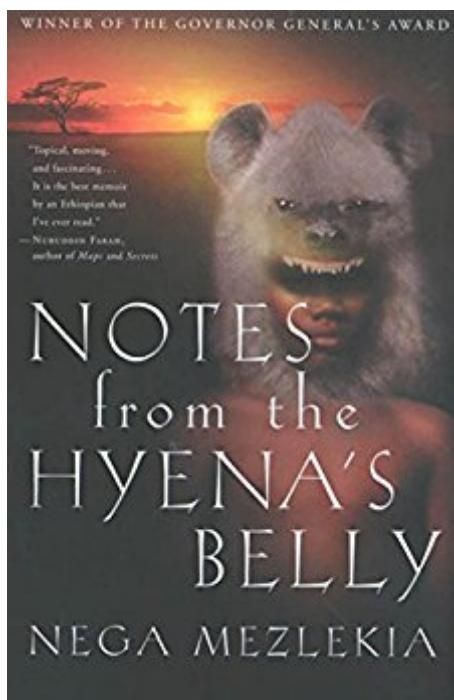


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Notes From The Hyena's Belly: An Ethiopian Boyhood



Synopsis

In this acclaimed memoir, Mezlekia recalls his boyhood in the arid city of Jijiga, Ethiopia, and his journey to manhood during the 1970s and 1980s. He traces his personal evolution from child to soldier--forced at the age of eighteen to join a guerrilla army. And he describes the hardships that consumed Ethiopia after the fall of Emperor Haile Selassie and the rise to power of the communist junta, in whose terror thousands of Ethiopians died. Part autobiography and part social history, Notes from the Hyena's Belly offers an unforgettable portrait of Ethiopia, and of Africa, during the defining and turbulent years of the last century.

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Customer Reviews

This is a memoir of the author's boyhood and young manhood in Ethiopia. Born in 1958 to a middle-class family in the city of Jijiga, Mr. Mezlekia left Ethiopia in 1980 and is now a professional engineer living in Toronto. Narrated with a light touch and a mixture of myth and fantasy, he opens a world for the western reader that has too long been influenced by nothing more than photos of skeletal images of starving children and grinding poverty. This story, however, is much more than that. From the start, there's a wide variety of interesting characters and a rich warm family life. There's Mustafa, the swindler, who boards at his home; there's Mr. Alula, the teacher, whose severe

forms of discipline call for retribution by boyhood pranks; there's Wondwossen, his childhood companion, who joins a guerilla army with him; there are his sisters who never stop feuding. But most memorable of all is his mother, who holds her family together during the extreme hardships which inevitably come to this violent and war-torn land. He was 14 years old in 1972, a time when idealism and student protests were sweeping the globe. In Ethiopia, however, students were gunned down and murdered. Young Nega was jailed often and regularly, and always tortured, but somehow his descriptions of this time in his life are told with a touch of lightness. Years later, in 1977, when over 100,000 people are murdered in seven months during the "Red Terror" and bodies laid out over the streets, he yearns for the time when they were all just simply tortured. Throughout the book, I couldn't help shuddering at the all the cruelty. From the brutality of the schools, to scenes in the hospital where patients were beaten, to the way that monkeys were slaughtered, I found it disturbing how easily such things were taken for granted. Although Mr. Mezlekia does his best to describe the political situation, I found it hard to follow the various juntas and guerillas and political parties. The fantasies and myths, which I usually don't care for in literature, seemed very right for this book however. It was a constant reminder to me that this story did not come from a western author. Mr. Mezlekia is truly a witness to his times. He has certainly widened my understanding of his world.

My family spent 23 months in Ethiopia during my active duty military service, in a home just a block off the road from His Imperial Majesty's (Haile Selassie I) palace and the Bole airport in Addis Ababa. That was from February of 1970 until January of 1972. The American community was concerned about the stability of the government there when the Emperor would eventually go the way of all mankind. HIM HSI died after we left, probably suffocated by the new rulers after the Dergue took over the country. Many of us wondered what has happened during the intervening years. This book tells the story from the memories of one student who lived and suffered through those perilous times. It's very interesting to anyone who ever lived there, and appears authentic.

Notes from the Hyena's Belly is a memoir that often reads like a novel. It depicts Nega's relatively calm childhood in sharp contrast to the growing unrest, civil strife and government corruption that dominated his adolescence and early adulthood. The book gives insight into a piece of Ethiopia's history, which is peppered with scenes from Nega's growing up years and folk tales that his mother told. Nega successfully speaks to the impact of civil war, government corruption and the too frequent global indifference to such issues in Africa, while at the same time maintaining a wry sense

of humor that makes his story all the more human and real. This combination gives it a unique flavor and certainly makes it memorable.

The story gripped me from the start. To see Ethiopian culture and history in such a clear way was so interesting. I learned so much watching the rise of Communism in Ethiopia through the author's eyes.

ok but superficial

If you want to walk in another person's shoes this is the way to go! This book is amazing! A must read!

Mr. Mezlekia has written a fast-paced autobiography that will draw the reader in and give a glimpse of life in a very different time and place. My only wish is that he had been more descriptive of his family, so that the reader would feel as much for them as for the author.

It wasn't a bad book at all, it just didn't keep my interest the whole time. I had to read it slowly with breaks. I had never heard of the genocide in Ethiopia that occurred in the 1970s. Nega Mezlekia lived through its events. He begins by explaining the way his family worked, how the country was monarch-run until these events started, and what his life was like during the few years that he was working his way to survive and care for his family. What I found quite interesting about this story is that the title talks about being an a hyena's belly, but on one page in the book, he states that a prison he was put into for simply being a youth was called that. The problem I had with this is that he barely talked much about it and what went on there. What he did say, was truly sad, but it was not the only time he skipped over things that I believe had great details over. He was also part of the rebellion as a child soldier for about seven months, but hardly really talked bout that life. He spent much greater details in talking about his troubled school-life childhood and how he was thought to have a devil within him by teachers. I will say that the saddest and greatest imagery that this book left me was that there was a lot of death around him. He really was pained to bring any of that up at all. I can understand that would be hard, as he obviously had some PTSD, as he talked about having the memories torment him while he was living in Canada. What happened to his family is very sad. I loved learning some of the stories his mam would tell him to teach about lessons. I am homeschooled my sons and the eldest learned a few stories like this shared in the DRC.

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