

An Adopted Boy's Immigrant Dream: To sail Home to Ethiopia.



PETTENASCO - For many Africans, Italy has become the dreamed-about destination for a better life in Europe. But for Habtamu, a 13-year-old adopted Ethiopian boy living near Milan, the dream was to return to Africa.

On January 4, the boy ran away from his adoptive family's home, in Paderno Dugnano, 10 miles outside of Milan. With some money he had received as a Christmas gift, Habtamu bought a train ticket to Naples, from where he hoped to embark for Ethiopia. But he got lost. On January 9, police found him and brought him back to his Italian home.

"I wanted to go back to my homeland," Habtamu told the policeman who found him in Naples train station. The boy, who had a map and was planning to go to Sicily to catch a boat to North Africa, said he wanted to see his older brother, and other relatives in Ethiopia.

Four years ago, Habtamu and his younger brother Asmè, now 10, were adopted by the Italian couple Marco Scacchi and Giulia Clementi. The parents say that the two children are very different. Asmè is sociable, outgoing, and playful. Habtamu is serious and thoughtful. According to the adoptive grandfather, Luigi Scacchi, Habtamu behaves as a father to Asmè. "He follows him with great responsibility, he tells him what to do, and he corrects him," Luigi Scacchi said.

The children's biological parents were killed during the war in Ethiopia. Habtamu and Asmè wound up in a shelter until they were adopted by the Scacchi through an international organization.

In Italy, Habtamu quickly learned the language and gets good marks at school. He is a member of the local scout group and excels in sports. In four years, he has become perfectly integrated in the local community, according to his teachers and classmates. But he missed Africa, his older brother, and the other relatives.

He spoke with his adoptive parents about his dream of a trip to Ethiopia. “We have always spoken serenely about this topic. The dialogue with Habtamu was open,” said Marco Scacchi.

Habtamu wrote about Africa in his essays at school, and spoke about it with a local priest. He started to plan his trip. With the money he received for Christmas from his grandparents, he bought a ticket. And he took the train. After his parents had spent days making desperate appeals in the local press, Habtamu’s African dream ended in Naples. For now.

"It is up to us to build a happy future for him," said Marco Scacchi. “And if Ethiopia is that future, we will go there.”

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