



# THIS ONE'S FOR THE GIRLS

BY  
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(TOP): TEAM TESFA TRAINING IN MESKEL SQUARE, ADDIS ABABA. WORKE, FIRST ROW, MIDDLE, IN THE BLUE.  
(ABOVE, LEFT): TIGEST; (ABOVE, MIDDLE): ALMAZ; (ABOVE, RIGHT): THE SIMIEN GIRL RUNNERS TEAM AT LUNCH AFTER RACING,  
WITH GGRF BOARD MEMBER ERIN SINES, WHO TREATED THE TEAM, COMPLIMENTS OF GGRF, AND TEAM ORGANIZER FANTU GOLAA.

Worke wants to be a teacher.

Tigest wants to be a professional athlete.

Almaz wants to be an airline pilot.

These are the dreams, which now have a possibility of coming true, for some of the girls on Team Tesfa and the Simien Girl Runners. Two running teams supported by the Girls Goita Run Foundation, an all volunteer charitable organization founded two years ago by former Women's Studies Professor Dr. Patricia E. Ortman, her husband, Population Reference Bureau CAO/CFO James E. Scott, Attorney-at-Law Marie L. Hagen, Artist Beth Cartland, and Perfect Organics Marketing Director Amanda Chawansky. Since then, they have been joined by PRB Health Policy Analyst Erin Sines, and they have garnered support from a broad spectrum of contributors and supporters both in and around the Washington, D.C., area and elsewhere, as they try to raise money (and consciousness) to provide shoes, clothes, food and coaches' salaries to girls in Ethiopia determined to have a future.

According to Ortman, the Foundation was inspired by an article by Emily Wax in the December 29, 2005, Washington Post about the thousands of girls in rural Ethiopia who migrate to Addis Ababa to train to be professional runners and to finish school. They do this in large part to try to avoid early marriage and the potentially severe consequences of early childbirth, including the world's highest rate of vaginal fistula. Although things are changing and the official policy of the government is that marriage is illegal for anyone under 18,

the country is still very poor and in remote rural areas in Ethiopia, as in many of the world's poorest countries, there are few options.

The good news is that today, 7 out of 10 of Ethiopia's top earning athletes are women. Therefore, parents can sometimes be persuaded to let their daughters go to Addis to try to succeed in either the sports or educational arenas, knowing that in the long run they will be able to contribute more to their families and to their communities.

So teenage girls go to the Addis, live with friends or relatives who can provide some level of support, try to finish school, and find other girls with whom to train, hoping to be spotted and picked up by an official running club who will then support them while they train. This way, many of them can manage to continue both to train and to stay in school. But, as Wax reported, their meager resources do not allow them to buy proper shoes in which to train. GGRF was originally founded to try to fill that gap. Inspired by girls who were trying so hard and were so determined, Ortman felt there should be a way to reach across the ocean to give them money for new, proper-fitting athletic shoes on an ongoing basis.

As they began to research, however, they found that many of the girls also lack proper clothes in which to train and are calorie-deprived. And, unfortunately, as in the case of some of the Team Tesfa girls, their living situations sometimes fall apart and they are left homeless and vulnerable to all manner of other problems.

Although the GGRF founders initially thought they would be able



to partner with an existing NGO on the ground in Ethiopia, none they learned of so far turned out to be a good fit. So while they continued to raise funds, they also investigated other options. In December 2007, they were contacted by Dana Roskey of the Tesfa Foundation, who along with some of his staff (people who are runners), had essentially rescued several of the girls who trained with them from bad situations. GGRF began sending funds for shoes, clothing, food, and coach subsidies to help them create Team Tesfa, which means Team Hope. Over the course of 2008, the team grew to 11 girls and is still growing.

Team Tesfa has ambitious plans for the future in order to become self-sustaining. Part of that is partnering with a professional runners training company to offer training camps in the Ethiopian Mountains to runners from all over the world. With the help of the Tesfa Foundation, they were lucky enough to have that happen already and their first camps are being offered in February 2009. They also want to open a café in Addis where team members can work to support themselves when they are not training and where they can have shower facilities for the team. Before the creation of Team Tesfa, most members had gotten discouraged with formal education. Now, they all want to advance their education in some way. So, some are back in school and a few are being tutored. Some, like Worke, have ambitions to become a teacher or other professional and work part-time in Tesfa Foundation pre-schools.

Shortly after connecting with Roskey, the Girls Gotta Run Board also connected with Fantu Golaa, founder and partner of the Simien Lodge, who approached them with a compelling plan to start a team in the Simien Mountains, the main purpose of which would be to keep teenage girls in school in order to delay early age marriages. The Foundation agreed to fund a pilot team of 10 girls and by a process of competitive races among thousands of girls in several schools in Debark. Mr. Golaa and the community chose the 10 most promising girls. Most live at home. They all attend school. And they all have big dreams for the future. Since the team was created, in March 2008,

their families say that they have noticed a big difference in the girls. They are proud to be on the team, they are more disciplined in their studies and their grades have improved. Training takes up much of their free time, so it is more difficult for them to engage in less productive or beneficial activities, like hanging out with boys. Debark is very poor and there are not many social, sporting or empowerment

opportunities for young people, so the Team gives the girls something constructive to do with their time.

GGRF's immediate plans for the future are to support expansion of both Team Tesfa and the Simien Girl Runners, as well as possibly add one more team in Addis. The Foundation also continues to investigate possible ways to provide money for shoes for running girls who are in stable, supportive living situations in Addis, but who are not yet team affiliated and cannot afford shoes. Literally thousands still need support.

Of course, continued and expanded support for the teams already in existence and for additional girls depends on expanded fundraising capabilities. In 2008 it cost about \$650 per girl to provide shoes, clothes, extra food and coach subsidies. Funds have been raised through donations, a series of art exhibits, some fundraising races, and sales of GGRF memberships and logo merchandise. But escalating costs, especially for food means that providing the same level of support in 2009 will cost more.

Besides continued individual donations, the Foundation is looking now for people and groups who will sponsor a girl (or girls) for a year at a time over the course of a few years, the time it takes her to get through school and/or to become a professional runner. The Board is also looking for more people and groups

to hold independent fundraising events of all kinds to benefit the Foundation and for people who can provide information and assistance in promoting the Foundation and additionally increasing fundraising capabilities. Ortman says, "An angel would be nice."

To learn more and to see how you can help, go to the organization's website at <http://www.girlsgottarun.org> or contact Dr. Ortman at [pat@girlsgottarun.org](mailto:pat@girlsgottarun.org).

**Girls Gotta Run could not have gotten off the ground without the participation, advice and support of the Ethiopian community.**

**Etete Restaurant donated food and catering for the kick-off event in September 2006 at the Sewall-Belmont House in Washington, D.C.**

**Fregenet Assaged covered the opening exhibit for Voice of America and broadcast her coverage of the event, including interviews with many of the people in attendance, to Ethiopia.**

**Several talented and highly regarded Ethiopians in the arts community regularly participate in exhibits, contributing at least 50% of the proceeds of any sales of their art to GGRF. Included are Dilip Sheth, WDC artist and gallery owner; photographer Andarge Asfaw ("Ethiopia from the Heart"); painter Helina Metaferia; Elsa Gebreyesus, women's activist and artist; the husband and wife artist team of Meseret Desta and Mekbib Gebertsadik; and Mihret Kebebe.**

**Drs. Maignet Schifferaw and Getachew Metaferia provide invaluable advice and assistance; additionally, they are GGRF donors.**

**Dr. Takele Argaw and Ms. Kebe Tesfaye provide invaluable advice and assistance; additionally, they are GGRF art patrons.**

**Important early advice and guidance came from Ms. Sefanit Mesfin-Champagne and Ms. Bersebeh Beyene.**

**Assistance from the wonderful people at Addis Arts & Culture, including Ms. Wessen Debele, Mr. Kiflu Tadesse and Mr. Tebebu Belete, was crucial to the successful completion of the GGRF informational video.**

**Liben Eabisa at Tadias Magazine made sure the GGRF NYC exhibit at the Phoenix Gallery in Chelsea, NY, was publicized to the NYC community.**