



# Assia Avera

"I will never forget my mother waking me in the middle of the night to tell me we were leaving for Jerusalem. I was only seven, but I knew that Jews were not allowed to leave Ethiopia. From that night on we were always in danger. It was a miracle that we made it to Israel, our homeland."

In soft-spoken, fluent English Assia Nathanel Avera, 30, tells the story of his family's aliyah from their village in Ethiopia in 1984. Of walking for weeks across the scorching desert, robbed by bandits, shot at by rebels, and barely surviving in the disease infested refugee camp in Sudan. "When we finally arrived to our homeland, we knew that we were fulfilling the centuries-old dream of our people," says Assia.

With his parents and 12 brothers and sisters, Assia's first home in Israel was at a Jewish Agency absorption center in northern Israel. "Adjusting to Israel was very difficult for my parents, but for me it was much easier," recalls Assia. He went to a residential high school, and did a one year pre-college preparatory program before being drafted into the army.

"My army service was the best thing for me," says Assia, who served in a combat unit for three years. "I was a sergeant, leading 20 soldiers. This was a lot of responsibility, and made me more mature than most 19-year-olds."

Upon his discharge, Assia moved to Tel Aviv and began studying graphic design and art. He worked as a security guard to pay his rent and expenses, but says that if it had not been for the Jewish



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Agency scholarship he received, he would never have been able to complete his studies. "It is not only me that the Jewish Agency helped, but a lot of young people in the Ethiopian community," explains Assia.

During his studies, Assia was chosen as an "Israel at Heart" delegate. He traveled to the United States and Australia, meeting people and telling them about life in Israel beyond the violent headlines.

Today, Assia works as a policeman to support himself, but he aspires to be a full-time artist and dreams of having his own studio. His drawings, which have been featured in art exhibitions, reflect his deep pride in both his Ethiopian and Jewish culture. "My mother always told us stories about life in Ethiopia, and I am very connected to my roots, to Judaism and to Israel. This is the only homeland for the Jewish people."