

Why I wore a suit to work today

Instead of PLE results, they brought home pre-term babies. Some of them from men who were once my peers.

Today, I wore my best suit to work. It is nothing expensive, but it is my best. I got it eight years ago. A friend's uncle gave it to me for my wedding.

I say my wedding, but it was more like 'our' wedding because it was a mass event. That day, 80 couples were wedded. My wife and I had been together for 16 years, but had never had the money to do the church thing, let alone have a reception.

To be honest, I did not want to. I did not see the need. When my wife's church announced it, she guilt-tripped me into walking down the aisle with 79 others. I kept the suit but not the wife. Not for long anyway. She died three years later. Cancer.

There was no money to treat her. Even if she were to be diagnosed today, she would still die because I still do not have the money. Healthcare services back home are a myth. I hear politicians talking about free healthcare services and laugh because I know it is nothing but political song and dance.

So, today I wore my wedding suit to work because ever since that wedding day, I have never had reason to wear it. As an *askari* at this warehouse on 16th Street Industrial Area in Kampala, I am expected to be at my station in uniform. I have a pair of trousers and two shirts. Maroon, faded now because I have had them since I started work here, 15 years ago. The boss says I might get a new pair mid-year if business goes well. It is what he says at the start of every year. I got here 15 minutes before my shift, so I could wear the suit a bit before changing into uniform.

This week I am working the nightshift as I have done every fortnight for the last 15 years. It is better than the day shift. It is quieter, cooler, and there are fewer fake conversations to be forced into by the people who walk through the faded green gate that I am paid



As you spread your wings, be wary of the boundaries, some call them values. PHOTO/Al

to keep. During the night, there is no one walking past you like you do not exist or are not worth talking to. In the night, most people who want access to the premises approach me with caution. I think it is because of the stone face I wear and the way the hunger in my eyes is accentuated in the dark. There have been three or four forced intruders. Nothing much to steal here.

2026 will be the last year I sit here. In December, I will return to my home in Kaabong and tend to what is left of my father's home, but more importantly, be with my daughters. The job does not allow me time to go see them often. My first one graduated last year from a technical institute. I set her up with her own tailoring business at the village trading centre. The second and last will finish this year, and hopefully start a business too.

I am grateful that they made it. Many of their peers did not. Instead of PLE results, they brought home preterm babies. Some of them from men who were once my peers. So, I am grateful that my girls hang in there.

Even on the wet nights, when the rain is unforgiving, I know that sitting by this gate drenched under my makeshift shelter is not all for nothing.

I will retire this year and maybe do some cabbage farming. I do not know if I will be able to get some of that PDY money; we shall see. I do not expect much from our new old leaders. I never have so there is not much hope there.

I do not really have savings or a pension. My daughters are my savings and my pension. NSSF? Hmm! I am grateful for the Shs170,000 that I am paid monthly. I do not want to spoil things for my family by making silly demands.

This year, I will wear this suit three more times to work, then store it. I hope to wear it again the day I am buried. Hopefully by then, my daughters will be making steady progress and have some gains to protect.

So madam Janati, that is why I wore a suit to work today. When you go back to your office at 8th street, help me send this money to my older girl. It is her sister's tuition fees."

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Just Saying with Janet Napio



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