

# Ethiopian Review

Ethiopian News Forum

## **Pettis: Tale of Ethiopian twins unusual, engaging**

Posted by sun | May 24th, 2009 at 7:58 am |

Cutting for Stone" by Abraham Verghese

This unusual book tells the story of twin boys born to an Indian nun who works in a hospital in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Their father is the hospital's surgeon, though he claims to have no knowledge of how the pregnancy happened. The twins are conjoined, and a Caesarian delivery is required. The nun dies, the surgeon runs away, and the twins are lovingly raised by two doctors at the hospital.

Though they are surgically separated shortly after birth, the boys remain very close in their thinking and their responses to the world. Their adoptive mother names them Shiva (for an Indian god) and Marion (for Dr. Marion Sims, an Alabama gynecologist whom she admires). Marion is the narrator of the book, and we learn about Shiva only indirectly. Their childhood and school years comprise the first section of the book.

Both boys show a strong affinity for medicine, and because they are being raised by doctor-parents on the grounds of a native hospital, they are able to fully develop their interests.

The middle of the book deals with their growth into young adulthood and their gradual estrangement from one other. The politics of Ethiopia are featured throughout this part of the book, and revolution is the reason why Marion eventually has to flee the country.

He goes to the United States, where the third part of the story continues through his internship at an under-funded New York hospital, his eventual reconnection with his father, and his uncovering of the secrets surrounding his birth.

Some parts of the story seem improbable. For example, why does Marion remain infatuated with his childhood sweetheart despite her many betrayals? Still, the epic scope of this novel draws the reader along. Because the author is a surgeon, his medical descriptions are clear and easy to understand. This is an unusual book with memorable characters.

By Kerry Pettis | (BROOMFIELD)