

Pain of famine troubles College-sponsored refugee



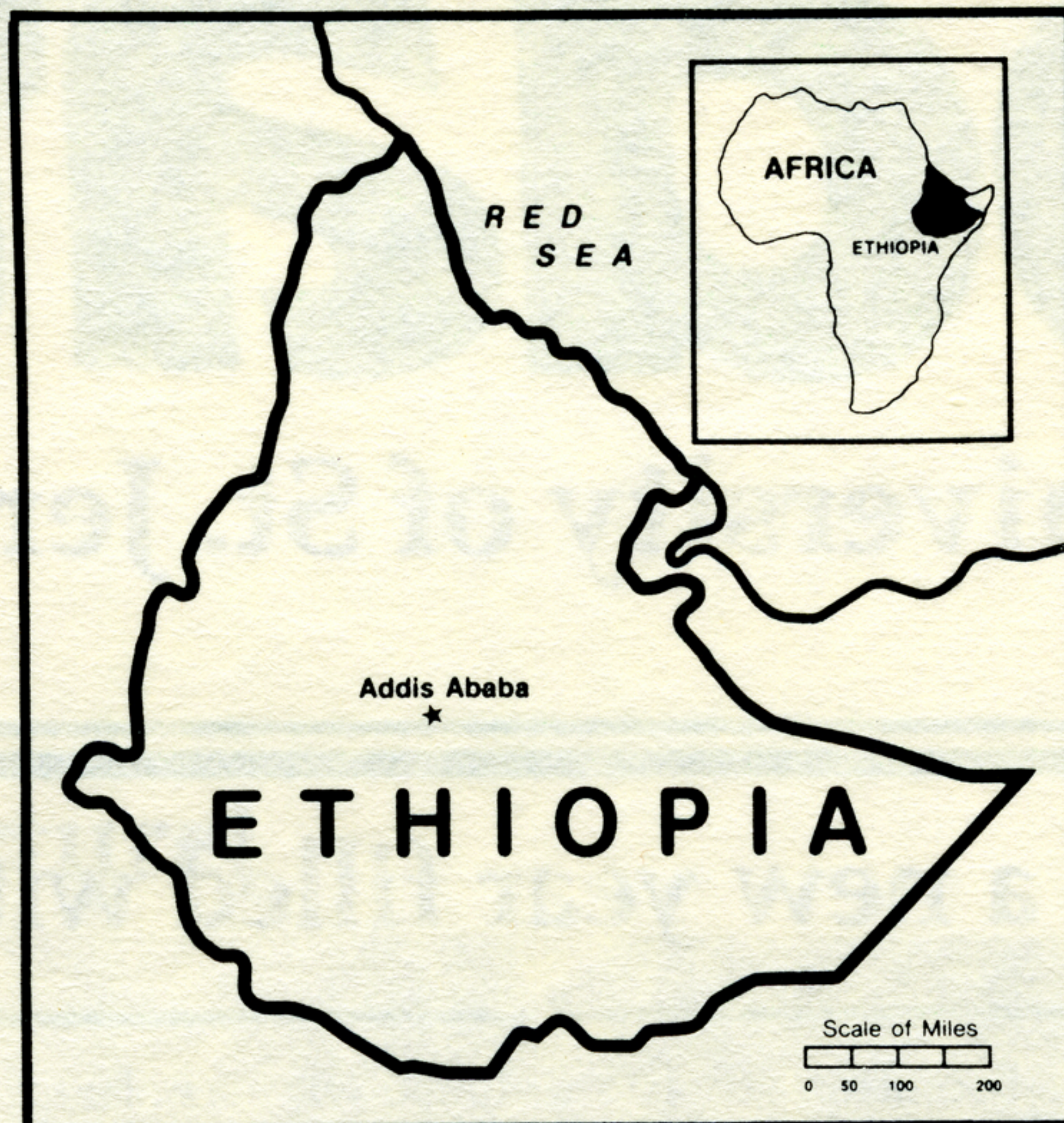
Aweke Alemu: A long path to St. Jerome's

As television magnifies for Canadians the painful images of famine-stricken Ethiopia, a new student at St. Jerome's has a personal stake in that horrific human tragedy half a world away.

Aweke Alemu, 28, of Bale, Ethiopia has been sponsored by the College since his arrival in Canada in September. He was admitted into the second year of an arts program at St. Jerome's following a long and convoluted path; his life in danger, he was a refugee forced to leave his homeland.

Today, as a student in the Men's Residence, Aweke says he finds it difficult not to think about the tragedy in Ethiopia. "I try to study and concentrate, but my mind wanders," he says. He has received word from his family that they are safe but he continues to fear for the worst and sends part of his allowance to them.

He left behind his parents, three brothers and five sisters. "I also have a fiance in Ethiopia and have no idea how to get her here. It's been three years since I've seen her and we communicate regularly by letters," he says. "I believe we will see each other some day - we have that promise."



In Ethiopia he worked in the Ministry of Agriculture for three years and became supervisor of marketing. "The present famine was partially predictable," he says recalling his experience in government. "Agriculture has been largely ignored by the Government as they focus on industrialization. The collective farming policies did not allow for incentive, with the result that some farmers tend not to work. This is compounded by a lack of education in proper farming techniques and severe draught."

A revolution in his country conscripted Aweke into the Ethiopian army for three years. He fought against the Somali nation in the Ogaden Desert war in 1976-77. "I had requested a discharge," he says, "and was promised one, but we were forced at gunpoint to go to the Northern Front to fight against Eritrean Liberation Front. I had little choice but to go."

He stayed for two years and then applied for resignation which, not surprisingly, was rejected. "I quit the army, tired of fighting against my own people, and stayed in the country," he explains. "The authorities issued a warrant for my arrest, falsely claiming that I was giving away government secrets. I was very frightened and went into hiding in the bush for two months. My relatives brought me food, but I was largely without human contact."

Aweke felt forced to make the painful decision to leave Ethiopia. Kenya was a logical destination, as it had been for thousands before him, fleeing an intransigent and corrupt government.

His life threatened by Ethiopian authorities, Aweke arrived in Nairobi under Kenyan government protection. "I reported this death threat to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and they sought my immediate resettlement in Canada or the United States," says Aweke. For two months he lived in hiding in a church-sponsored hostel.

When the Ethiopian government concluded that Aweke was no longer a security risk, he obtained work in Nairobi as Assistant Registrar and eventually as Registrar at the East African School of Theology, where he had studied part-time for one year.

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"I always felt unsure in Kenya, because I did not have true freedom," Aweke recalls. "I feared the Ethiopian Embassy was always watching me. What I really wanted was a country to call my second home, a place where I could live freely and be a good citizen."

Aweke wrote to the World University Services of Canada (WUSC), an organization which seeks sponsors for foreign students and sends specialists to work in underdeveloped countries. After a year, he received word that St. Jerome's would sponsor him through WUSC.

His arrival in Canada was a welcome relief. "I don't feel strange here," he says. "The love I have felt in this short period of time has been beyond my expectations. Something inside me tells me I'm in the right place."

The College has paid for his accommodation and living expenses, Beaver Foods has donated his meal plan and the Student Union is paying for Aweke's books. As a gesture of support, residence students have raised over \$800. for Aweke's family.

Once he completes his studies at St. Jerome's, Aweke plans to return to a Third World country to work in the development and relief field. "I feel obliged to help the poor," he says. "People are dying every day and sometimes I don't see any hope. I must return and do what I can."

Many of the thirty-five graduands at the October 19 Convocation were mature students who earned their degrees largely on a part-time basis. The number of mature students at the College has steadily increased over the years. We welcome the following new graduands to our growing alumni family:

Sharon Mae Anderson
Maureen Baker
Paul Frederick Berger
Craig Kenneth Black
Marguerite Ruth-Ann Botting
Helen Cox

Mary Crooks
William Paul Cross Jr.
Nancy Mary Felka
Mary-Beth Fenlon
Barbara Joan Galvin
Steve Gamble
Patrick Dennis Giroux
Judith Dorothea Gordon
Marion Grace Griffin
Catherine May Hanson
Jill Annette Harris
Anthony Gerard Hirschberger
James Norris Inch
Laurence Hudson Johnston

Theresa LeFebvre LeGare
Daniel John Matwey
Paul Edward McGrory
Heather Louise McGuire
Sharon Ann Meyer
Linda Leslie Miller
Patricia Lynne Mousseau
Victoria Ijeoma Okoroji
Bruce Richard Pearson
Claudia Anne Rudyk
Daniel Henry Seto
Phyllis A. Siegner
Linda Sharon Stone
Donald Stuart Sutherland