



Australia's Mother Theresa: Catherine Hamlin

“We know that God is behind this work”

By Marion Grimshaw August 2009

The Fistula Problem

One of every twenty pregnant women have difficulty in childbirth or suffer obstructed labour. But in western countries today, women can successfully deliver a child with medical assistance or by caesarean section.

In developing countries, pregnancy and childbirth present a far higher risk. People live in remote and often inaccessible areas. Prenatal care is limited. If problems occur during labour, swift transport to hospital or for medical assistance is almost impossible. In countries such as Ethiopia where the roads are few, the terrain is rugged, and medical help is not readily available, a mother with a small or malformed pelvis or a badly positioned child may be in labour for five or more days without help.

As a result of prolonged and obstructed labour, the woman's bladder or vagina is torn so that a hole or fistula is caused in the bladder, and sometimes in the rectum. Usually the baby is stillborn. It is so common in undeveloped countries because of the lack of medical care but also because girls are married at a very young age, usually between twelve and fourteen but sometimes as young as nine. They are usually very small of stature due to malnutrition and their childish bodies are not ready for childbirth.

When fistulae occur, the woman is unable to control the flow of urine or excreta. She then has an offensive odour. Her husband will leave her and her family and friends will avoid her. Many a young girl with fistula injuries has suffered a fate worse than death, experiencing a life of rejection, separation, loneliness and “shame”.

The Hamlin's decided that they must find a hospital for these “outcast” women, something that would be a sanctuary and a haven, where they would be welcomed and restored. Because the patients were so poor, treatment had to be given free of charge. The Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital became a reality in 1974. Since then the work has continued uninterrupted, despite drought, a number of political upheavals and civil war.



Reg and Catherine Hamlin



In 1958 two Australian doctors, Reg and Catherine Hamlin, went to Ethiopia to train midwives. Seeing the plight of these poor women, they became determined to help them. They perfected a technique pioneered by an American surgeon in the 1850's that, in most cases, will result in a complete cure. Then they built the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital in 1974. Since then more than 20,000 women have been treated and cured. The Hospital now trains doctors from other developing countries, and the effect of their work is spreading world-

wide, restoring new life and dignity to thousands of young women. Some are able to have a child and experience the happy role of parent. It is estimated that as many as three million women suffer from this problem throughout the developing countries of the world. All patients at the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital are treated free of charge.

Rural Village for patients who cannot be completely cured.

A small number of patients (about 3% of those treated) are so badly damaged in childbirth that they cannot be cured. These patients are fitted with an external bag for their urine. Continuing medical care is essential. Yet despite this affliction, most of the patients are able, and want, to do some light work.

In 2000 the Ethiopian Government gave the hospital a parcel of 21 hectares of rural land outside of Addis Ababa for them to build a “self-help” village for these patients and, construction completed, they occupied the village towards the end of 2002. There are ten self-contained cottages, each accommodating ten patients with a supervisor living on site. The residents of the village are taught skills in agriculture, farming and craft work. The total cost was in excess of \$A 2m., almost all of this provided by gifts from Australia.



The Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital

Although Drs. Reg and Catherine Hamlin commenced fistula surgery in the early 1960's, the first ward of the fistula hospital was not built until 1974. When Dr. Reg Hamlin died in 1993, there was a need for additional doctors to reside on site. An increasing number of patients was coming for surgery and the hospital buildings had to be upgraded and extended. The Australian Government (AusAID) and other generous donors in Australia and New Zealand, made it possible to restructure the whole of the Hospital Complex in 1999.

Administration : The Hospital is administered by a registered Trust in Ethiopia. Dr. Catherine Hamlin AC is the Chairman of the board of Trustees and Senior Consultant in Surgery. Dr. Ambaye Wolde Michael, a world authority on Fistula surgery, is the Medical Director. Mrs. Genet Kifle, who joined the staff 10 years ago from the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia, is the Financial Administrator.

Training of doctors and nurses : The Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital is an International Training Centre for fistula surgery. Doctors from all over the world where obstetric fistulae occur, come to the Hospital for training. Graduates from the Addis Ababa University, in Obstetrics and Gynaecology, are trained at the hospital.

Dr. Catherine Hamlin, Commander of the Order of Australia

Executive Director and co-founder of the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital, has been given the highest Australian Award. She was made a Companion of Australia in 1995.

Elinor Catherine Nicholson was born in Sydney on 24 January 1924 into a well-to-do family with a deep Christian faith and a history of missionary work dating back several generations. There were three boys and three girls and they lived a very comfortable life in a sprawling convict built house overlooking the Parramatta River in Ryde. They were quite used to living with servants and housemaids. Her parents were loving but firm, bringing their children up to know the difference between right and wrong, with strict rules on how to behave. Their mother was the disciplinarian, dealing out ‘whippings’ with a hairbrush and Catherine’s stubborn streak

showed early in that she refused to cry even knowing that this would bring an end to the punishment. Catherine was the tom-boy of the family, riding horses and climbing trees and she took this adventurous spirit through into her adulthood.

In her last year of school she decided to become a doctor and although this was an unusual career choice for a girl at that time, it seems to have proceeded smoothly and at the age of 22 she graduated with a medical degree. During her time at university she had what she described as one of the most defining experiences of her life when, touched by a sermon by a famous missionary speaker, Reverend Hugh Paton, she dedicated her life to Christ. She had a strong conviction that some day she would become a missionary.

Catherine and New Zealand born Dr. Reginald Hamlin shared a missionary heritage and deep Christian faith. They met (and discreetly courted) at the Crown Street Women's Hospital, Sydney in the late 1940's. Reg, 15 years her senior, was the Medical Superintendent. They moved between hospitals in Adelaide, London and Hong Kong before being "called" to Ethiopia. In 1958 they answered an ad in a medical journal for an obstetrician and gynaecologist to establish a Midwifery School in the General Hospital in Addis Ababa and went there in 1959, with their small son Richard, on a three year contract with the Ethiopian Government. On their arrival they were told by one of the doctors "The fistula patients will break your heart."

They had seen this condition rarely and were unprepared for the impact these women would have on their hearts and their lives. They did not return to Australia. Reg died in Ethiopia in 1993 and Catherine continues their work there, operating three days a week, training surgeons in the procedure they perfected to cure this affliction and travelling to many western countries to raise funds.

In the first year they were in Ethiopia, fistula repairs were carried out on 32 women. By the third year 300 women had been healed. In the forty years since this work began they have treated and cured more than 20,000 women.

The Hamlin motivation for establishing the Hospital arises from a profound and deeply-held belief, grounded in the Jewish Old Testament and the Gospels, in a God who cares deeply for the outcast. One is reminded of the interaction between Jesus and the "Woman with the bleeding", documented in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. Another tormented outcast, she quietly touches Jesus' cloak, in the hope that this act in itself will heal her. But what is striking about the story is not just her physical healing, but the way that Jesus publicly acknowledges her and re-integrates her into society. Catherine Hamlin herself has commented: "We know that God is behind this work. I want to say that specially; that He has helped us over the years. We believe in prayer, and we believe that He has answered our prayers for many individual patients. With the work in the hospital we've been blessed."

On reading her book *The Hospital by the River* I was moved by her compassion and her ability to do this work with a calm acceptance and without apparent rancour for a culture and tradition that cripples and traumatises so many of their female children. Her harshest criticism is delivered with moderation when she talks about the sex a new husband has with his child bride – "It is rape, really" – condoned by their parents. Criticism is also forthcoming when she writes about fund raising trips appealing to the world's richest people to help its poorest. They found many wonderful donors but just as many extremely rich people who would not help. "So although our British trust is doing all it can towards establishing such an endowment (\$US 5million), there is still a need for me to make fundraising trips and to try to break the hearts of millionaires. I feel I could do this if only I could get interviews with such people of wealth. But this is virtually impossible, as they are always well shielded from beggars."

She would like to see prevention programs implemented, but this has always been a problem. There is only one midwife for every 3000 Ethiopian women, an estimated 8000 new fistula cases a year and little change in the attitude towards child brides. Despite this, Catherine remains strong in her faith and optimism – "I have peace in my heart about it".

Chronology

1947 -1948 House Surgeon at St. Joseph's and St. George's Hospital
1948 -1953 Senior Resident Medical Officer at the Crown Street Women's Hospital, Sydney
1959 -1975 Consulting Obstetrician and Gynaecologist at the Princess Tsahai Memorial Hospital, Addis Ababa.
Haile Selassie Humanitarian Prize
Co-founder of the Fistula Hospital, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
1974 – 1992 Assistant Medical Director at the Fistula Hospital
Member of the Order of Australia



ANZAC Peace Prize
Gold Medal of Merit Order St Gregory the Great by Pope John Paul
1989 Honorary Gold Medal from the Royal College of Surgeons, England
Distinguished Service Awards from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.
1993 – 1997 Medical Director at the Fistula Hospital, Addis Ababa.
1995 Paul Harris Fellowship from Rotary International
1995 Commander of the Order of Australia

Patients at the hospital

Astrology and the Rays

Not knowing Catherine's time of birth has given me licence to hypothesise her Ascendent and I have chosen Virgo. This seems to fit, both in her soul purpose and in the house placement of her chart.

- Virgo can cause her to approach life in a critical, driven way but it can also give her attention to detail, making her a good administrator with a shrewd mind and a devoted and loyal server who can be relied upon in any crisis. She would, and does, appear quiet and unassuming. As well as being suited to administrative work she could also be drawn to healing work.
- With Virgo in this position we find Aquarius on the 6th House cusp – the house of work and service, giving her an innovative and different approach to serving humanity. We also find Pisces within this house, giving a suitability to healing, nurturing, caring, religious or mystical careers.
- Her tenth house has Gemini on the cusp – making her a communicator and a teacher. This is where she will appear before the public and gain her status. This she does with her fundraising tours, speaking to the world about her work. Cancer is also within this house, again pointing to the healing and nurturing nature of her work. Pluto is in this house in Cancer, giving her the power to bring about major changes in the social system and to be recognised publicly for her efforts.
- With both Mars and Jupiter in the 3rd. house in Sagittarius, she puts a lot of energy into her local environment, communicating and teaching in an inspired way

- Neptune in the 12th House sees her expressing her spiritual beliefs in the hospital she co-founded and working with the sick and disadvantaged.
- Her Sun in Aquarius in the 5th. House places her well to achieve, through her creative efforts the goals of her soul.

She has some lovely aspects which assist her well in her endeavours:

- Moon conjunct North Node in 12th House. – her emotions and spiritual sensitivity unite. She was born into a family which was oriented towards spiritual growth. It is relatively easy for her to achieve her spiritual goals. This is in the 12th. House, the house of hospitals, institutions and the sick and disadvantaged, as well as inner work.
- Sun sextile Mars – Gives her an ability to express herself with confidence and plenty of energy to achieve her goals. Success will come to her in her life enterprises.
- Moon sextile Saturn – gives inner self confidence which helps her to build firm foundations in life and achieve her ambitions. She works solidly to build a secure and firm footing earning the respect of those around her. Saturn in the 2nd House gives her sound values, especially in the service she provides in her hospital.

Ray Chart

Catherine's Rays are soft line.

Soul Ray 2

Personality Ray 6

Mental Ray 1

Emotional Ray 2

Physical Ray 7

- I felt that Catherine has a Ray 7 Physical because she is tall, slim and neatly put together and although there are not many clues in her book to justify this, she does have a morning ritual of prayer, meditation and Bible reading, a ritual she treasures. Although the work she does is hard and sometimes she may not get time for regular meals, she sustains herself with snacks and seems to manage. She manages her time with well ordered efficiency.
- A Ray 2 Emotional seemed to fit although there is little evidence of her ever being overwhelmed apart from a short time after the death of her beloved Reg when all was left to her to continue – a big responsibility. This was short lived and her loving, serene and non-reactive nature came through again. There does not seem evidence of Ray 6 reactivity although as I read her book I felt at times that she wrote with restraint, as though there could be some emotionalism lying underneath. This most probably came from her Ray 6 Personality.
- I had difficulty with her Mental Ray. There is quite a lot of Ray 5 about her, coming in through her Aquarius Sun, Sagittarius Mars and Jupiter and Leo Moon but I don't feel that this is the Ray of her Mental body. She writes in a colourful manner more indicative of Ray 4 but I found no evidence of a vacillating mind or any real tendency towards drama. Also Ray 4 would make her far too soft line. I gave her a Ray 1 Mental, being direct and to the point. I feel that there is a Ray 1 quality in her make-up somewhere and it doesn't really show elsewhere in her chart. Her writing, while being colourful is also very realistic, describing things in a more detached manner, stating situations as they are with little embellishment. Her Mental Ray 1 is influenced by Capricorn (Mercury in Capricorn), bringing in Rays 1,3 and 7, and giving her a very direct mind which can be manipulative and deceitful as well as judgemental and inflexible at times. With Saturn being both the exoteric and esoteric ruler of Capricorn the higher Ray 3 energies are also available, helping her to bring humility and flexibility to her thinking and preparing her for initiation.

- Catherine has a strong Ray 6 Personality, showing in her dedication to her work and service and her devotion to her spiritual beliefs, having dedicated her life to Christ in her early twenties. Her Ray 6 Personality is influenced by Aquarius. This gives her a tinge of Ray 5 and also Ray 7 through the exoteric ruler Uranus. The personality may agitate for change and try to destroy that which does not meet with its approval, however, Catherine is obviously resonating more to the higher aspects of Aquarius coming through the esoteric ruler Jupiter (Ray 2) which fuses heart and mind, personality and soul, resulting in an inclusive love for all and sensitive humanitarian awareness. This is very evident in her life as she works with love to bring healing to extremely traumatised and damaged women. There is little judgment to be perceived as she tells her story, almost as though she understands that to judge a culture and tradition that is aeons old is fruitless and she puts her energy into the work she is doing instead, healing and teaching right spiritual values. The higher energy of Aquarius will help her to detach emotionally to a certain extent from the situations of her patients and to get on with the job without burning out.
- Her Ray 2 soul shows in her love/wisdom aspect. I feel that she has a deep intuitive and loving understanding for the people she comes in contact with, not only her patients but all the people who populate her part of the world, black or white. Her expression is very inclusive. She is a Ray 2 soul incarnating through a Virgo Field. She has overcome the separativeness of the critical, judgmental aspect of Virgo under Mercury's rule and rather has espoused the higher qualities of Virgo under its esoteric ruler the Moon veiled by Vulcan. Vulcan purifies the nature, integration occurring and the beauty of the soul birthing - the Christ child. Ray 1 gives endurance and the strength to slowly work towards the goal of overseeing changes within the culture through healing and education. Vulcan is in Capricorn, the sign of initiation, a definite clue to her standing on the Path.

Catherine's Moon is in Leo in the 12th House.

Her "prison of the soul" pattern inheritance is to be highly sensitive, arrogant, selfish, autocratic, wanting to control and make slaves of and be adored by everyone around. Being primarily concerned with her own wellbeing and personal desires, and could show in her work in the hospital. The exoteric ruler is the Sun which is in Aquarius in the 1st House – she could view herself as mentally superior, and wanting to control others. None of these negatives are playing out in her life.

- The esoteric ruler is the Sun veiling Neptune with Neptune also being in Leo in the 12th House. This purifies the ego, dissolving all blocks to love. Pure Christ Love can then shine through the heart of the disciple and consciousness becomes identified with the universal "I", making her a clear channel through which the will of God can express. "I am That, and That am I". The twelfth house is where she does her inner work as well as the work of the Christ. It is where the Dweller on the Threshold may be found prior to its emergence for defeat at the 3rd. initiation.
- So her prison of the soul pattern is being arrogant and selfish, wanting to control others and be adored, especially within the hospital she has founded and the retreat she has provided for her patients. The soul has provided her with the opportunity to break this pattern and she certainly appears to have been successful as she has great compassion and does not see herself as superior.

Catherine's Sun is in Aquarius in the 5th. House.

- Her personality consciousness can be unstable and volatile, setting out to destroy everything it doesn't approve of, focussing on her child and her creative interests. Uranus in Pisces in the 6th. House doesn't help this situation, clouding her ability to see things clearly and affecting her area of work and service and possibly her health, making her prone to alcoholism or drug abuse.

- The esoteric ruler is Jupiter in Sagittarius in the 3rd. House. Catherine's soul is going to use this energy to render her harmless in speech and thought and give her a practical and grounded approach. Coupled with visionary outlook, this ensures that important goals are identified and reached. "I see the goal, I reach the goal, and then I see another." Her soul will have her interacting with souls in the environment, and developing the Antahkarana.
- Her soul wants her to overcome the instability and volatility of her personality, to become harmless in speech and thought and with humanitarian awareness to reach forward in a practical and grounded way to further the path of other souls in the environment. This she does in her work with the fistula patients.

Catherine's Ascendent is in Virgo

- Her personality would approach life with a materialistic and judgmental attitude, criticising everything including herself. Mercury in Capricorn in the 4th House would give her a mental instability and make her home life difficult.
- The esoteric ruler is the Moon veiling Vulcan in the 5th House. Vulcan purifies the nature, integration occurs and the beauty of the soul births through – the Christ child. "I am the mother, and the child, I God, I matter am." Ray 1 gives endurance and strength to reach her goal: to be a quiet leader, a true server, dedicating her life to her highest ideal. She is to oversee change within society – especially education and healing, so these institutions can better serve humanity. She is to do this through soul-inspired creative projects.
- Her work is an excellent indication that her soul has been successful, her creativity being expressed in the hospital that she and Reg created and the village for patients unable to be cured. Her writing also serves this purpose.

Initiation

I believe that Catherine has passed the 3rd Initiation. Her life has been one of selfless service, her personality is integrated and soul infused and she is walking the soul's path.