



A Mother's Heart

'No matter where one lives, a mother's heart can be seen through her tears; tears of joy and tears of sadness.'



I first met Berket scavenging at the Korah trash dump (above). Now that her family is sponsored, she is eating 3 times a day and is in school (left)

could be sold for pennies. On some weeks they scavenged enough wire and plastic to purchase a small quantity of grain.

but she was communicating something desperate and deep, the details of which I could not understand but the message clearly cut to the core of this woman's being and was transferring to mine.

in the countryside became scarce and times more difficult. So they decided, as many in rural areas do, to move to Addis in hopes of finding work and a better situation for their family. Little did they realize that with the higher cost of living, lack of opportunity and no education, they would soon be forced to move into Korah; a slum area in Addis where only

I came to learn that she and her husband moved to Addis from Southern Ethiopia. He was a craftsman and had provided for his

I initially came to know Marta through her twelve year old daughter whose beauty was hidden deep beneath her dirty rags, ash covered face and reddened eyes from the smoke that continually lingered throughout the city garbage dump. Bereket was shy, yet strong and instead of spending her days in school, she and her younger sister scavenged through the trash, helping their parents find food to eat or recyclable items that

But usually all was saved to pay for their dirty, one-roomed shack that was held together by sticks and corrugated tin. Most days the family survived on one meal and that was foraged from the discarded waste in the Addis Abeba landfill.

Months later when I met Marta for the first time, tears filled her eyes and the hugs she lavished on me were intense and long, full of emotion... I could feel her body shake as her embrace held me close, almost unwilling to let me go. I could not speak Amharic



family by weaving hand-made traditional clothing. As their family grew, food

the poorest of the poor, the lepers, the sick and the rejected live. Once settled

here, they became one of 130,000 people who are hopeless and forgotten; many of them widows and orphans, depending on the garbage dump for survival.

I cannot imagine how Marta's spirit must have been crushed when she first moved her little girls into the dark and dirty hovels of Korah. What thoughts must have kept her awake at night, lying on the dirt floor with one blanket to share, no money for coal and no money for food? How does one comfort a child crying from hunger when one knows no food is coming? What happens to your heart when for the first time you realize your daughters can no longer go to school but must spend their days at a trash dump? Marta had heard the stories, perhaps she had already experienced them herself – the pangs of poisoned food, the slash of an unexpected shard of glass, the burning eyes and the toxic smells, the dangerous vehicles, stopping for no one – young or old as they moved the trash and dug up the land. What tears must have fallen as she began to send her beautiful girls to the dump to survive. I can only imagine, as I have seen Marta's tears from the other side... tears of relief, tears of joy and of unending gratitude.

After meeting Berket at the trash dump Hope for Korah

was able to find a sponsor for Marta's family and through their monthly sponsorship, this family has been given new hope and their lives have been changed! They now eat three times per day, the children are in the Berta Breakfast 'Crisis Inter-



Marta's husband is very thankful his daughter has returned and she is so happy to be back in her daddy's arms.



vention' Program (specially designed for malnourished children), and they are in school and attend after-school tutoring. Marta's family has moved to a better home and they have beds, they

attend weekly community meetings, receive medical care and are in the first steps of an income generation project which will use and grow their skills, helping them become self-reliant, eventually breaking the cycle of poverty that has entrapped them.

Seeing Marta now, alongside her husband and precious daughters is incredible. I do not cease to marvel at the strength, grace and dignity of this beautiful woman. They do not look like the same family, their countenance has changed. But I didn't understand the breadth of their suffering until one of my more recent trips to Korah.

When I arrived back, Marta greeted me with her usual passion, squeezing me tightly and then proudly introduced me to her fourth daughter! All along I had thought she had only three girls... but I now discovered that her youngest had a twin sister who because of the family's poverty and inability to provide, had been sent away to the countryside to live with relatives. What incredible joy shone in Marta's face as she shared that because of sponsorship, they can now have their daughter back!

When hearing those words, my heart flinched and a strange feeling

came over me. I somehow held back the tears as I responded to this woman with her two twin girls standing before me. As a mother myself, I just can't imagine what her heart has experienced; how it has been broken... and how it is beginning to heal.

I have met with Marta many times and whenever I see her, her eyes fill up with tears.... Tears of joy and thanksgiving, mingled with tears of past sorrow ... and over and over, she repeats these words...

"I never asked for this and yet, unexpectedly God has provided! Everybody forgot me, but it was like He picked ME up, out of the trash dump. My life has changed and I am so thankful! I am so thankful!"

- Marta

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