

Long Way from Adi Ghehad

A biography of
Dr Teame Mebrahtu



STAN HAZELL



SHEPHEARD-WALWYN (PUBLISHERS) LTD

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First published in 2017 by
Shephard-Walwyn (Publishers) Ltd
107 Parkway House, Sheen Lane,
London SW14 8LS
www.shephard-walwyn.co.uk
www.ethicaleconomics.org.uk

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record of this book
is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978 0 85683 518 6

Typeset by Alacrity, Chesterfield, Sandford, Somerset
Printed and bound in the United Kingdom
by Short Run Press, Exeter

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Foreword

Stories of outstanding people, who overcome great adversity, encounter almost impossible odds in rising from humble beginnings in remote villages to become noteworthy citizens of the world, form part of the most uplifting areas of literature. Such individuals and their life experiences in following a powerful mission to improve humankind, provide exemplars of how to live a truly good life. This account of the life of Teame Mebrahtu is undoubtedly part of that pantheon of biographies.

As a colleague at the University of Bristol, I first came to know Dr Mebrahtu twenty years ago as a respected fellow academic who led postgraduate courses in Education, directed principally at students from the developing world. As we became better acquainted, it became evident that his commitment to the students was both to inspire and equip them to be knowledge leaders in the often poor but proud countries of Africa and South America. He also saw it as his duty to care for them as individuals, who were studying in an unfamiliar culture, at a prestigious university with high expectations. His own experience was fundamental to the time and concern he gave them, which often extended to representing their interests to governmental agencies, to support when there were deaths in their families, to meals at his home and all too often to giving his own money to aid them.

This level of humane engagement was well beyond the expectations of the University, and no doubt it was seen by some of his colleagues as unwise and a diversion from his obligations to research and publish, to ensure career progression. It was only as our friendship slowly

developed, that fragments of his personal encounters with the problems afflicting some of his students emerged. As this powerful account of his life reveals, Dr Mebrahtu is profoundly modest, routinely dismissive of praise, generous to a fault and genuinely selfless.

So, it was a long time before the detail of his origins in the timeless hilltop village of his birth, his struggles to gain an education, the impact of political upheavals in Ethiopia and Eritrea, and his ultimate enforced asylum in Bristol were revealed. In more recent years we have talked a good deal of his love of Eritrea and desire to play a part, again, in its development. Only then did I learn of his remarkable father's determination to give his firstborn son the education he was denied. The story of the mule journey (recounted in Chapter 2) made a deep impression on me. It has biblical resonance. Like Abraham and Isaac, it tells of painful partings, self sacrifice, great vision and a lifelong honouring of the gift.

The author of this splendid book, Stan Hazell, has also known Teame for a long time. We shared a view that the full version of this story should not be left untold. Our individual and joint representations to him to 'write it all down', resulted in reluctant agreement, wrapped up in the overwhelming modesty that ensured its progress was small. Stan, a journalist who learned his craft as a writer for newspapers in South Wales and later for many years with ITV in the West of England, went a crucial stage further and offered to write down Teame's telling of his past. What we see in this volume is the result of an impressive partnership of skill and trust.

Once Teame agreed to the project, he and Stan met every week for two and a half years, to unearth this personal and professional biography. This extended dialogue, with Stan as the systematic interlocutor, released a wealth of recollections that may have lain silent without his professional capacity for searching out a good story and making sure the facts were all there.

In my own research on ageing, I have conducted many biographical interviews with older people. Such studies require the interviewer to gain the confidence of the life-story teller and to assure them that you are ‘a safe listener’ who will maintain absolute confidentiality, even if parts of what they say are used in reports, articles or books. In these circumstances the interviewer is an ‘interested stranger’. The opportunity to tell your own story is a rare one for most people and as a result it produces recollections deeply buried and not infrequently elicits personal accounts which have never been told to anyone.

Even when the experience has unearthed difficult aspects of their past, people who are interviewed are almost always grateful for the experience. They see your careful non-judgemental listening as a rare gift. In the case of Stan Hazell, he gave a gift of immense magnitude to Teame. Not only was he an outstanding listener, who provoked him to dig up his past and talk about it, he translated it, shaped it and wove it into a coherent biography, week after week after week. With great respect for what he heard, Stan has produced an honest and highly readable book which honours the subject but does so as an intelligent reporter. A signal achievement.

As a reader of *Long Way from Adi Ghebad*, you will discover the life-story of a man of intellect, deeply held values and a believer that education can transform human institutions and societies. At the same time you are introduced to the troubled political situation in the Horn of Africa during the second half of the twentieth century, which led Teame to leave his beloved homeland and seek asylum in the United Kingdom.

There will be many in the widely dispersed Eritrean diaspora who will know of Teame Mebrahtu and want to read his story. They will also want to read themselves into the troubled career of their small, proud nation. Others will come to this book to understand the enduring principles and values of a leading international educator. Yet

others will want to follow the life of a dedicated and principled asylum seeker who gave himself fully as a university teacher, but also as a model black person in Britain when racial tensions were high and he was one of few who were respected and trusted.

For myself, I am profoundly grateful to have had the opportunity to know Teame and to count him as a friend.

PROFESSOR MALCOLM JOHNSON

Introduction

I have known Dr Teame Mebrahtu for well over forty years – he a Bristol academic and me a local journalist – and in that time I heard intriguing snippets of his life. But I knew there was much more to discover. This is the result.

Teame is a modest man and took some persuading that his life was worthy of note. But I am glad I persisted because he has a remarkable story. It starts in the village of Adi Ghehad in the Highlands of Eritrea, where Teame was born – hence the title. Becoming the first of his family to receive an education, albeit with many difficulties along the way, he became one of his country's leading academics and teacher trainers.

But he lived in a period of political turmoil which saw him imprisoned as a teenage student demonstrator. He experienced the beginnings of the Eritrean liberation struggle which brought bloodshed to the streets of Asmara where he lived. And he was an eye witness to the moment Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown by the *Dergue*, a military junta made up of many of the army's junior officers. During the regime which followed, led by Mengistu Hailemariam, a close friend and colleague was assassinated.

Granted permission to study for a PhD at Bristol he was then ordered to return by the Mengistu government. Realising his life was in danger he refused to go back. So he became an asylum seeker joining those of his countrymen and women who have become refugees, fearing for their lives from one or other of the political upheavals that have been a part of the region's recent history to this day.

Writing this account has seemed like describing a fictional adventure story, such have been some of the situations in which he found himself. But, as they say, life can be stranger than fiction.

His asylum in Britain granted, he declined state benefits saying he was not entitled to them. Instead he used his passion for education and his African background to give talks in local schools after first winning the confidence of the head teachers. Having gained his PhD he became a respected senior academic and Adviser to International Students at the Bristol Graduate School of Education. He helped hundreds of students on their academic journey. He would take a personal interest in their lives and well-being thereby implementing his firm belief that, if student welfare comes first, then academic success will surely follow.

But as I found out more about what he did in addition to his demanding role at the university his story became all the more remarkable. With his knowledge of the developing world and experience of being an asylum seeker, he has become an acknowledged expert on the problems faced by refugees, how the societies in which they end up can best integrate them, and how the refugees themselves can adapt their new lives to a different culture.

Multicultural education – improving opportunities for ethnic minorities and helping all children to understand the wider world outside their own borders – is something he has campaigned for and lectured about. He organised an international conference on the subject.

He served his new community in many different ways. It was partly out of conviction that it was his public duty to the country that had given him sanctuary. I think he was also influenced by an inherent humanitarianism and respect for the Eritrean tradition of caring for others which goes back to the ancient laws of *Adgina-te-Gheleba*, a creative piece of legislation laying down the behaviour expected from the population including how they should respect and help each other.

Whilst loyal to Britain, he has never forgotten his beloved Eritrea, working to create an education system as the country neared independence and, on a number of occasions, going into the war zone during the liberation struggle. Even now, amidst the travails the country faces which have multiplied the tide of refugees flooding into Europe, he has a vision of what he believes the country could still become.

I have found teasing out these, and many other facets of his life, a fascinating journey. There is much more to tell in the chapters that follow. It would be wrong to define him by his refugee status, or even by his passion for education and belief in its potential to bring about needed change, important as that has been in his life, because he has done so much more. He is a citizen of the world, a global educator as he would describe himself. And he demonstrates in this fast changing world qualities that bring richness to our increasingly multicultural society.

STAN HAZELL
December 2016

Eritrea

Eritrea, a country in the Horn of Africa, is bordered by the Red Sea which makes it strategically placed along one of the world's busiest shipping lanes. On its other borders are Sudan and Ethiopia. It is a country with a people proud of their heritage and with their own languages of which Tigrigna and Arabic are the official ones. The population is currently estimated to be between 3.6 million and 5.5 million, although there has never been a census, so precise figures are not available.

Eritrea was part of the first Ethiopian kingdom of Aksum until its decline in the 8th century. It came under control of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century, and later the Egyptians. In 1885 the Italians captured the coastal areas and gained sovereignty over parts of the country. They ruled until World War Two when, in 1942, the British defeated the Italians and established a British Military Administration. From 1952 to 1961 a federation of a sort prevailed between Eritrea and Ethiopia until Emperor Haile Selassie annexed the country to Ethiopia – abrogating a UN resolution in the process.

At the time of the annexation Eritrea possessed a far more sophisticated urban and industrial infrastructure than Ethiopia. Ethiopia nationalised Eritrea's 42 largest factories and systematically dismantled the Eritrean industrial sector during a protracted civil war. They also suppressed the two official languages of the Eritrean population, ordering the burning of books – an act which fuelled the fires of liberation. Annexation had signalled the start of the bloody civil war between Ethiopian forces and Eritrean liberation fighters.

In 1974 the Emperor was overthrown by a Communist Military Junta later led by Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam. The Emperor died a year after being deposed. To this day the cause of his death is still shrouded in mystery. The Mengistu regime oversaw the Ethiopian Red Terror of 1977-78 – a campaign of repression against the Ethiopian People's Liberation Party and other groups opposed to the Dergue, the regime's secretive ruling body.

In 1991, after the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, supported by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, deposed Mengistu, the way was opened for fighters from the EPLF to gain control of Asmara and form a provisional government. Two years later, in 1993, a referendum on Eritrean independence was held, supported by the United Nations and the new Ethiopian government. There was an almost unanimous vote for an independent republic. Isias Afwerki, a leader of one of the liberation fronts, became Eritrea's first president. Liberation was hailed as a new dawn for the country with high hopes of a better future.

But the co-operation between the two new governments did not last long. Eritrea and Ethiopia disagreed about the exact demarcation lines of their borders. There were many clashes with both countries spending millions of dollars on warplanes and weapons. When it escalated to a full blown war between 1998 and 2000, it is estimated that 100,000 people were killed. A peace agreement was finally signed in December 2000 with an international Court of Arbitration ruling that Eritrea had violated international law by attacking Ethiopia in 1998.

The war, known as the Badme War after the disputed border territory, destroyed the country's economy. According to the World Bank, Eritrea lost US\$225 million worth of livestock and 55,000 homes during the war. It is estimated a million Eritreans were displaced. Although a mainly agricultural economy, the presence of land mines in border areas has meant some of the country's most

productive land has been unused. Recurrent drought in the Horn of Africa in recent years has hit food production.

Eritrea also has substantial mineral deposits – copper, gold, granite, marble and potash. As Reuters the international news agency reported, the country is looking to utilise them to kickstart the economy. The opening of the Bisha mine in 2011 – firstly to mine gold but latterly zinc and copper – has been part of that process. Other new mines are planned producing, gold, copper, zinc and potash.

But there are challenges for a country that has been described as one of the world's most secretive. The World Bank describes Eritrea as 'one of the least developed countries in the world'. Continuing tensions between Eritrea and Ethiopia have resulted in a 'no war, no peace' situation and the stalemate is considered 'a major impediment to the government's development efforts ...' Fighting broke out in the Tsorona border area in June 2016 with casualties reported on both sides.

Amnesty International in its 2015/16 Annual Report claimed that thousands of prisoners of conscience and political prisoners, including former politicians, journalists and practitioners of unauthorised religions, continued to be detained without trial. Many, says the report, have been detained for well over a decade. Amnesty also say that mandatory National Service is indefinite in a system they describe as 'forced labour' with thousands of people attempting to avoid conscription by fleeing the country.

A UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea reported in June 2016 that the country is an 'authoritarian State'. The report adds: 'There is no independent judiciary, no national assembly and there are no other democratic institutions in Eritrea. This has created a governance and rule of law vacuum, resulting in a climate of impunity for crimes against humanity to be perpetrated over a quarter of a century.'

Eritrea's government describes the UN report as 'unfounded accusations' and claims they are 'politically motivated and groundless'. They claim the report is 'entirely one-sided' because members of the Commission only spoke to Eritreans outside the country, many of whom have their own agendas.

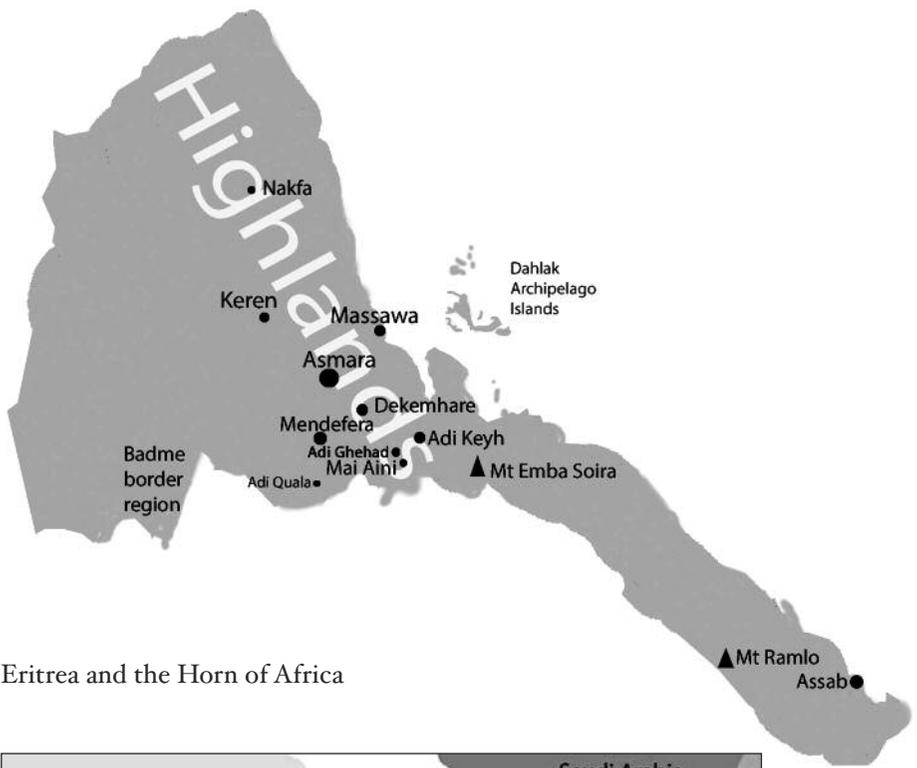
The country has had a 'go it alone' culture which goes back to the thirty-year liberation war when they succeeded against seemingly impossible odds. The secretive nature of the Eritrean government means that they have never published a national budget making it difficult for the outside world to work out what is happening in the country's economy.

China has been providing aid of various kinds to Eritrea since 1992 and has been co-operating on health issues since 1997. Nine Chinese medical teams have since worked in the country. China has also been involved in the expansion of the Hirgigo power plant in Massawa and aided the setting up of the Eritrean Institute of Technology among other projects.

The EU has granted Eritrea an aid package amounting to €200 million, financed by the European Development Fund, aimed at supporting the country's energy sector and improving governance. The EU says they are insisting on the full respect of human rights as part of their ongoing political dialogue with Eritrea. The grant will run from 2016 to 2020.

The Africa Editor of BBC World Service News, Mary Harper, reported in July 2016 that despite the government's secretive behaviour and allegations of human rights abuses in the labour force there are signs of growing interest from foreign investors. Both Eritrean and foreign investors are also said to be looking towards the country's 1,200 kilometre (745 mile) Red Sea Coast, with its hundreds of unspoilt islands, rich fish stocks and ports, which all have significant economic potential.

The report adds: ‘Whether any of this will be realised will depend on two main factors. Eritrea’s willingness to adopt a more flexible attitude towards its economy, and foreign investors’ readiness to engage with a country that has recently been accused of crimes against humanity and has spent years in international isolation.’



Eritrea and the Horn of Africa





CHAPTER ONE

Early Life

Adi Ghehad is a village in the Eritrean Highlands, founded many centuries ago by the man after whom it is named – Ghehad. *Adi* means ‘Place of’. The village, 150 kilometres from the capital city Asmara, is still inhabited by Ghehad’s descendants.

The Mebrahtu family, whose name in one of the Eritrean mother tongues, Tigrigna, means ‘God’s Light’, can trace their lineage back to the days of Ghehad. A father’s name shows his antecedents. With no written records it was the only indicator of who they were descended from and was likely to be the first question one Eritrean would ask another on first meeting them.

Eritrea became an Italian colony in 1890. Following the second Italo-Ethiopian War in 1935, which lasted until May of the next year, there had been a large influx of Italians. Mebrahtu Beraky, a villager from Adi Ghehad, like many other Eritreans was enlisted into the Italian Army in the 1930s. He fought with them in their campaign in Libya. A self-educated man who had never had proper schooling he learnt fluent Italian and Arabic as well as some English in addition to his mother tongue Tigrigna. Following his service in Libya he became a carabinieri working with the Italian army and initially stationed at the town of Massawa on the Red Sea. He was now in his twenties, an age when it was customary for young men to marry.

The girl who was to be his bride was even younger, and was from Biet Semayti, a village about 40 kilometres from Adi Ghehad. Her name was Wagaye Berhe. *Wagaye* means 'My Worth'. She came from a family who were among the richest in the area in terms of the head of cattle they owned. Her father, Belamberas Berhe Gaffre, was one of the founding fathers of the traditional law, known as *Adgina-te-Gheleba*, practised in the Akeleguzay Province. Wagaye was fourteen years old, a not unusual age for a girl to marry in the local culture. As was the custom the marriage had been arranged by family members with Mebrahtu's mother Teblez Seghed playing a major part.

The young couple set up home at Metsalu, a suburb of Dekemhare – a large town in the Highlands about 40 kilometres south of the capital Asmara – after Mebrahtu Beraky was transferred to the police station there. He had been offered accommodation at the Palaso di Polisia, the police quarters in Dekemhare, but had to turn it down because he couldn't afford the rent. At that time he had a profligate lifestyle and was spending too much time drinking in local bars. Metsalu was a cheaper place to live.

Soon their first child was on the way. Wagaye was sent back to Adi Ghehad to have the birth at the home of the baby's grandmother, Teblez. The child was a boy. They named him Teame Mebrahtu. The year was 1939, although the exact date is uncertain as no records were kept at that time and the Eritrean traditional calendar is seven years behind its Western counterpart.

The house where Teame was born in Adi Ghehad was in one of four homesteads, each with about forty houses, where different branches of Ghehad descendants lived. The village had about two hundred households with a total population of about a thousand. The Mebrahtu house was in the homestead in the Western part of the village known as Tekleyes after one of Ghehad's sons.

When Teame was born the teenage Wagaye still wore her hair in

the style for young girls. As he grew older Teame was allowed to call her by her first name and she used to tell him he was more like a brother to her than a son.

Some months later following the Christening ceremony – which according to the traditions of the Orthodox Church had to be on the 40th day after the birth for a boy (the 50th day for a girl) – Wagaye took the baby Teame back to Metsalu to join Mebrahtu Beraky. Two years later another son arrived – Anghesom. Over the next twenty-two years she had eight children, three sons and five daughters. Teame's youngest brother, Hagos, born in 1961, was later to join the Eritrean liberation fighters.

The time in Metsalu was a difficult one for the family who were living in relative poverty as Mebrahtu continued to struggle to make ends meet. Teame remembers his young brother once getting so hungry that he tore strips off a joint of raw meat to eat it.

Finally Teame's grandmother Teblez, unhappy to see the family living in such poverty, stepped in to help. She put up the money for Mebrahtu Beraky to join with a close friend and police colleague of his, Mesmer, to buy a pair of donkeys with licences to collect and sell firewood.

It was to prove a turning point for both men. Mebrahtu was regretting failing to manage his income properly and his drinking habit. He was determined now to care for his growing family more responsibly. The business proved lucrative and both families were able to afford to move to quarters in the police compound in Dekemhare. Soon afterwards Mesmer moved back to his home village in the Hamasien province. He sold his share in the donkeys to Mebrahtu Beraky.

The additional income from the donkey business, vegetables and butter from the family homestead in Adi Ghehad, along with Mebrahtu's better management of his finances, meant that the

family fortunes had been transformed. They could afford a transistor radio for the first time. Meat was plentiful with Mebrahtu buying and slaughtering a goat every Saturday. The family could have new clothes.

When, in 1941 with World War Two engulfing North Africa and the British conquering the Italians in Eritrea, Mebrahtu Beraky was seconded into the British Army serving as a record keeper – a *diarista* – and was allowed to continue living at the police compound at Dekemhare. He considered himself lucky to have a job there. Many of his fellow Eritreans, who had served with the Italians, were sent back to their villages when the British took over. But, because of his self-taught skill in speaking and writing Italian, Mebrahtu Beraky was kept on.

Built in the Italian style, the compound had quarters for the staff comprising a main living room, sleeping areas and an outside kitchen. Under the British there were strict rules about cleanliness and hygiene in the compound buildings with regular inspections. With malaria a threat there were fears of infection. Teame still vividly remembers the smell of the disinfectant used to wash down the concrete floors every Saturday.

Teame quickly settled into life in the compound. He made friends with the children of other soldiers living there, played football and, helped by his parents, began to learn how to grow vegetables and flowers in the small plot allocated to them. When he was four his father decided to send him to a local church school. He was the first of his family to go to any sort of school.

It was run by an elderly retired priest at his home in Dekemhare. There were classes on six days a week, Monday to Saturday, with pupils attending just three morning or afternoon sessions to accommodate the number of children seeking places. Sometimes classes took place out in the garden because of the intense heat.

The priest was of the Orthodox faith. So only the children of Orthodox Christian families were accepted. Catholics, Protestants and Muslims had their own schools in the town.

Learning the Tigrigna alphabet formed a major part of the lessons. Unlike the English alphabets with twenty-two characters, this one has two hundred. Each letter has a number of different inflections, sometimes as many as seven or eight. The letter H for example has these different pronunciations: *Hae, Hu, Hi, Ha, Hiye, H',* and *Ho*. They all had to be learnt by rote, repeating them out loud time after time until they knew them off by heart. The classroom was alive with the sound of the children's voices. The priest had a problem with one of his eyes so he relied on hearing the pupils at work. If he could not hear the sound of their voices reciting he knew they would be up to some mischief.

Religion, the Orthodox kind, was also important. The children were taught how to say the Lord's Prayer and other Biblical quotations and religious songs. But it was in Ge'ez, the liturgical language of the church which has common links with Tigrigna and also Amharic, the mother tongue of many Ethiopians. So his young pupils had to learn some Ge'ez as well.

There was a strong grounding in the Ten Commandments, also spoken in Ge'ez, with an emphasis on respect for elders, mothers and fathers. Respect for the teacher was also considered important. At the start of every class the pupils were expected to bow to the priest, say good morning, then kneel and kiss his knee before taking their seats. The tradition of respect in the classroom, and to one's elders, was to have a major influence on Teame.

Older pupils would be used as mentors, helping the priest keep the fifteen or so pupils in his charge under control and assisting with lessons. Discipline was strict. The priest used a length of ox hide to dispense punishment. Teame felt the weight of it when he arrived late

for lessons one day. It was a painful experience and he was never late again.

Although learning to write was not part of the curriculum, the brighter pupils, Teame included, began to learn the basics as they recognised the characters in their lessons on the alphabet.

With only three half day sessions a week Teame had time on his hands. By now nearing seven years old, he became something of an expert tomato grower. His father had a small plot in the police compound, but little time to work on it. His job often meant night work when he would book in the criminals who had been arrested in the town, making notes of their offences and personal details.

So Teame had free range of the small garden. The family had a good crop during the growing season as well as a variety of flowers which he also cultivated. He made friends with another boy his own age who looked after his father's garden on an adjoining plot. His name was Zehaye Fessehaye and he was to become a life-long friend.

But gardening was not enough to keep a small boy active. Teame joined a gang of other boys, and a few girls, living in the compound. All of them were about same age, six or seven. Zehaye was one of them. Teame found himself the leader of the group. They got up to all sorts of mischief in the compound, sometimes stealing eggs from the kitchens. There were other gangs of children in the compound, some of them of older and bigger. There were often clashes between them. Teame found himself in conflict with the much bigger and stronger leader of another gang. He was four or five years older. There was a fight and Teame, not surprisingly, came off worst.

The gang used to venture around the town, sometimes playing football on open ground using rolled up old socks as a ball. One day the makeshift ball ran into a ditch on the side of the road. Searching for it they found a small bag full of money, probably dropped by thieves the night before.

The gang, especially Teame and Zehaye, had a long discussion about what to do with the money although they never actually counted it. Keeping it was a temptation. But the thought of being found out by their fathers, both policemen, along with an inherent sense of honesty finally took precedence. They decided to hand the bag of money into the police station. Having done so they had hoped they might get a reward. But their hopes were in vain.

One day, on the way to school, Teame and Zehaye came across a swarm of bees in a tree – a valuable and much prized commodity in the Eritrean villages. They marked the tree as a sign to others that the swarm was theirs.

Then they caught the swarm in the accepted manner by pouring water over the bees so they fell into a sheet, trying hard not to get stung in the process. Having got their bees, there was a long discussion about what to do with them. They discovered the value of the bees and Teame's father paid Zehaye's father for his share.

It was then decided that the swarm should be taken to Adi Ghehad, Teame's home village, and placed on the Mebrahtu homestead. The bees have since multiplied many times allowing the Mebrahtu family and some of the villagers to enjoy the honey. They are still known as 'Teame's Bees'.

Another time Teame and Zehaye, determined to impress a group of older boys who were taunting them, walked across water pipes – used to irrigate farmland – which straddled a 15-metres-wide ravine. It was a foolish and dangerous thing to do but they got safely to the other side with delighted shouts of: 'We've arrived.'

At that time Dekemhare had a large Italian quarter which was known locally as 'Little Bologna' as the homes and other buildings were so beautiful. The young Eritreans were discouraged from going there, but they would smell the cooking of the exotic Italian pastries, although they would never get to eat one. Many of the Italians, and

those of mixed Italian/Eritrean blood, started to leave the country in the years following the British takeover of Eritrea.

Teame had now been at the church school for three years and was nearly seven. By this time he had two siblings. His brother Anghesom had been joined by a sister, Zighe. His mother, Wagaye, would go back to his grandmother's house, where he had been born, several times a year to help with the crops and looking after the animals. She would take her younger children with her. On her return she would bring several quintals of maize and *taff* flour which would keep the family fed for months.

The Mebrahtus considered themselves lucky to have this addition to their larder. Not every family on the compound were so fortunate. Wagaye would share the maize with other families living on the compound who would otherwise have been short of food. Policemen were not paid well.

At seven Teame became eligible to go to the government Elementary School in Dekemhare. His father was determined that he should go. He wanted his son to have the education he had missed. He told Teame he should improve his lot in life and the only way was through education. 'Do you want to end up like me?' he would say to him. Teame did not appreciate it at the time, but later came to realise just how great had been the sacrifices his father made to provide him with an education.

Teame had a sleepless night before his first day at the new school. He was anxious over who his new classmates would be. What his new teacher and the classroom would be like. In the morning he donned the new shorts and short sleeved shirt his father had bought him. His mother had ironed them so that the creases stood out just like those on the police uniforms. She had also made him a satchel made out of heavy cotton. For the first time in his life he had a handkerchief which his mother insisted he kept in his satchel. He had no shoes and

walked to the school in bare feet accompanied by his father. Teame remembers feeling very proud to have his father at his side. It was not something he very often had time to do.

Despite his worries he was impressed by his new school which was within walking distance from the police compound. It was a modern glass fronted building built in the Italian style and surrounded on two sides by borders of flowers. Close by were the Catholic and Orthodox churches and the Mosque and a button making factory called Enda Sabbam. There was a bicycle repair shop run by two brothers known as Mussie and Aaron just across the road from the school.

There were thirty others in Teame's class, mostly boys. Few girls at that time went to school. The first thing he noticed was that some of the children were much better dressed than he was despite his new clothes. And they were wearing shoes. For the first time in his life he came up against inequality. He resented the looks and sneers from some of the better clothed whose parents, officers and businessmen, would have been wealthier than his father on his police pay.

He had a quarrel over the issue with one of the other pupils which ended in a fight. There was a severe reprimand from his teacher. But Teame had learned something about bullying in the classroom which would give him a better understanding of it in later life.

Once lessons started Teame settled down and began to enjoy life at the school. Such was the demand for places that pupils were limited to classes either in the morning or afternoon to provide more opportunities. The emphasis was on the Three Rs, Reading, Writing and Arithmetic along with General Science and Personal Health and Hygiene. Teame's time in the church school had given him a head start over some of the other pupils. He could already read and had begun to learn how to write. Exercise books and pencils were provided but had to be left at the school and not taken home.

Civic education was taught and included advice on how to treat others. It was not linked to a particular religion. The school had a mix of faith backgrounds among the pupils including Orthodox, Catholic and Muslim. The teacher would tell them of the need to have respect for others regardless of who they were and to think of those weaker and poorer than themselves. They were urged to be honest in their dealings and to share what they had with others who might need it more.

Teame was to get a chance to explore that last piece of advice during the half hour breaks in the middle of the school sessions. His mother always cooked him a snack of *kitcha* (bread) similar to a *chappati*. There were other children who had nothing to eat so Teame would share his meal with them. He wondered later if the teachers had known of the backgrounds of the pupils who had no food with them, and were encouraging others to share.

The teachers would give them songs to sing as part of the learning process. One of them struck a cord with Teame. It went:

*Nab Temberti, Nab Temberti,
Nsa eya Abay habti,
Dleyuwa mealti mes leyti.*

It urged young people to go to school and get wisdom because that was the source of knowledge. It would open doors to the future. Education is the greatest wealth, not money. The words would always stay with Teame.

He successfully completed his first two years at the school and was doing well in his third year much helped by Memher (teacher) Haile-michael Ghebreyesus, a gentle and considerate man, who he remembers as being an excellent teacher who knew his subjects well.

But halfway through the year his father was transferred to another police post in Mai Aini, a town 60 kilometres away and had to leave

Dekemhare. Wagaye and the two younger children went back to Adi Ghehad. Teame had to be found somewhere else to live.

A police colleague of his, Sergeant Abraha Neguse, agreed to let Teame live with his family. It was difficult time for Teame. Although the Sergeant and his wife treated him well, they had five children of their own. Food was scarce and Teame was often hungry and angry. He was miserable and missed his mother to whom he was very close. He stayed there for about six months but then the Sergeant was given a new posting and had to move his family away from Dekemhare. Once more Teame's father had to find somewhere for his son to live and to ensure he continued with his education.

The only solution was a great uncle, Blata Kafil Seghed, in the town of Adi Keyh, 50 kilometres away. But that meant moving to the Elementary School there. It was an unhappy time. Although he was comfortable at the home of his relative, Teame found life at the new school difficult. In the strange surroundings with new teachers and classmates – some of whom were much older than him – Teame became shy and fearful. He had confronted his fears by saying a quick prayer and kissing the wall of the church of St Michael's on his way to school. He also threw a few pence over the wall of the church for the beggars in the hope that their prayers for him would help him cope with his anxieties.

He felt his prayers had been answered as despite his difficulties he managed to endure the last few months to the end of term and pass his Grade 3 exam. The next academic year, however, was to be an important one. He would get the chance to qualify to move up to the Middle School after a General School Examination. But, there were even more challenges to come. Teame was just ten years old.