



# ERI-VOICE



*A newsletter of the Eritrean Community of Greater Boston*

MAY 2004

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## **EDITORIAL**

*“In and through community lies the salvation of the world”.<sup>1</sup>*

Community. The word used so frequently that as an Eritrean I’ve begun to wonder what it means, locally in Boston, nationally, and diasporically. The migration of Eritreans to metropolitan cities throughout the United States started about thirty years ago and continues today. In this period we have transformed into a population comprised of Eritrean immigrants, first generation, and second generation Eritrean Americans. Critically thinking about what the Eritrean community means to all of us is essential to our personal and collective growth.

The importance of community is inescapable. We commune naturally, through social and organizational affiliations. Not to oversimplify the subject but we often commune based on cultural, spiritual, and intellectual commonalities. When Eritreans refer to “the community” in Boston, they are often referring to the geographical meeting place rather than a web of social networks connected based on cultural identity or interests. As a place the community center is symbolic of our existence as a distinct population in this city and region.

As a first generation Eritrean American and California native my first reaction to the community center in Boston was amazement. I regarded the facility with childlike enthusiasm. The fact that Eritreans in the Boston area owned a facility, sufficient in size and functionality was

inspiring. Prematurely perhaps, I envisioned the provision of relevant services and activities that could be held at the community center. Luckily shortly after my arrival in Boston I was put in contact with Boston-based Eritreans that were already well on their way to breathing life into the community center. Amidst the current turmoil these individuals saw the importance in redeveloping the community center as a site of empowerment for Eritreans in the greater Boston area. In the past year we’ve witnessed the emergence of computer classes, this newsletter, a regular tutoring program, and successful youth-led events.

Yet recently, I’ve come to realize that the development of the community center cannot rest in the hands of a few active members. Our identity as a diasporic group will require the efforts of every member of our “community”. Every skill, proactive viewpoint, and level of participation is welcome and essential to the growth of our community center. So I encourage every Eritrean or individual associated with the Eritrean population to take an active role in the future of our community and our center. It is imperative that we go beyond recognizing it as a possession and question how it serves, represents, and empowers us as Eritreans in Boston.

What does “the community” (Eritrean Community Center) represent to you? What is its significance to your family, your children? What activities would you like to see take place at the community center? Let your ideas and vision propel you towards action.

By Naomi Bitow

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<sup>1</sup> M. Scott Peck, The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace, 1998.

**Celebrating Thirteen Years of  
Independence**

**May 24<sup>th</sup> 2004**

**Happy Independence Day!**

*ERI-VOICE is a monthly publication of the  
Eritrean Community Center Inc. of Greater  
Boston.*

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**FINANCIAL TIMES:**

***Unmasking Dow Jones***



***By Girmai Bokre Kahassai***

I am sure most of us get confused when we hear the words "DOW JONES". We hear mention of them on a daily basis through television news, radio, and print media. For those of you that have ever wondered what it means and are still not quite sure, the following article will provide a brief history and explanation.

**What is Dow Jones?**

The *Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA)* is one of several industrial component stock market indices created to gauge the performance of the of America's stock markets.

It takes the average daily performance of 30 selected individual companies and gauges them every business day at the close of the stock market. These are the values that are often reported on televisions news programs.

The following companies are among the 30 individual components of the DJIA:

- *American Express (financial services)*
- *AT&T (telecommunications)*
- *Coca-Cola Co. (beverages)*
- *General Electric (electronics, financial services)*
- *General Motors (automobiles)*
- *Home Depot (retail, specializing in home improvement)*
- *International Business Machines (hardware, software and services)*

- *J.P. Morgan Chase and Co. (financial services)*
- *Johnson & Johnson Corporation (pharmaceuticals)*
- *McDonald's Corporation (fast food franchise)*
- *Microsoft Corporation (software)*
- *Wal-Mart Stores Inc. (retail)*
- *Walt Disney Company (entertainment)*

### **Historical Progression of DJIA**

On the day DJIA was created in 1884 the value of the DJIA was :

**100**

November 14, 1972 the Average closed above 1,000:

**1,003**

November 21, 1995 it closed above 5,000:

**5,024**

March 29, 1999 the average closed at:

**10,007**

May 3, 1999, it closed at:

**11,015**

January 14, 2000 the average closed at an the all-time peak:

**11,723**

By mid-2002 however, it had returned to its 1998 level:

**8,000**

October 9, 2002, the DJIA bottomed out at its lowest close:

**7,286**

June 4, 2003, the average closed **above 9,000**

Six months later, on December 11, 2003, the average closed **above 10,000**

Last month it was **in the range of 10,500**

Hopefully this article has given you a general understanding of the Dow Jones. If this article has left you with any questions feel free to contact us at [eccnewsletter@yahoo.com](mailto:eccnewsletter@yahoo.com)

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### **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT: Meetings, Decorum, and Change**



***By Belai Tewolde***

During deliberations at the second to the last Annual General Meeting of the ECC last month, we witnessed an intolerable lack of discipline when some members came very close to a fistfight that forced the untimely adjournment of the meeting. Over the past year seasoned elders and veteran members of community as well as relative new comers have been equally guilty of this violation.

Before I set out to explain the sequence of events, and the appalling circumstances of that evening, it should be pointed out and made clear that we should be steadfast not to let the course of the ECC be determined by those intent on creating disorder and destruction.

It has now become apparent that there are a small number of people who will leave no stone unturned to intimidate others and stall all progress at the ECC.

Equally important is the dedication and courage shown by some members who

tried bringing order to the house by separating those involved in the brawl. I am sure there are many members that would like to express their gratitude to them.

Although an account of the incident and the method the Executive chose to deal with it was discussed at the meeting a fortnight ago, it is important to revisit the incident so that many on the outside could have a clear and accurate picture of what transpired. Midway through the meeting when some members were leaving the hall a member who was sited close to the exit door uttered some words that they found offensive. One of the offended individuals then pleaded with the Executive that such conduct needed to be restrained. Before the Executive could react, however, a few members took matters into their hands and started exchanging insults at each other across the hall. Instead of letting the Executive investigate the incident and act accordingly, they added fuel to the fire by shouting and cursing at the top of their lungs. What caused us extreme discomfort and unease was when a member let out a mouthful of vulgar, hostile, demeaning and humiliating outburst.

My intention is not to apportion blame, but to indicate that even when situations become tense we should refrain from engaging in conduct that offends the dignity and decorum of the entire membership. You would be surprised how a courteous and respectful approach during debates would pay off. Last meeting is a perfect example. Win or lose, people debated issues cordially without any sign of malice or spite. It should not be hard to stand your ground for what you believe in without getting into a shouting match.

Another issue that greatly contributes to disorder is the disregard for punctuality during scheduled meetings. If only members would come on time our

meetings could start promptly and proceed efficiently.

Finally, the leadership of the ECC should be commended for the course of action it took. Although the constitution of the ECC contains provisions to deal decisively with such behavior, they choose to take a more conciliatory and non-confrontational approach. In the future, however, they should take immediate measures to strengthen security and protect our members from harm at the hands of individuals with a history of violent and disruptive behavior. Detailed contingency plans should be put in place should similar disorder arise in the future.

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### **VIEWPOINT:**

**Ambassador**

***By Traci M. Spencer***

A dry, dusty day in August greeted me on my first day in college. Well, not really college, but the summer bridge program that promised to acquaint me with college life and encourage lifelong friendships. I carefully unpacked my stuff, with Puff Daddy's "No Way Out" CD blaring in the background. A stranger bounded into my room and simply asked me what my shoe size was. As she awaited my reply I examined her face: tan skin, deep-set eyes, smooth skin and mounds of curly hair swiftly contained in a tight bun. With equal simplicity I answered my shoe size, much to her dissatisfaction at the difference, and she walked away. That is how I met my best friend.

I had no idea that we were any different, two young African American women looking for answers to the questions of our youth. One day while combing each other's hair in her dorm room she made

mention of this thing I had never heard of – this place called Eritrea. She began to explain her ethnic heritage to me in ways that, at the time I could not grasp and with a surety that, I’m certain, at the time she couldn’t either.

“I’m Eritrean,” she said  
“What’s that?” I asked  
“We’re God’s people,” she explained.  
“We’re all God’s people,” I replied.

It was then that she began to let me in. She told me of the Ark of the Covenant and the religious traditions held by people in the horn of Africa for centuries. She explained to me the 30--year war that had taken place for independence. She shared with me her desire to return home and commit herself to serve her people.

No longer did she leave the room whispering in Tigrinya when her family called the dorm. She didn’t take her family off campus for visits and meals, but instead brought them up to our space. I was careful to greet appropriately, giving three kisses on the cheeks, not two. “Salaam,” I spoke to her mothers, who with wide eyes and a matching smile responded, “Salaam.”

At the end of the summer, she flew home to Oakland with me, most assuredly not expecting to learn much. After all what more is there to Black American’s living in this country? To the contrary, we traveled through the city meeting my family and friends and my culture began to emerge. Not the foolishness of popular culture, MTV-style full of materialism, greed and ignorance that most people take Black culture to be. But the culture of the African American family: the inextricable link between every family member, the notion of shared success and failure and most importantly, the reliance of the family on God. I entertained her with and stories of my people in the south. I explained to her how deeply interconnected my family of almost 30 is. She learned of our direct connection to slavery in Louisiana when I

showed her the art of a distant cousin who was a slave.

She took me into her home and her grandmother cooked for me – introducing me to berbere. I took her to my home she was welcomed by my mother’s beans and greens and cornbread

She explained Orthodox Christianity to me. I taught her about the tradition of the African American church and Gospel.

She told me stories of her family “back home” in Eritrea. I reminisced about my family “back home” in Louisiana.

She shared her traditions with me. I shared mine.

This is how I met my haftay / sister

Years later, living in an overpriced apartment in Los Angeles, we talked endlessly; I lounged, wrapped in the comforting softness of a gabi and she walked over to a photo of my grandfather, and remarked, “He looks like he could be Habesha.” We weren’t so very different after all.

Next year we both plan to visit “home.” I’ll be going with her to Eritrea, knowing only the words to the children’s song “Isaac Hawey” in Tigrinya and she will travel to Louisiana wondering about the complexities of crawfish – both in support and friendship.

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## COMMUNITY PROFILE:

### Pythias Temesgen



Pythias recently came to Harvard University from Maryland to interview as a finalist for the QUEST Scholars program. **The Quest Scholars Program (QUEST) is a five-year long leadership and science education program.** We are grateful that he agreed to sit down and chat with the editorial team at ERI-VOICE during his stay. As the only child of a former *tegadelit* (freedom fighter) and young immigrant, Pythias has experienced the best and worst of two “worlds”, ‘North and South’, ‘Developing and Developed’. He is an excellent student, and more importantly an excellent person. Out of humility he is quick to attribute these characteristics to his mother and a host of other influential people in his life.

**EV:** Let’s start with the basics. Where were you born? Where did you spend the early years of your life?

**PT:** I was born in Sahel. At the time my mother was a *tegadelit*. I spent my early years in Sudan, until I moved to United States when I was seven. I moved to Houston, Texas and spent a few years there while my mother studied in England. Our next move was to Maryland, which is where I currently live.

**EV:** What high school do you go to?

**PT:** I’m a junior at Riverdale Baptist High School (private school where he is a scholarship student).

**EV:** What are some of your involvements in school, favorite subjects, personal and academic interests?

**PT:** I’m on the varsity basketball team, involved in the Model UN, and I’m an after school tutor. My favorite subjects are probably History, English, and Calculus. It’s funny I really appreciate English, in fact I feel indebted to the English language. Mastering English allowed me to be fully understood and communicate in this country.

I’ve always had an interest the aeronautical sciences and astronomy. This interest started when I was pretty young with a fascination in the stars and space travel. Academically I can definitely see myself studying aeronautics.

**EV:** What or who inspires you?

**PT:** My mother. She’s an amazing person. Although she did not graduate from high school in Eritrea, when given the opportunity to she went on to excel in college and complete her degree in the UK. She’s really taught me a lot about perseverance. My uncle Fasil, who similar to my mother overcame a lot of obstacles, also inspires me. He’s currently a physicist and university professor.

**EV:** Defining and understanding one’s cultural identity in the US as an immigrant or the child of immigrants requires a good deal of self-actualization and reflection. Are there any ‘lessons learned’ or insights you would to share with us?

**PT:** Well when I first immigrated to the US I became really withdrawn and reserved. I think a lot of that came from wanting to just ‘fit in’, and not stick out so much. Later in life, with my mother’s support, I became more comfortable with my cultural identity.

Through reading books, such as Dan Connell's *Against All Odds*, and talking to older Eritreans about their experiences during their revolution my pride in our historical background has grown. Our heritage is definitely something that we should be proud of.

For more information about the QUEST Scholars program check out:

<http://questscholars.stanford.edu/>

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### **EXPRESSION SECTION:**

#### ***Salvation on the Sahel Mountains***

Ingrained within the hard-edged peak  
Deep in the stark volcanic terrain  
Midst rocks hard humble and meek  
She lay there with excruciating pain

Her crimson life fluid on the ground  
The strong limbs were losing sensation  
Struggling to turn the other way around  
With fast-fading valor and determination

As the blistering orb bled its light  
On the delicately carved valley  
Her soul burned hot and white  
This was the heart-wrenching finale

Before life escaped her calloused hand  
The fallen soldier smiled at her motherland

***By Pythias Temesgen***

### **ANOUNCEMENTS:**

► **CELEBRATION!** Saturday May 29, 2004, the ECC will host a musical event to celebrate Eritrean Independence Day. All Eritreans and their friends are invited to join in this joyous event. The event will be held at 590 Shawmut Avenue, Boston, MA 02116; from 8pm to 2am.

► The Newsletter Team would like to pay tribute to the recent graduates in our community in the next issue of the newsletter. Please e-mail us at [eccnewsletter@yahoo.com](mailto:eccnewsletter@yahoo.com) with the names of recent high school and university graduates. Include information about the school, area of study (where applicable), and degree conferred when you submit each name.

► The annual general meeting of the ECC that convened May 16, 2004 was markedly unpolluted and cordial. After a few important amendments were made to the bylaws of the organization, the meeting then moved to electing new board members. This year it was agreed that the number of board members would drop from thirteen to nine. Accordingly, many from the previous board and a few new comers were elected to serve. We wish the new board great success in the coming year.