

Brother/Sister, Won't You Donate A Brick!

San Giorgio School Reconstruction Party of October 31, 2009

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The avidly awaited and much advertised San Giorgio School Reconstruction Party of October 31, 2009, has come and gone. To date, a full account of the event has not been posted. What transpired during that evening? Consider the following account comprising only a few frames from the panoramic view of the evening.



Before the evening party was underway, a brainstorming session was convened. Present were guests from various states of the US and Canada. The meeting officially recognized the National Association for the Reconstruction of San Giorgio School, Inc. as the umbrella organization. The meeting also expanded the current leadership by adding to it representatives from other states, including Canada, and empowered it to centralize and coordinate all activities.



The party was held at the Double Tree Hotel in Arlington, Virginia. The spaciousness and ambience of the venue were simply awesome. Securing such a venue was a measure of the aptitude and negotiating skill of the organizers. Needless to say, the aura that permeated the hall instilled a sense of pride in the attendees. The speakers of the evening and the invited guests wore professionally prepared name badges. The entrance to the hall was decked with posters and t-shirts, all reminders of San Giorgio School.



The number of attendees was well over 700, exceeding the expectation of the organizers. This was a unique convergence of former students of San Giorgio School, who came from near and far corners of the United States and Canada. The evening was also graced by a considerable number of guests who neither attended San Giorgio School nor grew up in Mendefera or its vicinity. These contingents came simply to advance the cause of education. What a commendable gesture! A considerable number of youth were also present. They came to honor the legacy of their parents and/or grand-parents who attended San Giorgio School. Present also were friends of deceased and martyred graduates of San Giorgio School. What an honorable tribute!



The party was a reunion of classmates who have not seen each other for several decades and as such it assuaged aching nostalgia for the good old times. For some, the evening was not devoid of occasional bewilderment and embarrassment due to faded

memory of the names and faces of old classmates. The flash lights of cameras were piercing the hall from every direction as the attendees were trying to commit the sweetness of the moment to the annals of their personal history.



Looking at the august audience, one could only be awed by the presence of so many accomplished professionals: educators, physicians, engineers, architects, lawyers, musicians/singers/lyricists, entrepreneurs, administrators, etc. At one point, some of these towering giants were daily commuters from the surrounding villages adjoining Mendefera. At one point, some of these prominent figures were daily visitors of the Mendefera bus stop to pick a basket or a pouch of necessities delivered from home. At one point, some of these affluent individuals were group renters of affordable sleeping quarters. Thanks to education, the former students of San Giorgio School have come a long way!



There were many talented and reputable musicians who came from far and near with a single purpose in mind, to root for the reconstruction of San Giorgio School. This brings to mind the action movie of June, 1980: *The Blues Brothers*. Jake [John Belushi] and Elwood [Dan Aykroyd] were “On a Mission from God” to find their old band members, stage musical concerts and raise enough money to rescue their orphanage from being auctioned due to unpaid taxes. The San Giorgio School has found its own “Blues Brothers” [Engineer Asgedom, Haile Gebru, Belai Awalo, Mulugeta Wedi Zager, Luul Fessahaye, Dashim Mesgna, Tefaldet Brigade, Efrem, Temesgen Pupa, Mehari, Wedi Embaye, Kaleh, Gidewon] who would not rest still until they have garnered enough support and resource ensuring its reconstruction! The music was delightful and enthralling, drawing everyone to the dance floor and to negotiate for a space amicably. Some were overwhelmed with rapture of joy to the extent of levitating to the platform where the musicians were performing.



The party officially started with the sharing of the information that the San Giorgio School Reconstruction Project is firmly planted on a legal footing and is endowed with non-profit, tax-exempt status. All concerns were also allayed that the organization has no political or regional underpinnings. Education remains the leading motif! May the fountain of education keep welling up to quench the thirst of successive generations!



The rich history and the dire current situation of the San Giorgio School were presented not only to fill the information gap but also to spur the audience to action.

Built “in 1902, the San Giorgio School served as an elementary school during the Italians, as a prison and temporary residence for refugees during the British and for over 50 years as Middle and Secondary School during federation and after independence.” The school “has never been renovated since its establishment. The walls and ceilings are almost falling down. The walls and doors are severely damaged. The rooms are overcrowded with not less than 80 students in one room and three students use one desk.”



Humorous stories were told to deliver cogent messages. In one instance, a childhood friend of the speaker [please note that there were several speakers] scooped a lamb shank from a cooking pot and threw it in his pocket just as he was leaving his home. As both headed toward their elementary school, flies began to swarm around them and

were attracted to the oozing pocket like iron filings to a magnet. Perplexed, the speaker asked his friend to dispel the mystery of such a baffling act. The friend answered nonchalantly: “By the time I return home, there will be no more lamb shanks left!” There was a flip side to the anecdote which elicited laughter. It appeared that everybody who graduated from the San Giorgio School availed himself of the treasures of his alma mater, good education and passport to long-term success. Alas, on his return from abroad, he finds his former school bone dry, depleted and worn-out. Yes, San Giorgio School spawned throngs of students like the belly of a fish. If her offspring failed to look back and redress her plight, it fared no better than barren.



In another instance, the speaker entered into a fight with his older sister over a food item [ቆሎ]. His sister, being stronger and not at all inclined to show mercy, grabbed him and tried to sink her teeth into his arm. His pain was excruciating and his sense of pride was mightily wounded. He was unable to avenge himself and decided to plead his case before his mother’s court of justice. Unfortunately, his mother was not in the immediate vicinity and he started walking to where she was. Having walked a good distance, he glanced at the marks of his sister’s bite. To his dismay, the marks have faded altogether, leaving him with no tangible evidence. He thought hard and fast. The solution was to refresh the marks by biting his arm with the intensity matching that of his sister’s. Very clever! The idea here is not about punishment, retribution or deceit. Rather, it is about ***ensuring continuity and preserving a legacy for posterity!*** What if the myriad alumni of San Giorgio School had the ingenuity of the small boy! What if the San Giorgio School were to be restored to the landmark institution that it once was!



During one of his trips to Eritrea, the speaker took his youngest daughter in order to acquaint her with her heritage. Having shown her the major towns of Eritrea, he took her to his village, one perched on a hill top and surrounded by precipitous slopes. The daughter could not hide her astonishment. “Daddy”, she marveled, “How in the world could you come from such a remote and obscure place and end up in a bustling city like Chicago?!” The speaker responded that the answer rested with education. Education knows no borders, opens new frontiers or horizons and builds bridges of opportunities. Education acts as an agent of change and transforms lives for the better. Education removes the veil of ignorance and shatters the shackles of poverty. It was not a hollow sound when the school children classically sang: “From ignorance - life of darkness, To education - path of glory.” [ካብ ድንቁርና ናይ ጸላም ንብረት፡ ናብ ትምህርቲ መገዲ ክብረት፡ ዘይተወቐረ መጥሓን ነየጥሕን፡ ዘይተማህረ ሰብ ነየድሕን፡፡] A child deprived of education is wasted and doomed to poverty! Education may be expensive but it is much cheaper than the havoc caused by ignorance. “If you think education is expensive, try ignorance” remarks Derek Bok, educator from Harvard University. Eddie Kendrick’s lyric comes to mind: “Shoeshine boy, where will you be ten years from now?” This applies to the boys and girls of San Giorgio. Where will they be ten, twenty years from now? They are at a crossroads. Education will determine their fate and the responsibility of keeping San Giorgio School a viable institution of learning rests with the now well-to-do alumni and the conscientious advocates of education.



As another speaker pointed out, the students who once were challenged by hardship and scarcity are now enjoying the comfortable life of mainstream society. Awareness of these strides made the evening one of reflection, of counting one's blessing and of donating generously. And donate they did with gusto! The bar was raised higher and higher with each donor. As they say in Tigrigna: ንሎማ ዘይኮነ ዳሕድሕዮ ኣብ ዕነ!



The price tag of the reconstruction project is very steep, to the tune of \$6.5 million USD. This daunting figure will be challenged one dollar at a time. As the famous saying of Confucius goes, "A trip of a thousand miles starts with a single step." In the same vein is the lyrics of Jim Dale: "To build a tower up so high to a cloud you'll anchor, Build it one tiny brick at a time." The skit of Chris Rock is worth mentioning: He was hungry and had a taste for barbecue ribs. However, when he went to the fast food restaurant he found the price of a slab not affordable and negotiated to buy "a rib", that's right, just a single rib. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNQRqAoT-2c>



As they say, if you must dream, dream boldly! Yes, the reconstruction of San Giorgio School will be a reality in the near future. We will attend the inauguration ceremony and proudly exclaim: "I have been a part of the San Giorgio School Reconstruction Project!" We will see and touch the brick we donated when the edifice was being built "a single brick at a time."

Brother/Sister, won't you donate a brick!



To make Contribution, please either contact your local branch or send your contribution directly to:

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