

Local Community Bands Around Tualatin Woman to Help Ethiopian Village

Publisher's Note

Three years ago today, Jennifer Bridges shared her amazing story here in the pages of Tualatin Life. After visiting Ethiopia earlier in the year to accompany a friend who had just adopted a 4-year old boy, she and her family decided to sell most of their belongings and use the proceeds to take the entire family back to Ethiopia to work with the local non-profits that were serving the community. Today she checks in and gives us an update.



SUBMITTED BY: JENNIFER BRIDGES

The journey began three years ago. I went into the heart of Ethiopia. Then Ethiopia made its way into my heart. I fell in love with the village of Arjo, a tiny metropolis of mud huts and tin-roofed shacks nestled among rock-riddled, rolling hills. My

love for the people of Arjo became a deep desire to improve their destitute lives. Desire grew into an action plan, and that plan became my passion: an organization called Embrace Compassion.

What began with building a well to give the people access to clean water soon grew to three wells, and now we have three more in the works. What began as a mission of mercy to one family has become our Bright Spots sponsorship program for 27 children. What began as a handful of gifts for a few people has become a plethora of livestock, clothing, bedding, sports equipment, medical supplies, and more, touching nearly every life in Arjo. This global sharing from our American abundance costs us so little, but it has done so much to counteract the poverty, hunger, desperation, and hopelessness.

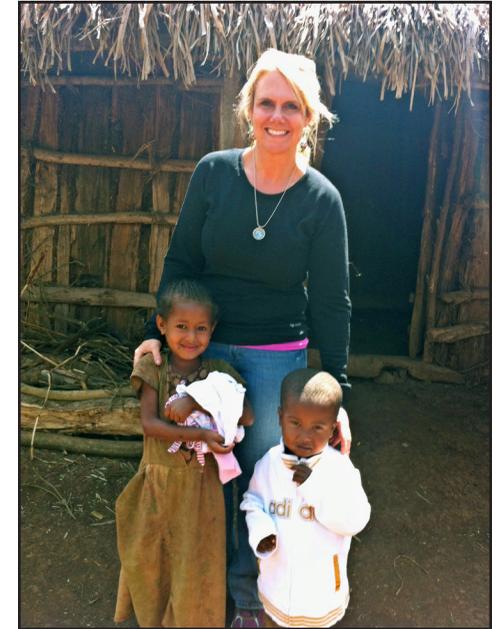
The more time I spend in Arjo, the more I realize how much I take for granted. Nights spent

huddled on a flea-infested dirt floor make me thankful for the comfort of my own bed. The desperate wails of a woman begging me to take the disabled son she cannot care for make me squeeze my own children a little tighter. Bruised and broken people toil from the first pink light of dawn to the last golden rays of dusk, but they never get ahead. Emaciated children, already bent with the cares of life, carry water on their heads and sadness in their eyes. My journey is a constant contrast of heartbreak against hope, despair against determination.

But I am not alone on my journey. So many from our Tualatin community have partnered with Embrace Compassion, coming alongside us in our endeavors. I am particularly encouraged by the young people who have opened their arms to touch lives halfway around the globe. These are the leaders of tomorrow who are changing the world today.

Jessica worked at Lee Farms to earn money for a car, but dipped into those hard-earned savings to share love with Arjo. Brittany donates a portion of her Jamba Juice salary each month to sponsor a baby born in Arjo during my visit last September. Kaytlynn and Harrison make and sell chocolate chip cookies to sponsor two Ethiopian children. Tegan, a Tualatin Middle School student and Red Rider in Tour de Cure, put aside her personal struggles and sold her handmade jewelry to help Africans who are struggling even more. Five-year-old Haiden offered up lemonade stand money she was saving for an upcoming Disneyland trip. Pint-sized Bethany worked on her family's farm so she could buy a cow for a family in Arjo. And these are just a few of the stories!

I am thankful for every dollar, every gift, every sacrifice. There are so many needs, and so many opportunities to make a difference. Together we can



do incredible things that would be impossible to do alone. We can offer hope, promise, joy, and possibility. I am moved and motivated by the collaboration of our community in making these missions a reality. Thank you for your generosity. Thank you for your selflessness. Thank you for teaching your children that living with love matters. I can't wait to see what we can accomplish together in the future!

For more information, check out our website at www.embracecompassionafrica.org.



Jennifer was born and raised in the Northwest and then graduated from Vanguard University. She delights in serving her clients and currently owns Bridges Financial and Realty Group. People are her passion.