

arrived. I told them why I had fled my place before they left.

"Where is he?"

Two deaths, a surgery round out the year at personal level

BERNARD TABAIRE > INSIDE SOURCE

I visited my grandmother once every year for the last several years. The visits could have been more, but, well, life has its ways. At least I kept that small commitment to myself, and was glad my immediate household members were always present.

This year was one of those I would have visited twice. The second visit was scheduled for December 28. It would not be. I was on crutches following a surgical procedure in mid-December and I could not leave Kampala this Christmas season.

Plus, my grandmother had slipped into a coma on December 23. I breathed hard. I made peace with working through the memories, knowing the hilly terrain heading into the ancestral village of Nyarutuntu (better known as Nyakasiru) in Rwamucucu Sub-county, would be impossible to negotiate on crutches.

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Last week — late afternoon of Wednesday, December 27, I hobbled out of a doctor's office in Kampala.

At about the same moment — hundreds of kilometres away in Kabale (precisely Rukiga District) — my father's mother was being buried.

It was odd that I could not see off that old woman. I do not like (looking at) dead bodies, but I had long willed myself to be there when the grand matriarch was placed in the belly of the warm earth.

At more than 100, she had 'lived', as we would say in street-person lingo.

She was especially weak, but she still managed to sing a hymn, to pray for me and family, and to dispense a nugget of wisdom springing from her deep Christian belief system.

A woman of strong faith, she married a *mulokole*, Yosiya Kahungu, an early itinerant preacher, who embraced the much-studied East African Revival (the great spiritual reawakening movement) when it swept into the hills of Kigezi from Ruanda-Urundi in the 1930s.

She never got to know that in me, she has a steadfast non-believer grandson, who, nonetheless, deeply appreciated her faith-based ways. And so it is that when she bowed out at about 3am. on Christmas day, I regarded that timing to be right and fitting.

I now have to dig up and transcribe the video recording of her story that I asked her to recount during my 2013 visit, which gladly had my father present to nudge her toward clarifying directions. The next generations may find her rather long and rich story worth their time.

Hamba kahle, Mukaaka Kezia.

My grandmother's funeral is not the only one of a family member I missed. I drove out of hospital on December 15 after surgery the previous day. As we sat in the nonsensical

Kampala jam of that day, the husband of my aunt, Isabella (my mother came after her), was being laid to rest on the edges of Busitema forest, just off the Jinja-Malaba highway.

An exemplary teacher, a sharp mind, a laid back but good conversationalist, a refined man, Paul Lubembe signed out at 79. I saw him at Nakasero Hospital two days before the end. That's a humble life I would have loved to humble myself before as well, if not for anything but for some sort of closure.

As with life, I blamed myself for not being present at the funerals of these two people. Why, I asked, had I procrastinated for nearly a year over having the procedure on that left knee? Did my holding off make the knee worse hence turning the procedure more complex than anticipated?

But, hey, virtually within the same second a year ends and a new one begins, a life ends and a new one begins, an experience ends and a new one begins. Because of this super-immediate switch, we understand and live life in the past tense.

Bring on 2018. Happy New Year to you all.

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