

Giorgis's travels: The incredible adventure...Part II

Written by Sirak Habtemichael



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When he first arrived in Gonder, he was fortunate enough to find a job to maintain his living and later met an Eritrean man who owned a bakery in the town. He was employed there and stayed in the town for a little more than a year. Giorgis was fast at studying languages. He could communicate in English from his bible studies at the missionary school he was attending in Mendefera and managed to speak and understand Amharic from his stay in Gonder.

"Somehow, I was not satisfied with how I was doing in Gonder", Giorgis said, "So I decided to move on towards the west and so I took off once more."

He continued his journey towards the west and finally reached a Sudanese town called Demazine located on the shores of the White Nile River. There, Giorgis started to work at a banana plantation owned by some Italians and he enjoyed working there. More than the job, Giorgis enjoyed learning Arabic from the inhabitants and Italian from the employers. Giorgis stayed in Demazin for a few months and managed to at least communicate both in Arabic and Italian.

"I stayed in Demazin until late 1956. I was there when Sudan got its independence, which made me think of my country Eritrea, where Ethiopia was taking over gradually. I liked working in the plantation but to be honest the climate was inhospitable. Although I stayed there for a few months, I was not able to adapt to the climate, which instigated my readiness to move again", Giorgis remembers his boyhood. Out of the blue, Giorgis remembered some relatives who lived in Addis Ababa and thought it might a good idea to meet with them and may be settle there if it suits him. He continued on yet another long journey to Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital.

It was a very long journey returning back to the Ethiopian capital, but Giorgis made it to Addis Ababa in a few weeks of travel. Unfortunately, Giorgis did not like the hospitality of his relatives in Addis Ababa who had settled for quite some time there. "That was definitely a wrong idea", Giorgis said to himself and left Addis Ababa. Young Giorgis had become so taken by wanderlust by then that he just thought of a destination and wouldn't think twice about picking his backpack and setting off.

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Before leaving Addis Ababa, an idea struck him that he should go overseas but he had to find a way. Thus, he thought of going to Somalia and make his way overseas from the ports there. Giorgis traveled east till he reached the Somali-Ethiopian border; it was a long and tiresome travel, in which he went without any travel documents, hiding from authorities. Somehow, he made it to Somaliland but he had to find a way to reach the port of Berbera.

When he first set foot in Somaliland, Giorgis said, "I saw a tall typical Somali lady walking in the middle of the nowhere. I had to think fast to get help from the lady and approach her. When I caught up with her, she asked me if I was Somali or Ethiopian and I acted deaf. She felt sorry for me from what I could see in her face and took me to her village across the barren land and I stayed at her place for the night".

The travel continued the next morning. The Somali family bade him farewell and he continued his journey to a coastal city of Somalia called Berbera. His intention was to make his way across the Indian Ocean and seek a better life overseas. It was not easy for Giorgis to enter Berbera without any paperwork, but he somehow managed to sneak in. The town was not as his expected; the port was busy but security was tight and he perfectly knew that he wouldn't make it from there. Giorgis met three Eritrean drivers in Berbera and stayed in the town for a couple of days.

Somehow, the idea of going to Mogadishu, the Somali capital came to mind and so he thought he would try to leave from there. But he needed to figure out how. He saw a Somali driver who was heading to Mogadishu from a distance and thought of a story to gain the driver's collaboration. Giorgis was able to communicate in Arabic from his stay in Sudan and approached the driver. He gave a short smile remembering the story he came up with to convince the driver, "I approached the driver and told him I was from Keren, Eritrea, where I knew a group of Somali emigrants settled there. I told him I was a Somali who is trying to reunite with my family who according to some people were living in Mogadishu". The driver was stunned to find a long lost countryman of his desperately longing to reunite with his family. The driver didn't hesitate to extend the assistance needed from him and gave Giorgis a ride to Mogadishu and sneaked him past the checkpoints.

Mogadishu was even tougher. The first thing he did upon his arrival was try to find some elderly Eritrean settlers whom he had heard of in Berbera, two of which were comfortably established gentlemen in Mogadishu. Giorgis told his story to one of the Eritrean men he met in Mogadishu. He was an old man who settled in Mogadishu after the Italians took them as soldiers during WWII. The man was amazed by the story he heard from Giorgis and asked him how he made it all the way to Somalia without being stopped by authorities. Giorgis said, "I told him all my story and he said he would have like to help him but the only thing he could do was take him to the authorities so they provide him a legal solution."