



Cross Country and Track Coach Gaby Grebski sprints at 9,000 feet in Debarq, Ethiopia, with the Simien girl runners.

This year, school-wide interest in outreach to African nations has been much in evidence. As if sensing the pulse of the SFS Global Programs Committee, members from all three divisions made spring and summer trips to serve and observe. In the stories that follow, one can find glimmers of the School's vision for outreach to communities throughout the continent. John Flower, director of Chinese Studies and Global Programs and a member of the US faculty, says that "the school is considering a number of programs focused on Africa that would build sustainable institutional relationships and provide opportunities for Sidwell Friends students to substantively

ALL-SCHOOL AFRICA

Compiled and edited by Mei Su Teng

engage Africa through learning and service." Members of the School featured here and others like them have remarkable accounts to share about such engagement.

RUNNING TOWARD A FUTURE

By Gaby Grebski

A devoted runner herself, Gaby Grebski, Upper School counselor and coach of the girls' cross country team, reflects on her experience this summer visiting girls' running clubs in Ethiopia.

Our culture is one in which athletics play a significant role. Some athletes start very young, and many continue to participate through adulthood. They engage in sports for the love of competition, to be part of a team, to get into college, to stay in shape—the reasons are many. Rarely, however, do American children choose sports as a means of survival.

In Ethiopia, a country known for producing world-class runners, it is not unheard of for young girls to leave home and head for the big city to do just that—to run. They do not do so to get into the college of their choice, or even for glory necessarily, but rather they run to get away. What most seek to escape is a life in which girls as young as 12 can be sold as brides by parents desperate for dowry payments. Because of this harsh fact, Ethiopian women and girls are more likely to die in childbirth than to reach the sixth grade. Additionally, marriage often signals the end of a girl's education, for inevitably brides are forced to drop out of school to care for their families. The cycle of poverty that prevails because of adherence to traditional customs and values is especially unrelenting in rural areas, and even the passage of a new constitution by the current government promising equal rights for women stands little chance of making a difference among the poorly educated.

Through running, hundreds of girls are hoping to break the cycle. Prizes won in big races and the ultimate prize of participating in the Olympics are proving to be powerful incentives for families to allow their girls to delay marriage and work. Seven of the 10 top-earning athletes in Ethiopia are women. The potential (and sometimes realized) financial success and status that competition offers can free female runners and allow them to gain more control in their lives.

This summer, I was fortunate to spend time in Ethiopia visiting two running groups sponsored by the Girls Gotta Run Foundation. This charitable organization provides funds, training shoes, running clothes, food, and coaching fees to impoverished female runners and supports their efforts to obtain formal education. I met young women at Running across Borders, located in Addis Ababa, and at the Simien Girl Runners, in the town of Debarq in the Simien Mountains.

In my conversations with these athletes, I discovered that running encourages them to stay in school, for it is in school-sponsored competitions that they can be seen by the coaches of organized teams. Once discovered, they are more likely to receive some financial support, and in turn, the blessing of

their parents to train. In addition, because parents are more willing to let their daughters run if they can maintain good grades, the girls are motivated not only to stay in school but to do well. Because university entrance exams are administered in English, higher education is available only to those who have mastered this second language, another hurdle requiring stamina and perseverance.

Most of the girls realize that they may never achieve the level of success in running necessary to support themselves and their families, but they have other goals. Rather than marrying at a young age, many are focusing on their education



Running Across Borders girls get ready to race in rural Ethiopia.

in order to become teachers, doctors, civil engineers, or civil rights activists. Only once they have become self-sufficient will they consider finding husbands and starting families. It is clear that for them, running and education are closely linked—one giving them the confidence to dream well beyond traditional confines and the other, the skills with which to achieve their dreams.

Upon my return from Ethiopia, I chatted with **Sadie Lansdale '08**, a former SFS runner, about the experience. As a result, she has applied for a grant from her school, Tufts University, to fund a summer of outreach among girl runners in Ethiopia. In addition, current members of the cross country team have begun a pen-pal correspondence with some of the girls I met [see excerpts next page]. This effort at exchange is one way for SFS runners to share their skills in writing, their love of their sport, and their aspirations for the future, certainly a universal connection for young women in both corners of the globe.

For more information, go to www.girlsgottarun.org or contact Gaby Grebski at grebskig@sidwell.edu.

Letters from three athletes at the Running Across Borders training camp...

Dear Sidwell Friends Students,
I got your letter today. Thank you very much for the shoes and for sharing your experiences with us....My name is Dinkinesh Mekash Tafera. I am 19 years old....I am not married. I have three brothers and six sisters....Every morning I wake up at 6:30 and wake my friends, especially Seada, who likes to sleep very much, and then...go to training. This year I had the most memorable race of my career. It was cross-country, eight kilometers. I won the race; my time was 29:30, the best time in my running life. I was very happy that day.

Best wishes,
Dinkinesh Mekash

Doing training every day...is a means to support my life....On Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday I do easy training. Easy training includes forest, cross-country, and field. On Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday I do hard training. Hard training includes asphalt, concrete, forest, and track....Track is my favorite because I have the best time and have won at many track games this year.

Best regards,
Seada Nura

After morning training, I wash, change my clothes, eat breakfast and rest. Then I prepare lunch if it is my turn. Three days a week, I'm expected to prepare lunch for the group. Then I learn English for two hours before afternoon training. At night I eat dinner and chat with my friends for a while before going to sleep at 9:30. Track and road are my favorite distances. Since I don't like running on hills, that is why I don't prefer cross-country. In the future I hope I will get good results in these distances.

With best regards,
Dunkane Keba

PROJECT CAMEROON

By Mei Su Teng

In March 2009, seven students led by Middle School Drama Teacher Tim Reagan and Physical Education Teacher and Coach Megan Miller headed to Africa for the weeklong hands-on highlight of spring-semester learning known as "Minimester." They traveled to Yaoundé, Cameroon, where they were hosted by the now-retired SFS family of Alan and Mary Dock.

For their "trip of a lifetime," Reagan, Miller, and their students call these some of the most memorable moments: an early Sunday-morning walk up Mount Febe with hundreds of Cameroonians, a regular community-wide outing devoted to fitness; time spent playing and doing crafts with children at an under-funded orphanage, the eventual recipient of the Class of 2013's eighth-grade gift; lunch with U.S. Ambassador Janet Garvey, who explained some of the intricacies of diplomacy and the dealings between our country and Cameroon; and an interactive performance at the American School of Yaoundé

