

Introduction

Welcome to this edition of Educare. In this edition there are two short articles: on page 1, an introductory feature on preparing young people to live independently, and on page 3, a life story by a member of our church who grew up overseas and went on to serve in the army in many different locations.

Preparing for college, university and independent living, by Gill Bryant

How do we prepare our teenage children to make the transition to adult life? Perhaps they have just graduated, completed A levels or the International Baccalaureate, or achieved excellent GPA and SAT scores. They may already have a university place and be planning towards their new life.

What else is needed?

Are they moving from a Christian-based education system to something more secular? Maybe they have been home-schooled, or perhaps attended a local school where the majority religion or world view in the host culture has percolated through the education system.

If they are moving on to further study in the West, how much do they know about the changes in popular culture and thinking that have been affecting the passport culture in recent years?

In a recent online class on issues affecting TCKs, participants identified a significant gap in knowledge amongst TCKs, in the area of preparing to live in the secular West. The comment was made that there is no safe place for MKs in a Christian school to learn about controversial subjects – they are told that certain things are wrong, but they are not given the tools to deal with living in a context where those ideas are seen as normal.

Our young people need to be prepared spiritually, nurtured and encouraged in their identity in Christ. They also need to be prepared intellectually to understand what is happening to Western culture, where the new ideas are coming from, and how to evaluate them in the light of Scripture.

How do we train and mentor our children so that they can engage graciously with those who hold different opinions from the Christian world view?

We will be addressing these questions in future editions of Educare.

Living independently from parents is a challenge for most new students. Some can't wait to get there, whereas others might struggle more at first, but for all of them there is a need to acquire some practical skills in order to cope. This is true even for students who live with a host family

during their studies. For those living in university residences, the new lifestyle can bring even more challenges, as it requires a high level of relational skills to co-operate with others in shared accommodation.

It is worth teaching teenagers to plan meals, go shopping (with a maximum budget) and cook for themselves for a week. This could be done with parental help to start with, and later by themselves. They could cook for the whole family once a week too. Make sure that they know how to wash up by hand, even if there is a dishwasher at home. Teach them to use the washing machine and the vacuum cleaner. Ask them to clean the kitchen and the bathroom a couple of times.

Money management is another important aspect of student life. Talk together about the cost of living, and look at the expenses of running a home. Think about the costs they will need to meet as students – rent, electricity, food, transport, books, clothes and shoes. How will they organise their money? How will being on a budget influence their decisions, especially when socialising with other students? Teach them about debt, what it is and the consequences of borrowing. Explain to them about ‘loan sharks’ who charge very high interest rates. Encourage them to stay within their budgets, and find part-time paid work in vacations.

Transport is a big concern. In the UK, few students will have their own car, but the universities and cities where they are located generally have a good public transport system which caters for their needs. In the United States, this is not so. Students who cannot afford a car are dependent on others to get to where they need to go. An MK known to us who is now studying in the States commented that some of her Christian friends are only able to go to church if they can find someone to give them a lift.

How familiar are our students with using public transport? Some will be used to the local buses and taxis in the host culture where they have grown up, whereas others may have gone everywhere by private car. It is a good idea to give the students opportunities to navigate the public transport system in the passport country by themselves, before they move away from home. Start with simple journeys such as going by bus to the nearest town, and progress to more complicated ones that may involve a change of bus or train along the way. Make sure tht they can read a map or town plan, online or printed.

If they are going to be in a big city for the first time, teach them about keeping themselves safe. There will be certain parts of the city where it is unwise for anyone to go. Young women in particular need to be aware that it is not a good idea to go out alone at night. Encourage the students to seek advice from university staff or trusted senior students.

Our MK friend also mentioned time management as a big issue. She now keeps a daily journal where she records work tasks and deadlines. This enables her to work out which time slots will be her work times and which can be used for other things – household tasks, meeting with

friends, sports etc. It's good to teach our children effective time management before they reach university or college.

There will be more to come on this topic.....in the meantime, if you have stories of adaptation to independent living that you would be happy to share, please get in touch.

Growing up overseas, by Ben Fry

I am consciously aware, as I write this, that there are a great many children around the world who spend their entire childhood going through a series of international moves, struggling to call anywhere "home". I am also conscious that living alongside these children are parents and carers, and that life for them is equally disruptive. My childhood was certainly varied, but I know others have it more so. I suppose one thing which defines my life is that a trend which started when I was 10 has carried on through my adulthood. It is almost as if I enjoyed it, or perhaps didn't learn my lesson early enough!

Until I was 10, we lived in Warwick, England. One evening, my Dad called me and my brothers to talk. It was one of those moments you could tell was serious. He told us that we were moving house, so having moved a few hundred metres to a bigger house only four years prior to that, I asked him where the new place was going to be. I was assuming we were going to move another short distance down the street. He said something like, "You'd better ask me what country it is in, first." I did, and his answer was, "Scotland".

We duly moved to the outskirts of Edinburgh for the next couple of years. For the first six months we rented a house in a village called Kirkliston. I hated the house (it had rubbish carpets, and 10-year-olds are fickle when they're missing home), but the village had the best pipe and drums band in Scotland, apparently. They were a treat to listen to when practising in the local park. I made a few good friends amongst local kids through the local church, and a weekly Scottish Country Dancing class that I enjoyed! Having just got settled there, we moved to a house that my parents bought in South Queensferry – the town famous for the Forth Rail Bridge. That was our home for a year and a half, although we owned it for a few years after that. All this time I was going to a large and well-known private school in the middle of Edinburgh, where my Dad was an IT teacher. It was my first experience of fairly relentless bullying for being English. Apparently, we'd been fighting wars against the Scots for some time, and the other kids seemed to be incensed by it all. I never really understood why, or quite what I had to do with it. Thankfully the sport at school was second to none, and being a big rugby school, whenever England beat Scotland I got a temporary reprieve!

After a couple of years my parents must have been getting itchy feet, because they announced that we were moving again. This time we were off really far away, to São Paulo, Brazil. It took a while for everything to be sorted for our move to Brazil, so I missed a few weeks at the start of

the school year. Dad went a month or so ahead of us, and when we joined him we lived in a hotel for about a month whilst our apartment was sorted. The school there was an incredibly wealthy British School. I never really had the knack of languages, and my best mates there spoke English as their first language, anyway. Therefore, my Portuguese developed quite slowly. My elder brother's mates were the opposite, and before the end of our year in Brazil he was so fluent that people thought he was a local. We lived in Brazil in 1993-94, and of course 1994 is perhaps most memorable there as the year Ayrton Senna died and Brazil won the Football World Cup. I watched Senna's funeral procession from the window of my science classroom. I counted seven military helicopters flying above the fire truck that they used to carry his coffin; many of my school mates were in tears. I didn't entirely get the fuss, but Formula 1 is a big deal in Brazil, and Senna, I now appreciate, was a legend.

After the school year finished my Dad was made redundant. Because my parents were adventurous types, we spent the next three and a half months travelling in South America, and a month after that in North America. It had been the plan for Dad to start work in Paraguay at one point, and it was there that our extended holiday started. But for whatever reason that didn't work out, so we kept travelling. This gave me the chance to: run across the roofs of moving trains; visit Machu Picchu; camp in the Amazon; live for a week with a missionary to a remote tribe; and have my first experience of being at held gunpoint, on this occasion whilst being searched by an Argentinean Soldier. By huge contrast, in the USA we: visited Disney, Universal Studios and all of those attractions in Miami; bought a car; broke down in the middle lane of the motorway but were rescued after being hit by another vehicle; drove up the East Coast via DC to New York (over several weeks); visited Niagara Falls; crossed into Canada and back; and went to school for one day in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts.

We then moved back to our house in Warwick, in the UK, which my parents had been renting out. I was able to join many of my old friends from my childhood, but now with the experience of lots of foreign cultures. Some of the other kids didn't believe that I had lived in and seen so many places, which was a bit of a shock. It was probably jealousy! The school I went to was totally awful. The students had no respect for the teachers, and it was more or less impossible to get an education. This was a shock, having come from such a disciplined system, and it was no doubt an effect amplified by the lack of a uniform and the practice of calling teachers by their first names. We lived in Warwick for a year before moving again, this time to Nassau, The Bahamas.

The Bahamas was something else! What a paradise. Well, actually, some of it is paradise, and sometimes there were gun fights on the streets between rival gangs. But on the whole, my experience there was hugely positive. It is still my favourite place on Earth, although I have only been back once. I love the sea, and I loved the culture as I was experiencing it. At the time, the Bahamas was an overtly Christian culture. I was aged 14-15 the year we lived there, so I literally grew into a man, but I also had total immersion in two different Church cultures and superb

theology teaching both at church and at our Christian school. I also had my first serious girlfriend, which I suppose is a defining period.

I had absolutely no desire to leave the Bahamas a year later, but we nevertheless did because my older brother was essentially overdue for his GCSE exams (he was 16 when we left). We could have made the decision to stay on and just go through the Bahamian and US education system, but I now understand why that is a difficult call for parents to make. We therefore flew into Miami, and much like when we finished in Brazil, we bought a car and drove up the East Coast to New York, having first sampled the pleasures of Miami again. This time our eventual destination was a Bible Camp on an island just off New York which I attended for a week.

Arriving back in England again, and settling back into our old house, was an odd experience. You might have assumed I went back to my old school, but I was glad to have moved to a different one with a much better disciplinary record, sensible uniform, and standard customs in terms of how to address teachers. I also had a good number of friends here and made more as the year progressed. From that point of view, it was a great year for me.

What was tricky was that during my arrival interview with the Head Teacher he had asked me what results I had got when I did my SATS (a set of national tests taken by 14 year old children in the UK) , back in 1994. I couldn't remember exactly, so I guessed the answer, but undersold myself by a whole point on each of the three results. In other words, I said something like 5 – 4 – 4 when actually I scored 6 – 5 – 5. Clearly the results I had estimated were low, and I was put into the lowest-achieving class for every subject. Also, this being the school year I was to turn 16, it was the year I was to sit my GCSEs, so I needed to cover the whole syllabus in one year instead of the normal two. I worked hard and was gradually moved up the classes, as the teachers recognised my ability. I reached the highest-level maths class in January, and was able to sit the higher-level exam in May. I wasn't so lucky in all of my subjects as there wasn't room in the classes, but thankfully my GCSE results were good enough to get me into the Army Sixth Form College which was to be my next school. I also wasn't able to take Design and Technology (DT), because this course apparently required the whole two years of study. I was not allowed into the classes, so instead, I had to sit in the corridor twiddling my thumbs for two hours at the end of the day, twice a week, whilst the other students did DT!

The Army gave me a great deal of stability. It also gave me a superb education. The two years at Sixth Form were the longest I had at any of my six secondary schools (I count my school in Scotland as one of my secondary schools because I did a week of secondary there before we moved to Brazil; I do not count the school in Martha's Vineyard!). Right after Sixth Form I signed up to the army, aged 18 and 3 days, and went straight to university, before going to the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst for the commissioning course. It was at university that I met my wife and we got married. We have since had two children who have lived in a total of eleven houses with us, so far, in England, Germany (where our son was born), Nepal and

Northern Ireland. I have also spent time abroad on Exercises and Operations in Poland, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Qatar.

The military option of boarding school has, for my children, been a key factor in providing stability in secondary education; something which I am sure my own experience of growing up taught me could be desirable. I am of the opinion that academic education does suffer for children with my sort of experience. However, I am also of the opinion that general education and global understanding is vastly enhanced, and compensates considerably. Yes, I had tough times, but I had so many more awesome ones. For example, there was that one day when I had to leave the Bahamas, but before that I SCUBA dived with sharks, spear-fished grouper, and barbequed on private islands, all more than once! Try and beat that!

I think that above all else, this experience has given me a lifelong hatred of the way foreigners and strangers can be treated, mostly because I have spent so long being one. I do not call any one place, "Home". If people ask where I'm from, I either tell them that "I lived in Warwick until I was 10, but after that it gets complicated", or just say, "The big ball flying around the sun." I tell you what, as well, I've been to churches all over the world, and the Holy Spirit moves in all places where faithful people gather. Our LORD is the common factor in this world, and He has been with me every step of the way.

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