



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Champion of Children Award – Remarks of Gelila Assefa Puck

Beverly Hills, CA – March 19 , 2009 – [*Remarks of Gelila Assefa Puck made at Beverly Wilshire Hotel, Thursday, March 19, 2009 at the Annual Spring Luncheon of the Children’s Institute of Los Angeles Upon Receipt of the Champion of Children’s Award*]

Thank you so very much for honoring Wolfgang and me today.

You know a bit of my background already.

I was born in Ethiopia.

You also know that Ethiopia is a third-world country – but I was raised there comfortably.

I am a bit of a mixture like Barack Obama – in my case, part African, part Jewish.

We always had enough when I was growing up – even in Ethiopia – and sometimes we had more than enough.

But growing up in a country like Ethiopia, you cannot miss the poverty no matter how well off your own family may be.

There are the shacks ... and the slums and the refugee camps ... that you pass by every day ...

No matter how well you live, you see them ... no matter how important your job, you see them.

There are the beggars you see and meet on every corner.

And then there are the children.

Armies of poor children.

Sometime they are alone ... abandoned orphans ... dressed in rags, sitting sadly on the sidewalk.

Sometimes these kids move in packs along the alleyways ... through the markets ... down the street ... swarming around you ... asking for money asking for food.

I left Ethiopia behind many years ago. I’m an American now and very proud to be here.

I left Ethiopia behind but Ethiopia never left me ... and the children of Ethiopia never left my heart.

As I made my way in the world ... as I came to this generous country ... I promised I would do something for those who I left behind ... the kids on the streets ... the children on the corners ... the babies in the shacks and slums.

How blessed I was to discover an organization – the Ethiopian Children’s Fund – that was committed to doing something for these kids.

And how blessed I was to have a husband who has encouraged me to work with ECF in rescuing these wonderful children.

When I first discovered ECF, there were 21 kids in the program.

Today those kids are adults ... and there over 400 orphaned children now receiving aid and support from EDF through its school and clinic in the town of Aleltu ... out of harm’s way ... 55 kilometers outside Addis Ababa.

So when Nettie Dart called me to say that she would like my help for a children’s charity well, I have to tell you, she had me at “hello.”

Always happy to help children.

But I figured then I better find out exactly what kind of charity this might be.

I went to visit the center here in Los Angeles.

Now when you grow up in America, in Los Angeles, it’s so much different than the rest of the world ... and certainly the Third World.

You don’t see the poverty.

You don’t see the kids.

But here, at the Los Angeles CII Center, I found what was hiding in my beautiful America.

Children damaged by violence.

Children hammered by poverty.

You don’t see them on the streets of America ... but they are as hurt, as damaged, are endangered as any kid in Addis Ababa.

And I found here what I found at ECF’s compound in Aleltu ... children smiling in the face of adversity ... caring adults in the face of deprivation ... and the hugs.

My gosh, the hugs.

I had done nothing yet to help these kids.

But they accepted me when I walked in the door.

I had them at “hello.”

I hadn’t even learned their names. But they rushed into my arms ... and my gosh, the hugs.

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So that's really why I am here tonight.

The children you help. The smiles and hugs they give.

And that's the real secret behind Nettie's persistent calling ... her endless asking.

We love you Nettie ... we put up with you, Nettie ... because you are doing it for the children .. those beautiful children.

Nettie, how about you come up for a hug yourself I have something more for you.

(Pause for applause)

Now that I have you up here with me, let me give you a prize.

This prize, I hope, that will be a surprise. I know it will be for my longsuffering husband Wolfgang.

Wolfgang and I have an agreement ... no matter how busy our week may be ... on Sunday he belongs to me and to the children.

Well, I am so impressed with the work of your wonderful charity, Nettie, I am going to sell you one of my Wolfgang Sundays.

We'll work out the details, but I will send Wolfgang home to the highest bidder where he will cook supper for your family on a Sunday.

(Pause for applause)

Thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen. It is a great joy to be honored by you all, but an even greater pleasure to support the work you do every day with CCI.

Now I have only one request from you Nettie ...

We've come to you to help out ... just as you asked.

We've given you the dinners and the handbags for the auction... just as you've asked.

And you know I'm committed ... I've given you a chef for a Sunday dinner at home ... and you didn't even have to ask for that.

But could you please just not call me for any more ... well, maybe just don't call for just a few days ...

There are so many others in this room what would be glad to hear from you!

Thanks again to all!

About Gelila Style

GelilaStyle features the couture collections of Gelila Assefa Puck, an internationally known designer of fine gowns and handbags, who was born and raised in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Gelila's designs are rooted in her East African heritage and today are principally focused on a distinctive handbag line, which includes simple, classic clutches and bags made from crocodile, ostrich and African springbok.

Gelila and her husband, superchef Wolfgang Puck, support numerous charities worldwide, and were both honored in March of 2009 for their philanthropy by the Children's Institute in Southern California with the prestigious Champion of Children Award.

Contact

Gelila Style

www.gelilastyle.com