

African Missionary: In the Middle of God's Dreams

When in Sudan in termite season, I thought, eat termites. I delicately took my spoon and scooped a few fried pieces onto it. It is only protein, Perry. You are a Sudanese in training now. It is a mental thing. Get over it. Tentatively I put the spoon into my mouth and began to chew the crunchy contents.

It tasted buttery and a little salty—not too unlike burnt popcorn. It was not that bad. I took another bite with more confidence. *Hey, I can do this.* I looked at my kids and gave them a thumbs-up and a smile. “Mmmmm, *kweis, kweis*” (“very good”).

The shout of triumph could have been heard in Khartoum! They cheered and cheered. “Mama, you are a real Sudanese now! If you stay here long enough, your skin will even become nice and black like ours.” I had no doubt of the truth of that statement. But not for the reasons they might think.

What does it take to be Sudanese? It is not as hard as I had supposed. It takes only a heart to love and learn, a commitment to be real and a willingness to try termites.

Jerry-Can Litanies

It had been a long day. I was tired, to say the least. But I was not about to miss my favorite part of daily life here. And I had just conquered a dinner that might make even a tough guy think twice. It was cause for celebration.

Every evening, our kids break out the plastic jerry cans, pot lids and bamboo sticks and go to town. They sing and dance their hearts out to Jesus. Orchestrated chaos might be an accurate description. Our highly skilled percussion section of 10- to 12-year-old children pounds out rhythms of God's

heartbeat under our little bit of African sky. It is truly a family affair, with everyone joining in, from the youngest to the oldest. While rhythms of worship fill the night, some of our children are singing, and most are dancing, but all are a part of this jerry-can litany of praise to our King.

I cannot imagine anything more pleasing to God's heart. I bet He silences the angels to hear true worship rise from this war-torn patch of Earth. All the frustrations of the day faded into the night as I heard little voices crying out to the One who is altogether lovely and faithful. In the middle of holy dust and ear-jarring cadences, I knew there was no place I would rather be.

They introduced a new song that night. This one was in English: "I will never leave my Lord till I die, till I die. I will never leave my Lord till I die."

These who had seen mortars drop and lost loved ones to the violence of conflict knew all too well the reality of the words they were offering in worship. Two-year-old Viola climbed into my lap and snuggled her head into my arms. Mama's lap is a great place to fall into the land of dreams. I felt tears silently begin to wet my face.

It was almost too much. At moments like this I wondered if I would wake up back in America and discover that this was a dream or vision.

Was this really real? Did I really have 30-plus children calling me Mama in the middle of Sudan? Did a woman just get healed on the way to the Internet? Did we just take in our first infant? Was I really holding my promises from heaven in my lap and looking into their eyes every day?

As I watched my growing entourage of children and toddlers jumping and dancing in the moonlight, I realized that I hardly felt qualified for the next stage of my journey. What would it mean to love little Viola, who was curled up in my lap, into

her destiny? Holding her when she was 2 was one thing, but what would love mean when she was 10 and 20?

The dust cloud ascended like incense before His throne. The jerry cans slowed to a meditative beat, and the singing became soft. One by one, the children knelt down with their faces in the dirt, or they stood there with their hands lifted to their King.

Was this what revival looked like? I did not know. That was for history to decide, not us. But I did know, in that moment, that I was watching His kingdom come and His will be done, if only for an instant, on Earth as it is in heaven. And that was all that mattered.

The sun set on our prayers. The children lay down on their mattresses, and we tucked them in. We would not have beds for a few more months. As I looked at their sleeping faces illumined by the faint glow from a kerosene lantern, I again wondered about the days ahead. Instability loomed on the horizon.

But termites aside, it was not such an abnormal day. It was a day of learning how to love and how to see people as God sees them.

Jesus, Teach Me How to Love

There is a pace to life in the bush. It can be demanding in its intensity and infuriatingly slow all at the same time. Life here is a constant paradox that invokes questions and compels an inner journey. New life grows up in old ruins. Development thrives right alongside destruction.

I have been writing these pages from the semi-dark of another evening with no electricity on the waning recesses of my laptop battery. My "shower" is sitting in the plastic jerry can about 10 feet away. I think a mouse just danced over my foot. My arms look tanner than yesterday, but I know it will

all wash off.

I am no super saint. And I am certainly no suffering missionary. There are moments a hot shower would be lovely, but it cannot compare to being in the middle of God's dreams.

How did I wind up here doing this? I began a journey. I said yes to a downward trail of humility to find His heart, to find what is really real. I prayed a dangerous prayer a little over a decade ago: *Jesus, teach me how to love.* {eoa}

Excerpted from Love Has a Face by Michele Perry. Michele is the founding field ministry coordinator for Iris Ministries in Southern Sudan under Rolland and Heidi Baker. Born without her left hip and leg and other birth defects, she endured 23 surgeries by age 13. A native of Florida, Michele studied at Baylor and has previously served in Bangladesh, India, and the inner cities of the U.S. She is also an artist, photographer, and poet. Michele wrote most of Love Has a Face on an old computer by a kerosene lamp in a bullet-hole ridden shell of a building in Southern Sudan. Her writing was punctuated by the occasional AK-47 shot.