

# A PLACE FOR YOU

John 14:12

UPDATE FROM **CHERISE SMITH** IN DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA

Where do I begin? My mind races as I try to figure out how to start telling you about this experience of mine.

I suppose I would consider myself privileged. Being allowed to fight for someone's life, doing the best I know how, praying constantly for a chance for this person to survive. Day in and day out, not a second going by without me wondering if I should quickly pop my head in and see what he needs. Is it time for him to eat; should he be eating at all; could he survive without that rehydration drink that I mixed up for him, but he finds so hard to swallow? How do I know if I am really helping him at all?

Oh, Lord I need your strength. I want to give him hope every time I see him, so I give him my biggest smile and tell him about the things that he will be able to do when he gets better. I pray for him and tell him that God will give him strength. I get so encouraged when he has a few good hours and he can slowly shuffle outside into the fresh air and converse a little with us. Sometimes, he cannot even form a word, so I find these small conversations so uplifting. I am excited about his prospects of survival.

And then, I walk into his room to say good morning, and I can't help myself; I just about fall to the ground sobbing. His skin has sunken completely into his bones, overnight, just like that!! But I thought he was getting better. I have to leave the room quickly before he sees me. I need to be an encouragement!!

I just cry and cry and cry. My prayers shift; Lord if he is going home to you, please let him go quickly. But...He could be such a witness to you; a Zulu man who has given his life to you, and can be an encouragement to others like him. A man who would see and be amazed at your saving graces and miraculous healing to restore his life to him. I watched him outside the other day, slowly touching his face where the big recesses of skin are – he knows how sick he is, he would know a miracle, if you just gave it to him Lord.

But we continue to fight, day after day. A few good hours, a few scary hours. Why didn't we help earlier. He didn't ask, and we didn't feel comfortable to offer. At what point do you swoop in and tell a grown man that he may need your help. At what point does it go from being rude to being OK, because now it is bad enough to do whatever it takes. I heard him cough for weeks. Not in the day, just at night when I would wake up to use the restroom. You see, his

room is 2 meters away from our bathroom. How many weeks does someone cough like that at night before you say, “That’s it; you obviously need some medical care that you are not getting – let me help you.” We did intervene; as we do with many people in our area. And we got a very favorable response. Many people do not want our help. He was very receptive; took our advice and allowed us to take him to our private doctor for care.

He also listened to the gospel message that Kelly shared with him. When Kelly asked him if he wanted to pray, he said that he would rather repeat the words inside his head. Kelly encouraged him to confess these words of commitment to the Lord out loud with his mouth. He was willing. That day he joined our family of believers.

It had been less than 4 weeks, and it was taking a toll on me. It was Sunday, and he was really struggling. I left him with Peter, our Farm Manager for the day, so I could go to church with my family. I needed to get away from the farm for a bit, but I also wanted so much to stay. Peter would take the next day off to see his new Grandbaby. He had been with us through this whole time. If it weren’t for him, we could not have done this.

During worship I just cried and cried. I so very much want him to live – he has such potential and talent in Zulu craftsmanship with beads and wire. Oh the things he will be able to learn to do when he gets better. We had just bought some little baskets made of telephone wire that we know he could master once he has the strength; they are so popular and functional. And he could build up a good business with them – as well as use his talents to train others to make a living this way.

We usually visit a few friends after church and then head home. I ran through the front door and out the back door to Penn’s room.

Peter was standing there, and I knew I should just wait a few minutes. He went peacefully. There he lay, on the outdoor recliner that we had bought him, to allow him to be outside in the fresh air, to rest. He had not wanted to go outside that morning, so we put him in the recliner so that we could place him near the breeze at the window. It was a hot day. And it was his last day here with us.

It all happened so fast; there was too much going on – I should have given more time to care for him – spent more time figuring out what would have been most nutritious for him. The doctor said afterwards that he knew that Penn would probably not make it, but he did not want to discourage us from trying our best. Each day I wished I knew if I was helping a sick man get better; or whether I was caring for a dying man. Nevertheless, I wanted to fight for his life.

So we say goodbye to our dear friend and coworker, Mr. Penn Gumbi, only 45 years old.

That is one thing that is so fascinating to me about death, I know the spirit goes to be with the Lord if one is saved, but ALL that knowledge, experience and everything that you accumulate inside of yourself here on earth, is suddenly non-existent. Mr. Gumbi's talents, all the things that we had not had the opportunity to learn about him yet – it's all gone. I rejoice that he is with the Lord, but I am saddened that this was his lot on earth. He is not saddened now, he is rejoicing.

Goodbye Mr Gumbi – R.I.P. – Rejoice In Paradise!!

We will miss your bright smile and the opportunity to know you better.

“In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.” - John 14:2

But, the work is not over. We struggled and fought to keep him alive, but now that he has passed away and gone home to be with the Lord; there are many things that need to be done to put his body to rest. He has not seen his mother or other family for at least 6 years, we never knew why, other than that they live 4.5 hours drive away, close to the Swazi, Mozambique border. That is a costly travel for any person in his position. I always thought about a time when we may make a trip up to his homeland and take him to visit with his family. So we went on that trip. We delivered Mr. Gumbi to his homeland, and his mother, to be buried where he was born. Oh it is so hard to see the sadness of a life that does not offer many opportunities; one that makes you have to move so far away from your closest relatives to make some sort of a living, and only come home to be buried. And that is the life of most of the people that we work with.

Cherise Smith – South Africa