

Summer Camp That Teaches Children Ethiopian Heritage & Culture: Interview With the Founder

Published by [Tadiaz Magazine](#) July 2nd, 2009 in [Family](#) and [Featured.4 Comments](#)



Abshirokids runs inter-generational summer family camps

dedicated to teaching Ethiopian heritage and culture. (Courtesy photo)

Tadiaz Magazine

By Tadiaz Staff

Published: Thursday, July 2, 2009

New York (TADIAS) – Mekdes Bekele, founder of [Abshirokids](#), a company that provides Ethiopian parents with teaching resources on language and cultural topics, is launching one of the country's first inter-generational summer family camps dedicated to teaching Ethiopian heritage and culture.

The weekend event at [Massaneta Springs](#), a charming camp and conference center situated in the heart of Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, will begin at noon on Friday, July 24 and concludes at noon on Sunday, July 26. The scheduled summer fun for the entire family includes both outdoor and indoor activities, including educational seminars and conferences for parents.

Here is an interview with Mekdes Bekele, who is also a mother of a young daughter.



Tadiaz: Mekdes, congratulations on launching this program. How does the summer camp work?

Mekdes: Thank you. The camp is designed for the entire family. We provide guests and presenters who are highly qualified and experts in their field.

There are age-appropriate activities that will appeal to both parents and their youngsters. We have activities that are geared specifically for kids from toddler to elementary school children. We also have activities that would appeal to teenagers and young adults. For the parents we have seminars and conferences that help in raising children in a multicultural environment. In addition, we have programs that would attract the entire family – such as singing, dance (Eskista), camp fire, group meals, canoe rides, hiking, volleyball, swimming, etc. The best way for people to get a good idea of the types of activities we have is to visit our website at heritageandculturecamp.org and click on Programs.

Tadiaz: Are there special challenges in teaching youngsters about their heritage and culture?

Mekdes: Yes, definitely. The primary obstacle is the lack of language skills. Language provides a gateway to understanding and being part of a culture. For this reason, we have a heavy focus on language. As it is well known, the younger the child, the more quickly they can absorb a new language. For this reason, we encourage parents to teach their children an Ethiopian language at an early age.

But there are also opportunities in teaching youngsters about heritage and culture. As I alluded to earlier, the sooner a child is introduced to the culture, the quicker and more long lasting the benefits. We believe that a child growing up in America that has a solid grounding in their or their parents culture will have a more positive self image and better self awareness.

Tadiaz: How old does a child have to be in order to be eligible to participate?

Mekdes: Since this is a family camp, there is no minimum age limit, as long as a youngster is accompanied by a parent or guardian.

Tadiaz: What is the duration of camp?

Mekdes: The camp will start on Friday July 24th 2009 at Noon and conclude on Sunday July 26th at Noon. It is a three-day event, however families have the option to attend either the entire Camp or come for the Saturday activities only.

Tadias: How much does it cost to participate?

Mekdes: The price varies based on the number of family members. Typically, the cost is approximately \$550 for a family of 3. This price covers 2 nights select accommodations, all meals (Friday lunch through Sunday lunch, including Ethiopian Banquet, with professional music and dance show), child care, if needed. Our web site has a price calculator as part of the registration process.

Tadias: Your summer camp is in Virginia? Do you offer special package rates for out-of-state children?

Mekdes: The event will be held at Massaneta Springs – a beautiful camp and conference location near the Shenandoah Mountains of Virginia. It is a short 2 hour drive from the DC Metro area and within easy driving distance from most places on the East Coast. The community has embraced this camp; in addition to families coming from the surrounding areas, we already have families registered from as far away as Florida, Ohio. and Kansas. There is no difference in price for in state and out of state attendees.

Tadias: On your promotional material you mention creating a support-group for Ethiopian parents and adoptive parents of Ethiopian children. Could you please tell us a bit more about that?

Mekdes: Whether adoptive or biological parents, we have the common goal of raising 1st generation Ethiopian Americans. What we offer is a venue and the opportunity for like minded parents of children with Ethiopian heritage to interact among each other and share experiences and knowledge on how to raise confident, capable, and compassionate Ethiopian-Americans. For example at this camp we will cover topics that apply to all of us such as: Raising confident children in a culture conscious world, Struggling for identity, and at a panel discussion parents will hear and learn from the experiences of Ethiopian-American young adults on the challenges and the opportunities of growing up in America.

Tadias: You also run another business called Abshiro Kids, which provides Ethiopian parents with teaching resources on language and cultural topics. Please tell our readers about Abshiro Kids.

Mekdes: Abshirokids, is a business that I founded to fulfill a vastly unmet need, exemplified by my own need as a parent, for resources and guidance to help teach children to speak Amharic and provide a positive cultural influence. Our main focus is to use language as the primary method to ensure that kids are connected to their culture, thus our slogan "Connecting Our Kids"

We select the products we offer with the highest standards in mind. We have also produced original material such as our popular Feedel alphabet poster. Abshirokids strives to be the most reliable resource for Ethiopian heritage families' linguistic needs. We encourage families to incorporate language in their daily life by making these activities fun and appealing for kids. Very good examples are our Activity place mats and Feedel place mats. In addition to Feedel we offer books, CD's songbooks and DVDs at our website: www.abshirokids.com.

Tadias: Is there anything else that you would like to share with our readers?

The Heritage and Culture Camp is a not for profit endeavor that is partially supported by Abshirokids. This camp is a labor of love by a very dedicated group of volunteers, parents as well as others, that are putting in hundreds of hours of work to make this event a reality. It is the vision of a group of parents (our steering committee) that is coming to fruition.

Tadias: Thank you Mekdes and good luck.

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You can learn more about the summer camp at www.heritageandculturecamp.org.

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1. **Mother of One** [Jul 2nd, 2009 at 3:53 pm](#)

Great! Very, very needed.

2. **NYCgirl** [Jul 5th, 2009 at 10:03 pm](#)

This makes me so proud to be Ethiopian !!!! Way to go Mekdes Bekele, founder of Abshirokids. I'm only in my mid 20s but I'll definitely bring my family if your camp is still in existence then. Her message is so true. If Ethio-American kids are brought up with the knowledge and access to their heritage, they tend to be more well-adjusted and productive citizens.

3. **Nolawi** [Jul 8th, 2009 at 10:49 am](#)

i met the abshiro kids people in chicago.. and I am amazed by the things they are doing for ethiopian children abroad... go abshiro..