

News

# Week four: memories come flooding back

Though throughout my stay in Ethiopia I faced many struggles and challenges, leaving was the hardest. My flight left at 10:15 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 3, which gave me the majority of the day to dwell on my goodbyes.

We had spent the Saturday before with the children — playing games, singing songs and just holding them close to our hearts. One of my students, Diborah, clung to me for hours refusing to let go. Her attachment mirrored my own emotions, desperately searching for a way to stay, to hold all the children, to keep them all within my grasp.

A few days before our departure, I had met with Keith Strawn, the founder of Blessing the Children International. I asked him a question that had been nagging me for some time. What can I do when I return home? His answer was simple. Tell people about your stay, he said. Let them know about the children, about their needs. Let them know of our plans for a new school — our plans to provide superior education, nourishment and love. Let them know that they can help. Blessing the Children International always needs more sponsors for children — more opportunities to reach out to impoverished children.

Despite my inner turmoil about leaving, the Boeing 767 took its course on time, separating me from my new home in Ethiopia. Stepping out of the plane in Washington, D.C., I was engulfed once again by American culture. During my layover, I purchased a frappuccino at Starbucks and realized guiltily that my one drink could have bought 40 loaves of bread for hungry children back in Debre Zeyit.

I decided then and there that my work in Ethiopia was not over. Flipping



Andrea Jandernoa

through Blessing the Children's book of sponsor children, I stopped at the picture of 7-year-old Messay. She had been one of my favorite children in Debre Zeyit. Even if it meant sacrificing a few purchases of unnecessary excess — like the cold drink in my hand — I knew I could afford to spend a dollar a day providing support for the energetic loving little girl that stared back at me from the picture. Even if I could no longer give her hugs, teach her English or give her little treats of gum and cookies, I could at least sponsor her. I could at least help from a distance.

I took out my camera and scrolled through the pictures. Memories flooded back. Memories of children laughing and some of the children crying. Memories of singing, praising Jesus. Memories of shared cokes — Coke — and shared lunches. As memories flooded back, tears welled in my eyes. One thing was certain. I would never forget my stay in Ethiopia.

If you are interested in sponsoring one of the children or making a one-time donation, visit the Web site at [www.blessingthechildren.org](http://www.blessingthechildren.org). Even the smallest amount can make the greatest difference in any one of these children's lives.



Courtesy photos

Jandernoa cradles her young student Diborah on the last day of classes. After their few weeks of interaction, Diborah is reluctant to let Andrea go.



Jandernoa joins in the excited frenzy after an English lesson with four of her students.



Jandernoa and Messay, 7, pose for a final picture before Jandernoa's return to Woodstock.

# Expressly Leslie offers hot vegetarian fare at market

Falafel sandwiches and other Middle Eastern dishes flavor Woodstock Farmers Market

By MIKE NEUMANN  
The Independent



*Editor's note: Each week, The Woodstock Independent will feature one vendor who helps make the Woodstock Farmers Market a success each year. The market runs through October from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Tuesdays and Saturdays on the Square.*

A barbecue junkie and a strict vegetarian don't seem like they would make a perfect match, but for Leslie Cook and David Carter it has worked out well.

When the Algonquin couple met for a second time after many years apart, they learned a few things about each other. Carter was a professional barbecuer, selling his concoctions at festivals and fairs. Cook, however, had turned vegetarian, but decided she would help Carter with his business.

"As a vegetarian, I began to find myself over my ears in pork," Cook said.

Last year Cook began selling her Middle Eastern fare, with the help of her husband, at festivals. After starting Expressly Leslie, she quickly found that farmers markets fit more with her type of foods and personality. Customers can enjoy a falafel sandwich, a vegetarian burrito or several other lunch specialties while spending time in the company of Cook and Carter, who try to make their guests feel at home at the

stand.

"When people love the food, that feels good," Cook said. "We love this town. We love seeing the people enjoy the music and the great times."

And if a person is looking for entertainment, Cook said Carter's main job is to entertain while she cooks. Some days you'll find Carter juggling lemons before making lemonade, and other times his act is cutting ribbon fries.

"He's so much fun," Cook said. "He brings them in and entertains them."

Last month Cook and Carter opened a permanent location at Joe Caputo & Sons Fruit Market, Algonquin, which is just a short walk from the couple's house.

Carter had developed a relationship with the store when he began selling his homemade barbecue sauce out of the store. As a vegetarian chef, Cook said she had formed her own relationship as a top customer of Caputo's "fantastic produce."

After discussions about pulling the stand up to the store fell through, Cook was offered a small café area by the store's exit, which included its own kitchen.

When asked how she would like to see the business grow, Cook quickly said that keeping it small and fun are essential for



TWI photo by Mike Neumann

Leslie Cook began selling vegetarian dishes at festivals, fairs and farmers markets last year. Her business, Expressly Leslie, also has a new permanent location at Joe Caputo & Sons Fruit Market, Algonquin.

success and the couple's happiness.

She did say, however, that she and her husband have thought briefly about opening a combination barbecue/vegetarian restaurant where customers would order from one of two serving areas and eat in a common area.

She joked that it would help "couples struggling with the same issue" as she and Carter.

Who knows, with the couple's newfound love for Woodstock, Cook admitted that the city might be just the place for the restaurant.