

OBITUARY
Gjalt Boerrigter, M.D.
1931–1999

Gjalt Boerrigter was born 11 September 1931 and died on 24 August 1999. I lost a teacher and a friend in Gjalt. Thousands of patients in Malawi will remember him as their "leprosy doctor."

GJALT

My friend
did not want to wait any longer;
the day
he left this life behind
he sent me
a long poem:
"Ithaka"
by C. Kofavis.

Gjalt, too,
had reached his destination.

I wept
when his nephew phoned me:
Gjalt was dead.

A period
had come to an end,
my life
had become poorer.
Who knows for real
what sadness is?

A long journey
to your village near the sea
but where else
could I have said
"farewell"?

On the last stretch of road
a pale
but full moon
was shining through the morning's mist.

I remembered
you travelled—
if possible—
only during full moon.

You loved
quiet talks
at moon light
and a gin
or two.

I swam far
into the slate grey sea
into the evening
into the night

to wash off the dust,
the dust of the journey,
and the salt of my tears.

It was good
I came
short the service might have been
everyone seemingly in a hurry
to leave

but it was good
that I came
even though
you were no longer there.

Farewell
(because “God
is not a God of the dead
but of the living”).

—Jorg M. Ponnighaus