

Remembering a friend who made an impact

On June 17, I attended one of the best celebrations I've ever been to.

From the moment I arrived, I could feel that the aura of the celebration was uniquely spiritual, and not because the celebration's venue was a church. It wasn't the soundtrack of flutes providing instrumental music or the drummers standing ready as guests entered, either.

It was the uniquely spiritual aura of the life we'd gathered to celebrate.

As the service began, there was no announcement for all guests to take their seats. Instead the leader gave a signal, and young drummers began to play as a slideshow of photos of the woman we were gathered to honor appeared on large screens in front of us.

A minister prayed, and then eight women dressed in white, orange and purple African attire danced their salute to the woman

we celebrated as an orchestra of drummers accompanied them.

Words she had penned advised us to laugh, to smile and to love and assured us of her faith in God's grace and mercy.

Friends, family and others she touched told us about her. Some had known her since she was a teenager whose leadership showed through her solid value system, tenacity and courage to stand for her beliefs.

They remembered her under a different

name, when she was an activist establishing a Black Studies Department at the University of Louisville. Others met her as she registered people to vote and organized cultural awareness activities on the University of Kentucky campus in the 1970s, accomplishments she marked years later with the simple statement, "Just look what we have done," on a postcard sent from President Barack Obama's inauguration.

A longtime friend recalled her encouraging single mothers in college and other young people for years to come by telling them that they "must take this educational journey for something larger" than themselves. Another friend charged the guests to learn from her life and from everyone's life, to thank yourself for the good work you do, to take personal responsibility for studying yourself and your culture and to have courage.

One colleague called her a person who created unexpectedly wonderful worlds for her colleagues and for the

special needs children they worked with. Another described her as the quintessential fine arts teacher — the kind who knows how to get children to embrace and learn from visual arts, acting, dance, poetry, costumes, cultural diversity and creative flair.

A former student called her "quiet thunder."

Her alumni from the River City Drum Corps, which she established with her husband and where she served as education director for 15 years, were her students and her children, also. They said she taught them that education, accountability and family were crucial to success.

Other children she loved testified that she taught them how to love unconditionally, and that she and her husband proved a man "can love a strong woman and survive."

Her husband called her his great love, a friend, someone smarter than he and someone with whom he could share secrets and adventures.

The Louisville Arts Council recog-

nized her for her years of devoted service to the arts community, and letters of condolences were read from residents of Louisville and Ghana.

Her name was Zambia Nkrumah. She died on Sunday, June 13.

I remember her as one of the many people among my parents' friends who watered my seeds of creativity through words of encouragement and through arts activism, and as a co-founder of the artistic, afrocentric, revolutionary world in which I now understand is rare for a child in Kentucky to grow up in.

Peace and blessings poured from Zambia's heart while Louisville was fortunate enough to have her, and I'm certain her life will be celebrated for generations through the community she loved, people she exposed to love and lessons she taught them. ♣

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