



# Transformations

News from the Fistula Foundation, Spring 2008

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HAMLIN  
FISTULA  
INTERNATIONAL

The FISTULA  
FOUNDATION  
*from despair to dignity*

## Hamlin Midwifery College Opens in Ethiopia

The Hamlin Midwifery College opened in January, fulfilling a dream of Dr. Hamlin's that began when she and her late husband arrived in Ethiopia in 1959. The Hamlin Midwifery College is located at the Hospital's site outside of Addis Ababa, in Desta Mender ("Joy Village"). The main buildings were built with generous support to the Fistula Foundation from long term supporter, Johnson & Johnson, and the Caris Foundation.



*Anatomy Class at the Hamlin Midwifery College*

Dr. Hamlin and her team know that well trained community midwives can help make deliveries safer for women and babies and can help prevent fistula. The students at the College have been carefully picked from high schools near the newly

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## "A Walk to Beautiful" wins Best Documentary of 2007 Opens in theaters in New York and LA

The moving feature-length documentary "A Walk to Beautiful" won the prestigious Best Documentary Award from the International Documentary Association, besting more well-known entries such as Michael Moore's "Sicko". The film tells the stories of five Ethiopian women treated by Dr. Hamlin and her team at the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital. Shunned by their communities, these women spend their lives in loneliness and shame. The film follows them on their journey of hope and ultimately transformation.

to welcome Pulitzer Prize-Winning writer Nicholas Kristof, whose editorial about Dr. Hamlin in May 2003 was the genesis

*(continued on page 3)*



*Nicholas Kristof, New York Times Columnist and Kate Grant, Foundation Executive Director at New York screening*

The Foundation hosted a screening in New York, and was heartened to be able

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## Transformations

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# Letter from Dr. Catherine Hamlin

Dear Friends,

Our patient load is always heavy in the month of February, due to the harvesting in the countryside being over, and so a male relative is more likely to be available to accompany our poor fistula women to Addis Ababa. The women are often brought to the Hospital by a father or a brother as in many cases the husband has left them, especially if it was a first pregnancy.

One such patient arrived a few days ago, when I was in the Outpatients Department seeing new arrivals. This poor girl was so emaciated that she had to be carried in by her father and brother, both farmers from the countryside around Ambo and desperately poor. They told us they were giving her little to eat as her bowel contents were being passed through her birth passage, and they thought that by starving her, this condition would be helped! Her injuries are extremely severe involving both bladder and rectum. She will need a temporary colostomy and many months of rehabilitation before her fistula injuries can be repaired. Seeing her in the ward a few days later lying in a clean bed, eating a nourishing meal and with a smile on her face was indeed touching, her eyes no longer sunken from dehydration, and her face starting to look less gaunt!

The overcrowding of our Hospital is very evident at present, seeing often two women in every hostel bed even with both being incontinent. But it is still better than lying in the streets. When I recently passed our small teaching room, there were thirty seven young women crowded together as they listened to our Ethiopian "chaplain" speaking to them and teaching them from the Bible. The work of this kind man is great comfort and blessing for many, as he helps with their spiritual needs, often sitting by the beds of patients in the wards to talk or to pray with them.

We feel justified in constructing a new building for teaching, when we see the overcrowding in our present small room, and when we see teaching bringing such benefits for our patients. And so we have asked our architect to design such a building and have a space for it already allocated!

I know our staff would wish to add their thanks to all of you who help us care for these suffering women, as I do too. We also send our love.

*Catherine Hamlin*  
Dr. Catherine Hamlin



Yvonne Mambona

## LATEST NEWS

- **The Washington DC area Tesfa Ineste** Cor fundraising event in Arlington, Virginia on Saturday, April 5, 2008, attracted hundreds of Ethiopian Americans. The event was the building and support of the newest Protestant church in the eastern Ethiopian city of Harrar. Many thanks to the her talented and dedicated group of volunteers.
- **The Ethiopian American Youth Initiative** of Boston, led by Gebre, is hosting a screening of the film "A Nation to a Nation" on Saturday, April 5, 2008. Bo Gebre is the President of "Nation to Nation Network". The event will be held at Boston U.

## Midwifery College...

(continued from page 1)

functioning provincial fistula hospitals. This process was undertaken so that the midwives can be supervised by the Fistula Hospital's provincial staff and can have a facility where difficult cases can be referred when emergency obstetric care is needed. The first graduates should be at work in rural areas by 2010.



Main Building of Hamlin Midwifery College

## Best Documentary...

(continued from page 1)

for the film and to commend the film making team at Engel Entertainment, including Executive Producer, Steve Engel, Director, Mary Olive Smith, and Co-Producer Allison Shigo, for their achievement. The screening offered the opportunity also for the Foundation to thank Conrad Person at Johnson & Johnson for their long-term support of the Hospital and Foundation and to welcome Dr. Barbara DeBuono from Pfizer, a new supporter of the Foundation and the film. The film will air on the Public Television program NOVA on May 13. Please check your local listings for details. Those interested in helping contribute to the costs of the film production should go to our website: [www.fistulafoundation.org](http://www.fistulafoundation.org)



## New Song: You Are Not Alone

Talented artists are often inspired by their hearts and souls to take action. Such is the case with composer, Marie-france MacDonald. After seeing Dr. Catherine Hamlin and hearing the story of her work on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, composer Marie-france said she was "overwhelmed with profound joy and sorrow simultaneously and said 'Dear God, what do you want me to do?'" She said she received her answer at the keys of her piano, where she composed the moving song "You Are Not Alone". While the words are printed below, we encourage you to go to our website where you can hear the actual recording via the "Quick Links" section of the site.

### You Are Not Alone

*You are my sister. I may not have met you  
But I've heard your story and I have cried for you.  
I have but one voice. I will raise it for you  
To speak for my sister You are not alone*

*You are not alone  
One sister in misery is one too many  
And that's what I say  
You are not alone  
I'm spreading the word little sister  
And soon help will be on the way*

*You are my sister. I'm reaching out to you  
To help ease your burden I'll carry some for you  
I have but two arms. Let them embrace you  
You are my sister. You are not alone*

*You are not alone  
The same moon and stars that are shining on you  
will shine on me in time  
You are not alone  
I'm sending a prayer to the powers that be  
as if your life were mine*

*You are my sister. You are a part of me  
Your joys and your sorrows will always be with me  
I have but one heart beating within me  
For me and my sister. You are not alone.*

Composer:  
Marie-france MacDonald



Committee hosted its third annual Sunday December 9th. The event. All funds raised will go toward provincial fistula hospital in the. ks go to Tsedale Assefa and ceers.

er EAYI, founded by Samuel A Walk to Beautiful" as a fund- ward Member, Abaynesh Asrat king will provide the Keynote niversity, beginning at 4:30 pm.

- **The American College of Nurse-Midwives** on February 29, 2008 welcomed Fistula Foundation Executive Director, Kate Grant, who spoke about the history and future of Hamlin Fistula Hospitals and the role of the Foundation.
- **The nonprofit organization "Working Films"** ([www.workingfilms.org](http://www.workingfilms.org)) will co-host a Summit with the Foundation and Engel Entertainment bringing together nonprofits working in maternal health on March 19th in New York. The Summit is designed to create a community of organizations committed to using the film "A Walk to Beautiful" to advance maternal health in developing countries broadly and fistula prevention and treatment specifically.

# Mother's Day Gift Ideas

This Mother's Day we have a few ideas for those mothers in your life.

We invite you to make a gift in support of the women seeking treatment at the Hamlin Fistula Hospitals in honor of someone you love – be it your mother, your grandmother, your wife or even your sister.

## Tribute Mother's Day Card

For your donation of \$10 USD or more we will mail a custom made Mother's Day Card to someone special in your life.



As a special tribute this Mother's Day,

made a contribution to the Fistula Foundation in your honor.

This generous gift will be used now and into the future by the Hamlin Fistula Hospitals in Ethiopia to treat and prevent obstetric fistula, a debilitating childbirth injury caused by prolonged, obstructed labor.

On behalf of the women seeking treatment at the Fistula Hospital and all of us working towards supporting the Hospital, we wish you a Happy Mother's Day!

Sincerely,  
The Fistula Foundation

## Blue Flower Scarf

Just in time for Mother's Day giving, we are introducing a blue version of our popular flower scarf. The flower motif is designed to represent the lush gardens surrounding the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital, which patients and visitors alike find rejuvenating. The large gardens of wild flowers and grass provide an important part of the oasis of healing for which the Hospital is renowned. It was custom designed for the Fistula Foundation and contains a discreet "The Fistula Foundation from despair to dignity" signature in the bottom corner. It is a full 3 feet by 3 feet square, so it can be worn as a shawl or a scarf. It is 100% silk. With a donation of just \$95 we will send the scarf to a woman who you want to



honor. We are delighted to let you know that the scarves have been paid for by a generous grant from the Charles and Betti Saunders Foundation, so your entire donation will go to supporting the Foundation.

## Dignity Bracelet

The silver-plated Dignity Bracelet incorporates the Fistula



Foundation logo

and features the word "dignity" in English on one side of the bead and in Amharic, the most common native language spoken in Ethiopia, on the other side. For any donation of \$125 or more you can send a Dignity Bracelet to a woman you want to honor, or even get one for yourself!

## Dignity Earrings

The silver-plated Dignity Earrings were designed to match with the Dignity Bracelet so that they can be worn together or separately. With any donation of \$65 or more you can send a pair to a recipient of your choice.



If you wish to send the scarf, the bracelet, earrings or a custom made Mother's Day card as a Mother's Day gift, please place your order with us, no later than Monday April 28th. You can place your order online at our website [www.fistulafoundation.org](http://www.fistulafoundation.org), by calling our office at (408) 249-9596 weekdays, or you can mail your order in the enclosed envelope.

# The Hospital named "Best Humanitarian and Service Organization" by the President of Ethiopia

The Hospital was honored by a special award for being the "Best Humanitarian and Social Service" organization in Ethiopia. The award was presented by the President of Ethiopia, His Excellency Ato Girma Wolde Geiorgis and received by Dr.

Hamlin at an awards ceremony in Awassa, a town in the Rift Valley, south of Addis Ababa. This was a very festive occasion and the Hospital was able to bus a group of hard-working staff from the Hospital to join in the celebration.

*Dr. Hamlin receives award from His Excellency Ato Girma Wolde Geiorgis:*



## Los Angeles Times

### MOVIE REVIEW

## 'A Walk to Beautiful'

**Ethiopian women ostracized because of incontinence get their lives back in 'A Walk to Beautiful.'**

*By Kenneth Turan, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer*

February 29, 2008

"A Walk to Beautiful" will leave you speechless two times over—first with despair, then with joy. Neither unmentionable subject matter nor nonexistent commercial prospects can keep this documentary from having a power over your heart that is unparalleled.

Set in Ethiopia and made over a four-year period by director Mary Olive Smith and a devoted team, "Beautiful" introduces audiences to five women who suffer—and that is truly the word—from a devastating condition brought on by injuries sustained during childbirth.

Simply put, these women are chronically incontinent: They leak urine at all times because, in most cases, there is a fistula or hole in the birth canal caused by the kind of extended, days-long labor that left their children stillborn.

Because of the stench associated with their condition, these women are ostracized and rejected by everyone, including spouses and even parents. Living in deeply rural parts of the country, women like 25-year-old Ayehu are forced to reside in makeshift hovels and wait numbly for the death they look forward to as a welcome release.

"I would rather have my arm cut off than have this problem," says 17-year-old Yenenesh. "Then I could at least mix with people. Nothing could be worse than this." As Australian Dr. Catherine Hamlin was told when she moved to Addis

Ababa, Ethiopia's capital, in 1955, "the fistula patients will break your heart."

Dr. Hamlin and her late husband Reginald, however, were determined to do something about it. They founded, as a city sign describes it, "Fistula Hospital for women with childbirth injuries," a place that, as far as these women are concerned, just about performs miracles.

For many of the hospital's patients, just getting to the front door is a serious challenge. Many of Ethiopia's villages are so remote it takes a walk of five or six hours just to get to a road (hence the film's title), a journey to be followed by two or three times as many hours on a ramshackle bus. Dr. Hamlin tells the story of one woman who begged at her local bus stop for six years before amassing the money for the fare.

What they find at Fistula Hospital is a welcoming place—clean, light and airy and staffed by doctors, many Ethiopian, who are specialists in treating their condition.

One treatment, however, does not fit all: Some women can be cured by surgery to close the fistula (the hospital does some 1,500 a year) while others need to learn daunting exercise programs and other techniques.

Amazed to find so many women with problems like their own, the patients gratefully bond with each other, becoming part of a community after years of being shunned by everyone. As Dr. Hamlin says, "the healing of the mind starts."

"A Walk to Beautiful" makes a powerful impression, not only because of the nature of the story but because the filmmaking team tells it with delicacy, sensitivity and care. Because they had been abandoned for so long, the women profited open up to their Western questioners to a remarkable extent, but the film never exploits their candor. In addition, an Ethiopian-flavored score by David Schommer strikes exactly the right tone.

Though only 85 minutes in length, "A Walk to Beautiful" finds time to discuss the causes of this problem, all but eliminated in the West in part because of better medical care. Though contributing causes include devaluation of women, early marriage, chronic undernourishment that leads to bodies that are too small for childbirth and lack of hospitals, the root of this evil, the filmmakers clearly think, is the endemic rural poverty that makes everything worse.

The difference in these women between the day they arrive at the hospital and the day they leave, wearing symbolic new clothes, is as stark as night and day. "I am glad God gave us doctors," one deeply grateful woman says. By the time "A Walk to Beautiful" is over, you will agree.

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# *A Walk to Beautiful*

*The Award-winning  
Documentary  
"A Walk to Beautiful"*

*Will air on Public Television  
On NOVA, Tuesday May 13  
Check your local listings for details*

