew that having it on a stand-alone laptop would have severe limitations. One of the Peace Corps Volunteers was able to network a single computer workstation to the laptop, but he also recognized his limitations when it came to networking. It was at that point that we decided to call in the Marines … or, to be more specific, a single Marine-turned-Peace Corps Volunteer who was assigned to Hawassa. I had been told that Richard Gelicame was the "go to" person when it came to networking. Rich gladly accepted the call and spent

a week with us in Mekelle. He completely reformatted all of the PCs, added two routers, installed virus protection software, enabled wireless access through modifying a transmitter, and configured the software for Internet access. He also needed to add additional electrical outlets, crimp cabling to run between the PCs, and he reinforced the power strips for greater stability. The online catalog would now become a reality. (Photo 12)

It is no surprise to those in the library profession that catalogs are labor intensive. I determined the minimum amount of data that would need to be entered into the records and drafted a set of procedures. I first had the Peace Corps Volunteers test drive my instructions to see if they were logical and understandable, made some changes, and then trained the Ethiopia staff. I debated about the worthiness of including collation information (pagination, illustrations, and dimensions) when I discovered that the entire staff was sharing one lone ruler. After combing a number of stationery stores, I was able to purchase an additional ruler and decided that after all that effort we were definitely adding dimensions. (Photo 13)

The KOHA software is easy to configure and I was able to set up templates for both bibliographic records and for item records. This included setting up material types and shelving locations. Since books would not circulate and since patron information was kept in the local language, the circulation module did not need to be configured at this point. As noted earlier, KOHA is capable of using both Amharic and Tigrigna script, but the limited personnel resources just did not allow us to take advantage of this feature of the software.

There were two staff members who understood written English and also had keyboarding skills. We carefully worked through the procedures together. While the KOHA software has the capability of downloading cataloging records from online sources, we didn't have access to the Internet. All cata-

loging would be original but with somewhat brief records. The fields that I felt important were ISBN, call number, author, title, collation, and subject. Most of the books had CIP and we used the Sears subject headings if they were available. If not, we would rely on keyword searching or finding the books by browsing the shelves. Since both the keyboarding and language skills of the staff were limited, I did not want inventive headings. (Photo 14)

Once again, the issues of surnames became a challenge. Capitalization was also something very foreign to them. Words are simply not capitalized in either Tigrigna or Amharic. Names were frequently entered in lower case and other words in upper case. Many children's books have elaborate fonts and flourishes which gave way to some creative spelling. An uppercase "I" (eye) and lower case "l" (el) were frequently switched. Similar words such as "plants" and "planets" were often confused. Correcting every single error would have been demoralizing to our workers, so I focused on those errors that affected searching. I would work with each library assistant individually so that each could identify her own errors and make corrections. I then asked them to check each other's work. Not perfect, but definitely good enough.

The KOHA software has a professional looking web interface. It was easy to teach all the library assistants how to search the catalog and students quickly picked up searching techniques as well. I placed one computer at the reference desk and a second at the registration desk. These also became the two primary computers for inputting cataloging records. The KOHA server was also placed at the registration desk in order to limit access to staff only. Access to the online catalog came primarily through the use of computers in the PC lab.

Each of the Peace Corps Volunteers took turns entering data as well. At the time I left in November, we had entered bibliographic data for 3,000 items and "barcoded" 4,500 of the 20,000 volumes in the collection. Actual barcodes were not available, so following up on the recommendation of my colleagues from Colorado, we wrote a simple number in the upper left hand corner of the front endpaper in a black permanent marker. This number was sequentially generated by the KOHA software. Simple and efficient.

The need for an online catalog became apparent as students began asking more and more sophisticated reference questions: "What is the big bang theory?" "Can you help me identify different trees of the world?" Not surprisingly, maps and atlases were also frequently requested items as the students explored the depths of the oceans, country flags, major languages or population statistics. With this type of question in mind, we began our cataloging project for both reference and the non-fiction sections. A reference log was kept so that all library assistants could learn from each other as to the type of questions being asked and how questions could best be answered. These entries to the log were kept in any language in which the assistant felt comfortable. Records were also kept of requests for specific types of materials for later purchase, such as obtaining a copy of the Ethiopian constitution or additional copies of high-use materials.

Besides providing access to the local holdings, an online catalog will also prepare students for libraries at the university level. Addis Ababa University, as has been mentioned, uses the KOHA open source software and has had an aggressive retrospective conversion project operating for the past few years. The University of Mekelle uses ABCD, a software suite for the automation of libraries and documentation centers. A professional catalog and other strides made in automation will now enable the Segenat to apply for future technology grants.

The greatest change that I witnessed in Ethiopia from my first visit to these subsequent visits was the high use of cell phone and mobile technology. I purchased a CDMA, a mobile device that connected me

to the Internet and connected me to the world. It was very expensive to purchase ($200.00 U.S.) and relatively expensive to maintain on Ethiopian salaries. A 100 Birr mobile card ($6.50 U.S.) would last about 12 to 15 hours with careful use. But it gave me great flexibility by allowing access to the Internet and email from home, office, or anywhere that I travelled. With the intent that I would donate the CDMA to the library when I left, we configured the library network to utilize the CDMA. I trained an assistant on email so that she could forward to me needed statistics for future fundraising. The IT manager included Internet in the Introduction to Computers course and the Segenat is determining the best way to frugally use the minutes for Internet applications.

Programming

With books on the shelves, a highly automated environment, and a multitude of student visits, it was time to focus on a range of library programs for children. The reading nook was popular with the preschoolers who attended story hours and puppet show presentations, made more professional through the intensive training prior to the library opening. (Photo 15) Jigsaw puzzles presented an interesting challenge since the library assistants had never put together this type of puzzle before, but the children picked up the skill with ease with a simple demonstration. Other activities included the use of local materials, such as corn husks and eggshells. Corn husks were in great supply and used for corn husk dolls, much to the delight of both boys and girls. The price of eggs rose fifty percent during the time that I was there and although seemingly plentiful, they became too expensive for everyday activities. Still, the children enjoyed decorating and displaying their finished artwork of all types. (Photo 16)

Once the computer lab became networked, the Segenat was able to offer "Introduction to Computer" classes. Two separate sessions were conducted, one taught by a volunteer from the Mekelle Youth Center. In addition, the Segenat offered other pro-

grams: a Science Club mentored by a retired school teacher of 30 years; an art club mentored by a local artist; and a homework club monitored by older students. Signup sheets and waiting lists filled quickly. Two Ethiopian-American authors, Dinaw Mengestu and Maaza Mengiste, donated copies of their books, *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* and *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* for the Book Club. Local authors donated copies of their books for the Book Club as well. (Photo 17)

New and returning users were tracked daily with the male/female ratio almost two to one. This is not surprising since girls had much more responsibility at home. Attendance on Saturday was also high, due in part to the showing of free videos on Saturday morning. But the video program only accounted for about twenty to thirty percent of the overall attendance on Saturday. Many of the schools did not have Saturday classes and students heavily used the library for studying. An Ethiopian Television reporter was advised by her son, a frequent library user, to report on the new library. Two fifteen minute sessions were aired nationally on ETV and the next Saturday, the Segenat had a record number of 765 attendees with 1015 attendees the following Saturday. This upsurge in attendance led to some creative thinking about crowd control. The staff brought out folding chairs and limited entrance to the library based on available seating.

The Next Journey

What does the future bring for the library? Fund raising is a high priority since the library is privately supported. There will be great efforts made in Ethiopia, the United States, and Sweden (which has a large Ethiopian population), to raise the necessary funds. The city of Mekelle has offered the Library three additional sites for future branches. Based on fundraising and demographics, a site will be chosen that best meets the needs of the children in Mekelle and relieves some of the demand on the Segenat library. We suspect, however, that more branch libraries will likely just in-

crease the overall attendance. Sunday hours are under consideration, should additional funds become available. Extending daytime hours beyond the six o'clock closure is unlikely because of concerns for the safety of those staff members who travel great distances in the dark. In Mekelle, there are few streetlights, side roads are tricky during the rainy season, public transportation is limited, and hyenas do present a real threat. (Photo 18) Challenges such as these call for creative solutions, compelling vision, and the collaboration of many around the world. Leonard Kniffel described the Segenat this way: "New Youth Library Makes Impossible Dream Reality." With passion, dedication, and hard work we can make the impossible possible, and the extraordinary ordinary.

Endnotes

[1] Carl von Clausewitz, "On War" (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 65.

[2] Lenoard Kniffel, "New Youth Library in Ethiopia Makes Impossible Dream Reality." American Libraries, August 23, 2010. http://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/news/08232010/new-youth-library-ethiopia-makes-impossible-dream-reality

[3] I do not want to overstate the war analogy, but remnants of war surrounded me each day. The "Segenat" were "the children of the revolution, the Segenat ("Greens"), between seven and thirteen years of age…they served mainly as couriers and supply carriers behind the front lines." Gebru Tareke. The Ethiopian Revolution: War in the Horn of Africa. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 106. The "revolution" of which Gebru Tareke refers is the overthrow of the Derg, the Military Government which overth-rew Emperor Haile Sellasie on Sept. 12, 1974. The people of Tigray were instrumental in this defeat as described in the Library of Congress' Ethiopia: A Country Study, "In Ti-gre, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) sought regional autonomy and the overthrow of the Derg. In the late 1980s, the TPLF and other Ethiopian ethnically based resistance groups formed

the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), and, together with the EPLF, administered defeats on a demoralized Ethiopian army that led to the collapse of the Derg in May 1991." http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Ethiopia.pdf. When I first met Yohannes, it did not take long to discover that we were both on Churchill Blvd. in Addis Ababa, the day that Emperor Haile Sellasie was overthrown; he a student revolutionary and I a neophyte Peace Corps Volunteer. Each day that I was in Mekelle I met men who were involved in the revolution in one way or another.

Photo 1. Sign on a crossroad near The Segenat Children and Youth Library stenciled in both Tigrigna and English.

Photo 2. This Donkey Mobile Library was stationed at The Segenat during the dedication and attracted much attention.

Photo 3. Portable Libraries, containing approximately two hundred books in English and local languages in a carrying case, serve the needs of small rural schools that have few classrooms.

Photo 4. Barbara Hooyman Baker, sister of the late Dr. Thomas Hooyman, unveils the plaque at the Dr. Thomas Hooman Memorial Library and Media Center at Fre Se-wat Elementary School in Mekelle in August 2009 (Nahase 2001 in the Ethiopian calendar).

Photo 5. The Segenat Children and Youth Library is a free standing building that houses 20,000 books, a computer/media lab, small classrooms, and ample study space.

Photo 6. Library Assistant Birhan Mehari reads from Yohannes' book, "Silly Mamo" in the Reading Nook.

Photo 7. Units of shelving separated the youth section from the picture stories and the reading nook, allowing for both quiet and privacy for studying and research.

Photo 8. Meheret and Enda sort the non-fiction titles prior to the opening. As library assistants, they make 600 Birr per month, about $37.50 U.S. and typically work a six-day week.

Photo 9. A group of Ashenda Girls (and boys) walked in from the town of Debri to participate in the Ashenda festivities. This group won first place in a dancing/singing completition.

Photo 10. Two young girls sit outside the Segenat Library with a copy of Yohannes' book, "Tirhas Celebrates Ashenda." It is written in both Tigrigna and English and is probably the first book that either has owned.

Photo 11.   Three boys wait their turn to sign in to use the library. Initial registration includes their name, school, and age. Children walked to the library from all parts of the city and beyond.
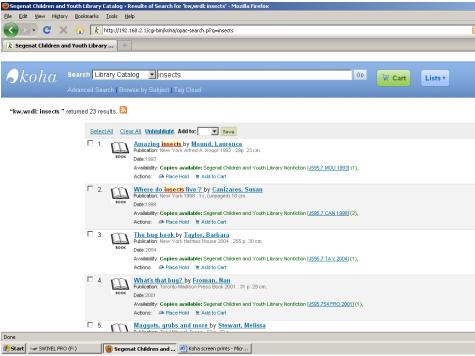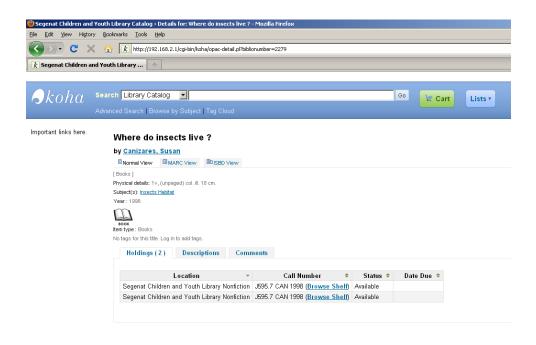

Photo 12. A screen shot from the KOHA public access catalog. The displays are clean, colorful, and professional looking.

Photo 13. Each cataloging record provides author, title, physical dimensions, and location in an easy to read and easy to search format.

Photo 14. Enda Mehari enters data into a MARC record format on the reference desk computer, a wireless computer that is on the network. A numerical "barcode" is written on the front endpaper of each book.

Photo 15. The alcove of the reading nook was the site of many arts and crafts activities. Locally made cowhide stools added additional seating and functionality. Two quilted wall hangings of Yohannes' books, *Tirhas Celebrates Ashenda* and *Silly Mamo* added whimsy to the décor.

Photo 16. Regat, Lula, and Azeb were library regulars and very good students. Because they were "Janet's girls," they were granted special privledges to come to the library before it was officially opened. Regat and Lula participated in the library dedication by reading *Tirhas Celebrates Ashenda* in Tigrigna and English to an audience of 400.

Photo 17. Yohannes Gebregeorgis, Maaza Mengiste (author of *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*), and Janet Lee at Addis Ababa University, where Yohannes and Maaza were speakers at the Calaloo conference. The conference entitled (Black) Movements: Poetics and Praxis Praxis was sponsored by *Callaloo: A Journal of African Diaspora Arts and Letters*, the leading journal publishing art, literature, interviews, and criticism by, or focusing on, people and cultures of the African Diaspora.

Photo 18. The library staff on the front steps of the Segenat Children and Youth Library. This group includes three assistants, three students, and two cleaners.