

## Feeling at Home in Asmara

By Jane Doe

I arrived a day early and an elderly gentlemen approached me on the street in front of the cathedral on Independence Avenue. I was with my best friend and later roommate, Miriam. I did not turn around and respond immediately because I thought he was talking to her. I was hesitate to speak because of my heritage and I was unsure of the perceptions of Italians in Eritrea. In my mind I thought if I was colonized, I would have negative opinions about those who tried to destroy my culture.

The sound of my own language being spoken, with such warmth, surprised me and made me finally turn around. I was even more surprised that he was not only fluent in my native tongue, but of his embrace when I responded in Italian. I could believe that a stranger called me his sister and extended a dinner invitation to his home. In my adoptive country, America, the exchange would have been considered suspicious if not an attempt to have a nefarious end. But his eyes and body language conveyed genuine delight and curiosity.

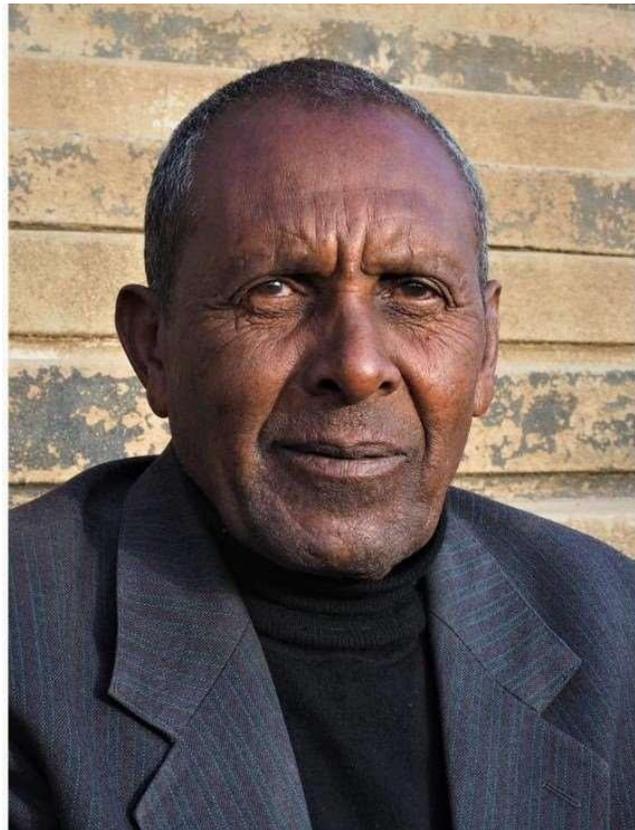


Figure 1 Photo Credit: Friderike Butler

Even though I declined his invitation for dinner, this gentleman made sure I had his contact information in the event that I needed something while I was staying in Eritrea. I would like to say that this was an isolated event, but upon my return to the Sunshine hotel, the staff at the front desk treated me like I was a sister and went above and beyond to me feel like I was home. My experience in Eritrea will always stay in my memory but in my heart because even though I have traveled to many countries, I have never felt as loved, cared for and welcomed as I did in Eritrea. I never felt my color, facial features or accent were apart of my identity. I felt engulfed in their history and narrative in a positive way. So my fears from being from one of the countries that colonized them dissipated immediately. I too feel a sense of pride for the new direction and for their new beginning in history. Until we see each other again my brothers...