

**NUEYS-DC**

# ERI-DC Youth Profile

**Volume 2, Issue 4**

**December 2006**

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The National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students, Washington, DC Chapter is a non-profit organization with a mission to empower Eritrean youth.

For more information, contact NUEYS-DC at [nueysdc@yahoo.com](mailto:nueysdc@yahoo.com).

NUEYS-DC's Quarterly Newsletter

## NUEYS-DC Hosts Important Event: "From Shida to Air Jordans: A Critical Look at Eritrean-American Youth and their Identity"

On Saturday, November 11, 2006, approximately 50 youth attended an important and timely discussion at the Eritrean Cultural and Civic Center in Washington, DC titled "From Shida to Air Jordans: A Critical Look at Eritrean-American Youth and their Identity." The discussion, which was hosted by NUEYS-DC, was part of its ongoing Personal Advancement Seminar Series.

The invited guest speaker, Dr. Tesfay Aradom, a psychologist who has worked closely with the Eritrean community for many years and with immigrant issues in the greater Boston area, led the discussion with the youth.

Dr. Tesfay began the discussion with a general presentation on the topic of immigration and the psychosocial impacts it has on identity formation. He explained the several stages that first- and second-generation immigrant children go through in forming their identities and listed eight factors one should consider when

determining the effects immigration has upon identity formation.

These factors include (a) whether immigration was temporary or permanent; (b) whether immigration was voluntary or involuntary; (c) whether there was a possibility of revisiting the home country; (d) at which age immigration occurred; (e) the levels of psychological, emotional, and social functioning prior to immigration; (f) the migration experience; (g) the reasons for immigration; and (h) the post-migration experience, namely reception of the host country.

The spirited discussion that ensued demonstrated the relevance of the issue and the need for further discussion.



*Dr. Tesfay opening the discussion*

The participants expressed great interest in continuing the dialogue

and thanked the speaker for bringing this important topic to the forefront for youth to be able to address it.

NUEYS-DC recognizes that while these many issues will not be solved easily or over-night, they will only be possible through candid and frequent discussions among Eritrean youth, parents and the community at large.

NUEYS-DC is looking forward to hosting similar events in the future, specifically addressing various aspects of the Eritrean-American experience. We would like to thank all of the participants who attended the discussion and encourage others to attend future ones.



*Youth participate in a group activity*

topics, including limitations in language skills, communication with parents and relationships between Eritrean-American and African-American communities.

The discussion then delved into a range of

# Reflections on the Eritrean Language School from a hope-filled student - Eritria Pitts

My struggle with learning Tigrinya has lasted for some time now. When I was a cute chubby kid, nay *dubba* kid with pig-tails, getting away with phrases such as “kemey alekha” or better yet, imitating my mom while putting her hands on the sides of her cheeks and exclaiming “oway!” were easy enough to get by with. However, now at the age of 25, using these simple expressions, are just not cute anymore,

My name is Eritria Pitts and I am a young adult with a *gegiff* name. It’s not that I have not tried to learn Tigrinya. The struggle has not been easy. I remember when my sister and I were younger, my mom would attempt on several occasions to teach us Tigrinya. It would start out something like this:

“Okay, girls, from now on we’re only going to speak in Tigrinya, haray?”

And we would reply in unison, “*Haray mommy.*” Unfortunately, this only lasted for a couple of minutes and before she knew it, she would cave in and ask us in English if we wanted tuna fish for lunch!

The next vivid memory I have of my attempt to learn Tigrinya is at the age of 14 when my grandmother came to live with us. My grandmother did not speak a word of English and the only word I knew at that time was “*tsibuk.*” Sad to say, our conversations were limited to a creative form of grandmother-granddaughter sign language or my repetitive usage of “*tsibuk*” or “*no tsibuk.*” At some point, my vocabulary expanded to create more expressive statements . . . “*Ane going to the store*”, while pointing to a coupon. To this my grandmother would usually laugh and sigh at the same time.

And then there was the summer of 2001 when I finally saw *Adi.* This was my next real step. I was going to do this for real, I even hired a tutor. That lasted for 3 days.

When I turned 24, I came up with a creative game with an Eritrean friend called “*Who speaks better Tigrinya,*” in which my mom acted as coach and said things in Tigrinya that we competed to translate. Though to this day, even though I believe my Tigrinya was far better than his, my

victory is contested, since in response to the question “*Se’at kidney koynu?*”, I said “*What time is it?*” whereas he answered the question. *Dorho* brain!

I’m 25 years old now and have not given up hope yet. Not until I complete my goal to speak the languages of my namesake, Eritrea. My path has now led me to NUEYS-DC’s Eritrean Language School at the Eritrean Cultural and Civic Center (ECCC) in Washington, DC where every Wednesday night a group of dedicated Eritrean youth study two of the languages spoken in Eritrea, Tigrinya and Arabic. The classes are small and the instructors patient. And I’m only paying \$15 for this?? Hard to believe considering all that is to be gained from this small endeavor. I have a feeling this is going to be a “*tsibuk*” year!

~ Eritria Pitts

## NUEYS-DC College Prep Workshop “Getting into College and Paying for it 101”

On Saturday, October 21, 2006, NUEYS-DC held the first part of its second annual two-part college-preparatory workshop called “Getting into College and Paying for it 101.” The aim of these workshops is to help Eritrean high school students navigate their way through the college application process.

Bsrat Mezghebe and Selam Kebrom led the discussion and four current Eritrean college students served as panelists to offer perspectives on the admissions process and college life.

The workshop advised participants how to choose the best college, submit a competitive application, obtain financial aid, and succeed upon matriculation. The group agreed that while peers and

family were all good sources of information to identify ideal schools, it was the students themselves who should determine their own criteria and needs.

Presenters also recommended that the students visit any college before matriculating, as admission materials and websites did not always offer accurate representations of college life.

In addition, although GPA is important, the moderators and panelists also stressed the significance of the personal statement, encouraging the attendants to draw upon their unique backgrounds to present honest and compelling essays.

They urged the students not to be dis-

couraged by the high costs of college; rather, to use online resources like [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com) to identify scholarships, to take cheaper community college courses, and to be mindful of their college’s credit transfer rules.

The following week, in order to ensure that young Eritreans presented the best application possible, NUEYS-DC offered the opportunity for individual counseling to revise admission essays or to discuss other pressing issues.

NUEYS-DC would like to thank all the high school students who participated as well as our panelists, Saron Araia, Aden-anas Ghebrekal, Athina Tesfa-yohannes, and Russom Woldezhgi. For more information about this event and others,

# YOUTH IN FOCUS

## Ambessa Jir - A conversation with a young filmmaker about his new film "Fragmented Life"

*Q: How did you become interested in film-making?*

A: I developed an early interest in film. As a child growing up in Mendefera, I used to love watching movies and I would go out of my way to watch any movie that came to town, regardless if my parents gave me permission or not. In college, I studied many different things, including pre-medicine, but nothing interested me as much as film. I started by taking an acting class and I eventually transferred from my college in Scottsdale, Arizona to Howard University, where I received my B.A. One of my professors was Ethiopian filmmaker Haile Gerima, and I got to know him very well. Seeing another filmmaker from our region definitely inspired me. I am now working towards getting my masters of fine arts from Howard.

*Q: Did you start making films as a student?*

A: Yes, I have made several short films on various topics that interest me.

*Q: What have some of those topics been?*

A: I have focused on comedies about Eritrean families, as well as interaction among Eritrean youth. I also did a film about an Eritrean who was imprisoned in Ethiopia, inspired by Eritrea's struggle for independence. Most of my films are reactions to issues that I think are important, which tend to be Eritrean

issues, even though I am also interested in making films that are about non-Eritrean issues as well. Now, I am focusing on the challenges that Eritrean families face, due to the culture clash between parents and children. I am especially interested in communication, and how things that aren't discussed in families can manifest themselves after time. In "Fragmented Life", my current project, I tell the story of a family that sends their misbehaving son to Eritrea and the im-



Ambessa Jir

impact that has on their other children. The film is a bit complicated and took me a year to write. I wrote it not to present an opinion about sending youth to Eritrea, but about the effect it can have on their loved ones.

*Q: Do you write and cast your films?*

A: Yes, I write, direct and edit all of my films. In terms of casting, for "Fragmented Life", I relied on families and friends to find or serve as actors to play the parents. For the siblings, I cast local youth, as well as an Eritrean model from NYC. I held auditions to cast the American roles, and got a good turnout.

*Q: Will you have a public viewing of the movie?*

A: Once I complete the film, I am thinking about having a small premiere. Because this topic is so relevant, I would like to use this film to inspire dialogue among the community.

*Q: What impact do you want your films to*

*have on the Eritrean community?*

A: I observe my community and hope to create original and meaningful products. I want people to be challenged by my films and return home discussing them with their families and friends.

*Q: What are your goals for the future?*

A: In general, I want to make as many films as possible. It takes a long time for filmmakers to achieve name recognition, so I have to just continue to build off of each film that I make. After I graduate, I am planning on making a feature full-length film, hopefully about an Eritrean issue. I already have scripts prepared. I also can see myself continuing to make independent films. It means that I will primarily have to rely on grants and private donations, which I have been doing.

*Q: What advice do you have for youth who are interested in the arts, especially film-making?*

A: They should pursue their interests as soon as possible. They have to work hard and apply initiative. I also recommend for young people to find mentors who are professionals in their fields of interest, who can provide guidance and insight. It is true that our parents have difficulties appreciating careers in the arts. However, your success depends on the work you put in it. This career is definitely not easy and there were difficult times, but now I am seeing the results of my hard work.

Visit [www.myspace.com/ambessajir](http://www.myspace.com/ambessajir) for more information about Ambessa.

## Upcoming Events in 2007!

- NUEYS-DC would like to alert you to several upcoming events in the new year. For more information, please contact [nueysdc@yahoo.com](mailto:nueysdc@yahoo.com).
- On Thursday, January 4, 2007, NUEYS-DC will be hosting its first ER Mix N' Mingle of 2007. Make it your New Year's resolution to

attend these fun and informal networking events! The location will be announced shortly.

In the early part of 2007, NUEYS-DC will host a community discussion about violence affecting Eritrean youth. It is a follow-up to the dialogue inspired by Dr. Tesfay's seminar on Eritrean youth and

identity. (See article on pg. 1). The date and location will be announced soon – please attend and support this important event.

There has been tremendous interest in and support for the Eritrean Language School. It will continue providing language instruction for over 100 students, and is working to expand to meet the growing demand.



**NUEYS-DC**

We're on the web!

[www.nueysdc.org](http://www.nueysdc.org)

*United for a strong, conscious,  
and patriotic youth!*

**Just how “belih” are you???** Here’s some Eritrean trivia for you.

1 ~ What is the date of Eritrean independence?

2 ~ How many ethnic groups are there in Eritrea? What are their names?

3 ~ What is the Eritrean currency called?

4 ~ What is the name of Eritrea’s capital city?

5 ~ What is celebrated on March 8 in Eritrea?

(Answers: 1. May 24, 1991; 2. There are nine ethnic groups in Eritrea: Afar, Bilen, Hidareb, Kunama, Nara, Rashaida, Saho, Tigre and Tigrinya; 3. Nakfa; 4. Asmara; 5. International Women’s Day)

## **End-of-the-year message from the NUEYS-DC Board**

It has been quite a year for NUEYS-DC!

We have striven to provide activities and opportunities to promote the cultural, educational, professional, and social advancement of Eritrean youth in the DC area.

Specifically, our Eritrean Language School, offering Tigrinya and Arabic language instruction, has doubled in size; we have organized several events to educate youth about college admissions, our Personal Advancement Seminar Series has brought both American and Eritrean professionals to offer valuable personal finance, real estate, and psychosocial lessons to our youth; and our happy hours and social excursions, including ice-skating and skiing, have allowed youth to get to know each other better.

While 2006 has been a successful year, there is still much more that we need to achieve.

We recognize that our success depends on the critical support of the community as a whole. Therefore, we are deeply thankful to all who have generously supported us. We also humbly ask for more of such support. While NUEYS-DC, as an organization, is made of individuals who plan and coordinate events, the NUEYS-DC family is comprised of elders, parents, and youth who contribute with their ideas, time, and participation.

We need all community members to help us ensure that NUEYS-DC expands upon its success and provides even more services. Our youth – the future of this community – deserve it.

Thank you again for your support. We wish you all peace, prosperity, and health and we look forward to continuing to work with you in 2007.

Best wishes,

NUEYS-DC

## **HAPPY NEW YEAR FROM THE NUEYS-DC FAMILY !!!**

