

Dorm Number 104

by Adugna Kebede

Most of my Alemayan '85 friends, near and far, left a lasting mark on our lives during the four years we shared together. Every dorm room has a rich story to tell. Today, however, I want to pause and reflect on one place that became especially meaningful to me: **Dorm Room 104**.

Life's turning points often arrive unexpectedly, without warning or consent. For a teenager experiencing separation from his family for the first time, one such turning point occurred the moment I stepped into Room 104. Filled with ambition and hope, yet uncertain of what lay ahead, I began a solitary journey to a beautiful campus only to find myself assigned to that room. Among its eight occupants, there was only one familiar face: **Temam Ababulgu**, a kind-hearted and wise friend from high school. Even then, Temam stood apart from his peers, distinguished by his depth of thought, artistic excellence, patience, and boundless compassion. Having such an anchor provided immense comfort and reassurance as I began a new chapter of life in a distant college village.

Soon, dorm life grew richer and more memorable with the arrival of additional roommates: **Gizaw Kebede** from Dire Dawa, **Jemal Ahmed** from Nazareth, **Dawit Gebre** from Dembidolo, and two fellow STTP students from Dire Dawa. It took time for us to truly know one another, but as the days passed, familiarity grew into closeness. Eventually, we understood one another so well that we could anticipate each other's moods, reactions, and expectations.

I was, without question, the most restless—and perhaps the most troublesome—among us. Yet I was fortunate to be surrounded by extraordinary patience and grace. Temam's calm presence grounded me, while Dawit Gebre's humility and gentleness softened the room. His response to every joke tossed from one bunk bed to another was always the same: a sheepish smile followed by contagious laughter. Above all, **Gizaw Kebede and Jemal Ahmed** transformed the chemistry of our group. Their depth of experience and perspective made dorm life not only enjoyable but profoundly formative, laying a foundation that shaped our lives in lasting ways.

During those formative years, having Gizaw and Jemal as older brothers was a blessing that continued throughout the three to four years we lived together and long afterward. At the time, I failed to fully express my appreciation for their wisdom, patience, quiet counsel, and careful guidance as they helped me navigate life's crooked avenues. In hindsight, both their spoken and unspoken words, and the way they led by example through their conduct were priceless.

Both Gizaw and Jemal had a profound influence on my life, one that I still carry with me today. In moments of immaturity, when I rushed into decisions without considering consequences, they gently kept me in check, placing a loving arm around my shoulder and whispering, "Young man, perhaps you need to calm down and think this through before rushing ahead aimlessly." At other times, they shared life lessons drawn from their own experiences, each in his own distinct and captivating style, always leaving a lasting impression. My

roommates' qualities extended well beyond our dormitory, leaving a distinct and lasting impression on others especially within their academic departments as attested by their classmates.

*I could write at length about the countless ways they shaped my life, far more than they may ever realize. This brief reflection is simply an attempt to express my heartfelt gratitude to these remarkable gentlemen, **Gizaw and Dawit (posthumously), and Jemal and Temam**, for their enduring impact, and for knowingly or unknowingly helping shape who I have become.*

Temam and Jemal, thank you for making our life in Room 104 permanently etched in the hidden chambers of my memory. Even today, I continue to draw from the well you filled with kindness, wisdom, compassion, patience, decisiveness, purpose, and grace. Words fall short in expressing what cannot be fully described.