

“Medicine is my Duty; Writing is my Therapy”:

An Interview with Dr. Ruth Ghirmay



By : - Kidane Shimendi

*Medicine and literature rarely intersect, but for Dr. Ruth Ghirmay, the two fields are complementary. Working as a physician in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Orotta National Referral Hospital, she spends her days caring for patients while transforming human experiences into poetry. In honor of March 8, International Women’s Day, Eritrea Profile invites you to read her passionate story of healing and creativity.*

□ *Could you begin by introducing yourself?*

I was born in 1991 in the historic hills of Ararib, in the Sahel region, three months after Eritrea gained its independence. Because my mother was a teacher, our family moved frequently. I attended school in Keren up to the third grade and continued my education in Asmara. Education has always been the most valuable legacy in my family; I was a prize-winning student and an active participant in school debating and presentation contests.

My parents are the greatest inspiration in my life. They taught me that “success is the fruit of hard work”—a principle that remains the core of my life. I remember my father taking me to the corridors of the University of Asmara, where he pursued his own education. In those moments, I promised myself that I would one day walk those halls as a student. Holding firmly to that conviction, I went to Sawa to complete my high school education and military training as part of the national service.

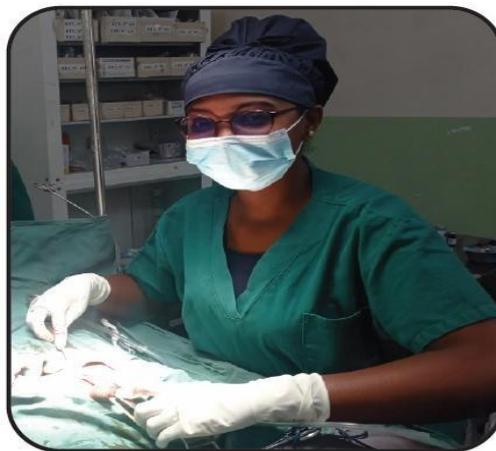
□ *How was your experience in Sawa?*

I joined Sawa with the 21st round. I found Sawa to be a transformative national institution, where young people from every corner of Eritrea gather to be physically and mentally shaped into conscious, organized, and equipped citizens. At Sawa, I developed a range of skills, including communication and time management. More importantly, I became acquainted with all of Eritrea's ethnicities and their breathtaking cultural diversity. In the national matriculation exam, I scored 3.6, which allowed me to get higher education.

• *How did your academic journey continue in college?*

My academic life in college was demanding—it required immense energy, determination, discipline, and most importantly, vision. Guided by these principles, I achieved a perfect 4.0 in my second semester, which enabled me to join the College of Medicine. I chose medicine because I had been exposed to my father's medical discussions from an early age.

During my college years, I never counted the days because I was deeply passionate about the fascinating topics in my department. After eight years of rigorous study, I graduated in 2019 and was assigned to the Dekemhare Hospital.



*Dr. Ruth - Ghirmay during surgery*

• *Dr. Ruth, how has life been after college?*

Being assigned to Dekemhare Hospital was a great privilege. I gained new friends and colleagues who continue to play a part in my ongoing journey.

After several months, I was reassigned to Orotta College of Medicine and Health Sciences as a Graduate Assistant, rotating through various clinical departments. My exposure to pediatric patients, particularly children with disabilities, strengthened my commitment to maternal and child health—a commitment that

later shaped my decision to specialize in obstetrics and gynecology. I see women as both the backbone and the light of every family. Currently, I am completing my fourth year of specialization in obstetrics and gynecology.

- ***I was told you are multilingual. Which languages do you speak, and what is the significance of learning different languages?***

So far, I speak Tigrinya, French, German, and English, and I am currently learning Italian. Although I am not yet fluent in Tigre, I can understand my patients when they speak it. I love learning languages because I believe language is the bridge to people's hearts and life stories.

- ***When did you discover your passion for writing?***

I discovered my passion for writing during childhood while listening to English country music and radio programs. As I listened to music, I would write down the lyrics and ask my family and older friends to correct them. I also jotted down every story that came to mind on scraps of paper.

At Sawa, captivated by its beauty and the adventure of life there, I began writing stories—a practice that gradually developed into a serious literary pursuit. I sought guidance from mentors and childhood inspirations, including Ms. Rahel Asgedom and Ms. Ruth Simon, who encouraged me to share my work with the public. Their support proved transformative.

- ***Last week, you published a collection of poems titled *Even Broken Wings Fly*. What message do you want to convey through this title?***

This book is a tribute to the resilience of the human spirit. In my medical practice, I see patients facing physical and emotional pain—their “broken wings.” But I have learned that being broken is not the end of the journey. Through hope, medical care, and inner strength, we can still rise. The book explores how we find the courage to “fly” and achieve our dreams, even when life confronts us with difficult challenges. Whether it is a patient recovering from a debilitating illness or a young person overcoming social hardships, the message is that our scars don't ground us—they define our strength.

- ***What does March 8, International Women's Day, mean to you personally?***

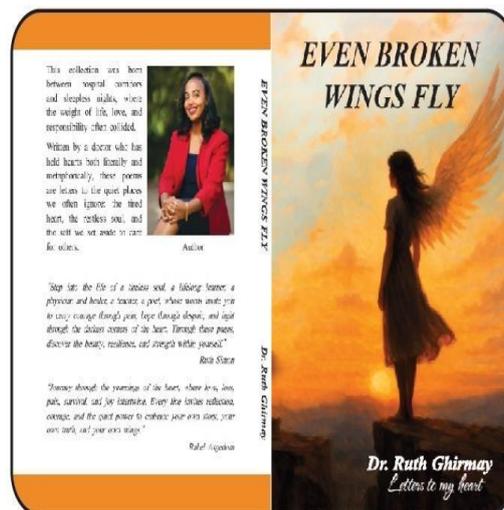
Personally, March 8 is a testament to the endurance of the Eritrean woman. In my field, I witness women's strength during the most vulnerable and powerful

moments of life—childbirth. I see them as the primary healers and educators of our society. Even Broken Wings Fly is dedicated to that very spirit of overcoming.

As a practitioner in obstetrics and gynecology, March 8 is deeply personal to me. I see women as the “light of the family” and the backbone of our nation’s health. My work is dedicated to ensuring that every woman’s wings are strong enough to fly—by providing them with the medical advocacy and care they deserve.

- ***How do you manage your time between both professions?***

I view medicine and writing as two sides of a coin. Medicine provides the “data” of human life—the pain and the recovery—while writing provides the meaning. I manage my time through the strict discipline I acquired in medical school. Medicine is my duty; writing is my therapy. I don’t see them as competing, but as complementary. One fuels the other. I am a better doctor because I write, and a better writer because I practice medicine. Discipline is the skill that allows me to honor both callings.



*Dr. Ruth's Book*

- ***Before we conclude, I would love to hear one of your poems.***

This is one of my favorite poems, and I would love to share it with the public here for the first time.

- ***Do you have any final messages?***

I would like to say something to the next generation: dream without limits and never stop chasing those dreams. Challenges are inevitable, but with vision, patience, and dedication, every dream is achievable. I believe obstacles are a natural part of any meaningful journey and can be overcome through determination and hard work.

Finally, I want to express my deepest gratitude to my family, friends, teachers, and mentors—they are my life's inspiration.

□ *Dr. Ruth, thank you so much for your time. We wish you great success in your future endeavors.*

*Angel Child of Our Family*

*Nobody blames you for not being around*

*Nobody accuses you for not helping us*

*Nobody hates you for not contributing with us*

*Nobody gets angry for not enjoying with us*

*Nobody knows what you are going through except us.*

*You are a free bird created by Lord!*

*A free bird with an open heart,*

*A bird with love and honesty,*

*A bird with a desire to help others,*

*A bird that never complains about anything.*

*You are the dearest of all!*

*I wish all your pain was mine than yours*

*I wish I could stand your unpleasant nights*

*I wish I could have carried your sickness*

*I wish I had your tolerance*

*Dearest of all, I wish I could find you a remedy.*

*You are the sunlight of our family!*

*Our darkness was removed on your arrival*

*Our happiness dimmed in your absence*

*Our harmony bloomed in your presence  
The smartest free bird God has given us,  
We will love you for the rest of our lives!*

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