



# Being a MK

Grace Hwang

**1. Have you ever asked “Who am I?” Have you ever encountered an identity crisis? How do you feel when people call you “MK,” “Third Culture Kid,” or “Children without Boundaries?”**

Definitely – the question and even the challenge of establishing an identity is common to all adolescents, and most especially third culture kids. This was true for me too, particularly upon my returns to the United States, or what is termed “reverse culture shock.” The question of cultural identity is actually a blessing that people in the US are privileged to ponder. In Kenya, life was more simplistic for most of the locals so they received outsiders relatively more graciously. Who is wondering about one another’s cultural identities when you are thinking about survival, how to fulfill needs for the next day? However, in the US, we have time on our hands. And when you do not know who Lady Gaga is or understand the newest slang, you are suddenly seen as an alien. In terms of being labeled names like “MK” or “TCK,” I would say that my feelings towards those are mixed, or love-hate. They come with their stereotypes, some of them positive, some of them negative. For instance in my experience I have been labeled as “more open-minded” on the positive end of the spectrum and “socially unrefined” on the other end.

**2. How did you fit in/adjust to cross-culture environment? Are you satisfied with the education that you have received? Can you share briefly about your school?**

I tried as best to keep a mentality of lenience, towards others and myself – to be willing to laugh at my own mistakes, and allow others to laugh with me. One cannot adapt to a new surrounding through gritted teeth but open hands. And this is what I always tried to remember: I must not only tolerate, but embrace our differences. We are all different threads in the tapestry the Lord has woven. The education I received from my school, Rift Valley Academy, which was a missionary kids’ boarding school, was more than satisfactory for me, not only academically, but also spiritually and emotionally. I did not have to board because my home was close enough, so my brother and I would ascend the mountain every morning to get to school. While it was a Christian bubble, it accommodated students from all over the world. I had the opportunity to learn from and share life with these amazing people in a unique setting.

**3. What is “home” in your view? What is the impact of moving frequently on your view of home?**

Because I have moved so frequently, even prior to being a missionary kid, I have settled with the

fact that I will have no stable physical home – and I love it. Sure, once in a while I look at other people’s lifestyles and wish I could sleep on “my own bed” or just go back to one place that holds all my memories. However, ultimately I know I would not trade my mobile lifestyle for any other. I love being able to find “home,” even if it is temporary, in various locations that are so widespread and so diverse. In Kenya, I feel at home with the natural environment. In America, I feel at home with the fast paced rhythm of life.

#### **4. Do you think your family or church give you enough care? How do you wish this could change?**

I would say that my family and church have given me more than enough care in various aspects, especially physically and spiritually. I have been so privileged with a wide net of prayer support and occasional care packages loaded with goodies. However, I do desire to see greater development in emotional care for MKs and TCKs in general – looking past the labels that come with these titles. For me personally, I’m flattered that others want to know about my experiences. However, I start to feel like I am a tour book rather than a person. Instead of mostly getting questions like, “What is Kenya like?” or “Can you speak Swahili?” I wish that I could have more conversations about everyday life. I think that will happen when people look past the big, flashing label of “Africa” and see another young adult with a need for more personal interaction.

#### **5. Have you ever encountered spiritual loneliness or lows? How did you overcome such spiritual lows? Have you ever experienced lessons of faith with your parents?**

Indeed – at one point, I allowed my doubt in God to nearly tear our relationship apart. I have always believed in the existence of a God. However, I severely questioned the existence of a God of love for some time. As a chronic patient and once-resident of Kenya, I have been in numerous settings where I have witnessed and experienced great physical and emotional pain in others – some who continued on to their physical deaths without having any spiritual salvation whatsoever. I grew cynical of the God I thought I knew. I challenged his fairness. If he was a God of love, why did he allow decent people to die without having heard of his love and grace, and

in physical hardship? It occurred to me one day that if I refused to trust in God, who or what was I trusting in then – myself? Suddenly my qualms against God seemed so foolish. I am a petty human. God is infinite. Why was I challenging him on how to run the universe? One of the biggest lessons of faith I experienced with my parents was one we did not learn at the same time – the lesson of sacrifice. One of the most immense sacrifices my parents made when they answered the Lord’s call to be career missionaries was towing their growing children with them to the mission field. I never realized how significant that was until a missionary couple came to spoke at my church and shared that their greatest difficulty was being willing to raise their children on the mission field. The verse the mother tearfully drew from was Proverbs 17:6, “Children’s children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children.” It was then that I realized that my parents are a blessing to me in their sacrifice – they loved me enough to relinquish their hold on me completely to God.

#### **6. What kind of impressions has your parents’ ministry left you? Have you received the calling from God to be like your parents as missionaries?**

The greatest impression that my parents’ ministry has left me is that ministry is dynamic – even hectic at times – and that is why one can only look to God to be the only source of stability. This is especially true in the Kenyan setting. Schedules and even entire plans can change constantly and abruptly. If one goes into ministry set on accomplishing one’s own grand visions or dreams, it will only drive one crazy. You have to allow God to meld that vision, whatever that may be, so that you may flow along with Him – and the ride can get pretty wild! I do not believe that I have yet received a special calling from God to be a career missionary. However, I know that the Great Commission, that is, to go and make disciples of all nations, is something that God has charged us with as the body of Christ. So while I do not feel a specific calling to a certain location or people group, it is my desire to continue to reach out to various cultures and people groups. And hopefully in the future, I will better understand God’s specific direction for me.

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