

ESSENCE®

SPECIAL COLLECTORS EDITION

40 OF THE MOST INSPIRING AFRICAN-AMERICANS

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Mawi Asgedom



MAWI Asgedom's resilient spirit has taken him from a refugee camp in Sudan to earning a bachelor's degree from Harvard University, and he's still stepping. He was only 3 years old when his family fled from their home on the border of Eritrea and Ethiopia to escape a deadly civil war. But today, at 25, Asgedom shares his life story to inspire others. He has become a powerful motivational speaker and is much in demand around the country and has authored a book.

Living in a refugee camp, his family faced hunger and disease. They couldn't go home, but they couldn't live a good life in the camp either. So their next move was to the United States when Mawi was 7. The Asgedoms lived in hotels around Chicago, until they established a place of their own. Here, there was a confusing new language and customs to learn, as well as confronting the overall culture shock of living in a strange land. It was a time of enormous sacrifice: Mawi's father, who had been a doctor back home, became a janitor.

Despite the hurdles, Asgedom had faith that the future could be as bright as the past had been dim. He studied hard and excelled in school. When it was time to apply to colleges, Asgedom applied to Harvard. Not only did Harvard accept him, but also the school offered him a full scholarship. In 1999, when he graduated cum laude, he was selected as one of the four graduation speakers. And on graduation day, he addressed a crowd of 30,000. It was a bittersweet moment. Mawi Asgedom's father and brother were not there to celebrate with him; both had been killed by drunk drivers, six years apart.

Some of the proceeds from his book, *Of Beetles and Angels: A Boy's Remarkable Journey From a Refugee Camp to Harvard*, go to the HAT Foundation, named for his father and brother, Haileab and Tewolde. Mawi keeps them, along with the people of his African homeland, in his heart as his journey continues. ■

Moving to a strange land with his parents, brother and two sisters, Mawi Asgedom had to learn a new language and customs.



ESSENCE Books presents 40 OF THE MOST INSPIRING AFRICAN-AMERICANS, a look at those who are breaking barriers and building their communities. These talented, resourceful African-Americans, from diverse levels of society, illustrate the power and wisdom of faith and hope. Through stunning photographs and moving stories, 40 OF THE MOST INSPIRING AFRICAN-AMERICANS reflects our ability to overcome and achieve in a way that lifts the spirit.

40 OF THE MOST INSPIRING AFRICAN-AMERICANS

Muhammad Ali
Maya Angelou
Mawi Asgedom
Charlotte Austin-Jordan
Halle Berry
Keith Black
Mary J. Blige
Hydeia Broadbent
Ben Carson
Valerie Daniels-Carter
Frances Davis
Sampson Davis
Josephine Dukes
Michael Eric Dyson
Shirley Franklin
Kenneth Gamble
Cathy Hughes
Rameck Hunt
Janet Jackson
Samuel L. Jackson

T.D. Jakes
Kenya Jordana James
George Jenkins
Marion Jones
Michael Jordan
Frank Mercado-Valdes
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