

# In search of an oasis

Reflections on thirst in today's bottled-water world

By Julia Marino

The ground was as dry and expansive as a deserted planet, sand stretching for miles on all sides like outstretched arms. A thin film of dust covered the surface as hundreds of cattle, goats and camels dotted the landscape. As we continued toward the drying well, the livestock moved toward us, behind us and alongside us en route to a trough for water or beyond to graze.

It was the dry season, and our team of journalists was in the remote village of Dubluck in southern Ethiopia. We were taking in the scene — the harshness of the hot sun and the sad realities of climate change — and observing how drought has affected the lives of nomadic cattle farmers, or “pastoralists,” in this distant part of the world.

We crossed the flat, dusty ground of the plain, where a dip in the earth led to a large, hand-dug well, its deep walls resonating with the low chanting of men. The ritual dates back centuries and helps them endure hours of long, laborious work under the scorching sun. A cow sipped the remaining water, its ribs protruding under tattered skin. Women scooped water from another level of the well, rhythmically pouring the brown liquid down toward the waiting animal.

In that moment, I realized we stood amid a thirst — a thirst for more water to fill the quickly drying wells, for more frequent rainfall, for peace and prosperity. It is a thirst so desperately in need of quenching in arid eastern Africa.

Leaving the well, we readied our cameras for an interview with the tribe's chief, who spoke matter-of-factly of his community's struggle. As nomadic farmers, they follow water and pastureland to feed their livestock and sustain their livelihoods. With each year, they have seen less and less water — and with that, more and more conflict over dwindling resources. Last year, parts of Ethiopia experienced just two days of rain, a deadly pattern that has become more commonplace in the past 40 years.

As our mission to shed light on water scarcity issues continued, I gradually discovered the true meaning of the world's most basic resource, one I had all too often taken for granted. We rarely think about our water use, just as we rarely consider the air we need to breathe. But the sad reality is that to some, water is a source of life that is not easily accessed, leading to thirst, disease, and ultimately, death. As a journalist, I hope my stories can bring more awareness to this basic human right.

Now, back at Ohio University, I peer through a library window at the lush grass and sparkling fountain outside. As I sip cold coffee made from Ethiopian coffee beans, my bottle of “Crystal Geyser natural alpine spring water” sits close by. This reality stands in stark contrast to my memory of the Ethiopian lowlands. But it reminds me of the many ways we're connected.

Now that I have experienced the beauty and hardship of these pastoralists, water will never again taste the same.



## About Julia

**Julia Marino, BSJ '07**, is a second-year master's student in photography with a concentration in interactive multimedia in the School of Visual Communication.

As an undergraduate, she was awarded a John R. Wilhelm International Reporting Scholarship by the Scripps School of Communication to work as a videographer in eastern Africa. She traveled there in the winter of 2007 and collaborated with Afrika News and the Common Language Project, two nonprofits that aim to bring underreported stories to light.

This article originally appeared in *Outlook*, the university's online news and information site. To read more travel stories, visit Julia's blog at [www.juliamarino.wordpress.com](http://www.juliamarino.wordpress.com).

**Julia shoots video on a road leading to Kenya from Ethiopia during her travels in Africa.**