



Update from Shelvis and Nancy Smith-Mather April 2021

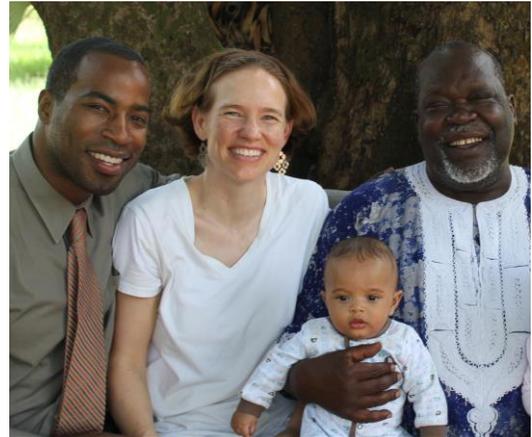
The Grandfather of Grandfathers

The most difficult thing about living overseas is the distance from family. This aspect of our lives in South Sudan became significantly more challenging when, over eight years ago, we welcomed our first child into our family. As new parents, we hoped our son Jordan would regularly be swept up into the loving arms of an adoring grandparent, an aunt or an uncle. We wanted him to benefit from the nearby presence of extended family who would care for him as their own.

We thank God that while living in Yei, South Sudan, we found an abundance of friends, colleagues, and neighbors ready to stand in for our extended family. Daily, Jordan received hugs, kind words, and sweet attention from numerous aunties and uncles at the RECONCILE training center. Shelvis and I fondly remember when, during the 2013 RECONCILE Peace Institute, Jordan met “Jidu.”

Canon Clement Janda introduced himself to our son as “Jidu to Jidujeen (Grandfather of Grandfathers),” acknowledging both his age and his desire to be in relationship. In other circles, Jidu held other titles: Reverend, Canon, Honorable, Senator, Elder, General Secretary Emeritus of the Sudan Council of Churches, and General Secretary Emeritus of the All Africa Conference of Churches. Renowned as a peace negotiator, liberation champion, and global ecumenical leader, all of our children grew up knowing him as Jidu.

Connecting deeply with someone whose life experiences differ greatly from one’s own can be difficult. Opportunities such as: acquiring higher education, working with persons of various cultures, living for long periods in foreign countries, and holding top positions with decision-making power, can change an individual’s mindset. These opportunities and more make up Canon Clement Janda’s story. He attended seminary in the U.S., directed Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation in Zambia, and worked with the World Council of Churches in Switzerland, yet he related easily to South Sudanese who never stepped across the border of their home state. Canon Janda would converse with the security guard at the gate, the women cooking in a mud-walled kitchen, as well as the president of his nation. In a traditionally hierarchical society, this unique quality made a huge impression on us in our early years in South Sudan.



Grandfather Clement Janda holds baby Jordan with new parents Shelvis and Nancy in Yei, South Sudan 2013

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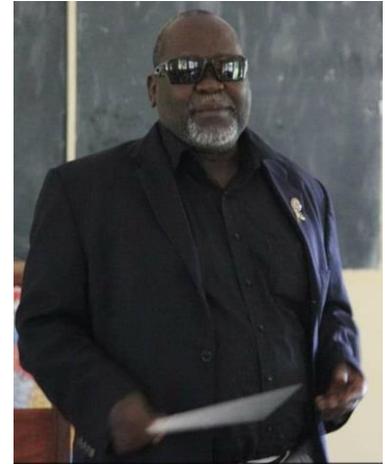
We always felt humbled Canon chose to spend time with us. In 2012, he welcomed us to Yei, his hometown. Like a seasoned guide, he helped us navigate the complexities of a new culture. An authoritative historian, he taught us about the root causes of conflict in South Sudan. A caring pastor, he checked in on us to make sure we were acclimating well.

Extending authentic friendship to us, he visited our front porch in South Sudan while processing and grieving the loss of a close relative. Years later, after both our families fled to Uganda due to the war, I felt comfortable crying on his front porch about the severe illness of someone very important to me. He and his wife Joyce listened compassionately through to the last tear.

When Shelvis applied to Oxford University, Jidu collaborated with two other nationally recognized peacemakers to write a letter of recommendation. The letter showed the humility, wisdom, and commitment to collaboration Canon Janda exemplified in his life. It states: "In recommending Rev. Shelvis Smith-Mather to Oxford University, we do so trusting that he will share with us and our communities the lessons he gains from your esteemed institution, and that he will share with you lessons learned working with us. We believe that accepting this experienced peace-builder and thoughtful theologian into your program will be of benefit to you and us alike."

Canon Janda and Mama Joyce's home was one of our final visits in Uganda before traveling to the U.K. for studies and then later to the U.S. due to the pandemic. When the unexpected news of his death on March 8 reached us, it hit hard. Shelvis and I took the time to process this significant loss personally before telling the kids. It seemed our time in South Sudan and Uganda would never feel quite the same without the presence of our caring Grandfather of Grandfathers. His stories made us laugh, his wisdom guided us, and his love made us feel safe.

For our children, we coupled the sad news with ice cream, celebrating Jidu's amazing life. The day after the ice cream party, I found myself coaching Jordan on ways to speak with humility in order to be a peacebuilder, like Jidu. As the week unfolded, photos from the various funeral events popped up on my phone. I longed to be in East Africa, mourning alongside the many who knew him. The most difficult thing about living overseas is the distance from family.



Renown peace builder, Honorable Canon Clement Janda, teaches a course on Conflict Analysis at the RECONCILE Peace Institute in Yei, South Sudan



Jordan, Addie and Nicole give their "Jidu" a chicken to say "Thank you" in Aura, Uganda 2018