

SERVICE LEARNING

A group of five young adults, three women and two men, are smiling and posing for a photo in front of a propeller airplane. The scene is set at sunset, with a warm orange and yellow glow in the background. The woman on the far left has blonde hair in two braids and is wearing a black and white striped t-shirt. The man behind her has dark hair and is wearing a blue and white plaid shirt. The woman in the center has red hair and is wearing a dark jacket over a patterned top. The woman to her right is wearing a straw hat and a dark top. The woman on the far right has long dark hair and is wearing a white t-shirt. The airplane behind them is white with a propeller and the number '21' visible on the fuselage. The overall mood is happy and adventurous.

# ETHIOPIA

FEBRUARY 2014 PHOTOS BY MAURICIO ALBRIZIO AND ELIZABETH CLEERE



## AN UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE IN INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

**ELIZABETH CLEERE, SERVICE LEARNING AND  
CAS COORDINATOR**

**T**his year's cultural and service trip to Ethiopia gave fifteen students the opportunity to experience a country with a vibrant culture and a long and fascinating history. They saw the remains of our oldest ancestors, took a boat ride on Lake Tana, the source of the Blue Nile River, visited a 13th century monastery, and hiked miles down steep paths that led to a pristine crater lake. But what impressed and moved them most deeply, as you will read in the essays they wrote about the trip, were the encounters they had with the people of Ethiopia.

The heart of the trip was service – the opportunity to experience, firsthand, the importance and value of international solidarity. The day the group arrived in Addis Ababa, exhausted from their long trip, they visited a home for orphans who are HIV positive and played for hours with the children who live there. The next day they traveled north to a remote village in the foothills of the Semein Mountains and spent two unforgettable days working and volunteering with students and teachers at Tana School in Gaynt province.

At the end of their trip, the students visited another school a hundred kilometers west of Addis in the small, isolated village of Jemejem Legabatu – a school that students from International High School, with the support of the entire French American International School community, raised the money to build eight years ago in partnership with Save the Children. When I accompanied a group of fourteen students to Jemejem in December of 2006, the school was still under construction and students were attending classes in blue plastic tents, perched on small stones in the place of desks. Seven years later, we visited a school that consists of two sturdy buildings and colorfully decorated, fully equipped classrooms full of eager students. Outside was the well former students raised the money to build after our first visit to the school, as well as a vegetable garden that had been planted so that the children could learn to grow and prepare healthy food.

When the students who went to Ethiopia were asked to write about the most memorable moments of their trip, almost all of them chose to write about the days they spent volunteering at AHope and the two schools we visited in Gaynt and Jemejem Legabatu. What they took home with them was a profound personal awareness of how they can make a difference through their commitment to international projects that help give children half way around the world the gift of a good education and the promise of a better life.

## AN UNFORGETTABLE, MESMERIZING JOURNEY

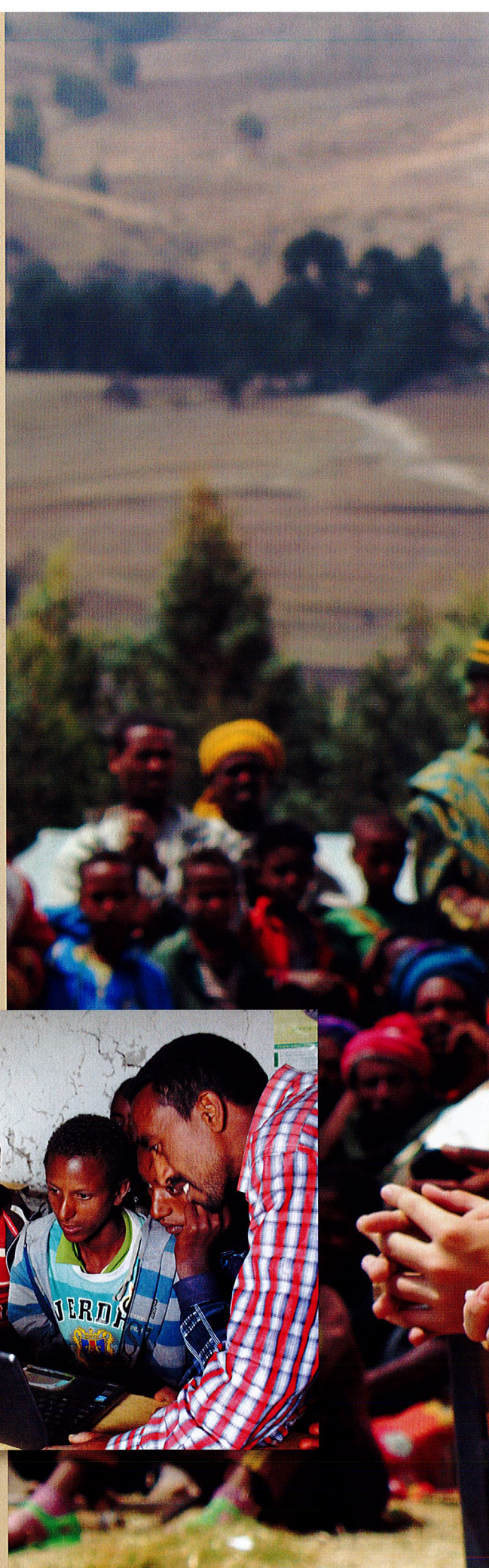
LORENZ MENENDEZ, GRADE 9

As a lifer at the French American International School I have been on many school trips, but nothing compares to what I experienced in Ethiopia. This trip was not the first time that I had been to a developing country. I have visited El Salvador many times with my family, so I was not shocked at the sight of poverty, pollution, and over-populated cities like some of my peers were. I was surprised, however, at the overall mood in Ethiopia. Wherever we went, we saw people with bright smiles, bestowing upon us pleasant waves in response to ours.

When we drove into the rural Ethiopian village where Tana School is located, a hoard of children started running alongside our bus. Many of them were dressed up in tattered blazers or had put on their cleanest, neatest t-shirts to welcome us. When our bus arrived at the entrance to the school, we perceived a small gathering of church elders with polychromatic robes and matching multicolored umbrellas. One had an ornate silver orthodox cross in his hand, glimmering in the light as he waved it to the beat of the drum a man was playing in the middle of the procession. We were all stunned to witness such a wonderful and welcoming reception, but we were even more astonished at what we saw next.

We followed the procession to a large field the size of a city block, which the schoolchildren use as a recess yard and soccer field. The field was filled with hundreds of students, parents, elders and teachers, assembled in a circle stretching around the entire rectangular field. The procession thrust us into the center of the circle. I was dumbfounded, perplexed, mystified, and flabbergasted by the sight of the immense gathering of hundreds of rural Ethiopian villagers staring at us as if we were famous. For me, this was the highlight of the trip, witnessing the exhilaration and excitement in anticipation of our arrival. Our group was then instructed to sit down in the center of the circle as Azeb, our beloved chaperone, translator and cultural ambassador, made a speech. All the students and chaperones were then presented with gifts of red, gold, and green scarves, representing the Ethiopian flag. For the rest of the day, some of us helped reinforce classroom walls, while others distributed laptops and taught English to eager students.

The following day we returned to the school, accompanied by a group of schoolchildren who followed our bus through the village. We volunteered for the whole day, cementing walls, configuring laptops, teaching English, and playing soccer. We also taught some little children how to play duck-duck-goose. At the end of the day, we departed for the final time, leaving the rural village and the adorable children behind. Many of them followed our bus all the way to the village again, helping us when our bus got stuck on a few rocks. A few hours after we left, the sun started to set on the horizon and a light rain turned into a drizzle. As our white minibus drove into the night, all of us felt as if we left a part of us behind at the school.







## HAPPINESS AND PRIORITIES

AIDAN MCCORMACK, GRADE 9

Before we went to Ethiopia, not everybody in our group knew each other, but we all knew we were going to have a great time. Within the first two or three days, we could all agree that “great” was an understatement; it was more like incredible, even after the minor inconveniences of travel, which we took as an opportunity to bond. It was all worth it. I learned a few things from this trip about happiness and priorities that most of us, myself included, do not understand. Most young people link happiness to material items like shoes, fancy clothes, the newest game, and having the best technology. The kids in the villages of Ethiopia that we visited or drove past most likely do not have any of these things, but you would always see smiles on their faces. Every time we drove past a group of kids we would wave to them, and in the blink of an eye they were laughing, waving, and running after us with joy in their eyes. The same thing happened when we went to Tana School, which was an overwhelming experience. When we arrived at the school we were greeted with an extraordinary ceremony attended by hundreds of adults and children, chanting and clapping to thank us for coming and helping out. Later, I noticed that the kids were always holding their school books in their arms, whether they were in class or not. It was clear that their priority was to learn. When we were chatting with the kids during recess or after school, there would always be a couple of kids asking us questions about school, seeing how much we knew compared to them. When we helped teach classes, all of the kids were eager to learn and answer questions. Even in the streets, the children did not ask for money, but pens or pencils. The most important thing I took away from this trip is the awareness that we should be grateful for the things we take for granted, particularly education.

## A FEELING OF BELONGING

EDOM TADESSE, GRADE 11

On February 17, we started the three-hour drive to the Gaynt region in Ethiopia. Towards the end of the trip we were all a little impatient and tired, and kept asking, “Are we almost there?” Eventually, we turned onto a small dirt road and encountered kids running towards our van, hanging onto the ladder. As we continued, it seemed like the whole village was following us up to the Tana Eyesus School. As we exited the van, more and more children surrounded us. We entered the gates of the school and saw Ethiopian Orthodox priests chanting an Amharic prayer, wearing traditional robes and headdresses and carrying colorful, decorated umbrellas. None of us had expected such a welcome, to say the least. I recognized the chants from my church at home and mentally sang along. As the priests moved to the side, they revealed around 900 kids forming a huge circle surrounding us. We were directed to seats in the front, facing the audience, with hundreds of eyes upon us. During the welcome reception, they gave us scarves with “Tana School” embroidered on them and later served us injera with sauce, which was delicious. This welcome showed us how much they appreciated our arrival and was our first taste of the excitement that continued throughout our two-day visit.

On our first day at the school, I was talking with a group of kids, some of whom were 12 or 13, while others were around 20. I told them I was Ethiopian and needed their help to improve my Amharic. From that moment on, we communicated in the language I had grown up with. I felt so at home and loved by those kids. They told me how they walked an hour to get to school, but said that they didn’t mind because they were getting an education. It was amazing to hear kids of such a young age talk about their future and the importance of going to school. Later



**“I FELT SO AT HOME AND LOVED BY THOSE KIDS.”**

**EDOM TADESSE**

LEFT: Oona Sullivan-Marcus, Edom Tadesse, and Jayana Alvarez (with video camera).

The Ethiopia trip was Edom’s dream; she recruited other students for the trip and organized a fundraiser for the Tana School that netted over \$20,000.

we played soccer, the kids from International versus the older Ethiopian kids. I am horrible at soccer, but the Ethiopians encouraged me throughout the game. Though they were on the opposing team, they would sometimes pass me the ball and say in Amharic, "It's okay, she's one of us!"

In Amharic, there are certain words that cannot be translated into English, and those words connected me to the Ethiopian kids in a way no one else in our group was able to connect to them. Talking to the kids at Tana School, I realized I had never felt like I really belonged somewhere before. I barely knew them, but they made me feel like I was family, and I will never forget that. For the first time in my life, I felt like I was in exactly the right place at exactly the right time. I forgot I was on a school trip and felt I had come home.

## HOPE

### LILY MANSFIELD, GRADE 10

The first day we visited AHope, an orphanage for children with HIV and AIDS. When we arrived we all piled into a room with the kids while the director gave a short welcome speech. We all felt a little unsure of ourselves at first, as we didn't speak Amharic and we didn't know if any of the children could speak English. While we were all still

sitting in the living room, a little boy of about three ran in and flopped down into Fabienne's lap. He was absolutely adorable, and I think that broke the ice for all us, making us realize that we were there to have fun and just play with these kids. We had brought board games, soccer balls, chalk and frisbees with us, so we each grabbed something and started up a game.

Nick broke out the chess board and started teaching some children how to play; I joined him later and found that they were catching on really fast. Camille, Adriana, Edom, Claire, Sophia, Adrien and Lorenz all taught the kids how to play frisbee. Eric, Paul and Jayana started up a game of soccer with the new ball. Fabienne and Aidan were playing checkers and chess with another group of kids. Oona was drawing with the chalk. We had all brought our cameras and the kids loved them!

I have often read articles by people who have been to Third World countries and talk about their experience and how much it changed their lives. These stories all sounded pretty unoriginal to me. Hadn't anybody experienced more? Now that I have done the same thing, I have an insider's knowledge, but I still remember what it was like reading about this kind of experience from the outside. I think everybody does experience more than they can express in words, but we must settle for repeating more or less what









other people have already said about similar experiences, because that is the only way we can find to describe the incredible journeys we've been on. In my case, while I was on the trip to Ethiopia, my thoughts and feelings were so complex and came so fast that I did not have time to process them. So I just let them wash over me and put as much effort as I could into making the present memorable. I can honestly say that this was not hard to do.

## **"RING AROUND THE ROSY": AN EVER-WIDENING CIRCLE**

**ADRIANA HORVAT, GRADE 9**

I am still in the process of understanding the kindness of the people we encountered. Still, when looking back on our trip, one particular moment that comes to mind is when a few of us were playing "Ring around the Rosy" with some kids at the Tana School. Fabienne and I had been teaching parts of the body to an English class when we decided to go outside and play "Simon Says" with the class so that they could practice what they'd just learned. Many more kids of all ages came to watch or join in, including Lily and Nick. Once the kids had mastered "Simon Says", we decided to switch to another game. After some rather ridiculous attempts at teaching them the hokey-pokey, we settled on "Ring around the Rosy". First the four of us demonstrated the game, then a few brave kids joined in, while others laughed and watched. Our circle continued to expand as we extended our hands out to the individuals surrounding us. Every time a child took my hand and joined in I grew happier and happier, more grateful for life and for the opportunity to be a part of these children's lives, even if it was for just a few days.

## **EATING IN ETHIOPIA**

**CAMILLE LEGENDRE**

With a chef and a restaurant owner as parents, I naturally spent a lot of time in Ethiopia taking pictures of the food and reporting back to my family. As you may know, the food there is served family-style, so you don't order individual dishes in a restaurant. You order, as a group, the different dishes you want, which all get served on "injera", a spongy pancake-like bread made from a grain called "tef" and water. Injera has a relatively sour taste and fills you up very quickly. It is cooked on a flat, round, iron pan, very similar to a large crepe pan. Injera is served rolled up, either in a basket or on the edge of your plate, while a large piece of it is spread flat on the plate with a variety of dishes served separately on top. Ethiopians use their fingers to eat, ripping off a piece of injera and scooping the food up with it. The dish we had the most often was "shiro", a dip made from a base of chickpeas. There were many variations of ingredients and tastes in the different dishes

of shiro we tasted, but in general it had a subtle, well-rounded flavor. Another food we had often was a snack that's eaten often in Ethiopia, "kolo". This snack is a mix of roasted nuts and seeds, occasionally with added salt, sugar or spices. We went to a market on the last day of our trip and nearly everybody bought a bag or two of kolo to bring back.

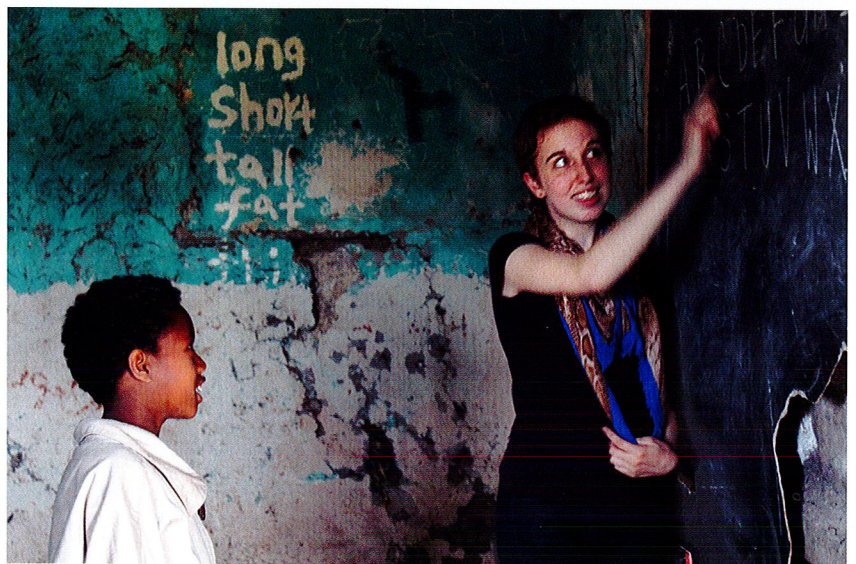
## **A MOMENT WHEN WE ALL BECAME ONE**

**ERIC PARK, GRADE 10**

There is a close relationship between Ethiopia and South Korea, my home country. Koreans have a positive impression of Ethiopia because Ethiopia helped South Korea during the Korean War. Since Korea developed a strong and successful economy, a lot of Koreans have been going to Ethiopia to help out, and I thought it would be great if I could do the same.

When we arrived at Tana School, a huge crowd was waiting to welcome us, including around twenty men dressed in robes and holding crosses. After this beautiful greeting, we went right to work. Claire Moazed and I volunteered to help with the renovation of the building. We helped some workers mix cement to cover the walls, which looked easy but was actually very hard work. After an hour, I was totally exhausted. Later, I went into a classroom and taught the students how to read the English alphabet and some basic vocabulary. The students were extremely eager to learn something, even though they didn't have good learning materials or even electric lights in the dark classroom. I felt ashamed of myself, since I have always hated to study, under the best of conditions.

At the end of our visit, there was a celebration centered around a big drum in the middle of a field. Everyone sat in a large circle around the drum and watched a few men play. When someone asked me to join them, I went up and learned how to play the drum, Ethiopian style. Everyone clapped and started dancing together, including the members of our group. That was the moment when everyone became one. There are no words to describe the feelings





that I had at that moment. When we rode away in our bus, the children ran after us for at least 10 minutes. I could feel that they appreciated us from the bottom of their hearts, but I have to say that we appreciated them even more for the precious experience they had given us.

What I felt on this trip, in general, is that the people we met were not fake, and we need this in our society. The smiles on their faces were true smiles. The night after we said our goodbyes to Tana School, while we were having dinner, Edom Tadesse said that she felt like she was in her 'true home'. She also said she never felt this comfortable in America, even though she was actually born and raised here. I felt I couldn't be silent, because that is exactly how I feel in America. As an international student, I only feel like I am "home" when I go back to Korea, and it's not just because that's where I'm from – it's something more than that, something that is hard to put into words.

### **BECOMING "MUSIC MAN"** **JAYANA ALVAREZ, GRADE 11**

Anyone who knows me well knows what I hold most dear to my heart, what I'm good at, and what I aspire to accomplish in life. But even those few people would not associate me with music. So, when asked to perform a song in front of hundreds of Ethiopians I had never met during the welcome reception at Tana School, I was caught a bit off guard. As I walked back to the van to get my guitar, I could feel a pinch in my throat.

I am still a bit perplexed as to why I was so anxious. Perhaps my unfamiliarity with live musical performance was creating self-doubt. Nevertheless, when I got back with my guitar, I sat myself up on a desk, facing the crowd, placed my fingers on the frets, and strummed the notes as best I could, trying not to let my voice crack. At the end of my performance, I felt a surge of comforting support from

my group. I would not have been able to feel so confident without their gracious smiles and cheerful high fives. But I was also quite proud of myself for being able to share a part of our culture with our Ethiopian hosts. I hope that the moment touched them as deeply as it affected me.

The next day, as we were laying down cement in one of the classrooms, a man asked Oona and me what we wanted to do after completing our high school and college studies. Naturally, being overwhelmed American teenagers, we do not have it all figured out. But when the man turned to me, before even asking me a question, he said, "Music Man." To my confusion, I asked what he meant. Music Man. Me. I was Music Man. I had never thought of myself as a musician until a complete stranger thought to bestow that title on me. Even though I am back home now, back to being my "normal" self, that part of me will forever remain in Ethiopia, as well as in my memories. I can still be Music Man. I know that now.

### **THE POWER OF MUSIC** **NICK THAYER, GRADE 11**

One of my favorite experiences from this trip was the drum and dance circle that formed after lunch on our second day at Tana School. I took a particular interest in this experience because, as a musician, the drumming seemed to open a new door for me. Even though it wasn't a particularly complicated beat, by African standards, I realized to what extent I know absolutely nothing about African music, other than the fact that they have far more complicated rhythms than we do, and that they have not yet been condemned to experience the likes of Nicki Minaj and Skrillex. I have often heard of famous musicians going

to Africa to learn about and be inspired by the culture and music (Pink Floyd, Paul Simon, Ginger Baker, and even Shakira, to name a few). Now I can say that I understand the source of their fascination and their desire for immersion. The way that an entire community assembled around a wooden bowl with an animal skin stretched across it was amazing. Hundreds of people were there, many of them getting up to drum or dance at some point, and even those who didn't were clapping with the beat. This reminded me of the general lack and continual decline of musical education in the U.S.

### **A SERIES OF "FIRSTS"** **MARIE CLAIRE MOAZED, GRADE 11**

The trip to Ethiopia was a very new experience for me. It was my first time for a lot of things: my first time in Africa, my first time to see a wild lion, hippo, and monkeys, my first time to ride on a decorated horse, my first time to shovel wet cement, my first time to eat battered and fried fish fresh from the Nile, my first time to cry tears of overwhelming gratitude at a dinner table.

This trip changed my life because of the feeling I got from traveling halfway across the planet to Addis Ababa, then to Bahir Dar, a town in northern Ethiopia, and then to a remote village where we visited and volunteered at Tana School, which many children walk up to five miles to go to, some barefoot, just to show that someone cares. Education is one of the single most important tools in our efforts to help our world to develop in a healthy way, and to be able to directly promote and emphasize its importance in an extremely poor, rural, third-world country was absolutely rewarding.





## **SOCCER: AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE** **PAUL BIRLING, GRADE 10**

As a 16-year-old boy, I feel extremely lucky to have been able to go to Ethiopia. Throughout my journey in this amazing country I was astonished by what I saw and experienced. When you're 10,000 miles away from home in a country where everyone speaks a language that is foreign to you, there are not a lot of ways to communicate with the local people. Sport, however, (which happens to be my passion) is one of those things that allows you to break through any language barrier. When you share the same passion, it doesn't matter where you are from or how much money you have – the only thing that matters is how dedicated you are.

Playing soccer in such a magical place as Ethiopia was probably the greatest thing I have ever done. Seeing all those kids smile whenever I took the soccer ball out of my bag is something I'll never forget. And I'll always remember playing soccer for hours with a boy at the AHope orphanage in Addis Ababa. Even though I was exhausted after our long trip to Ethiopia, I didn't want to stop because I knew that this boy was HIV positive and lived in a very poor country, and I saw that playing soccer with me made him happy.

Later, on our last day at Tana School in a region north of Addis, we played a big soccer game, our school against theirs. I expected the Ethiopian students to be good, but I never thought they would be as good as they were. Some of them were extremely skillful and really knew what they were doing. After that game I asked myself, "What if one of the kids here has the potential to become the best soccer player in the world, but no one will ever pay attention to his talent and he'll never realize his dream simply because he is not in the right environment to realize it?" Thinking about this made me realize how unfair our world is.

## **DUCK, DUCK, GOOSE** **SOPHIA CLARK, GRADE 9**

Being at Tana School for two days was the most memorable part of our trip to Ethiopia. On our first day there, after an incredible reception by the villagers and a wonderful feast, we started work. First I helped mark out the new soccer field. Later I helped mix and move concrete, but after carrying the buckets for only twenty minutes my back was already aching. Each time I passed by with a bucket, the kids and adults watching me would smile and ask if I needed help. They giggled while I clumsily trekked back and forth, spilling concrete all over my shirt.

Later on we played soccer against the Ethiopian kids. Playing with them was great fun, with everyone laughing and joking together. In the end the score was tied, three all, although we suspected the Ethiopians were not trying very hard.

After the match, we split up to do various activities. Adriana, Camille, and I gathered a group of kids to play a game, "Duck, Duck, Goose". Since we could not speak Amharic, we decided to simply teach them the game by

demonstrating it. After a couple of rounds the kids started to see how it worked, and we all started playing together. For me, this simple game of "Duck, Duck, Goose" was one of the most special moments of the trip. We eventually gathered a group of over fifty kids and adults around the game, some playing, some watching, but everyone laughing and having fun.

## **IN A WORD: AMAZING!** **ADRIEN MATHIEUX, GRADE 10**

I can't find any other way to describe my experience in Ethiopia. It was simply amazing. The people there exhibited a friendliness that I rarely see in the US; they don't let a mere language barrier keep them from trying to get to know you. In addition, the students at Tana School showed an impressive willingness to learn new material: when I taught classes there, they listened to everything I said with intense focus and tried to answer every question I asked. They were surprisingly fast learners, which was also impressive.

Another thing that amazed me was how happy the Ethiopians I met seemed to be. One day we visited AHope, an orphanage for kids with HIV who have lost their parents to AIDS. I remember this one moment when I was playing soccer with a kid and his older friend. I held the ball as the younger boy kicked it towards the goal, guarded by his older and bigger friend, who would pretend to try to stop the ball, but always let it pass. He would then congratulate his friend for scoring a goal. They both seemed to be having a lot of fun with this simple, repetitive game.

