

# HE SAID GO



## Till Death Do Us Part

By Sharon Pittman

"To go or not to go?" That was the question! We had just been informed that John my husband had idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, a terminal disease, and he had anywhere from six months to two years to live. To hear that was like a kick in the gut! After collecting our breath (literally), and crying together we refocused our future on the eternal.

Thirty-eight years ago we pledged at our wedding service, "To become one to better serve the Lord!" That motto has guided each of our decisions throughout our many years of marriage. After we fasted and prayed about John's illness and our lifelong commitment to mission work, it seemed clear that the Lord was leading us to serve as AVS volunteers in Malawi where I was to serve as the University Vice-Chancellor despite John's physical challenges. Lugging oxygen concentrators, transformers, nasal cannulas, and of course the dog, we arrived in beautiful Malawi as a team not knowing how long John would be blessed with another day of breath.

Six months turned into two years and with all the fresh cool air here at our rural home, two years turned into four and then the beginning of our fifth year. So much for the doctors' predictions! Each day we lived the miracles and each week he continued to offer Bible studies, distribute *The Great Controversy*, prepare students for baptisms while being linked to the oxygen concentrators that the Lord kept miraculously working without any service or routine maintenance that would have been provided in the USA.

Saying a long goodbye to someone I loved, allowed us to live with more love and more vibrancy! Our commitment to service was shaded with the urgent reality that today may be our last to maximize our shared impact for Jesus. Over the years we have been here in Malawi we had many discussions about death and dying and just what might need to happen should that time come. I think we often shocked our Malawi family with open

discussions about what should happen and what John would like to see happen when that day arrived. With John's southern drawl he would declare without pause, "I am ready for my dirt nap whenever Jesus is ready for me to sleep!" Or, "I will wait for Jesus while pushing up lilies!" His humor brought him through the days when he was gasping for air, feeling nauseated, or other such challenges brought on by his disease. He told the many friends who visited with him frequently. "Don't spend money on my funeral! Just make a box and put me in the ground and let me sleep!" He made it clear that all memorial monies should be dedicated to the scholarship fund for our many needy college students.



Then came COVID. It began with a cough, nasal congestion, and other Omicron COVID symptoms. We had great cough syrup from the USA, I was sure that would help, but nothing we tried relieved his incessant coughing. Three days later he looked at me with one big tear streaming down his face and said "Momma, let me go to sleep! This is my time. . . I have fought a good fight and I have finished my course." I panicked, called my leadership team and said "He has made his decision and I need to let him go!" They insisted that I take him to the hospital, but I told them that he preferred to be home during these final hours. Since he was on hospice before we left the USA, I had been able to bring palliative care medications and he decided, with sheer exhaustion, we needed to make that final choice that would end the suffering.

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## In Memory of John Pittman

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**All donations in his memory go for MAU student scholarship**

He breathed his last Sunday afternoon, February 20, 2022, about 2 pm, surrounded by the African kids that blessed our home, his many friends who wanted to say goodbye, his brother who happened to be visiting from the USA, and a dear family friend who was with

us in Malawi as a volunteer. We sang, we cried and we prayed as he took one last gasp of air. Then the machine that keep him breathing was shut off and all was quiet.

We purchased a village-made coffin and the next day hosted a small grave-side service. We had the best of African music, numerous African funeral traditions that added a great cultural touch to John's "going away party" as he said he always wanted.

Today he sleeps on the Lakeview campus of Malawi Adventist University in our small cemetery. I walk the dogs by there each morning as the Lord and I talk while exercising. I am at peace. He is napping nearby, and our shared commitment to a life of service goes on even after death did us part! "See you in the morning babes! Sleep tight!"

[Video of Funeral Service](#)

*Sharon Pittman is the Vice Chancellor of Malawi Adventist University.*

