

## **Q & A-A Memoir of the People, 'Gratitude in Low Voices'**

Written by shabait Administrator |

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**“His book is an important milestone and no one expects to write a memoir at such a young age unless there is something significant that needs to be told. And there is... beyond Dawit’s personal journey, a need to tell Eritrea’s history...albeit in small chapters, through personal stories. Here we are given the opportunity to go behind the headlines, to the home, to the villages, and revisit history.”**  
**Sophia Tesfamariam Eritrean writer in the USA.**

**Gratitude in Low Voices is an interesting book, as the author Dawit Gheberemichael, while presenting reminiscences of his own life, puts in context the Eritrean history... at least that of three decades ago, when a typical Eritrean communal life style was in its most virgin form and when the unity of the people outshined the atrocity inflicted on their days by colonizing forces.**

**Although the author himself claims his book is “just” an act of following the Eritrean adage which says “To those who have done you favors, either return the favor or tell others about their good deeds”, it is truly a modest and admirable beginning of Eritrean literary works’ debut in the western world.**

**Authored by Dawit Ghebremichael, an accomplished software engineer at Bloomberg-BNA Gratitude in Low Voices is a definite success with great reviews and a myriad of readers because just about anyone can relate. The book is being inaugurated in Eritrea as well. Yesterday Friday the 11th, an event to that end was held in Embasoira Hotel, Asmara.**

**Q:-Although a lot of people are now familiar with you, thanks to your book, please do introduce yourself to our readers.**

**Dawit Ghebremichael:** I was born and raised in Eritrea until I left in September 1989. I went to Kenya and then finally settled in the USA. I attended Spring Brooke High School. I then went to South Hampton University with a passion for IT, and specifically software development. My professional sail directed me to New York to work for Bloomberg. In 1999 I came to Eritrea and started Natna Business Solutions for IT Training and Software Application Development. I oversaw the Natna venture for about five years and then I went back to New York. I am now still working in Bloomberg in the infrastructure team.

**Q:-How was Natna Business Solutions funded? And what urged you to come back to your homeland and actually start a business?**

In 1998 I came to visit my parents. During my vacation I was invited to give a presentation at the Asmara University on a generalist topic regarding IT. Yet I chose to focus on the application of IT in developing nations. Originally the presentation was scheduled for half an hour but it ended being extended to at least four hours. From the intense participation

of the attendees I sensed the thrust of knowledge and the desire people had to make Eritrea a technological advanced country. Therefore, I looked for a way to come back and do my best to satisfy that eagerness at least with the knowledge I had acquired. I wrote a project proposal to Bloomberg and they were able to secure a partnership. They helped in financing. We used Bloomberg's servers all the way in New York with the first batch of students.

Over the five years we stayed here we focused on project and financial management package for several ministries and service providers. For example, we developed financial project and human resources management tool for the PMU under the Ministry of Finance. We also developed data warehouse and network for RDC, and we developed environment information management system and a wide area network system for the Department of Environment.

On the training endeavors we took I can mention as an instance the training we gave to employees of the Ministry of Information. Together with the trainees we developed a local air network for the ministry.

Those five years were definitely the most satisfactory of my life. Working in your country, with your countrymen for your country is overwhelmingly pleasing. The third Ethiopian offensive broke then and it was a devastating situation for my people, but we clenched our teeth and kept on the trainings and our projects convinced that nothing would come to obstruct the development of Eritrea and its people. For me it was truly a morally beneficial experience.

**Q:-Let's now talk about the book you authored, your memoir, Gratitude in Low Voices. This is a book that took**

**you almost ten years to complete. Why did you start putting your reminiscences in for of a book?**

It actually took me almost eleven years. I started writing for personal reasons. Once I went from Eritrea back to the States, I became a husband and a parent of three kids and when facing challenging times I would feel the need for inspirations. Based on my upbringing and being a first generation immigrant it's hard to find an inspiration just anywhere. Where else can you look for but inside you? So I said 'oh it's about time I do a self-assessment' and one of the original goals was to find something that would help me move forward and find courage to face life. I found it in recollecting my life time memories and put them together.

The now published version is not obviously the original script. I was on a three-month paternity leave when I first started drafting the memoir. I got it reviewed by friends and colleagues and in 2006 I sent the manuscript to more than twenty publishers. They all rejected it. One of them actually invited me to his office and told me that I had a great story but insufficient writing skill. His suggestion was for me to write an article and submit it to a magazine or a newspaper and maybe an editor would read it and then they would pick up that story and interview me, then ghost write it for me. Basically what he was telling me had a clear message. I had a great story, but my writing was not great.

Naturally if you get rejected by twenty publishers you get frustrated. But I was keen on seeing it though and so I talked to many friends and especially Prof. Tesfatsion. He gave me more than 10 books to read and told me to widen my perspectives. Every time I'd read one book I realized that I was far behind with my writing skills. What I had was passion but not much knowledge on how to write in ways that would attract readers.

So in the meanwhile I kept writing articles and short essays for websites. People would comment and give me feedback and that is how I improved my writing. Meanwhile I kept updating and expanding my manuscript and then I realized that I had more stories to be written and so I got on it.

**Q:-Why does the memoir include stories and accounts of so many people?**

Whoever I have become now and whatever I do is because of many peoples' deeds that influenced my life. So, I decided to make my first book a book of those people who've crossed my way. I expanded my focus and realized in it a strong sense of identity because I never ceased from engaging with my community. Starting from Nairobi, to DC and to New York.... I always join Eritrean communities wherever I go. So it is indeed natural to ask where this binding affinity came from. That is when I started looking deeper into the history of Eritrea from the humanity aspect. And that is why it took me longer to complete a book I started long time ago. I wanted to make sure that everything there is true and viable. I wanted to make sure that the book would make honest sense to the people of Eritrea. I knew our story needed to be told and it had to be told in the right way from the right perspective and, most importantly, in an accurate way.

**Q:-Normally memories are late age manifestations. We don't see a lot of young writers going for memoirs. Weren't you afraid of rejection?**

No, I wasn't. I was actually confident. Two things: I cheated my readers and I was confident in the profundity of our history. I say I cheated my readers because the memoir part is only 20% while 60 % of the book covers the history of the Eritrean people. Accordingly what I learned about my self is that I wasn't the

island of my own; my career and my journey were built by so many people starting from home up to the office that I am working in. That also gave me an idea on the book not being only about me but also anyone who shared my journey and any other Eritreans for the reason that at least to some extent our stories are analogous.

The second fact that pushed me to do so is the fact that Eritrea has a rich history. Most of the disagreements my editors, publishers and I had were created because of this specific fact. They wanted me to talk about myself but I wanted to include the interesting story of my people because at the end of the day, when it comes to first generation immigrants, most of our early ages are rooted at home. So we know, appreciate and miss the culture we were raised by. In my case I can say that the books and folk stories I grew up listening to shaped the writer part of me. This is why the accounts of my people come to light... I was raised by this society whose wonders I can't ever stop being mesmerized by.

**Q:-You don't include the post impendence period despite the fact that you were in Eritrea for quite a long time in late the 90s**

I didn't want to include recent time because it is not history yet, although, I hope to write about it in the future.

**Q:-Human Smuggling is to this day an ongoing phenomenon, and you actually write about it. You have experienced it too. Take us back to then.**

When we left our country because of the viciousness foisted in our people we had to move illegally. Human smuggling now and then is different. Unfortunately nowadays human



smuggling has become an advertised occupation, the most rewarding occupation to the smugglers. Smugglers make billions at the cost of people's lives. The amount of illegal monetary transaction, the forms of violence it involves, the communication and networking sophistication smugglers have reached and human smuggling we seeing around the world now is just inhumane. The saddest part is that now this "business" includes also a user expectancy. People are not afraid of casualties that would cost them their own lives and still manage to pay the extreme amount of cash demanded by smugglers. In my days, although I don't deny that it was an experience of fear and uncertainty of your own life, smugglers back then had the duty of safely transporting you from destination A to B. I have, of course, horrid memories.

**Q:-And the book is dedicated to...**

Iyob Tsehaye, martyred in May 23 2002. [From the book] "I sincerely do pray that I have lived a good life to honor my Eritrean identity that he died for. It's an identity that I believe has carried me throughout my life in exile. Eternal Glory to Eritrean Martyrs: this book is for them"

➤ **Thank You Dawit. Congratulations!**