

# Civil war in Ethiopia sends siblings to new life in U.S.

By Sean McNamara  
Freelance writer

ROCHESTER — Every day 14-year-old Fasil Kale Christos went to school in Ethiopia afraid of being abducted by the army to fight in that country's civil war.

During the first semester, his school in Addis Ababa had 174 students. By the next semester, that number had dwindled to only 72 after the military had drafted most of Fasil's classmates.

"They send them (children) away when they see them growing. All of his life, he's been hiding," said Meaza Tsighe, one of

Fasil's sisters living in Rochester.

Fasil immigrated to the United States three weeks ago to escape service in the Ethiopian military.

"I was afraid of the political situation there," Fasil said. For the last few months he had been confined to his house, not traveling outside for any reason. He did not even attend school out of fear that he would be seen and taken away by military officers.

Fasil is tall for his age, a physical trait that makes him a strong candidate for the army. He said his friends who were taken away by the army do not know the reasons behind the war. "They don't understand why they fight," he explained.

Fasil's immigration sponsor is Sister Mary Ann Coughlin, who teaches his sister, Aida Kale Christos, a senior at Nazareth Academy.

"I am very proud of this thing I have done," Sister Coughlin said of her sponsoring Fasil. Originally, Tsighe and her husband had hoped to sponsor him, but the Ethiopian government would not recognize them as sponsors.

## School drug program set

ELMIRA — Notre Dame High School is sponsoring a program on substance abuse May 1 and 2. Ron Gaetano, director of the drug and alcohol program at Union Hospital in New Jersey will speak on May 1 at 7:30 p.m. in the school auditorium. The event is open to the public.

Gaetano is a pharmacist, educator and counselor who has developed substance abuse programs for IBM, Conrail, General Motors and the U.S. Marine Corps. He has appeared on several national TV talk shows including "The MacNeil/Lehrer Report," and he wrote *The 100 Most Asked Questions on Substance Abuse*.

Junior high students from Elmira's Holy Family as well as St. Mary Our Mother in Horseheads, All Saints Academy in Corning and Epiphany in Sayre will have the chance to attend programs. Faculty from all the above schools will have an in-service presentation on May 1 at 3:15 p.m.

For information, call Sister Mary Walter Hickey at 607/734-2267.



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer  
Fasil Kale Christos, left, and his sister Aida Kale Christos have recently immigrated to the United States because of the civil war in Ethiopia.

Fasil and Aida live with Tsighe, her husband and their two children, Salome, who is two weeks old, and Samson, 2, on Locust Street in Rochester.

Each said it is difficult to adjust to life in the United States, where they are not always accepted.

"They see we are black and hear the (Ethiopian) accent and assume that we are less educated," Tsighe said. "Being foreign and having an accent, we are paid less."

Aida added that it has not been easy to make friends since she arrived here nine months ago. Although Aida is black, she said she feels very different from black Americans, even when it comes to something as simple as wearing makeup or a new hairstyle. She said that sometimes it has been difficult to "fit in."

"It's not easy for me," she said. "I'm afraid of everything."

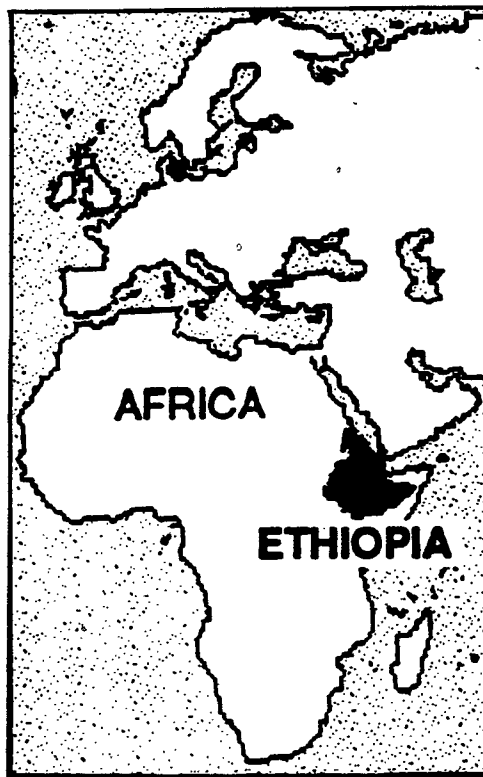
Tsighe said that additional misconceptions of Ethiopia come from the media, which focuses mostly on the droughts and starvation plaguing her country.

"There is hunger in our country, but that doesn't mean we're all hungry. We're always asked why we're not skinny," Tsighe explained. While sections of Ethiopia are plagued by famine, other parts of the country — including Addis Ababa — are not.

"We only saw the famine on television (in Ethiopia)," Aida said.

Misconceptions are only the latest difficulty the siblings have faced. Before immigrating, they had to find sponsors.

Sister Coughlin said she was hesitant to sponsor Fasil because of the responsibilities and the costs she would accrue. While Fasil's parents paid for his trip, Sister Coughlin intends to pay for his education at McQuaid Jesuit High School, where he will attend next fall.



While the northern provinces of Ethiopia are plagued by famine because of a severe drought, an ongoing civil war affects other areas.

"A lot of my friends have helped out," Sister Coughlin said. "They say it is because my cause has a face."

Both Fasil and Aida plan to go to a U.S. college after high school — Fasil will study engineering and Aida will go into medicine. They would both prefer going to college in Ethiopia.

While they like some aspects of life in the United States, Tsighe said she and her siblings would like to go back to Ethiopia if the civil war ever stopped.

"We have a hard time living here, too. It's not easy living in America," she said.



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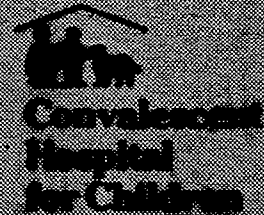
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All entries must be received within seven days of this paper's issue date. Winning names and answers will be printed the week following each drawing.

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