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FERENGE ETHIOPIA

ProjectsAbroad

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The Official Newsletter of Projects Abroad Ethiopia

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Editor's Letter

Welcome to the October 2013 Projects Abroad Ethiopia newsletter. This newsletter aims to inform all our volunteers with news and information about the latest happenings in Projects Abroad Ethiopia.

Projects Abroad Ethiopia team is working hard to accommodate summer volunteers –which have great experience in Ethiopia. Thank you all the people who have volunteered with us – we really appreciate all for your valuable time and great help you gave at the different placements. And who decided to choose Ethiopia for volunteering through Projects Abroad.

Enjoy reading this issue and I hope that you will find something that you like. **Thanks to our volunteers who have shared their stories and photos with us.** We encourage everyone to join us in making the newsletter interesting and exciting by sending in your own written articles and pictures of your experiences here with us. Your stories and pictures will help others to understand and learn about Ethiopia. If you have anything you'd like to contribute, suggest, or comment on, please contact: bikeseegnhaileleul@projects-abroad.org

Enjoy!!!!

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EVOLUTIONS OF TRADITIONAL TATTOOS

By Annelies Van Erp – Journalism in Ethiopia

Tattoos of crosses, wings, letters and different symbols are becoming the new trend among the young in Addis. Beside the traditional tattoos, which marks people coming from the countryside, more and more modern tattoo studios appears to be emerging in the capital.

“Tattoos are no longer viewed as something immoral, nor are they left exclusively to people from the countryside; it is a form of art,” explains Sami who owns a tattoo studio on Bole Road.

Tattoos have a long history and they were often associated with religion. For centuries, tattoos were used to reflect change in the status of one’s life. Whether to mark one’s passage into adulthood or an induction into a new group tattoos were used to emphasize the transition. In Ethiopia, many Orthodox Christians especially from the countryside wear the symbol of a cross on their forehead. The cross serves the purpose of showing strong faith and devotion. The three points next to the cross or on the arms are also common parts of the tattoo. The points symbolize the belief in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Traditional tattoos display pride of being a member of a certain religious group. Moreover, the tattoo is also a permanent jewel, a way to make the human body more beautiful.

Religion and art

Expressing the strong connection with God remains to be one of the most important reasons why people in Ethiopia want to cover parts of their body with a tattoo. “99 percent of my customers choose a religious symbol,” says Sami. He has been running his tattoo studio in Addis for the past four years. He acquired most of his experiences as a tattoo artist in Italy. Sami say that his passion for the art goes much farther than inking the tattoo in people’s bodies. In fact, developing the drawings seems to be part of his hobby as an artist.

“I see myself as a tattoo artist, because every design that I do is unique. I sit together with the customer and he/she explains to me in detail what he/she wants. I then start to sketch the drawing and I always let my clients get involved to make any adjustments,” he says. But Sami is quite

picky. “I have to like the tattoos that I am doing, I only make tattoos that I love myself.”

My business depends on mouth to mouth advertisement, so I have to be really satisfied with the result of my work in the first place. I think that is typical of an artist, he explains. Sami doesn't ink someone under age of 18, “and it goes without saying that I would turn away people that have been drinking.”

According to Sami, his customers came from different backgrounds and parts of the society. “I have already done tattoos for students, doctors and even judges,” says Sami.

Drunken sailors

There were times, especially in the United States and Europe, when cliché image of drunken sailors, criminals and rebels were famous tattoos images. Tattoos were associated with outsiders and belonged to the taboo atmosphere. Although tattoos were never totally preserved for the so-called mobsters, world leaders like Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt and Kemal Atatürk were rumored to be among people who sport a tattoo.

So far, Sami hasn't got any bad reaction. “In Ethiopia tattoos are part of our culture,” he says. But he also notices that tattoos are becoming more popular in Ethiopia at the moment. “A lot of people visit my shop, just to cover a scar or to fix a bad tattoo; or to replace an old one.”

Hygiene is the biggest prejudice where Sami has to deal with. “We are living in Africa you know,” he smiles. “Visitors immediately think that hygiene and an African country can't go together,” he says. “But, that is a big misunderstanding: hygiene and safety is priority number one.”

Ninety percent of Sami's clientele prefers a tattoo on the arm. It is a place one can display or cover it at will. Even though tattoos are becoming common, covering up a tattoo while on a job application is still a good idea, Sami says.

“A tattoo is a memory that remains forever and instead of the name of your husband or wife something that has got to do with religion is something you never regret,” Sami says. But although most tattoos are religiously inspired, they are also a manner of making yourself unique. If their popularity will keep growing they will become a trend like other fashion accessories. But the point of fashion is that trends come and go, but tattoos are forever.

SHARING A TAXI IN NAME OF LOVE

By Cameron Richards – Journalism Volunteer

I have been in Ethiopia for four days and have made a startling discovery: I love share-taxis but they do not necessarily love me back.

So far during my brief stay, I have marveled at Lucy's diminutive skeleton, delighted at the energy of the Addis Ababa street scene, and devoured close to my body weight in injera.

But what I have enjoyed the most is the satisfaction hailing a share-taxi to get around the city. As a traveler from a far off land, there is a visceral excitement that comes from seeing a blue and white van in a varied state of repair come swerving across two lanes of traffic, the conductor leaning out the window and shouting the name of the destination I want to get to. "Bole, Bole, Bole," "Piazza, Piazza, Piazza," or "Mercato, Mercato, Mercato." Even if the cry is not for the destination I had in mind, I am instantly intrigued by the possibilities. I cannot wait to hop, or rather squeeze, aboard and rattle off to my destination completely enveloped in the hustle and bustle of this fabulous city. My heart is open. It is when the van stops and the door slides open that I suddenly feel unloved.

Open disclosure: I am big. I stand about 190 cm and weigh about 105 kg, depending on the size of my breakfast. As a visitor, I also tote the inevitable bag complete with my raincoat, umbrella, notebook, camera, water bottle, and other varied things that I never carry at home, yet feel compelled to lug around while on the road. Plus I am traveling with my wife, so I have two of everything. Big me, plus my big bag is bad math in the close confines of the share taxi. When the conductor confirms that the taxi is in fact going my direction I can see the concern on not only his face, but on the faces of the passengers already on board. They all ask the same question, "How the hell is this going to work?"

Many times, I am greeted with a wagging finger that says no room; this is often accompanied by a



gesture to the interior of the van so that I can see for myself that this is the case. However, simultaneously with this one, two, or even three others squeeze around my bulging bag and slip into the space in the aisle, facing backwards behind the front seats, or half-cheeking it on an

already occupied seat. Then the van starts up, the conductor leaps in, slides the door shut and is, in my mind, off on some magical adventure and I am left behind. I get it, when the price paid is by the butt, the less

space each one takes up the more butts that can be accommodated. Space is a limited commodity that is in hot demand, and the taxi must, of course, turn a profit. Still, I feel my love is unrequited. One time, after gaining admission, compressing my bulk into the wedge of space allocated to me, the conductor insisted that I pay double the rate due to the space I was consuming. I argued, I fussed, but was unsuccessful in my pleadings. Though a little embarrassed, and slightly heartbroken, I forgave the conductor. Because this is what we do for love, forgive in the face of heartbreak and suspend reason to justify emotion.

And so I continue to find myself, perched on the curb, waiting for that special van, the one with room for me and my bag, that will return my love, and whisk me off on the next grand adventure. So if you find yourself in a share taxi and discover me peering eagerly into your taxi, can't you make a little room? In the name of love?

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