

## **A Death in the Village**

One Friday, I went with my son Rodrigue, to do a small distribution of water cans and of Iktivuguto (local yogurt) to the older mothers, as well I had the intention to visit Séraphine, who has suffered for over a year from the presence of 4 types of parasites in her system. She had been to the doctor and to the hospital on several occasions. They sent her home telling her there was nothing that could be done. They were not even able to do a blood transfusion, because the parasites would attack the new blood as well. She is 61 years old, my age....

I found her to be so small, like an aged little girl. The parasites that were eating away at her from the inside had left her as just skin and bones. Sleeping in a small dark room, the window shutters had been long broken with no money for repairs, she could not even see daylight. It was difficult for her to keep down the milk that I had brought her. Life can be too short, with too much suffering... In the dim light, I could still make out the dirtiness of the room and of her clothes and covers, and I detected a very strong odour of urine.

A couple of hours later, I returned with a mason who repaired the shutters. I brought soap, a towel, clean sheets, a nice pink nightgown, a soft sweater, and an egg scrambled in milk with two Tylenols.

With the help of Ancillie, who works at the centre and acts as a translator, and with much care to not hurt Séraphine, I washed her. She was dirty; she was so thin, she no longer had visible breast tissue, her skin was folded and stuck to her rib cage. I put on the pink soft flannel nightgown with the sweater, and got her to drink some of the milk and take the two Tylenols that I had crushed with a spoon.

I very much hoped that the small pills would sooth her pain. We then put her on the clean sheets, facing the sky that could be seen through her open window. Holding back tears, I told her that Imana (God) was watching over her, and that her pain would soon be eased. I thought of our terminally ill in Canada who finish their days in a nice, clean room, generally surrounded by their family. Séraphine has not had any family since 1994... Wearily, she told me that she felt better; she thanked me and praised Imana.

I went to the village the next day in the afternoon. She had just passed away, gently and in the company of 3 neighbours who had come to visit. Imana had come to take her, her suffering was over... From the repaired window, the soft daylight caressed her poor body.

Surrounded by about 20 mothers who were praying at the top of their voices, I had a heavy heart, but was aware that she was no longer suffering; not in her memory, not in her heart, and not in her body. I wished her a happy reunion with her husband, her son and family.

When I left the small hut, a magnificent rainbow coloured the sky. At this point, I began to cry, from heartbreak, and from gratefulness, and I accepted by own mortality and death, whenever and however it might come about. Death is part of life... I thanked God, Imana, the universe for all of the love I had received in my life, I hope to be able to redistribute it for a long time to come.

I thought of my friend Cyriaque César who gave me the Rwandan name of Uwubuntu (one who exhibits the quality of humanity in her), this name that each day here in this paradise full of wounded souls, I strive to wear honourably.

Nicole Uwubuntu