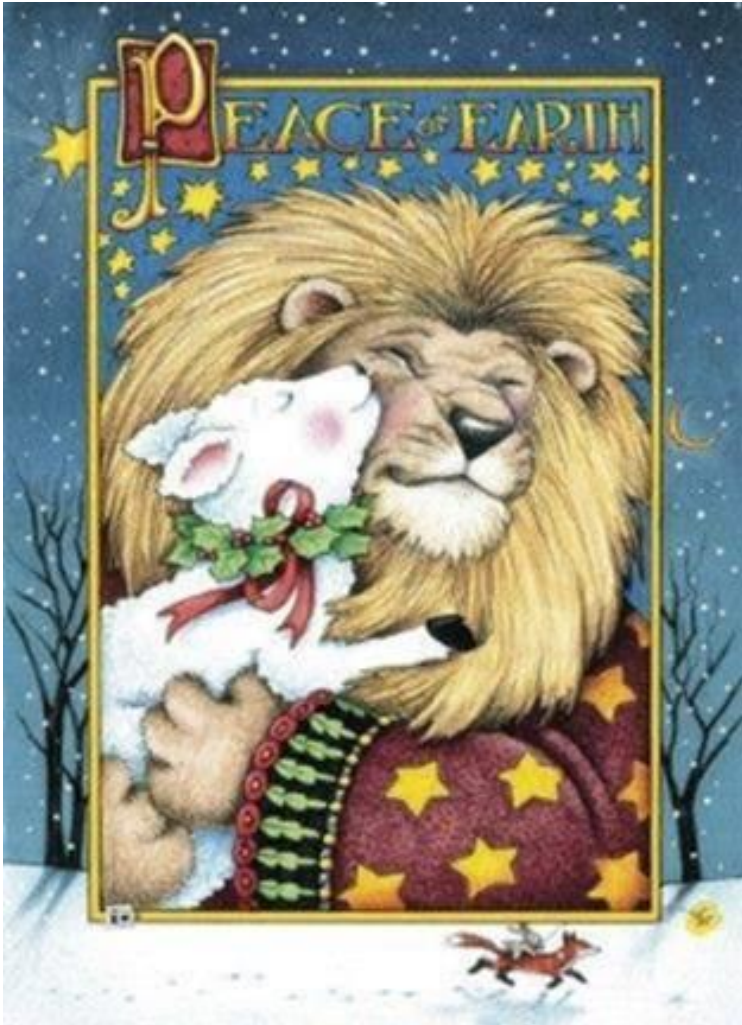


# STORIES BY THE FIRE WITH BECKY

A COLLECTION OF SHORT TALES ABOUT THE  
COURAGE OF KEEPING GIRLS IN SCHOOL IN  
RURAL ETHIOPIA



[www.trampledrose.org](http://www.trampledrose.org)

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## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	5
Welcome .....	7
The Past Story One "Why the world?" .....	9
The Past Story Two "Why Africa?" .....	13
The Past Story Three "A change of life" .....	15
The Past Story Four "Trampled Rose really begins" .....	21
The Past Story Five "Our Fairy Godmother" .....	25
The Present "You must pass through the difficult to reach the creativity" .....	31
The Future "A light in the darkness" .....	36
The Appendix "A Christmas Gift from my mother" .....	42

## Introduction



Merry Christmas 2020

As the daughter of “Becky Kiser”, I’m often asked what it’s like to be Becky’s daughter. My answer is, “it’s as crazy as you can imagine!” Life with Becky as a mom has always been an adventure.

Like most moms, my mom has been telling me stories since I was a baby. I loved snuggling up and hearing her read books, like the *Chronicles of Narnia*, and her singsong way of describing magical worlds. I also loved hearing her tell stories of her life as a little girl, imagining how my own mother could have ever been little herself. One of my favorite stories was how as a young girl she heard tales of missionaries traveling to faraway lands and she would dream of doing something courageous herself.

It came as no surprise to me when my mom moved to Ethiopia, I was used to her being called to adventurous lands and how she had always known she needed to carry out her life’s purpose. I knew that she had to live the daring and meaningful life she had always dreamed of.

*Stories by the Fire*, explains how Becky Kiser went from little girl, to mom, to fulfilling her destiny. I hope you enjoy these as much as I have always enjoyed hearing my mom tell stories.

Melanie Estrada

## Welcome

Welcome to our annual Trampled Rose Stories by the Fire. Although this year is a bit different from others past and we may be apart in our location, our hearts are still together.

I've written down a few tales of:

- The Past: we helped women and girls with obstetric fistula.
- The Present: girls are in Trampled Rose programs in public schools in rural Ethiopia
- The Future: plans are developing for even more of the expansion of light into the darkness of poverty.

This storybook is for you to enjoy with a cup of hot chocolate as you create a place of peace and relaxation as you read.

I noticed that there was no room to include all the stories with so many very key people to this journey; I'll ask you to excuse me for now. You all have been so valuable and beloved in every way. Let's keep writing until the stories in all of us are told.



Enjoy!

It's one of my pleasures to enjoy the richness of the friendships that have developed across the continents and deepened with those at home. All of us joined around the cause of keeping girls in school. We do know that the key to happiness is helping other people.

In this first story tale collection I hope to convey some stories of the funny, rich, and sometimes difficult times of changing our world one girl at a time. We all matter in this puzzle of poverty and lack of opportunity that we are working to solve. We need every piece as we have the courage to continue forward.

HOPE is the main message that Trampled Rose shared with our almost four hundred girls who were helped in the school year 2019/2020.

You are an important part of their hope. Sharing your light with the world not only changes the lives of the girls you help now, but also their future generations.

My wish for you is that all that you have sent into the lives of these precious schoolgirls will be multiplied back to you and your family.

In the words of one of my favorite ancient Hebrew prophets, “Be strong and very courageous.”

I appreciate YOU!

XO Becky

Happy New Year 2021

## The Past

### Story One

“Why the world?”



High School Senior

It might seem strange to some that I grew up without television, fingernail polish, dancing, playing with dice and especially, no Santa.

However, I grew up with lots of adventure books about heroes and heroic times. I had brothers and sisters in excess. My mind was opened to concern and love for the rest of the globe. I helped clean the church and grew up loving God, country, and family.

I knew I was born with a destiny and it was my responsibility to use my life for the greater good. At night, I'd dream of the adventures of missionaries in faraway places. Especially, as I cuddled up in a blanket in the corner of the family living room to read the life stories from the abundance of books in our home -- of Corrie Ten Boom, Jim Elliot, and Aimee Semple McPherson -- my desire was to have courage in danger.

My family's adherence to the religious rules lessened as I entered middle school and then high school but my burning passion to make an impact on the world never wavered.

I do wish that the whole adventure had been as noble and fulfilling as I had dreamed. In the USA we often hear stories about how children learned to swim by being thrown in the deep end of the pool by one parent or the other. Looking back on my early experiences when traveling the world, it did indeed feel as if I'd been thrown into a dark and deep pool.

The adventure started early; I was the mother of two. As my children were growing up, my father made me the president of



our family's construction business when I was twenty-eight years old. Being the woman boss of about fifty construction workers I learned to have thick skin quickly. In January 2000 my father sold the business to his employees, which gave me a new freedom coupled with fears to test my wings.



My first time to wear a tiara

My youngest child was heading off to college just as I turned forty. The time was right for the next chapter to open.

The last three years of my construction career were enhanced with a parttime position as an Independent Mary Kay Sales Director.

Yes, before you get the chance to ask, I did have a pink Cadillac.

Amongst the things I loved about my career were the friendships established. I was lying down in the back seat of Martie Sibert's pink Cadillac in January 2000. Martie's husband, Jim, was driving. We were on our way to Dallas to meet with other members of the Mary Kay sales force. This was my favorite conference of the year.

Martie turned around from her position in the front seat and asked, “Are you going to the meeting about working in the Philippines?”

I almost jumped out of my seatbelt. How could I pass on a chance to work internationally with a career I loved so much? This opportunity had just arisen; it was a new business model for the company. I couldn’t believe my luck.

The first week of February 2000, Martie and I were at the airport on our way to the Philippines to begin this chapter of our International Life.

Many more friends joined us very soon. The stories of our time in the Philippines must wait for another book but it is important to this story because it’s where my world expanded, and I learned how to live in another world so unlike my own. A far away land is where the next story in this book begins -- the story where I found myself lying on a cot in a medical clinic in rural Ethiopia.



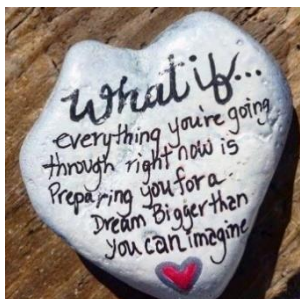
Penny, Martie, and Becky

## The Past

### Story Two

#### “Why Africa?”

The pleasure trip was to see the ancient place where the Ark of the Covenant may rest in northern Ethiopia. Axum may also be the home of the ancient Queen of Sheba. I was traveling alone following the historical path of the ancient Christians.



The hotel had a thatch-covered roof, and I was looking out over the small valley into the burial site of the Cushites, possibly the lost tribe of Dan. I was almost ready to head out with my tour guide to catch the flight to Lalibela, the place of the ancient monolithic churches. Looking up for a moment from my book, I reached out to take a sip of

the juice that had been served with my breakfast. As the liquid touched my lips, I thought, “That might not have been such a good idea.” The taste was just a little bit off, but I didn’t give it a second thought as I flew on the small airplane, landing on a tiny strip at a little airport in Lalibela. All was fine, until it wasn’t.

I was already sick by afternoon and begged the airline representative to reroute me back directly to Addis Ababa, the capital city, but there were no vacant seats to be had. I made it through the first stopover in Lalibela and was soon on my final scheduled stop in Addis. Then came the long drive to my hotel in Bahir Dar. The next thing I remember after barely getting into the bed in my hotel room was waking up again in a small, somewhat white room. I was lying on a cold metal cot. I slowly looked over at the wall to see a black crack with a spider crawling up and then crawling back down. I turned my head the other way to see a rusty IV hooked up to the veins in my hand. I knew something must be

wrong when I realized that I didn't know where I was, nor why, but even worse, I didn't care.

After a quick recovery from typhoid fever (the doctors in Ethiopia see typhoid routinely, so the treatment method is easy and straightforward), I returned home to the USA. I was grateful to be alive and was enamored by all I had seen. It was Christmas time and I had lots of reasons to celebrate.



Saint George Church Lalibella

## The Past

### Story Three

#### “A change of life”

It was March of 2004. My friend Penny Kelly and I were invited to teach entrepreneurial skills to a group of women in Ghana. Why not stop off in Ethiopia since I was in the neighborhood? While on the continent, why not stop to say “thank you” to the tour guide who had saved my life in Bahar Dar by getting me medical care and a flight back to Addis?



When I proposed the idea of a return visit, through an email, and asked him what he needed, he told me that his sister had fistula. Would I help? I couldn't understand what he meant or what he needed. It was my first time to hear the word fistula and my first time to hear he had a sister with a problem. I tried looking up the translation for fistula, guessing it might be an

Amharic word. Nevertheless, I booked a few extra days after Ghana to stop in Ethiopia.

My first days with his sister Rahel were shocking. She was about 4'10" and could not have weighed more than sixty pounds. The first time I met her was in her brother's home. The room was about thirty-five square feet and the family of five lived together. The whole family was so worried that I would be unsettled by the smells coming from Rahel that they kept spraying perfume and fussing.

You see, Rahel had been given as a servant to relatives when she was a young girl. She became pregnant in her early teens. With no medical care and her size and age, she was unable to deliver a

live baby. She pushed in hard labor for almost two days. Due to the prolonged labor the baby died in utero. The lack of oxygen to her internal organs and the pressure on her bladder and rectum during labor tore a hole, leaving Rahel to leak urine and feces for the rest of her life. She had obstetric fistula. Rahel had heard of a hospital that might be able to help. Would I take her?

The trip to the hospital began in the early morning. Rahel, her brother and I hired a taxi and began over a paved road, then a right turn onto a mud path, and finally, about an hour after our start, we entered through a gate to an oasis of plants and flowers. We got out of the taxi and paid the driver. Hundreds were in line.

There was a long continuous bench that zigzagged from the parking lot to the hospital door. Girls and women of all ages were waiting to be called. We sat down at the end of the line on that plank bench. As each new patient was called we moved closer one spot. The long bench was soaked with waste and the smell was overwhelming.

My first instinct was to run and sit and wait in an area where there were no patients. But then I looked around at the sea of hopeless faces and a wave of gratitude overwhelmed me. If I were so lucky as to never experience any of this depth of pain, I could share with the girls in their suffering. I stayed on the bench.

The line took hours until we finally arrived at the front door. Rahel's brother whisked me off to a corner. He didn't want anyone to think that he had a friend who could pay. This surgery is free for Ethiopians.

We waited for what seemed like an eternity. Then we saw Rahel running out the door of the hospital. She was sobbing and could hardly get the words out. She had been told to go back to her village and come back again to the hospital two months later.

She couldn't do that! Rahel was already skin and bones trying not to eat or drink so that she would leak less. I was indignant.

I marched straight in the front door and asked to talk to whomever was in charge. The Ethiopian staff was shocked and confused about what to do with me. They weren't accustomed to having a "white lady" burst through the doors. Finally, after a session of hushed whispers, they sat me down on a high swivel stool and told me they would go get Dr. Catherine.

I waited and waited until a tall slender woman approached. She asked me what I needed, and I told her politely that what I needed was for my friend to be admitted that very day for her fistula surgery. I told her that Rahel could not possibly return to her village for two months and she could never survive a return trip.

Dr. Catherine seemed surprised and appreciative of my passion. She looked me in the eye and said, "Yes, she can have her surgery, but you will be the one to pick the woman who has already waited for two months for her surgery and tell her that she needs to go home and wait for two more months so your friend can have her place."

"Fine." I replied, "I would like to have the name of a private hospital where I can have her admitted." Dr. Catherine smiled and said, "A hospital like that does not exist." "Well then," I said, "how about a private nurse?" Once again she smiled. "Not here in Ethiopia."

It was clear that I had no more ideas. I gathered Rahel up in my arms and left with a broken heart for all the women who were living through this hell on earth. We promised to return in two months.

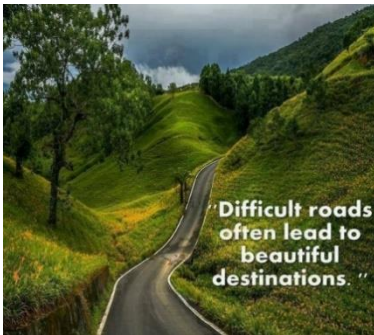
This story almost closes with me, her brother and Rahel getting back in a blue taxi minivan and heading for their small home. The one I would call a room. What was I going to do?

My mind flipped in circles for some minutes. Ideas came and went including the impulse to jump out of the taxi and run back to the USA. Then the idea came.

I know! I know! How about I rent Rahel her own little home in Addis? I could hire someone to help her and buy her enough food to last for two months while she waited for her surgery. Yes! That was it!

I rented the room, hired help, and supplied all Rahel's needs for city life for two months. The cost was less than fifty dollars a month. Rahel was cured of her fistula and returned to her village to continue her life. She was fine. It was my heart that was broken.

Back from my trip in Colorado Springs, my home was all white -- white carpet, white cabinets, white walls. I sat on the bench in front of my master bedroom window. My shoe and jewelry closet was on one side and my walk-in closet was on the other. Our lot was near the country club. The swimming pool and tennis courts called me anytime I could get away. Life was comfortable. And that's what made it so uncomfortable. That bench became where I sat night after night when I woke up unable to sleep with the unfairness of the world burning in my heart and mind.



How hard would it be to go back and help a few more like Rahel? How could I live the comfortable life that was mine only by birth? What if it were my daughter who needed help? What if I were born for such a time as this?



## The Past

### Story Four

#### “Trampled Rose really begins”

The day I met Cristina, (we named this important day, “The day we fell in love”) came more than eighteen months and fifteen round trips to Ethiopia after I decided to help a few more women and girls. All I wanted to help was a few. But the laws of the country were strict, and I was unusual.

When I returned to Ethiopia to find out what it would take to help five more with fistula I found out it was much more complicated than I could have imagined. I began going from government office to government office trying to get the information and licensing I needed to begin helping even one woman legally. I finally became so desperate I called my lifelong mentors, Dick and Sandy Houston, to ask for help with the legal issues and life advice about my decision. I thought I waited until 6:00 in the morning to call but both Dick and Sandy testify that it was actually 3:00 am when they received the call. Sorry about that!

This began the path to all kinds of work and frustration and learning new ideas and cultures from both my own country and Ethiopia. The path to beginning was tiring and exciting and magical and unbelievable, all part of several jet-lagged years while working to open our first project.

My life was back and forth and difficult and rewarding. There will be time for those stories another story night. The resulting success in numbers was one thousand fifteen women and girls with fistulas that were helped. Notice, I did not say *almost* one thousand fifteen. I’ve counted again and again and, if we got everyone correctly admitted, it was that exact number.

One little girl arrived at the Trampled Rose home when she was six and left when she graduated from high school. Every woman

and every girl had a story of loss. It was an honor to bring so many from darkness to light with a home, food, training, business skills, literacy, surgery, and love.

As for the day I met Cristina in Ethiopia. It was Monday, and I was on my way to the beauty salon. It had been a hard weekend. Trampled Rose (then named Women for Women) finally had our legal license, a place to house the women and girls with fistula more comfortably. The house had been rented and we had begun moving in with the few belongings I had brought over from the USA. We already had seven women in our program waiting for their surgery. I was ready for some pampering.

About that moment, my cell phone rang. A woman named Cristina identified herself as the representative from an organization of the spouses of ambassadors who raised money to help local organizations. She was on her way to meet with me. I hung up quickly and urged the driver to turn around and return to the Trampled Rose home. We pulled in to meet Cristina who was waiting in the back of her big white embassy car near the Victory Pharmacy. The Trampled Rose home was only a hop, skip, and a jump away.

We sat down on the front concrete stairs because we didn't have any chairs. Cristina pulled out her official notebook and asked, "So what do you need?" My reply: "Pretty much everything." "Do you have blankets?" "No." "Do you have cooking utensils?" "No." "Do you have enough beds?" "No." And so the conversation continued.



Ethiopian girl at the weekly market

As Cristina met with the seven charter women and girls and heard their needs, a fire ignited in her like none I have ever seen. Cristina organized her forces, including her husband with his empowerments as a loving, caring, and off-the-charts intelligent and fun French Ambassador to Ethiopia, Stephane. He was also our early connection to Rotary, but more on that later.

Cristina left the Trampled Rose that day, inviting me to stop by the French Embassy for a cup of tea. Little did she know that she had just invited me into her life and heart forever. The French Embassy became my refuge during their stay of three years. The fight continued to care for girls and women who had no one else who could or would help. Those were indeed Golden Years shared with a wonderful circle of friends. Again, more on those friends in another book.

## The Past

### Story Five

#### “Our Fairy Godmother”

The smell was terrible. A mix of sugar and coffee and old paint mixed with mildew. It had been a long two weeks in Ethiopia, and I was tired. Did I really have to face the food in the dingy restaurant of the Ras Hotel? I'd been staying at this hotel every time I came to Ethiopia for almost two years. It was cheap but centrally located. I felt safe knowing the guards and the waiters. It was close to the Sheraton where I could wander by myself to have a martini in the cigar bar. Although when my friend, Martie Sibert, came for a visit, she started crying when she saw the roaches scurry for hiding when we switched the lights on. I had been in Ethiopia long enough that I was glad to have lights at all; it didn't seem that bad.

In its dimly lit restaurant that fateful evening there was another American sitting at the only other occupied table. He was an older, dignified gentleman who noticed I was also alone. He asked me to join him. Why not? It would be nice to speak English with a native speaker. He introduced himself as Dr. John Clark. He was working at the Black Lion Hospital training Ethiopian doctors, specifically helping children with hydrocephalus, more commonly known as water on the brain.



Karen Sharp, our Fairy Godmother, with Ishi, our Trampled Rose Guard

We talked for a few hours and I told Dr. Clark about my work with women with fistula and my frustration of trying to understand the laws governing non-profits to ensure all the work I did was legal, the frustration of being shut out of the “status quo” of those

already working to help women with fistula, and my deep pain for the women and girls who were suffering.

It was nice to be with someone who also really cared. As our dinner ended, it was time to say, “Good night,” and wish each other a safe trip back to the USA. Dr. Clark asked me to wait one moment while he reached under his belt. He pulled out cash. He told me that he had a feeling he would meet someone, and he would know where to give the money. I was the one. I was shocked and weary; this miraculous encouragement reenergized me!

I took his personal information and we agreed to stay in touch. In fact, Dr. Clark did come to Colorado Springs to meet with me and my husband one weeknight several months later while he was traveling through Denver. I continued to be impressed with his commitment to the world. He was from Salt Lake City, Utah, and served as a Bishop in the Temple. I was struck by his deep faith.

One of the following times Dr. Clark was in Ethiopia, he called me and asked if I could stop by the hospital to see the children he was helping. I really was swamped with work, but there wasn’t anything I wouldn’t do, if I could, to be with this great man.

He walked me around the shocking hospital. In the hospital halls were stacks of trash, patients, deteriorating walls, and conditions I had never seen before. Even though I saw all this, I still wasn’t prepared to meet the children. Many of the beds didn’t have sheets, the children didn’t have diapers, their mothers were despondent. I could understand Dr. Clark’s call.

After we finished our tour, Dr. Clark and I sat down for a cup of coffee. He told me that his wife was unexpectedly ill, and he needed to return to Utah that very night. He told me he needed a favor. Would I remodel the physician’s apartment so that a foreign doctor would be comfortable staying? He then took me to the apartment that seemed so desolate that nothing could help. But I accepted the responsibility. My background in my family’s business had been construction. I would do my best to allow Dr.

Clark to leave in peace and to provide help for those children he loved so much.

The work began and went on for weeks and weeks. I fought, cried, and begged the workers to complete their tasks in a timely basis. Finally, I found the “magic bullet” -- a bonus at the end of each day for work that was done on time and well, and that equaled their week’s salary. Things sped off then and I was soon able to turn over a key to the apartment to a new doctor. Every detail was complete, including welcoming flowers and food for the week.

Dr. Clark and I stayed in contact and encouraged each other over the next year or so. One day in 2007 he called me and told me he had a special favor to ask of me. His niece, Karen, was locked in an institution by the state of Utah. She had an eating disorder and hadn’t eaten solid food in years.

She was living by forced intravenous nutrition. Her medical doctors were predicting only weeks or short months for Karen to continue living. Dr. Clark had worked on a research project that indicated that depression and violence is reduced when prisoners are assigned someone less fortunate to help.

He and Karen’s family were in desperation for help for Karen. Dr. Clark believed that if Karen could go help with the women with fistula in Ethiopia, it might be her only hope to get better. Would I come to Salt Lake City and help him petition Karen’s judge for her release?



Being totally ridiculous and impulsive (and a believer in hope), I said, “Yes.” A few days later I flew into Salt Lake City and had my first meeting with Karen’s judge. At the pre-meeting with the judge, Dr. Clark and myself, Dr. Clark explained his premise and I promised to be the responsible person. The judge listened attentively, then called Karen into the room.

Karen didn't look at all like I imagined a dying person to appear. She had long limbs, a beautiful face, cute makeup, clothes, and hair. She had been briefed of our idea and she also told the judge that she thought it might help her. The judge shook her head and said, "I don't see what it could hurt if she is dying anyway." She agreed to release Karen from the institution in two weeks. She instructed Karen to use those two weeks before the flight to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to get as healthy as possible.

Then it was my turn to meet Karen privately for about five minutes. We hugged first, but then I held her at arm's distance and, as close as I can recall, said, "Karen, you better sure as hell start eating today. I'm going to be pissed if you die on that airplane and I'm responsible. And, you have great hair! How did you manage to keep yourself so cute in here?"

That was the beginning of the eternal love between Karen and me. Karen ate that day and continued striving towards health until her passing to Heaven February 21, 2020.

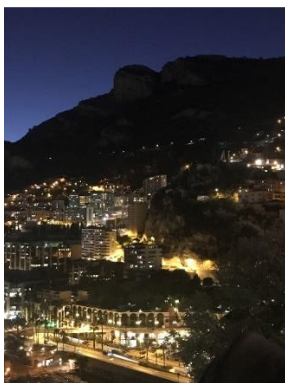
Karen did indeed make the flight to Ethiopia and shone light not only on those with fistula, but on everyone she encountered. After returning home she continued to send many cards of encouragement and in 2015 she handmade over 350 pairs of earrings--one for each of "her girls."

Karen will forever be the Official Trampled Rose Fairy Godmother. We love you to the moon and back, Karen.

## The Present

“You must pass through the difficulty to reach creativity”

Let your imagination race for years rushing past the stories and glimpses of my wonderful friends. This was beyond all that I could have asked for or imagined. The blessing of stopping in cities or countries just to have a hug, a kiss, and a glass of wine with a friend often seems like a fairytale of wishes come true. Be watching for my next collection of stories, “Friends Around the World” for more about this. For now, this is the story that describes one day.



In Monaco. My worst dressed day

Yes, I admit, I hadn't thought things through very well. I was on a quick trip through Europe to visit as many friends as possible in a few days. (Bea, Nicola, Brunella, Donatella, Catherine, Elena, Elena's family, Trilby, Anna, Lourdes, Keith, all my Spanish and Irish Mary Kay friends, and so many more.) I'd packed for weather from Switzerland, to Germany, to Monaco, to Spain. I knew I needed to use carryon luggage or I would never make all my stops.

My first destination was Monaco to meet with my friend Brunella and others at Monaco Aide & Présence (MAP). Brunella had been a partner with Trampled Rose since the first night she held a party to raise funds for women with fistula in her beautiful home in



Paris. I fell in love first with her daughter, Margherita, and then quickly understood that Margherita is such a beautiful representation of the generations of graceful women represented by her beautiful, generous, and talented mother, Brunella.

Brunella and her friends at MAP had been helpful since the opening of our first project together, that of keeping one hundred forty girls in school each year. Each girl receives a monthly allowance in her private account, which allows her the empowerment of purchasing for herself shelter, food, a school uniform, school supplies, health care, and often even helping younger siblings too.

The time came for Trampled Rose to transition from helping women and girls with fistula to the need to combat the results of poverty at its base. Trampled Rose must keep the girls in rural Ethiopia in school. Education was, is, and will be absolutely and unquestionably essential. The first chapter of its history gradually closed; another chapter opens.

It became apparent that cases of fistula in Ethiopia had been highly reduced. Although the problem of early marriage and lack of medical attention has continued for centuries, we are part of the generation to witness the extreme reduction or even virtual elimination of fistula in the areas of Ethiopia where we help.

Why the change? For many reasons that I have seen and many more reasons I will learn in the future. One thing I've already learned is that as a non-Ethiopian, I will never fully understand the idiosyncrasies of the multi-layered and complicated culture in Ethiopia.

Some of the reasons, from my experience, that seem apparent for this reduction of fistula are that the laws in Ethiopia have recently changed in favor of girls and women. Early marriage and female genital mutilation are now outlawed. These laws are enforced. There is new awareness of the value of educated daughters and sisters. Cultural norms have changed as information from the outside world has penetrated even the most remote areas, in part due to the increased coverage of cell phones.

This transition of need allowed Trampled Rose to focus on what is considered a “best practice” in overall reduction of poverty: keeping girls in school.

But back to the quick trip.... As I landed in Nice, France, and then jumped on the helicopter that was to take me to find my designated hotel and driver in Monte Carlo, I realized I was getting cold. The dress I was wearing was kind of a turquoise color and I hadn’t noticed before I left Addis that it was quite worn out.



Then I glanced down at my feet and it looked like I had little elf boots on. The toes were curled up and the suede was worn down. They had seemed perfectly fine to my eyes in Ethiopia. But now that I was surrounded by women who routinely fly on helicopters and don’t wash their clothes in buckets, I felt horrifyingly shabby!

On a better hair day

To add to the problem, my hair was not doing well; the frizz seemed to have made the hair style shape itself into a type of teepee.

Oh, now I noticed that the only jacket/sweater I had with me was silver knit. So here I was with frizzy hair, a traveled-in and old turquoise dress, black tights, and elf boots. Add to that a silver sweater. What could get worse? It started raining and the only umbrella I had was green with white polka dots and a ruffle around the edge!

How humbling to meet the perfectly dressed Brunella and her family for a dinner in downtown Monte Carlo. The wonderful thing that transformed the night was the magic of love. The streets seem to be made with diamonds, I felt loved and grateful, and what took over the entire dinner was love. What a privilege to have friends all over the world that share in the passion for

spreading our light in the darkness, friends who know that the key to happiness is helping other people. What a fairytale memory. It seems like one of those Christmas snow balls that you shake and then glitter comes down on everything. How amazing that I got to live inside that Christmas snow globe on my worst dressed day.

Now I'd like you to just try to imagine my joy the next day when I arrived in Germany and the first thing my friend Nicola said when she picked me up from the airport was, "Are you in the mood for shopping? I need some new boots."

I've had a few more "worse dressed days" since then. More stories for you to anticipate soon!



One of my favorite photos

Camels are the means of transportation in the village of Aliyu Amba where Trampled Rose keeps sixty-five girls (of the almost four hundred currently enrolled) in school every year.

## The Future

### “The Light in the Darkness”

The office was dark and dusty. There was electricity but the only light was a bulb on a single electrical cord. I had been meeting, one by one, with the fifty schoolgirls who are part of Trampled Rose in Muki Turi. I try to find three times each year to be with each girl in all five of our projects. Some haven’t been held in a long time and I do my best to squeeze each girl as we finish our update. I want to make sure that each one knows she is loved and valuable and that her dreams matter.

I finished my meeting with Kadija. This was her third and last year of being with us. She was graduating at the end of the year and was on her way to university. This was a painful time of letting go for me. I wondered how teachers do it every year.

Just as we finished what I thought might be our last hug, Kadija began to walk out but then hesitated and turned around. She said, “I know you think you are changing my life and for that I’m grateful. But what you need to know is that not only did you change my life, but you also changed the direction of my generations to come.”



Kadija was the first family member to attend high school. Not one person had ever imagined finishing university. As I found out later, Kadija and her sister Hana used their Trampled Rose support funds to help their younger two sisters also.

Kadija built her strength early being the daughter of a sustenance farmer in rural Ethiopia who barley harvested enough crops to keep his family alive.

In school in Merhabete

She grew up in a home that was made of cow dung and mud. It was built around a central pole with a thatch roof and a mud floor. The family slept together on a straw mattress. Kadija spent most of her early life hungry and barefoot. Her days were spent walking to the village well and carrying water back home in a heavy yellow plastic container that looks a lot like a gas can. Then she would walk through the deforested area near her home looking for small branches to gather to build a fire to help cook dinner for her family.

Kadija was naturally bright and cheerful. Going to school was a highlight in her life. Kadija was near the top of her class in many subjects and she loved her teachers dearly.

Kadija came skipping into her home one day and quickly understood that she had entered the middle of a horrible conflict between her parents and her two older brothers. The words stopped but the furor in her brother's faces continued. That night as Kadija was sleeping she heard her eldest brother quietly snarl to her father, "I don't care. I won't go! It's not fair to either of them."

Kadija's tired eyes closed again until she was jarred awake by the hands of about ten strangers. These men grabbed her and her sister, Hana, and covered them in white blankets. They started carrying them somewhere outside towards the neighboring mountain. The girl's heads were covered, and their eyes were blindfolded so they couldn't see a thing. But they could hear each other's screams.

Kadija and Hana also heard their captors singing traditional wedding songs. Although Kadija was only thirteen and her sister was eleven, to their horror they realized they were being carried by their family and friends to their new homes to be married and live with the older husbands they had never met. The voices missing were their elder brothers who had begged for their

freedom to continue their education. They had refused to attend in protest.

Kadija was dropped first at her husband's home and Hana was carried off to hers. Neither knew where they were nor how to escape.

Kadija didn't know if she was going to die or just wished to die from all the hard things she was forced to do. Life seemed hopeless. One day while at the village well, Kadija made a new friend that told her the location of her sister, Hana, who was living with her husband.

Kadija's new friend had heard Hana was looking for Kadija and her friend asked her if she wished to follow her home to see her.

Did Kadija have enough courage to find her sister? What if her husband found out? Could she take another beating?

Kadija did have the courage, and the secret meetings developed into a secret plan to run away. On the scheduled day they met just after sunset near Hana's new home. They didn't know what direction to go but they started anyway. They ran and ran for days with only stops long enough to sleep for a few hours. Finally, they arrived at a small village. They hoped to get some work doing laundry, day care, or maybe migrant field work.

They did find a job carrying stones for a construction project. They began at 5:00 am and carried stones from the quarry to the project until dusk. It was exhausting work, but they were free. One day on the job they heard another girl talking about applying for help from Trampled Rose. She heard that it is a project that keeps girls in school.

Kadija ran to the very same school office where we were now talking to apply for help. The rest Kadija did for herself. All Trampled Rose did was move the boulders on the path. Kadija

will graduate from Debre Brehan University in Ethiopia in 2020 with a degree in Accounting. We are proud of her!

Kadija's story is one of hundreds and now thousands of similar, but quite different, stories of girls that have not only survived, but triumphed in situations I cannot even imagine.

I'm inspired and encouraged by these true warriors. In the words of Kadija, this is not only for this generation. It is hope and light for all the future generations to come.



The Trampled Rose girls, and all of us, have come to know that we all grow even when we are apart, and we all celebrate when we are together.

Why?

Because we love each other.

Thank you for being part of this story.

Decorating the darkness in Merhabete

*The End*





## Appendix:

### A Christmas Gift from my mother

My mother, Elizabeth Sue Davis (Betty Sue Leathers), was born in Bird City, Kansas to John Leathers and Lola Jenkins in 1925. My love for stories began with her ability to take her children back in time to the stories of her own childhood.



Elizabeth Sue (Leathers) Davis

My mother grew up poor. Her father had been poor, and her mother had been poor. Life was hard for the couple and their six children. She told us stories of her father selling vegetables from a wheelbarrow, of her mother doing the laundry and ironing for rich farmers. Of her mother mopping the mud floor every morning with a mop and big buckets of water. She could make them hard as cement. Her mother always said, “just because you are poor doesn’t mean you have to be dirty.” The Great Depression hit our country and my mother’s favorite cheese was forever from the welfare food program.

She also told us about the Christmas she would never forget. It was late Christmas Eve. My mother woke up to the sound of her own mother’s weeping. My mother got up to comfort her and saw tears streaming out of her mother’s big brown eyes. She was crying because she had nothing to give to her children on Christmas morning. I learned from this story that poverty is hardest on the parents. My mother always taught a lesson with her stories.

Please accept this gift in honor of my own storytelling mother.

Enjoy!

### Sue Davis's Stir-N-Drop Sugar Cookies

2 Eggs

2/3 Cup Salad Oil (we call it vegetable oil)

2 tsp Vanilla

1 tsp Lemon Rind

$\frac{3}{4}$  Cup Sugar

2 Cup *Sifted* Flour

2 tsp Baking Powder

$\frac{1}{2}$  tsp Salt

Beat eggs, mix in other ingredients. Drop on ungreased baking sheet. Flatten with greased glass dipped in sugar. Bake 8-10 minutes at 400° Fahrenheit.



*Trampled Rose*

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