



City of Alexandria
Office of Historic Alexandria
Alexandria Legacies
Oral History Program



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Interviewer: *Krystyn Moon*

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Abstract: Afomia Wendemagegn moved from Ethiopia to the United States with her parents when she was seven years old. She is now eighteen and about to graduate from high school. During the interview she recalls her early memories of living in Ethiopia, her school years in Alexandria, and several trips back to Ethiopia. She also shares her favorite Ethiopian foods and music.

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INTRODUCTIONS 0:01:48	
Krystyn Moon	All right. All right, are you ready? All right. So, this is June 4, 2015 and my name is Krystyn Moon and we are doing an interview with Afomia Wendemagegn. And I'll spell that too, since our transcriber will probably want it spelled. W-E-N-D-E—
Afomia Wendemagegn	Uh-huh.
KM	E-M-A-G-E-N—oh, G-E-G-N.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yes.
KM	Great. And how do you say it, Wendemagegn?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Wendemagegn.
KM	Afomia is joining us. We found her, as luck would have it, as an intern here at the Black History Museum in the City of Alexandria [Virginia.] And it's really great to have somebody who's younger, who wants to share their story. Well, what I'd like to start with is your early life.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Uh-huh.
KM	And I know you're only—what—eighteen, right?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Uh-huh.
KM	Your very early life and what it was like growing up in Ethiopia for you.
GROWING UP IN ETHIOPIA 0:02:55	
Afomia Wendemagegn	Okay, so the earliest memories that I have, we used to live in a really like large piece of land, but our house was pretty small. And I didn't have any siblings at the time, but I did live with a lot of cousins, mostly male, but it was still fun. A lot of adventures, including getting in trouble, climbing trees, the neighborhood dogs. We currently—well, we moved like five years ago, after my aunt died, but our new house is great too. Not as much as the previous one, but I still like it. I remember going to school, wearing like sandals and socks and my hair in like little like nubs on my head and wearing a corduroy skirt and a white top. And I would go with my mom—she would often drop

	<p>me off. And she had this like red suit that she would always wear and that's probably one of earliest memories. Probably my first day at school, I would say, going to preschool over there, along with first grade. I don't remember any of my friends, but I do have photos. My mom, thankfully, remembers their names, so I don't have to deal with that. But I do remember the friends that I made when I went back last time, which was in the seventh grade and was for a year. I still keep in touch with my middle school friends, so that's pretty cool. And that's all that I remember about my early life.</p>
KM	<p>And where did your family live in Ethiopia?</p>
Afomia Wendemagegn	<p>Addis Ababa, Bole to be exact.</p>
KM	<p>Okay, how do you spell Bole?</p>
Afomia Wendemagegn	<p>B-O-L-E.</p>
KM	<p>Okay. That's very straightforward. Okay. And what was that neighborhood like?</p>
Afomia Wendemagegn	<p>When I was there—and I haven't been back in a while—but when I was there, it was a lot of houses along the street and a lot of small businesses. So, you really get your eggs from one store and then get your injera from another, which was kind of unheard of at the time, because you would often make your own injera.</p>
KM	<p>What's injera?</p>
Afomia Wendemagegn	<p>Injera is like the staple of our diet. It's like our pancake and it's like the most delicious thing that they have in the world, but I'm biased, so. But yeah, and if you were lucky, your—whoever would cook would allow you to make your own injera in like a weird shape, which was—yeah, I know. It's weird, but it was fun. You know, you get to eat your own injera. You're kind of proud of it, even though it looks like dilapidated butterfly or something like that. But yeah, Bole was—it was safe, a lot of children playing on the sidewalks. I used to—before my mom stopped—well, after my mom stopped dropping me off at school, I used to go with my dad to school. And then after that, we'd gone to like the carpool with like four—maybe three other kids. And I forgot the name of the person who drove us, but I do remember what they looked like. They were very like pale-skinned and they could almost pass for Caucasian, but we knew they were Ethiopian, obviously, because they spoke Amharic, white hair, really nice, used to take us wherever we wanted to go. Um, yeah. And I used to—I had a nanny. Her name was Alma. I actually—I feel like I've seen her</p>

	when I went back in seventh grade, but I'm not sure. She must have been in the countryside, but I remember Alma very well. Basically, it was me, because my mom used to work full-time. And yeah, she basically like did everything, like washing my hair, feeding me, making sure I didn't into too much trouble. But yeah, I remember.
WHAT AFOMIA'S PARENTS DID FOR A LIVING 0:06:51	
KM	What did your mom and dad do for work? You said that your mom worked full time and wore a red suit.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Well, that's the only one I remember.
KM	Oh, that's the only one you remember. What did they do for a living?
Afomia Wendemagegn	I remember my mom used to work for a company called AU or something like that. She worked with my uncle, her older brother. So, I'm not sure what she did, but it was like administrative work, I'm assuming.
KM	Uh-huh.
Afomia Wendemagegn	And my father, he used to own like a taxi and that's probably what he did. Yeah, so.
WHY HER FAMILY MOVED TO THE UNITED STATES 0:07:30	
KM	So, what inspired your family to come to the United States?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Mostly it was for educational purposes. They wanted me to go to college here, but they didn't want the culture shock to affect me. So, instead of going later on in my life, they decided the earlier we came here, the better.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	So, we just—we got a visa and we came here.
KM	Do you know what type of visa or how they obtained the visa?
Afomia Wendemagegn	I'm assuming lottery, but I'm not really sure.
KM	So, the 1990 lottery you came?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Probably.
KM	Yeah.
Afomia	I'm assuming it was that, yeah.

Wendemagegn	
KM	That makes sense. That makes sense. Where did they first live when they came into the United States?
Afomia Wendemagegn	We used to live with my mom's older sister and her family and that was in Rose Hill [neighborhood], I believe. I forgot what apartments, but yeah, it was around there.
KM	In Fairfax County [Virginia]?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yes, it was in Fairfax. So, we lived with them for maybe like less than a year, or something like that, and then afterwards, we found our own apartment in Alexandria and we've been there for like eleven years.
KM	Okay. How old were you, do you remember, when you came to the United States?
Afomia Wendemagegn	I was seven.
KM	You were seven.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah.
KM	So, second grade? First grade?
Afomia Wendemagegn	First grade.
KM	First grade.
Afomia Wendemagegn	I had to finish a quarter of first grade over here. They wouldn't let me into second grade.
KM	Okay. And what part of the city did your family end up finding an apartment?
Afomia Wendemagegn	We—I mean we've lived at the same place. So, it's like off of King Street. It's on Edsall [Road.]
KM	Uh, huh.
Afomia Wendemagegn	So, it's—I mean it's pretty busy. It's near Eisenhower Metro, so it's fairly busy, but not like—not like [Washington] D.C. busy.
KM	Yeah, yeah. So, your family moved to Alexandria. How did they find this place to live? Do you know?
Afomia Wendemagegn	I don't really remember. Yeah, I just remember like moving in and there were boxes everywhere.
PARENTS FINDING WORK 0:09:31	

KM	What were your parents doing for work when you came here? Do you remember?
Afomia Wendemagegn	I think they both were working at a restaurant or something like that as waiters or as servers, or maybe Subway [sandwich shop] or something like that. So, that's what I—I think that's what they did.
KM	Okay. Were they—do you think they were waiting tables at an Ethiopian restaurant?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Probably not.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Because if it was Ethiopian I probably would have remembered.
KM	And you can't remember, okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah, I don't really. I mean like that area is kind of blurry, so.
KM	Okay. So, you mentioned you had an aunt in Rose Hill.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Uh-huh.
OTHER FAMILY IN THE AREA 0:10:10	
KM	Did you have other family in the area?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Oh yeah. I have another aunt who also lived in Rose Hill.
KM	Uh-huh.
Afomia Wendemagegn	She's like—she's like five minutes away from Eisenhower [Metro station.] So, it's like really—.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	She's like around the border of Fairfax [County].
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	And we never lived with her, but we do have close ties with her. And this summer, we've taken her son, my cousin, to move in with us. So, we're really close.
KM	So, they came how many years before your parents to the United States?

Afomia Wendemagegn	I'm not really sure. But they were—they were there for a while before we came.
KM	For your family's initial support system, obviously your aunts were central to that. Were they your dad's sisters or your mom's sisters?
Afomia Wendemagegn	My mom's sisters.
KM	Your mom's sisters.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah.
KM	Did any of your dad's family come over?
Afomia Wendemagegn	My uncle came over.
KM	Oh, you have an uncle. Did he come over before or after your dad?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Way after my dad. He came here to like get his Master's degree.
KM	Oh, okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	And I think he was engineering or something like that, so yeah. But now he lives here, so.
KM	Okay. Did he come on a student visa or—?
Afomia Wendemagegn	I think it was a student visa.
ETHIOPIAN CHURCH AND BAPTISM 0:11:27	
KM	Did your family become involved in one of the local Ethiopian churches? Can you tell us a little bit about that?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Well, there's a church called Kidane Mehret [http://kidane-mehret.org] near like KFC [fast food], near a landmark.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	And it's kind of hidden, but you know it's there by the—I don't know if you've ever been to—they go in and out wearing like their white traditional garb.
KM	Yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	But yeah, we—we go to church. We're not overly religious, but we do try to go like especially around the holidays. And we do teach religion at home. So, yeah. And baptisms and stuff are always occurring. My

	favorite tradition is when you take like the baby after you baptize him, you take him home and then you roll him around on like an injera for good luck.
KM	Oh really?
Afomia Wendemagegn	And then everyone eats pieces of the injera. And—well, from where I used to be, that was so weird. But now it's like it's cute. I was like, "Oh, oh"—.
KM	That's really cute.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah.
KM	How old are the babies usually?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Oh, it's like forty—it's different for boys and girls, but they're all around like forty days after they're born they become baptized.
KM	Okay. Is that your favorite holiday thing at the church?
ETHIOPIAN CHRISTMAS	0:12:30.0
Afomia Wendemagegn	My favorite holiday is Genna, which is Ethiopian Christmas.
KM	Okay. Yeah and is that a different time of year?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah, that's different. That's like—that's after our Christmas—the American Christmas.
KM	American Christmas.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah. I don't know how—.
KM	I want to say January seventh, is that right?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Around that time.
KM	Yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah. Yeah, because we're at—yeah, I was—I'm born around that time. I was born on the Epiphany, so it's—I think it's before that. So, I'm not sure, but it's around that time. That's all I know. And so, yeah, that's my favorite time. You don't get gifts, but you do get to hang around with family. Well, I mean over here you get gifts, but—.
KM	It's very American.
Afomia	Yeah. It's very American, yeah. But there's all this food and there's

Wendemagegn	family, so.
KM	Okay. Is there a special dish for Ethiopian Christmas?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Doro wot.
KM	Doro wot?
Afomia Wendemagegn	It's like D-O-R-O W-O-T, and that's two words.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	And it's like a stew made with like chicken with like hard-boiled eggs in it and it's really spicy. I mean you can change like the use of spiciness, but we like it hot.
KM	Yeah, yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	So, yeah, but you can eat doro wot for like anything.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	It's just associated with Genna. That's probably my favorite. Before I turned vegetarian, that was my favorite dish.
KM	Okay. What made you turn vegetarian?
Afomia Wendemagegn	At first it was for health reasons, now just used to it. I'm sure if I started eating meat again, I'd be fine, but it's—it depends.
OTHER ACTIVITIES FAMILY WAS INVOLVED IN 0:14:09	
KM	What sort of other activities did your family become involved in early on? Were there soccer teams?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Not really. My family was—we're kind of like internal. Like we're not really outgoing.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah. We're not—well, not—I don't know that. It's just really we're fine with each other and maybe like hang out with other Ethiopian families around the neighborhood, but that's the extent. We do go to like Ethiopian events to support the Ethiopian community. So, if there's like a soccer game, we'll probably go down to like D.C. or Maryland to watch it. We all have like Ethiopian jerseys and stuff like that, even like traditional garb. That's our must-have.
TRADITIONAL ETHIOPIAN GARB 0:14:49	
KM	Why don't you describe that a little bit?

Afomia Wendemagegn	Okay.
KM	The white—particularly for women.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah. Well, they’re dresses.
KM	Uh-huh.
Afomia Wendemagegn	They’re becoming more modernized now, getting shorter and like straps and everything. But I like the original—the traditional one, where—I mean it’s like it’s sleeveless, but it’s very thick straps. So you know, it’s like professional looking. It’s an elastic waist, so, you know, as you grow or as you shrink, it goes with and shrinks with you. It’s usually—it touches the forearm, maybe a little bit higher and it’s completely white, except for the little designs. There’s like a band of design on the bottom and the scarf—the netela that comes with it.
KM	Netela?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Netela, yeah. It has a little band on it too that matches the band on the dress.
KM	It’s almost like a thick ribbon, right?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah.
KM	That’s elaborately designed.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah. And it depends on the [inaudible]. It could have like a design down the middle. It could have a design going down the sides, at the bottom only. It just depends on what you want.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah. And they’re coming in different styles now, so. It’s cool.
ATTENDING SCHOOL 0:16:06	
KM	Yeah. Can you talk a little bit about school? Do you remember what your first day of school was like? And can you tell us where you went to school for first grade?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Uh-huh. Yeah. I went to Rose Hill Elementary School.
KM	Uh-huh.
Afomia	And it wasn’t—I don’t think it was for a full year.

Wendemagegn	
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	But I remember I used to kind of get picked on for my accent or I would have like a lapse in language, where I would begin to say something in English and finish it Amharic and the teacher would be like, “What are you saying?” I’m like, “Oh, I’m sorry. I meant blah, blah, blah.” And never really bothered me, it just kind of weirded me out, like—.
KM	Yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	You know, I was just like, “I’m human. So what?” You know what I mean? But I guess I really liked the fact that they thought it was—kids sure thought it was important is what kind of freaked me out a little bit, because then you’ll be like—we used to have children from like other places come and visit us. And I mean, after the initial culture shock wears off, while I was either welcoming or—you know—a person would usually like find their way in. But here it’s kind of like—you kind of get teased a little bit for the accent. And I mean I was fine with it, but it does. Until you find like who you—which group you kind of fit into, it’s kind of hard. But afterwards, you’re just fine with it. It’s the same over there too. When I went back in seventh grade, I had like an American accent now.
KM	Yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	So, they—.
KM	Yeah. It’s the same. You have a very American accent.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah. So, it’s like—it’s not distinguishable, so they used to pick on me for that. You kind of just have to stand up and be like, “I don’t really care. Stop.” And then they will get over it.
KM	Yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	It’s the same over there.
KM	You went to Rose Hill for like probably a [an academic] quarter?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah.
KM	And then you moved to Alexandria—.
Afomia Wendemagegn	In the second grade.

KM	In the second grade. And what school did you go to there?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Samuel Tucker.
KM	Oh, Sam Tucker, okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah.
KM	And then can you talk a little bit about what it was like there? Was there—making friends, was a little different than Rose Hill? Were there other Ethiopian kids, for example, in your class?
Afomia Wendemagegn	There were definitely more Ethiopian kids.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Because the neighborhood I live in is predominantly like—it's mostly Africans from—like they had just came to the country and there's a lot of Ethiopians where I live, even more so now.
KM	Yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	So, a lot of friends—Ethiopian friends I made in second grade I'm still friends with and I'm like graduating with, so that's exciting. But yeah, I mean I actually—I loved second grade. I remember my teacher, Ms. Long. I think she moved to Texas, but I'm not really sure. But she was really kind. I had a lot of fun in her class. By that time, my accent was kind of like—it wasn't gone, but it wasn't as noticeable or I guess people didn't care as much anymore. So, it was kind of easy to fit in. But I always did like Heritage Night, and I've spoken Amharic to whoever was Ethiopian. My parents were big on culture.
KM	Good.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah, that's something that something that I'm really big on it, too.
KM	Yeah. You mentioned that your neighborhood—there were not just Ethiopians living there, but also—.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah.
PEOPLE FROM OTHER PARTS OF AFRICA 0:19:22	
KM	Other folks elsewhere in Africa.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah.

KM	Do you remember where?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah, like Ghana, Syria. I think there were a few Kenyans. I mean those were like the top three.
KM	That you remember?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah.
KM	And did they also have kids going to Tucker?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Oh yeah, yeah.
KM	Yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Most of my neighborhood—my neighborhood is pretty close-knit. So, whoever you went to elementary school with, you probably still graduated with. So, I think that's pretty cool.
EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES 0:20:02	
KM	Yeah, that is great. So, then when you went to Tucker, did you also—and you moved to Alexandria, did you start getting involved in extracurricular activities at school or with your family?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah, at school. I joined—I joined a lot of clubs. And my thing is, I like to stay committed to one club, but I also like to try something new.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	But with my volunteering and my work schedules, it kind of becomes too much. So, I often go from club to club every year. So, I remember in tenth grade, I joined like an Ethiopian-Eritrean club.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	And I was also in—oh—Project Discovery.
KM	Uh-huh.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Which I really liked. And then the next year, I'm going to FBLA, which I competed for and I actually got first—Future Business Leaders of America.
KM	[Laughing]
Afomia Wendemagegn	I loved—I loved FBLA. I loved competing for them. And that's also where I got like a sense of like how to be professional in the workplace and things like that. And I also—well then I was still in

	Project Discovery, which I've done a lot through applying for college and stuff like that. And then senior year now, I belong to the Chess Club and Academy of Finance. It's half a class, half a club. It's kind of like a weird hybrid of both, but I love it. And I was—I'm also part of the Asian Culture Club. Yeah.
KM	What made you decide to join the Asian Culture Club?
Afomia Wendemagegn	I've always been fascinated in Asian culture, especially in food.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	And their sense of style.
KM	Spicy food?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Spicy food. Thai food is probably my favorite right now.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	But I will say Vietnamese, like pho [traditional soup made with white rice flour noodles and clear broth].
KM	Yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Is also my favorite, so it's—.
KM	That's spicy too.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah, it's—and it's also vegetarian, which is like the best part. So, I don't have to give that up ever. But yeah, so I like Asian Culture Club and to see what's out there. And I also volunteer. I volunteer here, at ABHM [Alexandria Black History Museum] and I also volunteered at Gadsby's Tavern [Museum] and Alexandria Beatley Library. And I also tutor my next door neighbor. She has a daughter.
KM	Uh-huh.
Afomia Wendemagegn	And she's in fourth grade now I believe.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	And so, I tutor her or I help her with homework, whatever it is she really needs. So, I enjoy doing that as well. Yeah.
ATTENDING TC WILLIAMS HIGH SCHOOL 0:22:20	
KM	So, a lot of the clubs you mentioned are at T.C. Williams [High

	School], right?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Uh-huh.
KM	Do you want to talk a little bit what it was like to be at T.C. Williams? What were your favorite classes?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Uh-huh.
KM	How it sort of changed or how did you change as you were in high school?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Well, when I first got to high school, I was kind of like—I mean not everyone goes through this, but middle school is kind of tough on some people, because you’re kind of transitioning and—.
KM	I think it’s tough on everybody.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Oh yeah. And like puberty is just happening and you’re just like, “What am I?” And then you get into high school and it’s like even worse.
KM	Yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	And then you kind of like—it kind of stops like and you’re just happier. Not happy, but you’re content after all. So, that was tenth grade for me.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Middle school—I was kind of—middle school was kind of like a blur. I don’t really like to remember anything. It was kind of not—I don’t want to say a bad time, but it was just not as—I wasn’t as happy as I could be. And so, high school was when I really like—.
KM	Like came into your own.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah. That’s—that’s the way to put it. I found out like—you know—what I like, what I don’t like, who my real friends are, who I don’t like, and how to be honest and how not to be a doormat anymore, and how to kind of lose control a little bit.
KM	Yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	That’s my Type A personality going through.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	So, yeah. So, tenth grade I’m in—my favorite class was probably English class.

KM	Uh-huh.
Afomia Wendemagegn	And my teacher there introduced me to like some literature. I mean I love to read personally, but it was often fiction or—I mean something having to do with fiction.
KM	Yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	And he introduced me to like theoretical works or satires, I mean like Voltaire’s Candide. That’s probably one of my favorite books now.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	And I him to thank for that. And in eleventh grade, my favorite class was probably Biology, because it kind of has to do with what I want to do with the rest of my life, which is be a neurologist. So, I love biology, especially when we were dissecting cats. Everyone was just about to throw up and like two other students were just, “Oh my God!” Like I’m holding its leg in my hand. That was probably the best part. And this year, I—I’m going to the Academy of Finance this year.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	I was a TA [Teaching Assistant] for my teacher third quarter, so he’s probably the teacher I’m closest with now.
KM	Uh-huh.
Afomia Wendemagegn	And I mean T.C. [Williams] is wonderful, because of the diversity. There’s so many people from everywhere and you can make friends—like new friends literally any year. Like I’ve kept a close circle of friends that I’ve known throughout my life, but I’ve met new people. I actually—our prom was on May 29 [2015] and I made like two new friends at prom. So, that’s how—that’s how great T.C. is. It’s so big that like you can meet someone new at any time. Yeah.
ETHIOPIAN-ERITREAN CLUB 0:25:27	
KM	That’s interesting. Two questions and I’ll do one first and then I’ll ask the other one in a little bit. You mentioned the Ethiopian-Eritrean Club.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Uh-huh.
KM	At T.C.?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Uh-huh.
KM	Is there—is there one for when you were in middle school and

	elementary school or is it just at T.C. Williams?
Afomia Wendemagegn	I'm not aware of any at the other schools. The only one I've seen is at T.C. and it's under a different management now. So, maybe all them was different than at T.C., just different people working it, so it's not the same and it doesn't feel the same to you.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Half the group stayed, half the group left, and now there's like new people coming in.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah, I liked better the previous president. So, I'm part of the old group. But now there's like new management.
KM	Okay. There's a long history, of course, of conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, right?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Uh-huh.
KM	I'm curious, did this club emerge as a way to bring them together from those two nations, to sort of work through these issues?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Honestly speaking, from the kids that I've met, it's not been a problem.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	We all kind of assume that, okay, like you're Eritrean. That's great. Like the fight was not with us, that was our like previous generation, so it shouldn't apply to us. So, I mean, we don't really care if you're Eritrean or you're Ethiopian. We were once the same country, so we're kind of the same people.
KM	Yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	So, I mean the group, it helped in get—helping us like know about other cultures.
KM	Uh-huh.
Afomia Wendemagegn	But it wasn't—it didn't really have to bridge a gap, because to me there was no gap between the two countries.
KM	Okay. Did they organize cultural events or were there dialogues? What sort of activities did it organize?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Often it was you would put on a show at the end of the year—.

KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	With you know, various—there’s a lot of culture groups, ethnic groups in Ethiopia, so we try to showcase the most like prominent ones, the ones that we know of anyways. So, there’s probably like—there’s like Amhara, which is what I am. There’s Oromiyaa, Tigrinya, and there’s probably more.
KM	These are basically linguistic ethnic groups, right?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Uh-huh. Yeah, there’s like eighty-six or something now, so yeah. So, it’s just showing the most like commonly known ones.
KM	Right.
Afomia Wendemagegn	And maybe some of the not commonly known ones. And then the proceeds that we got from donations we got out of the show would go to an agency in Ethiopia, who could help distribute the money to underprivileged people.
KM	Uh-huh.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Mostly kids.
GRADUATION AND VACATIONING IN ETHIOPIA 0:28:12	
KM	Uh-huh. Good. And then my other question is going to shift in a different way. You’re graduating.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Uh-huh.
KM	In what? A week?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Well, two weeks.
KM	Two weeks, in two weeks. And you’re—what are your plans this summer and then for the future?
Afomia Wendemagegn	So, I’m really excited for days after graduation, so, June nineteenth, I’m going back to Ethiopia for the summer. Two full months, so I’m really happy about that. And we’re going to be touring everywhere, so not just staying in the city, like we normally do. We’re going to go to like Lalibela and Fasilides.
KM	What is Lali—?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Lalibela? Lalibela is the church in the—in the rock.

KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	It was completely built out of like a large rock and it was like a gigantic cross.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah, it's probably like—I think it's one of the wonders of the world or something like that.
KM	Is it like—how old is it?
Afomia Wendemagegn	It's pretty old.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	And the thing that amazes me is that like no machinery at all was used to create it. It was like by hand, so it's like—it's amazing.
KM	Is it above ground or below the ground?
Afomia Wendemagegn	It's in the ground. Like if this is the ground, there's like a hole and then there's a cross. It's like a building. It's like a 3D [three dimensional] cross. And it's like whoa, right. And you did that with your hands. That's amazing.
KM	And then what was the other place you mentioned?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Fasilides. There's some castles there. I don't know which king it was. It's either like Tegwos or something like that. I'm not sure.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	I'm not that great at Ethiopian history, unfortunately. But yeah, I really want to see the ruins there. There's also the ruins at the ruins at the Queen of Sheba's Palace.
KM	Yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	So, I really want to see that. And part of that is next to like a lake, so it's kind of like a beach.
KM	Oh, okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	But yeah, it's supposed to be fun. And one of my cousins went and they were like, "I had a blast." So, I'm like I want to go too.
KM	That's great. So, you're going just with your mom and dad or is it—?
Afomia Wendemagegn	I mean we're probably going to take some other people with us.
KM	Your cousins.

Afomia Wendemagegn	My cousin and my brother—my younger brother. He’s six, so I don’t know how that’s going to work, but he’ll have fun. He’ll be fine.
KM	Six is very different.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah.
GOING TO COLLEGE 0:30:25	
KM	Great, great. And then after that, you’ll come back here and you’re going to go where?
Afomia Wendemagegn	After that, I’m actually going directly to college the day after I come back. William and Mary [The College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia.]
KM	And are you undeclared?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Well, I know what I want to do, but my parents are like, “Just to be sure, just go in undeclared.”
KM	So, what do you want to do?
Afomia Wendemagegn	I want to—I know I’m going to dual major.
KM	Uh-huh.
Afomia Wendemagegn	In neuroscience and probably premed.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	And I haven’t chosen a minor yet, but I’m thinking of finance or something along that area, seeing as how I went to the Academy of Finance for three years, I might as well make good use out of it. It’s like that’s my plans, but it could always change.
KM	And it’s okay to do that.
STAYING CONNECTED TO YOUR HERITAGE 0:31:21	
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah, right.
KM	Great. I wanted to make sure we got all the future plans too. Oh, one of the big issues that we like to talk about with our interviewees is about staying connected to your heritage and you’ve actually talked a lot about that already. Your family speaks Amharic.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Uh-huh.

KM	Great. Did you go to Amharic school here or did you just practice speaking it and writing it at home? How did—how did your family make sure you kept connected to your language?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Well, when I was in kindergarten and first grade in Ethiopia, you have to take—you have to be—like English requirement, so you have to take English, French, and Amharic.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	And then after I came here, I unfortunately forgot French, but I kept Amharic. And then we go back a lot, like three, four, five years, depending on the timeline. So, I went back the fourth grade summer.
KM	Uh-huh.
Afomia Wendemagegn	And so, that kind of helped me build back up on French and Amharic.
KM	Yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	But I get like—you know—your French was totally gone. And back in seventh grade, that's when I learned how to read and write and in Amharic.
KM	Uh-huh.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Which is perfect timing, because I was starting to lose the language, but—.
KM	Were you in a special school in seventh and eighth grade?
Afomia Wendemagegn	In seventh—it was just seventh grade and it was kind of like a school, but like—I think the woman was like British or something like that. So, it was—it was built by an external party.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	But it was—the majority wasn't filled in and they were a few like exchange students. And there were a lot of students that also came from America and were Ethiopian and so they kind of understood like what I was going through. So, it wasn't people that I normally hung out with—along with like a few others—and—um—that also helped me retain the language, so now I'm still fluent in it. So, I read, write. And I mean, it's pretty hard to forget after you're an adult and you kind of know it. And we speak Amharic at home.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	So, it's—you can't help but know it.

KM	So and you've traveled back to Ethiopia—you came here when you were—?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Seven, came back in fourth grade, and went back—oh, no, no. I was seven and then came here. And then I went back in fourth grade and came back. And I went back in seventh grade, then came back. And now, I'm about to go.
KM	And then each time, it's always sort of connecting to family and heritage and—.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Uh-huh.
KM	And travels. Why do you think that's important to your parents?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Well, I mean it's a lot of—I'm not going to say a lot—but some Ethiopian kids are losing their heritage, simply because their parents—they're not forced—but they don't enforce it.
KM	Uh-huh.
Afomia Wendemagegn	And I mean, it's good to be assimilated to the American culture, of course, but it's also—I don't think it's a good idea to lose sight of where you come from. And the thing is—there was a lot of—the previous generation kids, who are like in their thirties now and their parents came over here when they were like much younger, they always tell people like they kind of regret that they don't retain the language or they don't retain how to write or whatever. And I mean, that's kind of like a worry to me. I don't want—you know—I don't want to regret not knowing it, so I might as well know it. And it's interesting it. And it's nice to—you know—feel like you're a part of something else, alongside being part of American culture as well. I like to think I'm like a hybrid of both, so.
KM	Uh-huh.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah, I'm trying to get my brother to join that—in that.
KM	He's six though, right?
Afomia Wendemagegn	He's six, yeah. I mean he listens, so that's good. He can't talk yet, but knows a few words.
KM	That's good.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah, so.
CITIZENSHIP 0:35:06	

KM	One question is I also had—sort of following that up with did your parents become naturalized U.S. citizens or are they both Ethiopian and U.S. citizens?
Afomia Wendemagegn	No, we're—we can't have dual citizenship, so we're—well, it's kind of weird how it works out.
KM	Yes, it is.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Here, we're American citizens.
KM	Uh-huh.
Afomia Wendemagegn	So, we have like real passports.
KM	Uh-huh.
Afomia Wendemagegn	And that happened I think when I was twelve or something like that.
KM	Do you remember going to a ceremony?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah. We had to like stand up and say the pledge, after everyone has taken the test. And they were like, "You are now U.S. citizens." And I remember it was raining and I was cranky and I was like, "Why are we here?" And now I realize. I'm like, "Oh! That's why I can go to college now."
KM	Yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	So, yeah. I remember that day.
KM	Was it in Alexandria?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah, I think so.
KM	Okay. Because they do it here. That's why—they're—they have a ceremony every year here.
Afomia Wendemagegn	I'm pretty sure it was here, yeah. Because I remember those—and I mean they told me to dress up. I might dress up, but they told me to look nice. But I was just—I was cranky at that time. I remember. So, I was wearing jeans and a sweater, kind of like how I'm dressed now, but without the choker. And I just—I just went in and I was like, "Wow, I'm so clearly underdressed." Because most of the people were like in suits and my parents were dressed up too and then there's me in jeans and boots and I was like, "Wow." But I was pretty decent.

	I'm sure they understood.
KM	Yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	And then in Ethiopia, I'm assuming we're dual citizens, because they do it that way.
KM	Yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	But all in all, we're like American citizens.
KM	Yeah. It's a pretty typical situation for a lot of people.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah.
FAVORITE FOOD 0:36:52	
KM	We talked a little bit about food. What does your mom make at home that's your favorite dish?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Oh, that's a hard one. Oh my God! That's like saying like if you had to choose one food to eat for the rest of your life, which one would it be?
KM	Well, how about you talk about a bunch of dishes that you—that your mom does a really great job doing, that you love, and that sort of helps connect you to Ethiopia too.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Well, my mom is an overall great cook. So, like everything she makes is wonderful. And I'm not just saying that because she's my mom. But I'd say like doro wot is probably like one of the top things. Fit-fit, which is basically a hybrid of like a stew and injera.
KM	Uh-huh.
Afomia Wendemagegn	You kind of like mush it.
KM	Yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Like that does not sound appetizing at all, but like it's so good. And then there's like a cold variant of that, which is called shiro fit-fit. And I mean, normally, it's used to get rid of hangovers.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	But for some reason, like I love it.
KM	Okay.
Afomia	Like it's so good and it's like on ice, which is so amazing to me. It's

Wendemagegn	like, “Injera and ice? Like what are you doing?” But when you add the other stuff, it’s really good.
KM	Yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah. Kitfo, which is basically like—it’s kind of like ground meat, fried a little bit, with some like spices on it. And you eat with injera.
KM	Uh-huh.
Afomia Wendemagegn	So, that’s good but they’re just hearing it now, so it’s not happening. There’s also tibs, which is basically like cubed meat and you fry it with like the spices again, rosemary, a little bit of mitmita and salt and like peppers and stuff like that and it’s so good. Everything’s good.
KM	Yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	So, I can’t really complain. There’s a lot of stews, various stews. So, there’s like shiro, there’s like mesir wat, alicha wat. There’s gomen, which is like—it’s kind of like—it’s kind of like kale.
KM	Kale?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Well, yeah. It’s kind of like boiled kale with spices in it. I like it, so that’s fine for me.
KM	And it’s vegetarian.
Afomia Wendemagegn	And it’s vegetarian. A lot of foods are vegetarian, so I’m like at the right place. So, yeah. So, she makes everything. And she tries to teach me, but I’m so lazy. It’s not happening. I mean eventually.
KM	Oh yeah, eventually it will happen.
Afomia Wendemagegn	I know some stuff.
ETHIOPIAN MUSIC AND DANCE 0:39:27	
KM	Yeah. Do you also listen to any Ethiopian music?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Oh yeah.
KM	Or dance?
Afomia Wendemagegn	I’m like a hard-core Teddy Afro fan.
KM	Teddy?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Teddy Afro.

KM	Afro—oh, Teddy Afro, yeah. Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Like I have been like waiting until I'm eighteen to go to one of his concerts, because there's alcohol.
KM	Oh, okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	But they will let you in as a minor, so long as you have a little like—.
KM	A special band [bracelet, signifying you cannot be served alcohol].
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah.
KM	Or a stamp or something, yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	So, I've been waiting like—I would have got tickets last year, but I was like seventeen and a half, and so they were like, "No, I'm sorry. You have to be eighteen," and I only missed—and I'm just like—my dreams were crushed. But yeah, like Teddy Afro is like the best. Like I love him. And I know like every Ethiopian is going to say that. But like, oh my God! And when he got married, I was like—I was happy, but I was also a conflicted fangirl, because I mean I just assumed like me and Teddy were going to be together forever. Like what can you do? It was like Teddy Afro is kind of like the Justin Bieber of Habesha girls.
KM	Yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	But like he's better than Justin Bieber. He's Teddy Afro.
KM	Yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	So, yeah. He's my favorite. There's also Abinet Agonafir. He does—he kind of does a mixture of like all—not all—but like a few ethnic group dances. And it's—I don't know. Like I love him too. There's also Aster Aweke. She's the female Teddy Afro.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	And her like—her range is so rich. Like her voice is kind of nasaly, but it's just—it's so good. Like it sounds amazing and the way she can kind of like—I don't know what the word for it is in Amharic, but it's kind of like—it's not like—it's kind of warbly.
KM	Uh-huh.
Afomia Wendemagegn	It's like a warbling sound, but it's—it just sounds like amazing. So, she's great and she lives in D.C., too, so I'm kind of [inaudible] about

	that. And there's also like popstars like Liya, Liya—what was her name? Liya Olga or something. I don't know. I forgot her name. And like Zodi, who did like a mashup of like Ethiopian music with like American lyrics.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah, so like when I'm driving, that's what I listen to. I'm just like, yes, you get it Zodi, you're the best, but she only had like one hit. I don't know what else she sings. So, I'm still trying to like find her. But yeah. I listen to any type of—.
KM	Ethiopian pop.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Ethiopian pop. I also listen to like old Ethiopian music.
KM	Uh-huh.
Afomia Wendemagegn	So like my favorite old song is [unclear-name of a song.] And like all—like younger Ethiopians are going to be like what is she saying. And all the older Ethiopians are going to be like, “Yes, that's the song.” And it is. I love that song. It's actually in my bar. It's like the CD is in my bar.
KM	It is?
Afomia Wendemagegn	I'm just like, “Yeah, this is my song.” And I do love to dance, especially at weddings where they just like go to town, so I can dance to any like song. My entire family dances.
KM	Yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	It's like everyone. Even like the little kids know how to do most of the steps. So, I'm just like, “Yes! Good for you, little kids.”
SPORTS 0:42:36	
KM	Do you do any sports?
Afomia Wendemagegn	No. Do my own individual thing. I'm not really good at team sports.
KM	Okay. I understand.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Just because—I like to do on my own time, instead of having it scheduled. So, in my free time, kind of I run, I do Pilates. I attempted yoga, but not like that well. I'm more of a Pilates person. I used to play tennis with my dad, but then we lost our racquets and it just—it went downhill from there.
KM	Okay, yeah.

Afomia Wendemagegn	I know how to play volleyball. I don't play it, but I do know how to play it. That's about it. What else do I do?
KM	Do you watch sports, like maybe soccer?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Soccer, World Cup. So far, I am a [Pittsburgh] Steelers [football] fan.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Well, I mean like if—it depends. Like football, I'm like iffy a lot. Like if I'm in the mood, I'll watch it, otherwise not.
KM	You mean American football.
Afomia Wendemagegn	American football yeah. Soccer, the same thing. If it's my team, I'll watch it. If it's not, I won't.
KM	So, what is your team?
Afomia Wendemagegn	I love Argentina.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Argentina, yes. I like Messi, Lionel Messi.
KM	Weren't they here recently?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah.
KM	Up at Georgetown [University.]
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah.
KM	I heard.
Afomia Wendemagegn	I missed it, yeah.
KM	I was like, "Oh my God! I'm psyched!"
Afomia Wendemagegn	I was so mad. I was like, Messi, come back! But he's my favorite. Yeah, basketball, not really a fan.
KM	Okay.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Any other sport, really. But we watch the Olympics a lot. I love the Olympics and stuff.
KM	Do you have a favorite sport in the Olympics?

Afomia Wendemagegn	I don't know what it's called, but when he's pole vaulting—when the girl like—or guy runs and they just like—.
KM	Yeah, yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah. And for some reason, that's so interesting to me. I'm just like—you know—it's like they take that pole and they jump.
KM	They run.
Afomia Wendemagegn	With the pole.
KM	And they stick it in the ground and then they go over the bar, right?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah, yeah. I think its pole vaulting?
KM	I don't know. I don't know. We'll have to figure it out.
Afomia Wendemagegn	It's so interesting. I'm just like how? Like how can you get up there? But yeah. Oh, yeah. And I also—I love to like jump on trampolines. It's like where I exercise, there's a place in Springfield. It's like flight—a flight. I love flight. And you're like gross and sweaty afterwards, but it's totally worth it. It's a great place.
STAYING CONNECTED WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS IN ETHIOPIA 0:45:10	
KM	How else do you stay connected with family and friends back in Ethiopia? Do you call or text?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Oh yeah.
KM	What's the best—what's the best way to stay connected?
Afomia Wendemagegn	I mean calling is pretty good. You have to buy a phone card and then you have to like scratch them off and be like, oh, you know, the PIN and the passcode and the—it's like a process, but it's pretty good rate to talk to family. There's also an app called Viber.
KM	Viber.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah. You can text on that. You can video chat on that. You can call on that.
KM	And that's for international?
Afomia Wendemagegn	That's international, yeah. You just need WIFI for it.
KM	Okay. And it's free?

Afomia Wendemagegn	It's free.
KM	V-I-B-E-R?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Uh-huh. Viber. I did. I used—.
KM	[inaudible]
Afomia Wendemagegn	I have never heard of that. I got to write that down.
KM	Yeah, I know. This is what we do.
Afomia Wendemagegn	I think my uncle told me—you can play games on Tango? I'm so excited. I think my uncle told me, but I like didn't download it. Maybe I did and I like deleted—I don't know. You know, I'll just find it after this interview.
FINAL REMARKS 0:46:20	
KM	That's fine. One last question. Do you have anything else you want to add or share to be part of your oral history?
Afomia Wendemagegn	I mean no. Really, I feel like I've said everything that—I mean hopefully this creates like a nice like juxtaposition of the two—two generations.
KM	I think we might use this for multiple generations, yeah.
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah. I like this in how it's different. You know, when I came here, it was like two thousands, so it was like Paris Hilton was big.
KM	Oh really?
Afomia Wendemagegn	Yeah, you know. Yeah, so it was different when my aunt's been here and people older than them it was probably different. So, it would be nice to see it. And I mean I hope I didn't like move around too much—you know—talk with my hands. But otherwise, I don't have anything.
KM	All right, perfect.
Terilee Edwards-Hewitt	All right. We're done.
KM	We're done.
END OF AUDIO 0:47:40	