



Bridging Worlds: Balancing Family, Education, and Advocacy in the Transportation Sector

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In February, 2022, my younger sister Neyat was in a car crash. Heartbreakingly, Neyat's friend died in the collision, and my sister was left with severe brain trauma. Even after many surgeries and countless hours at the Oakland Children's Hospital, Neyat needs the full-time support of my parents. Both quit their jobs to care for her. This terrible accident turned my life and the lives of my brother, parents, and of course of my sister, upside down. But it also cemented my path in life: to pursue a career in transportation to advocate for safety and change.

Both of my parents embarked on a journey of hope and aspiration, immigrating from Eritrea, East Africa, in the late 80s and early 90s in pursuit of a brighter future and enhanced opportunities for their children. Upon their arrival, my parents encountered numerous barriers due to their limited grasp of the English language, a challenge that persists to this day. In the aftermath of Neyat's accident, I frequently served as an intermediary between my parents' and medical staff. I felt torn, wanting to support my parents at the hospital, wanting to stay beside my little sister, while at the same time needing to keep working to financially contribute to my family and, still, wanting to pursue my degree at SJSU.

And so, I faced the daunting challenge of balancing my academic pursuits, a new part-time job, my ongoing employment at a shipping company, and being there for my family and sister. Despite the trials, I couldn't help but feel that if Neyat could speak, she would urge me to continue forging ahead with my life. I had worked tirelessly to gain admission to SJSU, and so I persevered. I divided my time, attending classes from Monday to Thursday in San Jose and working at a freight company twice a week in Oakland. On weekends, I alternated between home in Marin and being beside Neyat at the Oakland Children's Hospital.

As the first member of my immediate family to pursue a college education, one of my lifelong goals is to serve as a role model for my younger siblings, cousins, and the broader Habesha community. My family remains my most significant source of mentorship and motivation, continually encouraging me to be the best I can be, not only academically but in all facets of my life. They refuse to let me succumb to self-doubt, and their constant refrain is a call to action: "Get back up and do better."

Even before my world shifted in 2022, I was interested in making a difference in transportation. My career aspirations actually find their origins in a family-owned freight forwarding company located in Oakland. It was there that I came to understand the profound influence of transportation on our lives. I also am motivated to improve accessible transportation internationally, especially in Eritrea, where the sole public transportation consists of consistently overcrowded and underfunded buses. Long-term, by advocating



for policy changes and funding allocations that not only generate employment opportunities but also promote economic growth within our cities by expanding citizens' access to travel, I aim to effect positive change in the realm of transportation.



Diamon Tesfay at COMTO NorCal's 20th Annual Scholarship & Industry Awards Gala.
Photos courtesy of the author.

Transportation shapes everything we do every day, and I am determined to shape transportation for the better. My ultimate goal is to make a difference in improving the transportation infrastructure in Eritrea. Advocating for transportation here in California and abroad can make significant positive impacts on communities and lives. I also love sharing my culture with my community here in the Bay. As the President of the Habesha Student Association, I am excited to be a part of a cultural event we are planning in April along with the Black Student Union and the Nigerian Student Association. We plan to showcase Black and African cultures, food, and fashion. The event will also include a Black/African networking event to empower students to meet professionals in different industries and hopefully build relationships for their careers. I will continue to advocate for better transportation for the benefit of every person and every community, and I hope to inspire others to do the same.



About the Author

Diamon Tesfay is the President of the Habesha Student Association at San Jose State University. He also works as a Freight Forwarder in Oakland and previously interned with the Port of Oakland. Diamon is expected to graduate from SJSU in May 2024 with a B.S. in Business Management and plans to attend the [MSTM program](#) as the next step in his transportation career.