

POSITIVE PROFILES | Running for life

February 2010

Terefe Ejigu, 20, has been making his own luck. A Wellington resident for the last eight years, he's now studying at East Michigan University in Detroit, after winning a prestigious athletics scholarship. We asked him a few questions about how he got so lucky, and what it's like studying in the United States.

How did you get to where you are today?

I believe knowing the right people and not being afraid to ask for help is what got me where I am. For example, if I'm having financial problems I talk to people that can help. There are a lot of people who are willing to help as long as you are serious and committed person.

You don't have to be runner - you can do whatever you love and people will appreciate it. My headmaster at Wellington College was my mentor, I made very close friends at school as well and they helped a lot. My Kiwi high school friend helped me write a letter and fill out forms when I applied to American universities. My mother's friends and people that I know donated money toward my trip over here. So I believe getting to know people and being open has helped me to get to where I am today.

What's it like studying at an American university?

I love studying over here. It's because I'm doing what I love - running and studying at the same time. While in New Zealand I was only studying and I found it hard to run, because I needed extra help to continue running, such as money to pay for my running shoes, clothes and food. I major in International Affairs; I love my major because it will lead me to work in fields where I can give back to people who have gone through similar situations as me. Living in a new country as a refugee is a very tough experience. I also discovered that over here they have many diverse courses that I can do, such as African Studies. I have made great friends already; my roommate is multi-lingual and speaks French, so I have started taking French class and I love it.

What do you miss about New Zealand?

I miss my mum, my friends, people that I know. I miss Ethiopian food which Mum makes. There are Ethiopian restaurants over here but it's nothing like home food. I miss the freshness and beauty of New Zealand. I don't live close to the beach here and whenever I see waves and sun on TV, I think of Island Bay and Wellington's waterfront. I can't wait to go to the beach when I come there. I miss fish and chips too. I miss the size of Wellington and how convenient it is to go anywhere without car. I miss the runs that I do at night around the Bays and in the morning on Mount Victoria. I miss a lot of things about New Zealand.



Terefe with a new friend at Eastern Michigan University, where he is studying and running

Are there many other refugee-background youth at your university?

I haven't yet met any refugee-background students here at Eastern Michigan University (EMU). In fact I haven't met any Ethiopian students; I have seen few Somali students, but I didn't get the chance to meet them yet. I think it's because the city – Ypsilanti - is very small and many refugee-background people live in urban areas such as Detroit, which is about 40 minutes drive by car from where I live. Yet there are many international students over here, many from Middle East, Europe, India and other parts of the world. I have met older Ethiopian people, they used to study at EMU but now they work. They actually took me to their houses, fed me Ethiopian food and they even took me to their weekly indoor soccer games.

Is it good being focused on your running?

While I was at Victoria University, even though I was very thankful that God provided me with the opportunity to study, I was feeling guilty constantly for not continuing with my running. Thank you to God, because now I'm here doing what I love, and I couldn't be happier. I run and I study, that is my life here. I believe I'm a very lucky person and I owe it to my family and friends, because they made my dream come true.

For more about Terefe, check out the article on him in youth magazine Tearaway :
<http://viewer.zmags.com/publication/1d4021a7#/1d4021a7/8>

