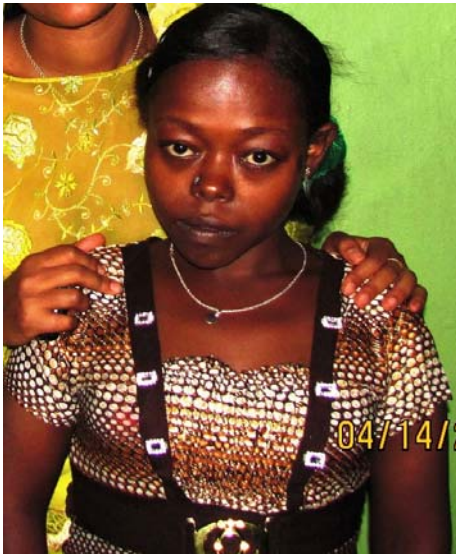


Genet Gaga



“I was treated like a prisoner who does hard work and does not get paid.”



My name is **Genet Gaga**. I am 25 years old and was born in Bale. Since I was a small child, I have been a poor girl who experienced many challenges in my life. I lost my parents when I was young. I do not know why and how they died. I only remember a little about my mother, but I do not know what my father looked like.

After my parents died, I was brought to my uncle's house to work and live. My uncle is a cruel man who used to torture me in many different ways. I was given work that was beyond my ability and was forced to stop school and work only for my uncle. Before my parents died, I went to school until second grade. At my uncle's house, I was not allowed to go to school or church, or even talk with anybody. This made me very shy and fearful. I did not know how to communicate with people and had nobody to share my

feelings with, other than God. At my uncle's house I was like a prisoner who does hard work and doesn't get paid. I was not given enough food so I was hungry every day. I prepared food for the family and then had to watch my uncle and his family eat the food I cooked while I was given only a small amount.

One day at my uncle's house, my foot felt itchy and started to swell. This had never happened to any part of my body before so I began to worry. Meanwhile, my eye started to trouble me. Tears started to flow from my eye and everything became blurry. I was told I had trachoma and that I should go to the hospital. My body became a victim of different kinds of sicknesses. I used to be able to walk for half a day without resting but now I felt tired and weak in a few minutes. With all the weakness, tiredness and loneliness, I continued to live and work at my uncle's house in order to stay alive.



I knew a man who used to work for the Mossy Foot Association in my area. One day this man saw me and felt sorry for me. He advised me to go to the Mossy Foot Association in Bale and show them my foot. Taking the man's advice, one day I walked to the Bale site where a large number of people with different kinds of foot problems were waiting for a turn to be seen and treated. After waiting my turn, I showed my

feet to the workers who told me to wash my foot with clean water, soap, and bleach and then put on medicine they gave me. After being treated and advised, I started to take care of my foot myself.



Every day, I washed my leg with clean water, bleach, and soap, put the Whitfield's medicine on my foot and put on the proper kind of shoes. As I continued to follow up with the Mossy Foot Association and days and weeks passed, changes began to show on my body. My strength began to return and my eye started to be clear. I followed up with Mossy Foot Association for three years without missing a single day. When my uncle saw me going to the Bale site for my treatments and medicine, he would shout at me and say that I was not working properly for him and to stop going there.

The Mossy Foot workers were impressed by the improvements and changes from the treatments, and

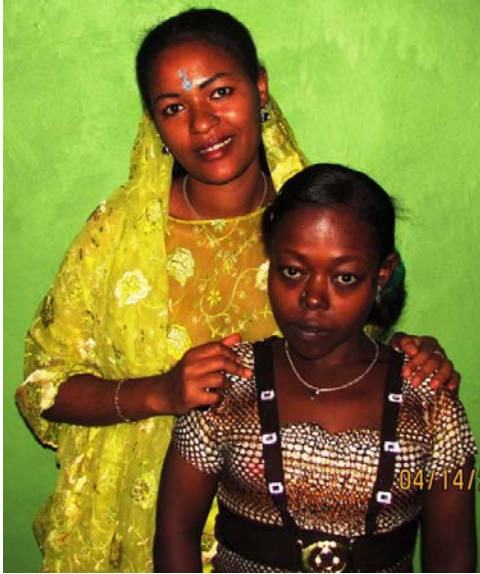
wanted to give me an opportunity to be trained as a hair dresser in Wolaita Soddo. When I told my uncle about this good opportunity, he became furious and said he would not allow this to happen. No one else in his family liked the idea either. Yet the Mossy Foot workers did not give up easily. They came to my uncle's house and worked it out peacefully with him. Even though he did not like the idea, my uncle gave me permission to be trained.



I was taken in Mossy Foot's vehicle to Wolaita Soddo where I learned how to make seven different kinds of hair dressing styles and how to properly use hair dressing tools. My social skills and communication skills also started to improve. With many other students like me at the training center in Soddo, I shared my story, prayed and worshipped together and improved my communication. After a month of training, I graduated on Monday, April 14, 2010. I was given a certificate and tools to help me begin a hair dressing business in the area where I live. When I go back, I will begin fixing hair for girls in my area. I will also teach others like me how to care for their feet.

God used the Mossy Foot Association to change my life. Now, I have hope to continue schooling, make money and lead my own life. I will always thank the Lord and the Mossy Foot Association for everything that has been done for me. I would like to thank my hair dressing teacher Roman who taught me to feel comfortable around people, have courage, and be confident. She helped me not to fear anyone and to put all my problems at the Lord's feet. She encouraged me to work hard and pray and praise the Lord for everything.

Roman, Genet's Teacher



“When she first came here, Genet was very shy and said nothing. Then she began to tell me everything in her life. Since her parents died, she had never gone anywhere and does not even know who her neighbors are. She shared many of her problems with me. I was concerned that her uncle would not like her having a hair dressing business and would create problems for her since she had nowhere else to live. So, I advised the Mossy Foot Association to follow up with this poor girl and care for her until she could lead her own life with confidence. Mossy Foot Association is a project from God prepared for poor people who have lost their hope. I see this from the many ways the association helps people I know and from the many students the project has given me to teach.”



Students trained in hair dressing preparing to graduate



Graduates with tools and materials to help them start a business