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VICS in Ethiopia

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Nurse, Midwife, Clinic Supervisor Says Goodbye

Joyce de Gooijer
Director, VICS



Top: Village of Haro Wato

Left: Maureen Mears (second from left) with priest and sisters in Haro Wato

If a picture is worth a thousand words, travelling must be worth millions, and to actually live there – beyond description. Names like Arramo, Bushullo, Dadim, Awassa and Addis have been part of our VICS language since 1974 when Joe Carriero, the first VICS volunteer to Ethiopia, arrived in Alitena. Thirty-five years and over 50 volunteers later, the last volunteer in Ethiopia, Maureen Mears, has returned to Canada.

Maureen was first posted to Ethiopia in 1983. She served there as a nurse until 1986. Drawn back to Ethiopia in 2006, Maureen has spent the past 10 years using her nursing and midwifery skills in various locations and settings. In Wolisso, her abilities as a clinical supervisor and classroom instructor helped students at St. Luke's College

of Nursing graduate from a 3-year diploma nursing program. From Wolisso, Maureen moved to Mandura, providing management and medical skills that supported a local, very remote clinic. Her final and last move to Haro Wato is where my experience in Ethiopia starts and hers ends.

Most remote VICS locations

Only when we started for Haro Wato did I realize the effort it took for Maureen to meet me in Addis. Her knowledge of the language, country and travel helped make the 29 hours, three bus rides, an overnight stay in

Awasa, and bumping through Dilla and Sollamo a smoother process than some roads! We arrived in Haro Wato, certainly the most remote location for any volunteer currently serving with VICS.

Through our 4-day stay there was no power, and neither the clinic nor the sister's residence had water or solar back-up. Maureen and I, having "tea cup" showers, were able to conserve the little water remaining. The back-up generator wasn't working and the day before we left, the ambulance battery died. Not surprisingly, internet and phone connections were quite limited – explaining why messages from Maureen were rare.

Haro Wato is a busy, active clinic. A new addition, the third major wing, includes a large waiting room. Maureen was mentoring nurses, ensuring that

protocol was followed and patient assessment done correctly. I watched her console a woman in labour, reach out to the family of a dying baby and celebrate successes with clinic staff.

We saw a bit of the area, attended Mass on the compound, took a walk to a neighbouring community, and then to an amazing waterfall. The area is beautiful. Even in the dry season, it's lush and green.

From Haro Wato we took an 18-hour trip back to Addis, stayed a day, then were on our way to Mandura, Maureen's previous posting. Mandura is even more remote than Haro Wato. A good portion of the road was under construction, so dust was certainly a common enemy!

Being remote didn't stop development

I was thrilled to meet Sr. Veronica – an energetic, lively, laughter-filled woman who efficiently and effectively ran the clinic. That was no surprise, considering that she was one of Maureen's former students at Wolisso. Being remote didn't stop development. A new housing project was under construction. Staff were thrilled with the new space especially since they would "be able to see the sunset!"

As VICS is an organization of mercy, Maureen exemplified living a life of mercy. She is an example of so many volunteers who, over the past 45 years, have dedicated their time and lives in developing countries. Though overcoming struggles and challenges are always part of the experience, so too are the joys and memories that come from living with those we serve. To Maureen and all volunteers who have so humbly served with VICS – thank you. ■



Top: Maureen in the new waiting room at the Haro Wato clinic



Left: Maureen in the classroom at St. Luke's College of Nursing



Top: Mandura clinic



Left: The new wing at the Haro Wato clinic