

An Exchange Connection: 1961-2003

Last February, ATAD became aware of the passing of Fred M. Emens, a host parent in 1960-61 to Gennet Bissate from Ethiopia, an ATAD board member, and ATAD president from 1962-1964. We also learned that Gennet, now living in Illinois, had returned to Rochester to be with her host mother, Peg Emens, and to assist her with details relating to her husband's death. We spoke to Gennet and Mrs. Emens at that time and learned about Gennet's exchange experience and the events which led to her return to the United States.

In 1960 Gennet came to live with the Emens' family and to attend Eastridge High School. Daughter Karen Emens had seen a presentation at school involving exchange students and had asked her parents if their family could host a student. After thought and discussion they said yes. Gennet recalls her initial difficulties with English, her introduction to snow, the novelty of selecting her courses and changing classrooms. For all, the exchange was a successful experience and Gennet and her host family kept in touch. Gennet later returned to the

United States to attend and graduate from Barat College and to get extra schooling in social work at the University of Pittsburgh. She returned home and married. In Ethiopia, however, things were far from settled.

In the early seventies there was a military takeover of the government deposing Emperor Haile Selassie. The regime of Mengistu Haile Miriam imposed a tyrannical government which featured radical reforms leading to the massacre of thousands of people by vigilante groups. This lasted from 1974 to 1991, and in this period Gennet's husband's brother was killed. Flight was a necessity for Gennet and her husband. Gennet's host sister, now Karen Smith, and her husband Lou, sponsored them so that they could come to the United States legally. Mrs. Emens proudly reports that Gennet and her husband's children have done well here earning medical and law degrees. Gennet recalls fondly how she and her family spent holidays with Karen and her husband while they were establishing their lives here. "They were our family," says Gennet. That is true to this day.

From the President

This past year has been a very positive one – a year that has seen the celebration of ATAD's 50th Anniversary with a gala dinner in a fitting setting overlooking Rochester's Sister Cities Bridge, a four-fold increase in the number of American students going overseas this coming summer, the launching of ATAD's web site, and the adoption of short and long range plans suggested by ATAD's Strategic Planning Committee that will enhance our visibility and effectiveness in the community. It seems that the experience of reflecting on our past during the Anniversary Celebration last fall has given us the inspiration and energy to now look ahead to the future.

Our International Students and their Host Families had a very positive year as well, as evidenced by enthusiastic comments from both the students and the families during our recent Re-Entry Orientation. In the coming months, our Partners overseas look forward to welcoming our students, just as we look forward to welcoming theirs. It is heartening to see that, in a world that is experiencing such strife and conflict, there is still hope that, one by one, we can make a difference.

It has been said that we are each members of many communities, some by chance and some by choice. It is those communities of choice, bound by common beliefs, that can be among the most meaningful. I am pleased and humbled to be a part of this meaningful ATAD community. As I come to the end of my six years as President of ATAD, I am deeply grateful for the dedication of all the Board Members, Host Families and students who have made these years so rewarding for me. It has been a privilege to work with and learn from wonderful volunteers who are so willing to share their gifts and talents with others in a common goal of better understanding between peoples of the world. I have been enriched by all that I have learned and by the friendships I have made here and abroad, and I thank you all for all that you have given me. Every volunteer, every host family and every student participant is a bridge builder, and each bridge we build has the potential to inspire someone else to build one, too. May we continue to build bridges, for "then shall we know one another and have peace."

Marti Eggers



Above: Gennet Bissate, at right, in 1961 with her host brother; host mother, Mrs. Emens, a school friend, and her host sister; Karen.

Left: Gennet with Mrs. Emens in March 2003.

ATAD Elects New Officers, Directors

Congratulations to the newly elected officers of ATAD!

President – Marian Kobrin
Vice President for Host Families – Karen Grover
Co-Vice Presidents for Americans Overseas – Pat and Dennis Massa
Secretary – Karen Chan
Treasurer – Dean Ekberg
Chairman of the Board – Marti Eggers

Marian Kobrin has been a Board Member of ATAD since 1992 and has served as Program Chair for Rehovot, Israel and Izmir, Turkey. She is also a member of the Policies and Procedures Committee and the Strategic Planning Committee. Marian is a special education teacher for high school students, a year-round position that is challenging as well as rewarding.

She and her family have broad international experience as well. They spent three and a half years in London where she became especially interested in the differences and similarities in cultures. After returning from England, Marian worked as a relocation consultant, helping to prepare American families for the

cross-cultural experience of relocation outside the United States. Marian and her husband Larry have also traveled extensively in Europe and the Middle East. All of these positions and experiences have prepared Marian well for her new position as President.

ATAD welcomes four new members to the Board of Directors – Gwen Brunskill, whose daughter spent a year in Caltanissetta; Peggy Lull, whose family hosted a student from Izmir and who will be Program Chair for Izmir; Dr. Dawn Riedy, whose family is currently hosting a student from Kraków and who will be Program Chair for Kraków; and Bob Wason, whose daughter spent a year in Würzburg and whose family has hosted a student from Kraków and one from Würzburg. Bob will be Program Chair for Würzburg.

Our very best wishes to all the officers and directors of ATAD!

ATAD
Check us out on the web!
www.atad.org

And for more to the story...

Outgoing ATAD President Marti Eggers recently located another former Ethiopian exchange student whom she had known in high school many years ago. Marti spoke to Gennet who knew where Marti's old classmate had once lived in the U.S. Through the internet and the responses of complete strangers, Marti finally was able to reach her old friend who now lives in Johannesburg, South Africa, after a long odyssey which had taken him through Kenya, the U.S., Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Botswana.

Welcome to the ATAD Family!

ATAD extends a warm welcome to six new International Students and their Host Families: from Rennes, France – Ronan Lelouedec (the Doyle family), Marie Bonnot (the Wahl family), Clarisse Boisserand (the Cambalik family), and Jean-Philippe Tatoux (the Morse family); and from Waterford, Ireland – Siobhan Bloomfield (the DeSmitt family) and Poppy Molvaney (the Clark family).

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