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subSAHARAN AFRICA

Wena omuhle osuwelilie (Beautiful one who has crossed the great river, farewell)

[Title graciously contributed by Mazisi Kunene, a friend and 1994 Poet Laureate for Africa.]

BY SHARON F. GRIFFIN

DURBAN, South Africa — December 1995

Dear Peter,

The day before Christmas, I attended a church service in a primary school classroom in a small town called Umzinto. By car, Umzinto is about 40 minutes south of Durban, nestled in the cleavage of rolling hills for which this province of KwaZulu-Natal is well known. I half-listened as Alan Doorasamy, pastor of the Family Worship Center — a small congregation of poor, struggling Indian, black and coloured Christians — told the story of the birth of Jesus Christ.

It was not until the end of the Sunday sermon that I lifted my head from the palms of my hands and glanced toward the front of the room. Pastor Doorasamy asked members of the congregation to prepare a plate of food on Christmas Day for someone outside their usual circle of friends and family. "You don't have to invite them to your table," he said. "But it would do my heart good if, on Christmas Day, you'd feed a stranger."

The request caught my attention because my father, especially at Christmas time, seemed determined to make sure the refrigerator, freezer and kitchen cabinets overflowed with food, so that anyone who visited our house not only ate hearty but took away food. Actually, my father had a thing about food in general. For example, he insisted that my brothers and I not eat in front of people unless we had enough to share. "The person might be hungry; you never know when a person has last eaten." When I traveled across sub-Saharan Africa in 1991, that rule was difficult to abide by. I recall one occasion when I squatted behind a tree, eating secretly. Tears ran down my face as I ate my food. I knew I didn't have enough to share, yet I needed to eat.

Simple as Pastor Doorasamy's request sounded, nearly all members of the Family Worship Center live from hand-to-mouth. What's more, many are former drug addicts, prostitutes and street people who turned their lives around through a program Doorasamy founded known as STEPSA, an acronym for Steps to Elevate People in South Africa. There's Mummy and her physically and mentally disabled son, 23-year-old Emmanuel. Mummy is shaped like an avocado, with stick legs. Her lips are like a dry ravine, cracked. A big knot disfigures her face; it rises up like a mountain between her nose and right eye. Mummy's doctor wants to remove it, but the single, middle-aged mother refuses to leave her son for even one night. They live in a two-room flat. What should be the living room doubles as their bedroom. I sit on Mummy's bed whenever I visit there and, without fail, she serves me a cup of hot tea. I would help her in the kitchen — wash my own cup and saucer — but there's hardly space for one person, let alone two.

Most other Family Worship Center congregates live in a new housing development called Gandhi Nagar. About 600 houses are squeezed into Gandhi Nagar

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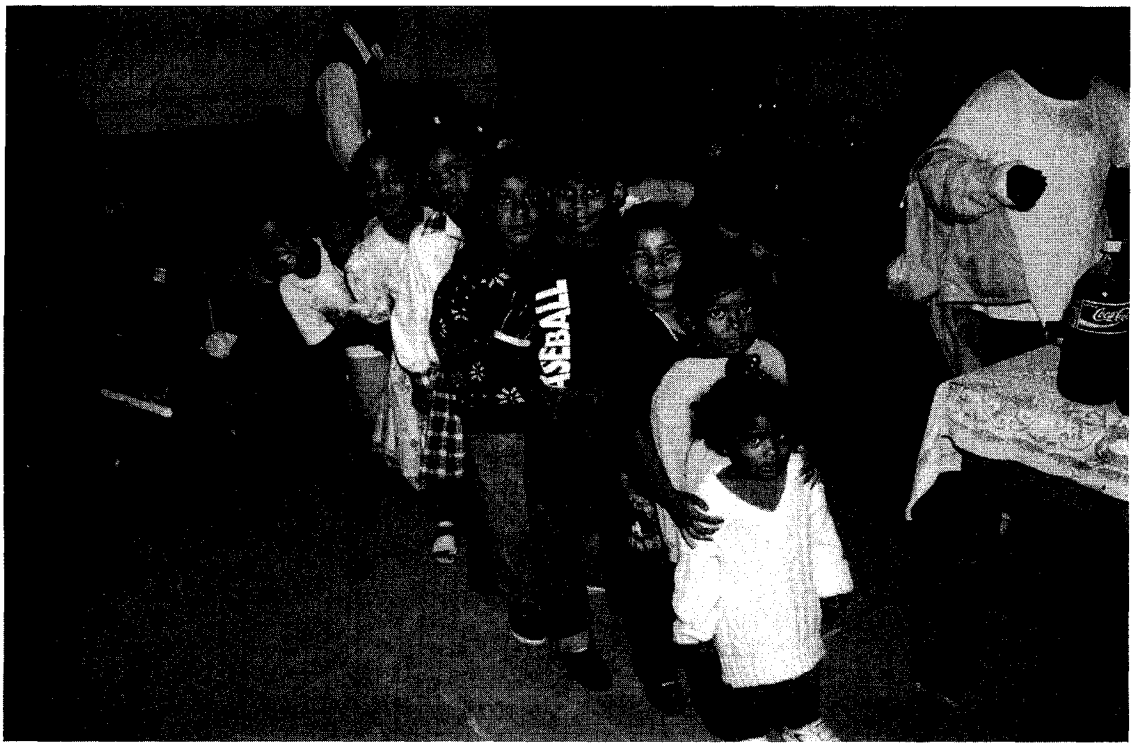

Family Worship Center children lined up to get a dinner of beans, rice, roti, breyani and curry. Earlier in the evening, the children acted in a Christmas play.

and the area is occupied primarily by Indians. The area is one of the most poorly designed and constructed housing developments I've ever seen. When it rains, as it has done consistently here for several weeks, mud washes through the streets. Worse, the concrete on which houses are built has begun to shift, so that some of the houses lean. Until now, I had never known rain to hold people hostage. However, residents of Gandhi Nagar run the risk of seriously injuring themselves if they venture outside in the rain. Imagine trying to trudge down hilly walkways and driveways through ankle-high mud.

I often get angry when riding through Gandhi Nagar, but I don't always know why. I can't figure out if I despise the place for its own sake or because its square, matchbox-sized houses remind me of the square, matchbox-sized house in which my paternal grandparents lived. My grandparents, Johnnie B. and Katherine (Franklin) Griffin, both of whom are deceased, were like the residents of Gandhi Nagar — proud and thankful for the humble, low-income house built for them by their local government. In the case of both my grandparents and the people in Gandhi Nagar, I suppose a humble, four-room house is better than no house at all, no matter how callous the thinking behind it.

After making the request that members feed a stranger on Christmas Day, Pastor Doorasamy proceeded to tell the story of a man who died, ascended to heaven and appeared before God for judgment. God pulled the man's file, studied it and said, "I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your home; naked and you clothed me; in prison and you visited me." The man looked at God and said, "I beg your pardon, Lord, but I've never seen you in my life. When did I ever see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did I ever see you a stranger and welcome you in my home, or naked and clothe you? When did I ever see you sick or in prison, and visit you? The Lord replied: 'Whatever you did for the least important of my brothers, you did for me!'"

I rode back to Durban with the pastor, Alan, a dear friend. "Thanks for talking about my daddy today," I said. He looked at me, puzzled. "I didn't talk about your father today," he said. "Yes, you did," I replied. "My daddy fed hungry people. He took clothes from our closets to give to the less fortunate, as he called them. And he used to invite prisoners to Sunday dinner.

"At the downtown jail in my hometown, prisoners needed someone to sign for them to obtain weekend releases," I said. "He'd tell them to come to our house for Sunday dinner, which was his way of making sure they returned to jail on time. Once I complained, 'Why do we have to eat with criminals?' My father, in his sternest voice, which wasn't so stern, said, 'Who are you to judge? You don't know what happens in a man's life to make him do what he does.'"

Rambling on, I added: "My father is the only man I've known who actually had homeless people as friends. When last I was home, a straggler sauntered up the driveway in the pouring rain. My father mo-

tioned for the young man to come inside, where he gave him coffee and dry clothes. They chatted for about 45 minutes; about what, I don't recall.

"A few of the homeless men we knew as regulars. They never came seeking favors; it seemed they mostly came to talk. Although oftentimes my father gave his homeless friends odd jobs to do around the house — clipping the hedges, mowing the grass, weeding the garden. He'd give them a little change, as he called it, and they'd be on their way, usually with a pack of my mother's cigarettes tucked in their pockets. That was my father's passive-aggressive way of registering his objection to my mother's smoking habit. I never once heard my father lecture or probe the men about why they either didn't have a job or couldn't keep one. Instead, the closest thing to an admonishment I ever heard was, 'make sure you give some of that money to your mama!'"

I paused in my talk, memories rushing through my head like a mighty river pouring over a great fall. Alan glanced at me from the corner of his eye. "I wish I had met your father," he said.

My father, Arcenure Franklin Griffin, died of a massive heart attack on Dec. 21, 1995, four days before Christmas. My mother says the two of them had finished dinner when it happened. Actually, my mother had finished dinner and retired to the dining room to wrap Christmas presents purchased for the family earlier that day. My father had helped himself to a second serving of turnip greens, grown in the garden he so loved.

My father suffered long, with diabetes and its debilitating effects. He had a heart attack more than 15 years ago. He also survived three bypass surgeries, and the amputation of two toes and eventually a leg. By the time of his death, he looked 20 years older than his actual 66 years. He looked as if he could have been my mother's father and my grandfather. I recall visiting my father in Forsyth County Hospital after his first heart attack. He looked scary, with tubes and wires pumping fluids in and out of his hurt body. He told me that he asked God to let him live long enough to see to it that my baby brother, Craig, who is 13 years younger than I, finished college. Craig graduates in the spring.

Despite a subconscious acceptance that it was a matter of time before my father died, I was not prepared for his passing. I feel as if a big fishing net has been cast upon me and I cannot free myself of the grief that entangles me. And, strangely, somedays I wake up afraid. Of what, I don't know. My father once said of me, but not to me, "that girl worries me because she seems to have no fear. She travels here and there, not worrying about a thing." What he didn't realize is that no matter where I have been, I knew that at the very least I could pick up the phone and hear him say, "Hey, shug!"

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I boarded a South African Airways plane at 6 p.m. in Durban on Dec. 24 and arrived in Greensboro, N.C. shortly after 2 p.m. on Christmas Day. It was the longest journey of my life. My two younger brothers, Michael and Craig, met me at the airport. The moment I saw their faces my spirit was lifted. Michael, especially, reminds me of my father, not only in his looks but he, more than any of us, inherited my father's quick wit and a rare ability to get along with almost anyone.

My mother was busy in the kitchen when I arrived home. Two turkeys and a ham sat on a counter; a pot of string beans, turnip greens, and wild rice simmered on the stove; and candied yams baked in the oven. "You're not having the family over for dinner are you?," I asked. "Sure, they'll be here in about an hour," she said.

Family means no less than 25 aunts, uncles and cousins, in addition to my mother, three brothers, sister-in-law and niece. It is ritual that we get together on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and usually Labor Day. Growing up and even now, I find it comforting to know that some things happen like clockwork, such as our family get-togethers. Until the age of 18, you might say that my small-town life consisted of a series of structured rituals that revolved almost entirely around home, school and church. It's this upbringing, I believe, that allows me to so fully appreciate various cultures, especially the Zulu culture, which I have studied for the past year. Even when I don't understand certain Zulu rituals, I appreciate the intent behind them.

The memorial service for my father took place on Wednesday, Dec. 27 at Hooper Funeral Home in East Winston. East Winston is the area of Winston-Salem where most blacks live. I know Hoopers well because the Hooper family attended the same church as my family. What's more, my father chose Mrs. Johnny Hooper, now 78 and living in a nursing home, as my godmother. Mrs. Hooper took me and other girls in the church out to dinner and to see the Nutcracker ballet every Christmas season. And she never once forgot to give me a birthday and Christmas present.

The Hoopers buried my daddy's mother and father; his sister, Hattie Maude; and his younger brother, Augustine, known to his nieces and nephews as Uncle Gus. Uncle Gus was an avid hunter, but stingy with his kill. However, he once gave me two rabbits that he'd shot and skinned. I was working in Rhode Island as a reporter at the time, which meant I had to take them with me on a plane. Uncle Gus pulled the rabbits out of the deep freeze, wrapped them in aluminum foil and tucked them into a plastic bag. Although they wouldn't fit in my travel bag, my father insisted that I show my appreciation and accept them, seeing as how Uncle Gus

rarely parted with his dead game. So I carried them onto the plane under my arm. Imagine the explaining I had to do when the outline of two hairless but otherwise intact rabbits appeared on the monitor of the X-ray machine at the airport, not to mention the accompanying cans of Lucks pinto beans my mother packed to make a complete meal.

I gave the eulogy at the memorial service for my father. It was the most difficult speech I have ever given. During my talk, I explained the concept of *ubuntu*, which I wrote about in my October newsletter. *Ubuntu* describes a philosophy that "people are people by virtue of other people." Unity, tolerance, compassion, generosity, respect, open communication, closeness, genuineness, empathy and sharing are the values and virtues that constitute *ubuntu*, or African humanism. It espouses communitarian ideas, with an emphasis on social responsibility.

My father exemplified the concept of *ubuntu*. Indeed, it is only since his death that I really have come to realize that his existence is definable only in relationship to other people — his family, neighbors, friends, co-workers, strangers. Just as the ocean gets its color from the sky, my father's character was colored by his closeness with people. My father did not get the chance to read my newsletter on *ubuntu*, and I doubt he would have connected the concept of African humanism to himself. That's because my father did not believe he was related to Africans.

Known as Zeke by his longtime friends, my father was not always politically correct. He often was crass. *"Opinions are like butt holes; everybody has one."* When I returned from travels in Africa in 1991, my father asked: "Sharon, did you see anybody who looked like me?" I said: "Daddy, lots of people there look like you." His response was, "I just don't believe I'm related to Africans." He based that view on television images and newspaper reports that depicted Africans as pathetic souls who were either starving or fighting. "The people are always fighting," he'd say, "and I'm just not like that." Fortunately, I helped soften his view with stories that demonstrated how peace-loving most people in sub-Saharan Africa genuinely are.

I planned to buy him a Krugerrand pendant as a Christmas present. A friend here in South Africa shook his head in disbelief and asked, "why would you buy your father a pendant with Paul Kruger's head on it?" I responded, "He's politically incorrect. All he'll care about is that I sent him something he can brag about to his friends."

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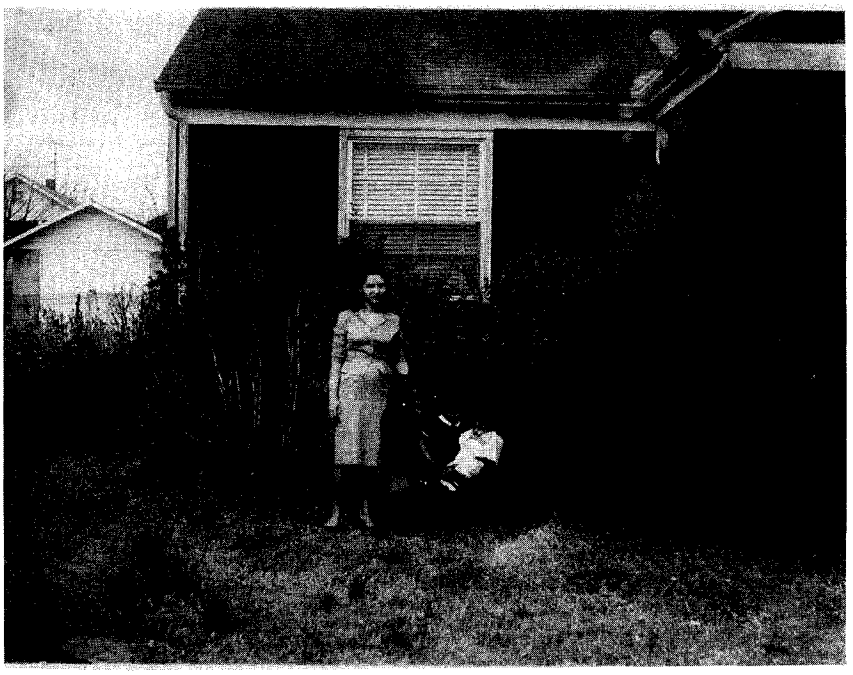
My father loved to brag about his four children. I recall that in my childhood he'd load me and my brothers into a car, drive to one of his friend's homes and brag about his pretty, smart children. It was absolutely embarrassing at times. He acted as if no one else had pretty, smart children. He continued to brag about us, even in our adulthood. When I was chosen for this fellowship and, especially when you, Peter, arranged for me to attend the Reuter Foundation Programme at Oxford University, my father couldn't contain his absolute delight. To him, my selection proved that he was right all these years. Understand that in the small world from which I emerged a family's name — who your people are — still counts for something. I am 36 years old but in my hometown I'm known primarily as Mr. Griffin's daughter. It's a title I've accepted with honor.

My father and mother, on their own, decided to send announcements of my selection as a Fellow of the Institute of Current World Affairs to local newspapers and to the Journalism Department at the University of Maryland, College Park — my alma mater. "I'm the writer," my mother told me. "Your daddy is the editor."

I did not ask my father what he thought of the Million Man March on Washington, D.C., which took place Oct. 16. I wish I had. A college friend sent me clippings from the *Washington Post* and other newspapers. The more I read, the angrier I got. I thought to myself, "if black men want to do something constructive, why don't they go home and be husbands to their wives and fathers to their children?"

I took special exception to a request that black women stay home, praying and teaching their children the values of self-esteem and family unity. The request seemed absurd to me. Already, too many black women are left alone to raise children. Therein lies the problem. African Americans are the only ethnic group within America in which a majority of children live with single mothers. Nearly three out of

Me, age 1, and my oldest brother, Baxter, climbing all over my father



My mother, father, me and my second brother, Michael. (Baxter was at school.) The photo was taken in front of the Thurmond Street house we lived in until I reached age 4. Mr. Spease, our next door neighbor, drove a truck for a meat processing company. He used to bring home packets of baloney just for me!

five African-American children (62 percent) live with only one parent.

For this fellowship, I interviewed with 17 people as part of the selection process. I recall speaking to my parents after the first three interviews. "I'm a bit nervous," I told them. My father said: "Don't worry. Just stand up straight and act right." "Act right" was a phrase I'd heard throughout my life, and its meaning encompassed everything from "speak the truth" to "be responsible for your actions." My advice to men who feel a need to atone is, "stand up straight and act right."

I'm comforted by the many memories I possess of my father. He was present and accountable for all the days of my life — a claim that, sadly, a majority of black American children cannot make. During the eulogy, I told this story: Three years ago, I was invited to dinner at the home of a journalist friend. Everyone at the dinner party was married with children, except for me, and all present happened to be black. Needless to say, conversations centered on family life. Not wanting to feel left out, I told stories of my family, growing up with my parents and brothers.

One of the women stopped me to say, "Sharon, you're the only adult black woman I know who's had a daddy all her life." A second woman spoke. She said: "When I was 18, still living at home in Oakland, I remember seeing a man who looked like me at a gas station. I wondered, 'could he be my father?'" A man spoke up next. He, too, had an absent father, and by the time he met his father, my friend was married with a wife and children of his own.

My friend said he had long forgiven his father's absence because he imagined that his father had a wife and children. Being a father himself, my friend said he could understand why his father had pledged his allegiance to a new family. However, when my friend learned that his father had not remarried and not fathered more children, he said he told the man he didn't ever want to see him again.

My wish, which I expressed at the memorial service, is that every child, especially an African-American child, experience the joy of having a good, loving father all the days of his or her life. My father was not a man of unspotted integrity. When he got together once or twice a year with his college friends — Bop City, the Fason Brothers and Uncle Bud, his best friend since childhood — he drank more than he should. As I've said, he was not perfect. But who among us is?

The day before my father died I was in Ixopo, which is inland about two and a half hours southwest of Durban, for the second time in as many weeks. In his unforgettable book, "Cry, The Beloved Country," Alan Paton described the hills of Ixopo as "lovely beyond all singing of it." That's still true today, although many of the hills are now covered with commercially-farmed forests rather than grass. A friend took several photographs of me at various spots in Ixopo. When he finished, I held out my hand and said, "that'll be 10 cents please for every smile." He chuckled and I explained that my father told me to charge 10 cents for every smile I flashed. He said he needed to recoup the expense of the braces I wore to straighten my teeth. "I laid a lot of bricks to pay for those teeth," he teased.

My father asked so little of me and my brothers: 1) Don't leave dirty dishes in the sink. They attract roaches. 2) Make up your beds and clean your rooms. Your mother's jaws will be tight if she comes home to this mess. 3) Don't talk in the vernacular. I pay good

money for you children to attend that Catholic school, where folks are always begging for money. I don't want to hear 'deys' and 'dems.' 4) If you become famous, don't forget you have a father.

Nothing annoyed my father more than watching sports figures get on television and speak glowingly of a mother, without a mere mention of a father. The topic I planned to write about this month I set aside. I decided that I might be as famous as I'll ever get. That's why this newsletter is dedicated to my father.

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I spoke by telephone with my oldest brother, Baxter, the Saturday after my father's death. He wanted to know if I had made up my mind about whether we should cremate daddy. According to my mother, my father talked about cremation for years until she let him know that his ashes could not stay on the mantel in the family living room. After she told him that, she said he never mentioned cremation again.

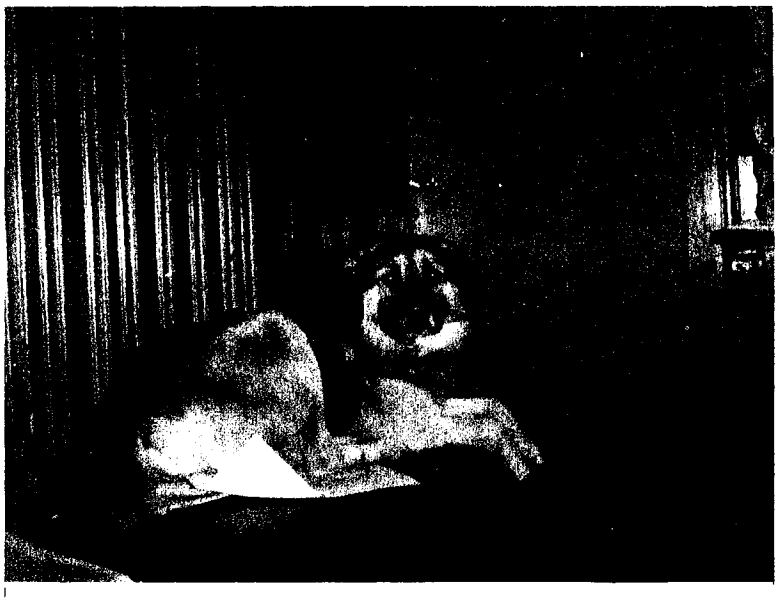
My mother was particularly solicitous of my opinion because I've been researching my family history for more than 10 years. I've collected lots of information from tombstones in graveyards. "If we cremate daddy, where will we sprinkle his ashes?," I asked Baxter. He said, "well, one individual has suggested that we bury him in the dog lot." We both burst out laughing as soon as he completed the sentence. We laughed because we both knew that the dog lot is the ideal place for my father, funny as it might seem.

My father owned a dog named Raj, which he loved beyond explanation. He found Raj in the backyard when the pup was less than six weeks old, and my father was less than six weeks out of the hospital after his first heart attack. He believed, rightly or wrongly, that the black-and-white mixed breed saved his life. Furthermore, he was convinced that if anything ever happened to him the dog would go get help, which was of great comfort to him.

Arcenure Franklin Griffin

Raj was an outdoors dog, by order of my mother. But as soon as she left for work, my father would let the dog into the house. They'd watch television together, and the dog had a favorite chair — a blue rocker-recliner. It annoyed my mother no end to see the dog sitting, self-righteously, in the chair. But everyone in the house was forbidden to speak harshly to Raj.

When I'd call home from California, my father would holler, "Raj, your sister is on the phone." I used to tell my father, "daddy, when you call me I'll talk to Raj. But I'm not talking to him on my dime." I recall a summer day when my mother's brother, Joe Hannon, visited and walked up the driveway toward the dog lot. "Raj, your uncle Joe is here," my father shouted, to which my Uncle Joe replied, "I'm not that dog's damn uncle."



Raj, my father's beloved dog.

Still today a framed photograph of an unidentified black man and a dog hangs in the dining room of the home where I grew up. The old man and dog are standing at a bus stop and snow is falling all around them. My father spotted the photograph in a local newspaper, which he read religiously, and talked about it so much that finally I made a long distance call to the newspaper, tracked down the black-and-white photo, and gave it to my father as a

gift. Before I left home to return here, I asked my mother not to remove the photograph from the dining room wall. She said she had no intention of taking it down.

Raj fell ill on a cold winter's day, and my father summoned Baxter from his job at a local television station to take the dog to see a veterinarian. The vet could do nothing to save the dog. After phoning my mother at the school where she teaches to get permission to put Raj to sleep, my brother warned the vet not to call my father under any circumstances. He, my brother, had to be the one to tell the aging man about his beloved companion.

My father so loved Raj that the fence surrounding the dog's lot and house remained standing for at least two years after his death. When my mother finally convinced my father to take down the fence, he planted a garden there. He grew collard greens, onions, cucumbers, hot peppers, yellow squash, tomatoes, string beans, zucchini, green peppers, turnips, squash, eggplant and okra.

My father was too tired and too ill to plant his own garden the last time I saw him, which was in October of 1994, the same month I left the U.S. to start my fellowship. He leaned on his crutches and supervised me while I planted rows of vegetables. When finished, I sat in a chair underneath a beautiful Carolina blue sky. He sat, too. I dozed off and on, but a loud-mouthed bird kept me from deep sleep. Finally, I said to my father, whose frail face and frame bore only the slightest resemblance to the robust, heavyset man I knew growing up, "that bird is a braggart." Though a beautiful singer, the bird drowned out all of the other birds perched in the lush trees surrounding the house. "That bird is no braggart," my father said. "He has a song to sing and the confidence to sing it." I've often lacked the confidence to sing my own song, and at that moment I felt as if my father was telling me something to remember, always and forever.

The loud-mouthed bird and its flying companions will no doubt miss my father. Nearly every morning he threw bread to them. On those occasions when poor health prevented him from feeding the birds, one or two would actually peck at and peer through a kitchen window, looking for him and for their daily bread.

This photo was taken at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church on the occasion of my confirmation and my father's. He's standing in the back, wearing dark glasses. After our confirmation, my father seldom stepped foot in the church — three, maybe four times. My mother corrected me at his memorial service when I made this statement. "He attended church at least six times after that," she said. (I'm in the front row, wearing ankle socks.)

At the memorial service, I let everyone know that I asked my mother to bury my father's ashes in the dog-lot-turned-garden at the first sign of spring. The location is ideal for one other reason: It's near a bird bath my father hauled home on his truck years ago.

Richard, one of my father's straggler friends, trudged through snow to visit my mother on Jan. 12. He was crying and missing his friend, my mother said. However, he pulled himself together and made a promise. "I'll be back in the spring to plant the garden," he told my mother. "I'll pretend Mr. Griffin is sitting in his chair, ordering me around, saying "Richard, you're not doing it right!"

As I've said before, my father disassociated himself from Africa and Africans. However, I wonder what he'd think if I told him about certain Zulu rituals surrounding death and burial. In effect, the Zulu people perform rituals to return the spirit of the dead to his or her family and family home. A journalist friend, Musa Zondi, told me that his mother died when he was still a boy. Three years ago, Musa performed a ritual that ideally should have taken place years before. Nevertheless, since bringing his mother's spirit to his Johannesburg home to guide him, Musa said his life has improved in inexplicable ways. "It might be psychological," he said, "but my life has changed." I know my father would appreciate our choice of burial for him because it allows him to be at home, keep an eye on things, guide us, as he always has.

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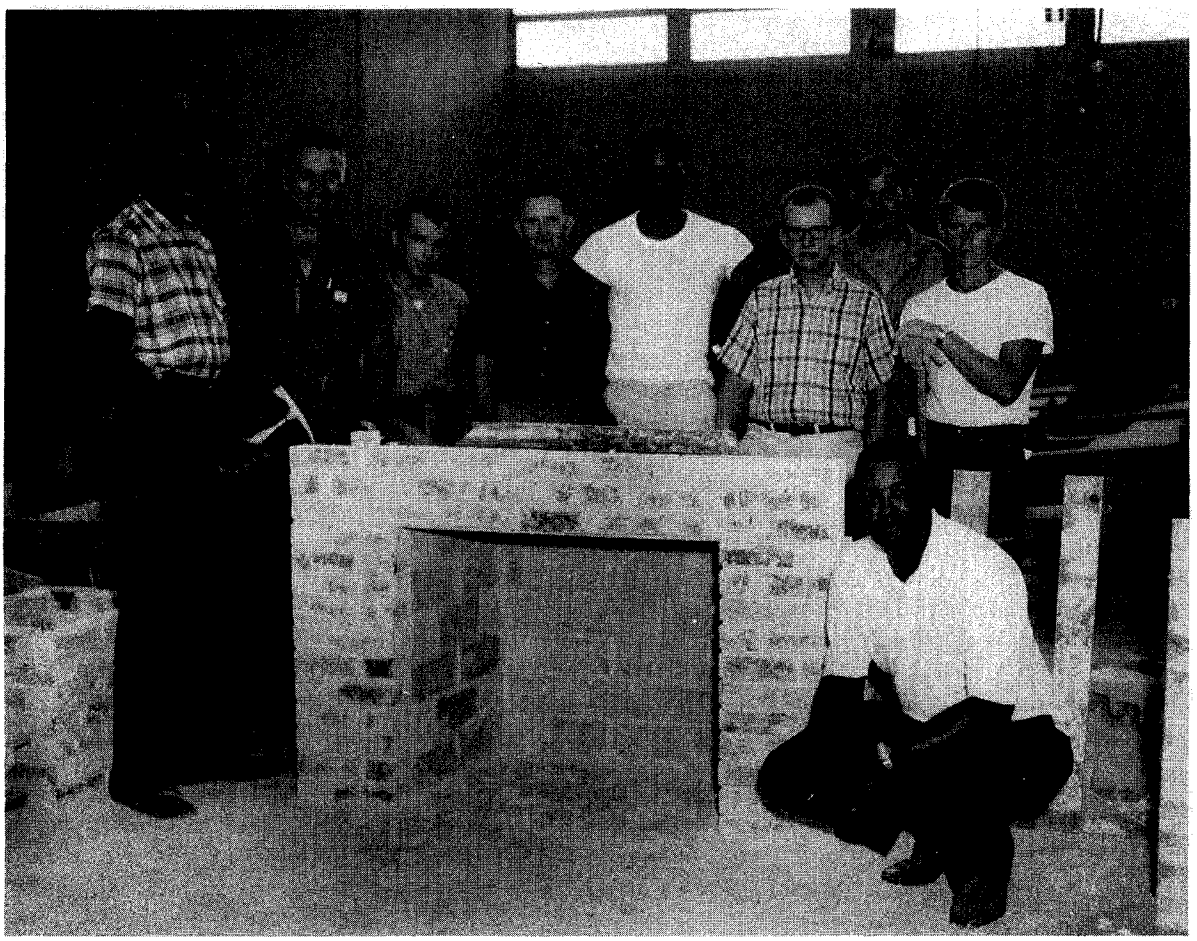
Quite an eclectic collection of people gathered at the chapel, a testament to the diversity of friends my father enjoyed. Uniformed policemen and deputy sheriffs showed up. My father was the second Negro deputy sheriff in Forsyth County. His partner, Eldridge D. Alston, was the first. They worked as a team, I suspect because no whites would ride with them. The year was 1961.

A man in my father's first-grade class attended, as did several members of his high school and college

My father (left) and his partner, Eldridge D. Alston (right). I decided against submitting my father's favorite photograph of himself in his deputy sheriff's outfit.



My father was a brick mason by trade. He also taught brick masonry at Forsyth Technical Institute. He is pictured on the right, stooped next to the brick fireplace.

graduation classes. Robert Scales Sr., a high school and college friend, gave a tribute on behalf of the 1946-51 Atkins High School class. At least two men who served with him in the Army also approached me.

My father set up a security program and department at Winston-Salem State University (WSSU) after leaving the Forsyth County Sheriff's Department, and later accepted the position as co-director of Student Affairs and the Student Union. So faculty and administrators from the university turned out, including the Rev. Cedric Rodney, who delivered the invocation, condolences and meditation at the memorial service.

Students who attended WSSU in the 1970s showed up. My father loved working with young people. They, too, often came to our house for Sunday dinner. My sister-in-law, a graduate of the university's nursing program, recalled that she once came to our house for dinner. That was years before she and Baxter took an interest in each other and married.

Mr. Hartsfield, my daddy's fishing buddy, was there, as was Ma Chris, who nowadays gets around in a wheelchair. Known for packing a mean pistol and good moonshine, Ma Chris's name still appears on a soul food joint on seedy Liberty Street. Tyrone Brown didn't attend the service. Instead, he, his wife and son, Michael, kept the house open while we gathered at the chapel.

Tyrone came into our lives many years ago. He delivered editions of the Afro-American newspaper to our house. One of several foster children raised by an old woman named Mrs. Brooks, he decided to adopt our family, especially my father. When he served in the U.S. Army and found himself far away from home fighting some U.S.-designated cause, he sent home letters and pictures of himself. He later married, adopted Michael, divorced and now is remarried. My father used to take toys to Michael when the child was a baby and when he, my father, was still able to get around in his truck. Tyrone told Michael that my father was his grandfather.

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In the early hours of New Year's Day, my mother and I found ourselves alone in the quiet of a house that used to carry the incessant squawk of a police scanner that my father listened to for hours every

day. We busied ourselves taking down ornaments on the Christmas tree that my mother so carefully decorated prior to my father's death.

My father didn't like Christmas. He never said so, but we knew it. He was not his usual witty and comical self during the Christmas season. He'd buy a Christmas tree, give my mother money to buy gifts for us, put together our bikes and stock the house with an abundance of food. But he expressed no joy at Christmas.

For years, I suspected that he suffered bad Christmases as a child. He grew up poor, but how poor I don't know. I once overheard him and my late Uncle Bud joking that the Griffins were so poor that my daddy and his two brothers took turns going to school because they had only one pair of pants among them. I figured it was a wild tale. However, my father's only surviving brother, William of Seattle, told me after the memorial service that he once missed a couple of days of school because he had no shoes. At the time, he said his mother was treasurer of the Sunday school money collected at her church. She was supposed to deposit collections on Mondays. Instead, she dipped into the fund to buy my Uncle William a pair of shoes. She deposited the money on Thursday after my grandfather got his factory check.

Maybe my father's poor background did have something to do with his dislike of Christmas. Or, maybe he frowned on the holiday because someone close to him died during the season. I can't imagine that the Christmas season will ever be the same for me.

At the top of the Christmas tree that my mother and I disassembled, rested a card designed by my niece, Raven, my father's only precious grandchild. *"That Raven is smart," he boasted. "She swims. She skis. She writes. She's had more experiences in her young life than many people have in a lifetime."*

Raven scribbled in her best 6-year-old handwriting, "Merry Christmas Papa. I hope you have a wonderful time in heaven for Christmas. Love, Raven." With red, green, blue and yellow magic markers, she also drew a Christmas tree and a poinsettia. However, two drawings I couldn't figure out. So when I saw her I asked for an explanation. The one drawing of a man with angel wings was Papa, she explained. The other creature, she said, looking at me incredulously, was Mickey Mouse, of course!!! Raven then flitted away like the butterflies I've seen her chase in spring, and for a brief moment she brought joy inside my tears.

Sincerely,

Current Fellows & Their Activities

Hisham Ahmed. Born blind in the Palestinian Dheisheh Refugee Camp near Bethlehem, Hisham finished his A-levels with the fifth highest score out of 13,000 students throughout Israel. He received a B.A. in political science on a scholarship from Illinois State University and his M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of California in Santa Barbara. Back in East Jerusalem and still blind, Hisham plans to gather oral histories from a broad selection of Palestinians to produce a "Portrait of Palestine" at this crucial point in Middle Eastern history. [MIDEAST/N. AFRICA]

Adam Albion. A former research associate at the Institute for EastWest Studies at Prague in the Czech Republic, Adam is spending two years studying and writing about Turkey's regional role and growing importance as an actor in the Balkans, the Middle East and the former Soviet bloc. A Harvard graduate (1988; History), Adam has completed the first year of a two-year M. Litt. degree in Russian/East European history and languages at Oxford University. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

Cynthia Caron. With a Masters degree in Forest Science from the Yale School of Forestry and Environment, Cynthia is spending two years in South Asia as ICWA's first John Miller Musser Memorial Forest & Society Fellow. She is studying and writing about the impact of forest-preservation projects on the lives (and land-tenure) of indigenous peoples and local farmers who live on their fringes. Her fellowship includes stays in Bhutan, India and Sri Lanka. [SOUTH ASIA/Forest & Society]

William F. Foote. Formerly a financial analyst with Lehman Brothers' Emerging Markets Group, Willy Foote is examining the economic substructure of Mexico and the impact of free-market reforms on Mexico's people, society and politics. Willy holds a Bachelor's degree from Yale University (history), a Master's from the London School of Economics (Development Economics; Latin America) and studied Basque history in San Sebastian, Spain. He carried out intensive Spanish-language studies in Guatemala in 1990 and then worked as a copy editor and Reporter for the Buenos Aires Herald from 1990 to 1992. [THE AMERICAS]

Sharon Griffin. A feature writer and contributing columnist on African affairs at the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, Sharon is spending two years in southern Africa studying Zulu and the KwaZulu kingdom and writing about the role of nongovernmental organizations as fulfillment centers for national needs in developing countries where governments are still feeling their way toward effective administration. She plans to travel and live in Namibia and Zimbabwe as well as South Africa. [sub-SAHARA]

John Harris. A would-be lawyer with an undergraduate degree in History from the University of Chicago, John reverted to international studies after a year of internship in the product-liability department of a Chicago law firm and took two years of postgraduate Russian at the University of Washington in Seattle. Based in Moscow during his fellowship, John is studying and writing about Russia's nascent political parties as they begin the difficult transition from identities based on the personalities of their leaders to positions based on national and international issues. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

Pramila Jayapal. Born in India, Pramila left when she was four and went through primary and secondary education in Indonesia. She graduated from Georgetown University in 1986 and won an M.B.A. from the Kellogg School of Management in Evanston, Illinois in 1990. She has worked as a corporate analyst for PaineWebber and an accounts manager for the world's leading producer of cardiac defibrillators, but most recently managed a $7 million developing-country revolving-loan fund for the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) in Seattle. Pramila is spending two years in India tracing her roots and studying social issues involving religion, the status of women, population and AIDS. [SOUTH ASIA]

Teresa C. Yates. A former member of the American Civil Liberties Union's national task force on the workplace, Teresa is spending two years in South Africa observing and reporting on the efforts of the Mandela government to reform the national land-tenure system. A Vassar graduate with a *juris doctor* from the University of Cincinnati College of Law, Teresa had an internship at the Centre for Applied Legal Studies in Johannesburg in 1991 and 1992, studying the feasibility of including social and economic rights in the new South African constitution. While with the ACLU, she also conducted a Seminar on Women in the Law at Fordham Law School in New York. [sub-SAHARA]

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