

*Dear friends of this Center,*

When I am looking back today to the very beginning of my time in Addis I have to think 13 years back, but it seems for me as a quite short time, because I am still living with these memories.

When I arrived in July 1993 the school was closed, no teachers around, only once we met for a coffee and then all disappeared for Nazareth. I had time to realize that I am in Addis, to learn Amharic (better to try to learn the language), to look for a house, a mamita, a zabana and to arrange me with the traffic in Addis – that time very different from today.



Cleaning day in Kazanchis

**The beginning in Kazanchis**

When the school opened after Maskal I was quite nervous if they would like me, if I could manage the new duties. But the welcome was so nice and friendly so that I felt enough courage to begin. I took my place in the container of Kazanchis and I started to work with the old typewriter that was available there. I liked the place, it was near to the classrooms and of my nearest neighbourhood I heard Hirut's voice nicely and friendly talking to the children. With Askale as a guide through the roads of Addis and a helper for communications within the families I started to visit the families of the children in their respective homes. It gave me a big impression about the poverty of their life and the very hard problems they had to manage. It gave me also a bad feeling not to be able to do something more helpful for them, when they looked on me with a lot of hope.

**My first big duty – to build the school**

In Germany I had been told to support the teachers in moving to the new school. So I asked for the date of moving and I was surprised that everybody started to laugh. They told me, that there was not yet a school but only field and grass. So I knew my first big duty – to build the school. Plans and money were around so we started to push the responsible persons to start and we became the first to build on that field. Many times

Askale and me travelled to that place, and I was afraid to think of the transport of children and teachers to that far area. My next duty came quickly – we needed a new bus for children and if possible a small car to assist the teachers to reach the school. KNH was helpful and also the German Embassy, the cars arrived and the problems with the customs started. Later when we got the second new school bus after the drama of the Mitsubishi bus we had again to manage the customs problems. I remember my first and last crying in the arms of Askale when I left for the 13 th time the customs office without a result. Finally we were successfull and the cars could start to run.



Building the classrooms in Mekaissa

After having decided about windows, floors, colours, after having changed the toilets from inside the houses to outside, after having asked to build a kitchen, which was not in the plan and having asked for additional money to build ways and steps around the houses, after



How many children fit in one minibus?

having planed and looked around for the children's playground and the furniture for the classes and the money for it, we could fix a date for moving – it was already 1995.

**Moving to Mekanissa in 1995**

The moving was done by the staff without my help in a very well organized way and we could start to work on

the new place. Before we made sure, that we would not leave Kazanchis like it was expected in the compound. We wanted to keep the place in the centre of the town especially for the poor mothers and the children living around. They had to learn to come by themselves and they managed it.

### Community based rehabilitation

A big problem came to me by CBM. They had decided to support no more institutions but to start community based rehabilitation. So they asked me to finish the project and to change it into CBR Program. I told them, that I was not sent to finish it but to strengthen it. But I liked their new ideas and so we decided to start with CBM this new program by 2 teachers. Today we are proud to know that EECMY-CBRD, what Alganesh is leading is the best of all in Addis.

### Focus on children

Beside all these work, my interest and love was with the children. And slowly, slowly I learnt about their sickness and their families. I went with Belaynesh to the Black Lion Hospital to ask for help in difficult cases and I remember how hard it was when the mothers have been told, there is no hope for improvement. Sometimes we ignored it and Belaynesh tried anyway her best and found always some means and ways to improve. I remember the two mothers, one with the girl and the other with the boy with curbed legs. Both got bad information and both cried together with us in the hospital. The girl got medicine and treatment and recovered fast, she started to stand and to walk, we looked for shoes for her and today she is a healthy girl. For the boy Belaynesh started a regular visit, teaching him, treating



The work to provide special chairs for children started.

him and later she organised a radio for him so that he had some highlight in his hard life.

One day a young girl came with bended arms because of a severe stiffness. She wanted to learn embroidery by feet. We thought that it is not possible at all, but she insisted and she managed it. Today she has a fix place at Signum Vitae and is working with her feet to make post-cards, especially for Christmas.

### Public relation

One day we got a big chance to present our children to the public. Almaz Mesfin had worked hard to get the permission of the National Theater to show in a two hours' presentation our children playing, dancing and singing. The actors of the National Theater created a wonderful song and a special drama showing the problems of parents with a child with disability and how an institution like ours could help. The big hall was full of spectators and they were touched and amused by our children. The newspaper wrote the next days about an "incredible presentation" and we all were proud and happy. Television was interested to report, the emissions were well accepted and lot of people came to the Center to get help for their children. We accepted as many children as we could and we offered for the others counselling days. But most of the parents were disappointed not to get immediately a place for their children. Finally we decided not to present us furthermore in the public.

### The Montessori program started

A highlight for the school was the offer of Sisters of Ireland to teach two of our teachers as Montessori-teachers. We had to find the money for their stay of two



Children with a teacher in the Montesori class

years outside of Addis and to organise the transport. Our two teachers had a hard but fruitful time and they came back with a big box of teaching material and a lot of new knowledge. When they started to work with the children we were all happy to see the progress in pedagogical work. As we got again the chance to send teachers we did it immediately.

#### Organizing the work

Finally we had to modernize our office. Visitors who came into the office smiled a little to see me at an old typewriter, not on a computer and not having a telephone. We needed quite a lot of power to get the telephone and after having the computer and a copy machine we needed a person to manage it and to support our office work. We had no problems to find Esubalew but we faced a lot of problems to get the permission to push him legally in his job. We decided for the name of the “project”, we called it “Center for Mentally Retarded children – CMRC” and we got an official stamp. With the new buildings our staff had increased and also the number of children We needed some other staff to support the daily needs and we found a wonderful lady for cooking – Wzo Almaz and a helper for the garden, which was becoming slowly to be a little paradise with all the flowers. We had more and more visitors who appreciated the work of the teachers and the Center.

#### When our Children leave school

The situation of the youngsters touched me very much. I remember the celebration we had to say goodbye to Tsegai who had worked with Belaynesh and was very helpful for her but now he was definitely too old and had to go. We all cried and I took in my future plans to start a help for the youngsters. For the moment we were all glad to find jobs for some of them, most of them were successful in their job and we liked to visit them from time to time. We thank especially Selam for offering opportunities for them.

Together with the Ministry of Education and Ato Birhanu we started the program for the youngsters that should help them for a better integration after the time with us. It was a long and hard work to finish a complete teaching plan for two years, accepted by Ministry of Education. We started with 30 youngsters, who had first of all to learn to come by themselves by public bus and on foot. Parents didn't agree, because they were afraid that, their children would get lost somewhere in the town, but all managed it and they were so proud and happy about it. So we started the first two years and in a celebration at the end they got their certification. The big work started with the duty to integrate them into their families and the community. Every boy or girl needed his or her special plan for the time at home. It worked only with the cooperation of the parents who should develop a plan about the work possibilities in their area and needed money. The teachers discussed with the parents and checked the plan, then the necessary money or goods were given. Supervision was necessary and this duty is still going on and is not becoming easier with more and more youngsters to take care of and it is exceeding the possibility of the teachers in the Center. It needs a complete new place for a person with this duty.



Rehabilitation of our Trainees: Prepare and selling ingera

#### Live and work skills Training

With the new program came the need for more rooms and places for the youngsters to work. We were



Building the new workshop and kitchen

Encouraged by KNH to build another building, offering a kitchen, showers, a mill, a bakery and a workshop that could give working places for the youngsters. We looked for the plan by an architect and for a constructor, when suddenly KNH refused the support. Luckily we had the Japan Embassy to change from inside equipment to outside building. And we started the construction. Once it was ready we found in the Swiss Embassy and the Austrian Embassy helpers for the inside equipment.



#### Leisure time

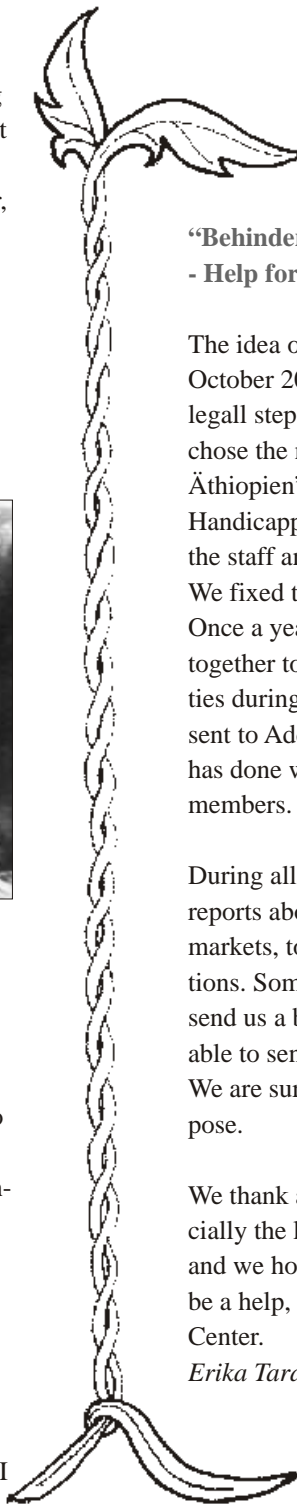
It was a special pleasure to travel with the whole staff for some days of recovering. Everybody was so happy to see some new parts of the country, to walk around, to swim, to laugh and to sing together. The staff members had always prepared a nice picnic, once we even slaughtered a goat at Langano. These days were very important for the staff and I wish they may have this chance also in the future.

#### A hard but wonderful time

Many many other stories could be reported, but I don't want to write a book and I don't want you to be bored. The years in Addis were hard, but wonderful years and I thank you all for your support and good cooperation and for all the love you showed to me that gave me the power to work.

I wish a good future for this Center. It may have always a very much motivated staff with a lot of love for the children and the work with them, and the power to resist all difficulties for the benefit of the children.

*Germany, 06-08-01 Erika*



#### “Behindertenhilfe”

##### - Help for Handicapped people

The idea of an association came already in October 2000, but until when we fulfilled all legal steps it was already February 2001. We chose the name “Behindertenhilfe für Äthiopien” which means “Help for Handicapped people in Ethiopia”; we selected the staff and looked around to find members. We fixed the yearly contribution at 16 Euro. Once a year we invite the members to come together to hear about the results of the activities during the year, to report what we have sent to Addis and what kind of work the Center has done with the money. We have now 70 members.

During all the years we tried to get money by reports about the Center, by selling goods on markets, to encourage people to give us donations. Some very active members did a lot to send us a big amount of money. So we were able to send within these years 81.000 Euro. We are sure; they were used for a good purpose.

We thank all the people to have helped us, especially the lady who is doing the administration, and we hope that the association can go on to be a help, an encouragement and a hope for the Center.

*Erika Taraki*



#### About Erika Taraki

1956-1958	Study
1958-1973	teaching at different places in Germany, one year in France
1973-1975	supplementary study
1975-1993	teaching at a school for children with learning difficulties
1993-2000	stay in Addis
	Retirement