

Of Sunday's and Sunday Visits

Written by Natnael Yebio W.
Friday, 15 April 2016 11:34



A couple years back, it was a Sunday afternoon, after having lunch with the whole family, we all gathered for the traditional coffee ceremony. In our house, Sundays and coffee together were a must and no matter what plans each of us had, we were obligated to suspend them aside for a couple of hours, all in the spirit of having a valuable family time and nobody dared to oppose such rule. Sunday was no “democracy” for the Yebio house hold.

As the youngest in our family was helping mom prepare the items needed for the coffee ceremony, there was a knock knock on the door.

Pondering at who could be at the door, I uttered loudly, “Who in the right state of mind dares to go out in a hot Sunday afternoon?” Before I knew it though, I was engaged in a long conversation about Sundays and going out with my Granddad.

My granddad would start his conversation saying, In the 1950s and 1960s most Asmarinos and to a lesser extent city dwellers outside Asmara spent their Sunday afternoons inside packed movie houses, watching John Wayne hunting down bad guys or maybe Errol Flynn assaulting pirate ships.

“Watch out! He is sneaking up on you.....Sock it to him.....Attaboy John Wayne.....” shouts the crowd.

It felt like a real Turkish bath inside the movie houses and if you happen to be in Cinema Croce Rossa, it was a rear enactment of Finnish Sauna. The flu virus darted across the room in total freedom. Fortunately, flu was not very common in Eritrea in those days.

But he can say with certainty that a feeling of joy obtained from watching cowboy and pirate films had cooling and salubrious effect on the audience.

Of Sunday's and Sunday Visits

Written by Natnael Yebio W.
Friday, 15 April 2016 11:34

What about those who couldn't collect enough money during the weekdays to be able to buy themselves a seat in the movie houses? They had been running errands to curry favor with their big brothers and obtain paltry donation in vain. Now, they have nothing to do expect hang around movie houses or stroll along the Liberation Avenue feasting their eyes on items displayed on shop windows or as a last resort set off to the wood in search of adventure.

What kind of adventure? I would ask my Grandpa. "Watching amore a L'Italiana," i.e. playing the peeping tom while Italian innamorati kissed and hugged under the bushes.

Teenagers like your dad were too young to have sweethearts in those days and even if they did, it was more or less a platonic love and then our semi-traditional upbringing did not permit them to unleash their passions in public.

Enter Simon, the lone wolf who prefers to stay indoors, brooding and making his mother feel miserable on Sundays. It is 1 P.M. in the afternoon.

"Why don't you go out and play like the rest of the neighborhood kids?" says his mother.

"All my friends have gone to the cinema and you want me to go out and play football on a hot Sunday afternoon?" retorts Simon.

Well, to some extent he is right. As Noel Coward has said already [only] mad dogs and English men go out in the mid day sun. The Japanese don't care to, the Chinese wouldn't dare for. Hindus and Argentines sleep firmly from twelve to one ...

The gloomy mood dissipates as aunt M'raf arrives for a visit. It is 2 p.m. in the afternoon and you wonder how this lady in her late seventies managed to walk all the way from the other side of Asmara carrying five loaves of himbasha (Leavened and decorated local bread) and some dates.

Of Sunday's and Sunday Visits

Written by Natnael Yebio W.
Friday, 15 April 2016 11:34

"Yeeesssss!" shouts Simon unable to contain himself.

"How are you dear M'raf? You never come empty handed, do you? You shouldn't have done that. It was not necessary.....Simon would you please put the loaves in the cupboard....."

"Yessiree!" shouts Simon

Simon darts out of his blues. His spirit is refreshed and the smell of himbasha and dates imparts in him a new lease on life. But he has other plans too. His mother is now ready to exploit the situation by sending him on errands after errands.

"Simon dear, would you be kind enough and go buy me some coffee beans and sugar....and would you please....." she hands him two kirshi (Local Currency of those days) to go shopping. He goes to the Arab shop on the corner and buys the required items and keeps the change. As the chat between his mother and Addey M'raf passes from first degree gossip to third degree backbiting, Simon sneaks out of the house and disappears.

"Simon, would you please....."

But Simon is long gone. He is in the movie house enjoying John Wayne with his friends who had given him up for dead.

"I did it!" he whispers to Tedros, his best friend, inside the movie house.

"I am sure you stole the money from your mother," says Tedros.

Of Sunday's and Sunday Visits

Written by Natnael Yebio W.
Friday, 15 April 2016 11:34

“She will only know about it in the evening.....”

“Evening or Morning, you will sure be belted.”

“I would go through hell just to see this film.”

And sure enough, Simon was severely punished by his father and mother that night, who lashed his skin by turns as if he was Kenta-Kuntie. He expected it and bore the pain like a Spartan warrior.

What do people think about on Sunday afternoons? Frankly speaking, women have no problems putting Sundays to proper use. They know where to go and whom to visit, what to carry and what to say. There are always relatives and acquaintances here and there who have just lost a member of the family, who are having their son or daughter baptized, who have an ailing mother in the house, a pregnant woman who has just given a birth to a child, another one who is celebrating a child's birthday....and sometimes they just invent excuses to be able to see each other and more often than not, they visit each other just for the hell of it.

Sometimes I look out my window on Sunday afternoons and watch people go by, women in their Sunday best, full of life, chatting, giggling, shouting....

“I think the sun has fallen down...or is it shining along with other suns...tee hee....”

The Asmara city buses are packed with womenfolk. Their loud talks and giggles bother a man who looks like he has given up on life all together.

“We never had peace of mind since the declaration of gender equality...”

Of Sunday's and Sunday Visits

Written by Natnael Yebio W.
Friday, 15 April 2016 11:34

"Give them some more time and they will dominate us." He sighs.

Most men don't know how to create excuses. If we exclude those who go to bars to play billiards and those who start booze before the socially accepted time, we have those that



curse the day, put on their hats and head toward the few parks that we have in Asmara, sit there and contemplate. They remember the rime they made people tremble with a single shout of command. They look at their surrounding and utter:

"Things are no longer the same since we retired."

"Why don't you go to the movies?" asks an acquaintance.

"You call these movies? They don't make films like they used to do back in the 1940 anymore."

On the other hand, young girls are very creative. As long as they feel attractive, they go out even in the mid-day sun, like mad dogs (or English-men), for adventure. For Senait it is a blind date with an unknown lover. She is simply drifting.

"Hello Yodita!" ventures a Romeo.

"I beg your pardon."

"Sorry, I mean Astier."

"I am sorry but you are talking to the wrong person."

Of Sunday's and Sunday Visits

Written by Natnael Yebio W.
Friday, 15 April 2016 11:34

“What difference does it make....”

That's how Senait came to know Filmon one Sunday afternoon.