

## My Son From Uganda

I met Roman, a refugee from Uganda for the first time on Christmas Day, 2019. He had been recently granted asylum after spending grueling months in a detention center. It was during a Service in Advent that our Rector, Mtr. Liz Maxwell, asked if someone would host a refugee from Uganda who wished to be with a family on Christmas Day. Without hesitancy, I said “we will”, speaking for myself and my partner, Matthew. Was my immediate response a result of muscle memory, having often heard “welcome the stranger”; or was something more mysterious working in my life? The opportunity to welcome a stranger, a young refugee without family or friends in this Country, was an unexpected and very special Christmas gift. Little did I know at the time that that gift would develop into a relationship of father and son.

Throughout my adult life, I anticipated Advent and Christmas with both excitement and apprehension, since I experienced the sudden loss of several loved ones prior to Christmas. Each of the losses, which I mourn to this day, makes Advent and Christmas bittersweet for me. Mysterious events leading up to and following one of the sudden losses, which occurred shortly before Christmas, 1971, changed my life in a totally unexpected and unimaginable way; and set me on a journey which at this juncture inspires me to write this article.

During Advent 1971, I was living in Grandview New York with my late partner, Robert, and his mother Anne. Anne, a widow, who had been living in the North of England, came to live with us upon her retirement. Days before Christmas, while having dinner, Anne told us about a forum on “death” at her Church (Grace Episcopal Church) in Nyack. In response to my questioning why we had to talk about death while having dinner and preparing for Christmas, she responded that that was just the point of the forum. “There is never a time to talk about death and therefore one may not know what to do when someone dies.” She went on to tell us that the first thing one should do is call the Rector..

The very next day, upon returning home from work, Robert found his mother dead. I was in my office when he called in shock and asked, “What should I do.” I said, “ Call her Rector and I’ll be home as soon as I can.” When I arrived Anne was still there, dressed for dinner and wearing her string of pearls (her death had to have been sudden), as was Fr. Charles Greene, and the police.

I can’t explain why I thought of going to Anne’s Church the following Sunday. Neither Robert nor I were religious. We found the Service and the Rector, who asked to be called Charles, to be supportive, and so we returned the following Sunday, and I kept returning; and within a year I was baptized at the age of 33. The following year both Robert and I were confirmed by Bishop Stuart Wetmore

In 1978 Robert and I moved back to Manhattan; and shortly before Christmas 1983,, Robert fell ill and died within a week. It was Fr. John Canon, Rector of St. John’s in the Village at the time, who was a source of great support to me.

Not long after Robert's death, and on his birthday, I met Matthew in a support group, and after six months of mutual support, we entered into a committed relationship; and in 2013, we were legally married in the chapel of The Church of the Ascension.

Now back to the beginning of this article.

Following our first meeting on Christmas Day 2019, Roman and I developed a close relationship. I can't recall when I may have referred to him as my son; but ever since he has called me Dad. Last year, his wife Carol and daughter Rolanda were able to emigrate from Uganda, and this year their daughter Immy (Immaculate Mary) was born.

Carol and Rolanda have responded to Matthew and me as family; so, on Christmas Day, Immy's first, we celebrated Christmas as a family; our family from Uganda.

My life continues to be an open road, and I am only the co-author. Some may call it fate or fortune if they wish, but I believe that The Holy Spirit writes the script so long as fear of the unknown, or not yet known, doesn't get in the way.

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