AN ETHIOPIAN ODYSSEY

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Category: Opinions

By Annette Allen

"Jack pulled up a chair and sat down to explain: "My father, Avak, was one of the many hundreds of thousands of Armenian children orphaned in the genocide in 1915 by the Ottoman Turks. He'd been born in Van, the capital of Van Province. His mother and father were killed, along with his younger sister, Aschen. Only he and my uncle, Yervant, survived, they were just four and six years old. They joined other refugees, and somehow made it through the Syrian desert to old Jerusalem, where they were cared for by other Armenians.
As I listened to him, I wanted to weep in pity for Aschen and Avak's parents and for Avak, who had survived that desert crossing, only to die 40 years later. Yet, it was extraordinary - Avak was my third link to Jerusalem, in just five months. I vowed, then and there, to find out where he'd been looked after in the old city."

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Annette is half-English, half-Norwegian and spent much of her childhood living out of suitcases, as the family travelled from city to city, country to country, following her father's aeronautical career. Most of her childhood was in Africa: Ethiopia and South Africa. When she witnessed the endemic poverty in these countries, she developed a strong sense of justice for these people, who had so little, and yet were often happier than we were, with all our material possessions. Her simple, Christian faith grew from such encounters.
After returning to Britain in 1972, she moved into corporate communications, working for major international companies. She won awards for some of her work, but as she approached 40, life began to seem increasingly meaningless, despite the BMW in the drive, the birth of James in 1989, and a lovely house.
Everything changed, after her mother's death in 1993. She stopped work for a while to care for her and began to question what life was really all about. In particular, she was puzzled by the still, clear dreams she had, messages which had no connection whatsoever to the previous day's events. She began to wonder if these could, perhaps, foretell her future.

Her first book "An Ethiopian Odyssey" is about her quest to find nine classmates from her schooldays in Addis Ababa in1964, prompted by another dream in April 2000 – she'd returned there to help provide water. Setting off in March 2004, guided by dreams and the old black and white photo of the women, with just their Christian names on the reverse, little did she anticipate that she would cross

three continents to track them down, helped by men and women around the world. The dream spread everywhere, on the internet, radio programmes and TV news and ends at St. Paul's Chapel in New York, the little church of such peace beside Ground Zero. The city is home to two of her former classmates.

It's Annette's intention to find all the remaining classmates and include their stories in book 2. On the front cover will be the class, as they are today, standing on those same steps at Nazareth School for Girls, Addis Ababa.

The crown which Avak Hagopian created for Queen Elizabeth II in 1954

> *"Jack stared intently at me: "Tell me, Annette, did you hear about the 40 orphans?*
>
> *"Yes, Jack mentioned something about it - Haile Selassie had adopted them."*
> *"Well," he smiled ruefully, "Avak was the youngest to be adopted. Selassie, or Ras (Prince) Tafar as he was known, wanted to create an imperial court band. During a visit to Jerusalem, he heard the Armenian brass band playing at the Armenian Orthodox Cathedral. And now, well, you know the rest."*
>
> *Gazing at the hand-coloured photo of the magnificent crown that Avak had created for one devine ruler to give another, blood roared in my ears and now familiar shockwaves of intuition sped through my body. The walls of the confortable Los Angeles kitchen seemed to disappear as I looked in tears at him and Silva.*
>
> *Braking the spell, Jack added: "So, will you be able to use it?"*
>
> *"Of course I will, Jack. It would be an honour to do that for your father's memory."*
>
> *We looked at more photos of the house in Addis Ababa where they'd lived after their marriage, and I told Silva news of Jack, her second cousin in Buckingham. It had been a momentous evening and I needed to sleep on the facts. Tomorrow, I would hear more about Silva's time in Ethiopia and life in LA."*

An Ethiopian Odyssey
published by

Half of the royalties will be helping to provide water and a future for the very poor in Ethiopia, and hope in the Middle East