

## The other name



Picture of Malakal, South Sudan, by the river Nile. (File photo J.B.)

Back at the beginning of the year, in an unexpected routing, my UN flight landed in Malakal to drop off a solitary passenger. Do you know, it's been almost 7 years since I had been in Malakal. 7 years since the civil war meant we couldn't go back.

7 years...

Approaching the airport, I saw the large open field, the town cemetery, the outdoor market. I saw the road that went down to the river Nile where muddy cars were washed.

The airport was not as it was in the day. It was my favourite airport in South Sudan: my favourite because I knew everyone there. It was more like a corner shop. The kind of place where you sat, drank cold Coca Colas in glass bottles and caught up

on the local news. Where have the people all gone, I wonder.

I was told no one goes through the airport building anymore. Cars park directly off the runway now. Even the outdoor toilets are preferred over the ones inside.

Back in its day, I remember friendly banter with the airport security staff. I remember the tea lady in the main hall. She sold you the last cup of sanity before the hectic travel day began. The baggage conveyor never worked but it always reminded me that I was heading somewhere. A TV hung in the waiting area. My memory tells me it was fixed on South Sudanese news. There might have even been plants in there. There weren't separate gates, just one big waiting room and a glass door that led out to the tarmac.

I used to get permission to drive the truck right up to the plane when we had chartered cargo flights. Missionary pilots in single engine planes would pull up. I'd jump out and fix the tail stand in place and start offloading. *Knock, knock* on the immigration door. "We have new friends arriving today." Co-workers were always just "new friends," the airport staff would soon get to know.

That TV must be gone... the plants too.

I wonder where the tea lady went...

And... just like *that*, the engines fired up and we were up in the air again. A day later I would be with my family in Nairobi waking up early and making breakfast for Noel.

He was born in Nairobi almost 7 years ago.

It was just the two of us that morning and, perhaps, because of nostalgia, I told him a story I had never told him before.

"When you were born, some of our Ethiopian friends came over to visit. They said they had given you another name: *Meheretu*. It's the Amharic word for *mercy*. They told us it was God's mercy that we weren't there during the fighting. *This* is God's mercy."

He smiled. He thought it was cool that he had "another name."

I hope that name made the rounds in Malakal. I hope the tea lady got called Grace; that security guard called Joshua: the Lord saves. But I'll never know.

***I will also give him a white stone  
with a new name written on it,  
known only to him who receives it.***

Revelation 2:17b

Our life may be as brief as a stop to a run-down airport, dropping off a lone passenger. Before we know it, we'll be airborne, on our way home. And when we finally reach home and it's just us and our Father having breakfast, He might hand us that stone and tell us about that new name.

A name He gave you during a hard time perhaps.

Who knows, I'd like to think He'd be nostalgic about it and tell you the story of why He chose it.

And it might finally all make sense.



Getting creative in "lockdown." Boys' artwork.

## Stop and look

I liked this project (above): chalk on the building. The boys wanted to surprise mom. Even the plainest of walls could be coloured enough to make you stop and admire. And all it cost was a handful of coloured chalk.

Hoping that our handful of chalk has put a smile on your face.

