

International and MK schools around the world have now finished the academic year or will finish over the next few weeks. This inevitably brings huge changes for all concerned. For those who stay behind they see friends leave; perhaps permanently with the real possibility that they will not meet up again. For those who leave there is the same loss of friends, but also the loss of place and familiar surroundings. All of this is lost and is exchanged, either for a new place as the parents change the location of ministry and work or for the passport country.

The "return" to the passport country may be a return to a familiar place and may even be eagerly anticipated as a place of new personal freedom, but both the returnee and the place have changed. The seemingly familiar can become alien and difficult to face, the eager expectations can evaporate in the face of a hard new reality that this is it – the returnee is back and has to cope with ordinary day to day living. This is no holiday, with treats and visits to family and friends. This is the real thing; bills to be paid, possibly a part-time job to help pay those bills, appointments, a new school, college or university, a house or flat to be put in order, and so much more. In other words, this is adjustment to living in a changed environment rather than just visiting it. For others the "return" may be to the passport country, but as a foreigner who has limited knowledge of it. However the child feels about the experience, re-entry will be one of the biggest, or even the biggest, adjustment they will face in their lives.

A lot has been written in the standard books about re-entry, but we would like to receive contributions of personal stories to add to that general information. Gill has written about her own re-entry experience back in 1970. Times have changed, but many of the experiences faced are the same. If you want to write about your own experience, please send it to us at [SteveGill@mkea.freeseve.co.uk](mailto:SteveGill@mkea.freeseve.co.uk)

Let us know if you are happy for it to be published in Educare; nothing will be published without permission.

The other issue opened up in this edition is raising children in restrictive societies. If you would like to comment on this, then contact us on the same e-mail address.

## 1970

There was snow on the ground, in patches at the side of the road. The roads themselves were clear, wet but not icy, although the trees were stark and bare, clearly silhouetted against lowering grey skies. It was not actually raining, but it was cold.

We travelled in a minibus, just our family, with a driver. The van was warm, and we sat quietly as we progressed through the Wiltshire and Hampshire countryside. The radio was on, playing the song 'Love grows where my Rosemary goes'. I learned later that it was a chart topper at the time. For me, then, it was like a lament. Inwardly I mourned the passing of my former life.

When I thought of Gibraltar, I did not recall the fact that it was raining when we left on March 12<sup>th</sup>. Today, March 13<sup>th</sup>, my life had changed forever. I had said goodbye to a hot, sunny place with blue skies and beaches...the towering Rock of Gibraltar, which had been my home for three years. My friends would all be in school today, at the Catholic convent...right now, they would be learning Spanish with plump, twinkly Mrs T. or French with the feared Mother S. It might even be music with Mr P. who made us research into the lives of all of the classical composers and claimed to be able to play every instrument in the orchestra.

I could remember leaving England at the age of eight, with my six year old sister and my brother who was two and a half. It was almost three years ago to the day – my father's employers took

no account of academic years in their overseas postings. One's father was appointed, and one went – lock, stock and barrel. What would we find today, when we arrived at Elson, a district of Gosport, our former home? My memories were very happy – I had grown up with lots of friends in the street, and we had all played outside. I had never felt left out – I belonged there. It was sunny in the summer, and in the winter we had crisp, cold weather. One year in particular (I learned later that it was 1963) we had deep snow. We all went to school together, I went to Brownies with the girls next door, we went to ballet and tap dancing classes...at weekends we would go to church and Sunday school and regularly visit our cousins in Portsmouth. My dad worked in Portsmouth Dockyard, but unlike his brothers, my uncles, he wanted to move on. I recalled the day when we were told that we were going to live in Gibraltar, and mum showed us where it was on the world map on our bedroom wall. I remember trying to spell out the impossibly long word, 'Mediterranean'. I went to Brownies for the last time and learned all about the 'pack holiday' which I would not be able to go on, now that we were 'going abroad'. In my mind then, 'going abroad' was something unpleasant which only happened to certain people, like road accidents or catching an unusual disease.

The journey to Gibraltar started at Lyneham, in a propeller plane, a Britannia, which in 1967 took almost four hours to reach its destination. I felt sick the night before, but the journey went ahead...I clutched a brown paper bag all the way there, but never managed to fill it. On arrival I was put to bed in the hotel room where we stayed for the first few days...I can remember being brought the biggest glass of orange juice I had ever seen. The illness turned out to be tonsillitis.

I don't remember being homesick for England. My new life was rapidly filled with sunshine, new friends, weekends at the beach or swimming pool. Junior school was mostly fun – I only learned much later in life that the barrel had to be scraped to get teachers for us service children. I can't imagine why, as Gibraltar was such a beautiful place.

Back to the van, with steamed-up windows...We arrived in our street and spilled out onto the pavement. Suddenly there were our neighbours, a family with six children...excitement, exuberance, and cries of 'Haven't you grown!' What do you say to that?

We went in to our old home, and it seemed dark. The kitchen was long, narrow and dingy and the bedroom I used to share with my sister was much smaller than I remembered. We knew that we would only be here for a few months, as my dad had been posted to Rosyth in Scotland – yet this had to be home, for the time being.

My sharpest memories of this time are from my new school. The contrast between the convent school - small, friendly, full of familiar faces – and this huge monstrosity, like a great city, was so hard to bear. The girl next door was at the grammar school, whereas I was sent to the comprehensive, despite the fact that I had passed two different 11 plus exams in Gibraltar. Something inside me died at this giant institution...I was scared and shy and got lost frequently. No-one really explained anything properly and I didn't understand why I was with different groups of children for different subjects. 'Setting'\* had not happened in the convent – our class had been together all the time. It was so confusing. Etched on my mind most clearly is my first meeting with the maths teacher. A kind girl who had been assigned to look after me introduced me to him. 'This is Gillian, and she's come from Gibraltar' in front of a silent, gaping class. The said teacher, an elderly man, took my hand and kissed it, and laughter erupted round the room. His gesture of mockery stayed with me down the years...maybe as an adult I could have laughed it off, but not then.

As for the friends I remembered from my childhood, where were they? I met a couple of them at my new school, but they had moved on. The childhood friendships which I had treasured were fragile bubbles, burst by the passage of time. My own struggles completely obscured those of my mother, which I only contemplated much later, in adult life. She had to hold the family together while my father became a weekly commuter to the impossibly far away 'Kingdom of

Fife'. How he did it in those days, before high speed trains and cheap flights, I shall never know. Mum's task was to look after the three of us and sell the house. We all missed Gibraltar, and had no idea of the life to come in Scotland.

The day came when the house was sold, and we packed up and travelled to Scotland by first class train. I record that because, to this day, it has been my one and only experience of first class travel. It was courtesy of the Admiralty that we had this comfortable journey in an old-fashioned compartment train.

We stayed for a few days in 'Mrs B's', a big, grey stone terraced house where my dad had boarded during his weekly commuting. After that we moved to a housing estate, the Scottish equivalent of English council housing. Our house was OK, but the surroundings seemed so grey and unfamiliar. School started on the incredibly early date of 24<sup>th</sup> August- my birthday, 27<sup>th</sup>, had never been spent at school before. As the days passed in my new environment, I absorbed 'Scottishness' without really thinking about it. Exercise books became jotters, plimsolls became gym shoes, and history lessons covered Bannockburn and Culloden. I learned to spell and pronounce names like McLeod, Farquharson and Dalziel. Discipline was kept by means of a belt or tawse, which every classroom teacher possessed – I remember very little trouble in any class. School dinners were taken in a hut where we queued up and partook of Scotch pies, bridies, chips, stews and dumplings. All of it became normal, against the political backdrop of North Sea Oil (badges were produced and worn by my classmates, proclaiming, 'It's Scotland's oil'), miners' strikes and the decline of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders.

As a family, we explored Fife and beyond, enjoying the Ochil Hills in the snow, the grandeur of Edinburgh and the bracing but golden coastline along the Firth of Forth. Looking back years later, I can see that there was a big cultural difference between the south of England and Central Scotland, and some preparation would certainly have helped. My mum could have done with some orientation too, although she did at least have the 'extended family' of other wives in the same position, whose husbands had been posted to Scotland from the south. As a child and then a teenager, my problems were not just due to culture, but also to the general school environment and to the changes in myself.

What are the lessons to be learned from my life experience? In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we are more open about our feelings and emotions, and this is healthy. We were not a Christian family, despite my mum's churchiness, and we were not used to sharing our feelings with one another. So much was bottled up because one didn't want to rock the boat. As I found out, this only suppresses the pain and stores up trouble for later on. We need to listen to our children, and give them time and space to share their feelings. We may even need sometimes to be vulnerable ourselves in their eyes, so that they can see that we, too, struggle. Obviously there is a limit to this, as they need to be able to depend on us for strength and support. But perhaps, if we can be honest, so can they.

We need to think about the timing of our moves. Sometimes a sudden move at an inopportune time is unavoidable, due to factors such as sickness or civil war. In these cases it is rarely possible to prepare children for change. However, in more normal circumstances, surely it is better for a child to finish an academic year than to be yanked away in the middle. Multiple changes can be especially difficult – two new schools in one year was definitely too much for me.

Memories are vitally important, and they should be shared and rehashed spontaneously and openly. In our family now, we frequently reminisce about life at BCS and in Senegal. At times we discuss in depth the difficulties of adjusting to life in the UK. This is in contrast to the family life with which I grew up.

In the world of mission and Christian work, we have an especially great responsibility to demonstrate God's love and concern in our families. Our children are not just cogs in someone else's plans, and neither should they be extras to our or our mission's, agenda. They are special individuals who need and deserve care and attention in their own right, if they are to cope successfully with transition and grow up with a true knowledge of a loving Father God.

Gill Bryant

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\* Setting – the grouping of children in a given year group according to academic ability. Children can be in different class groups for each subject.

Re-entry references

Third Culture Kids; Pollock & Van Reken; Nicholas Brealey/intercultural Press

The Art of Coming Home; Storti; Nicholas Brealey/Intercultural Press

Families on the Move; Knell; Monarch

MK manual; Barnicoat; Mail order from us for GBP2.50/€4/USD5 + Postage

## LESSONS FROM HAGAR'S STORY

How many of us have struggled with our children's problems? Do we ever identify with Hagar's situation in Genesis 21? Some time ago the Lord spoke to me powerfully through this passage, and it helped so much in a difficulty which one of our children was experiencing. Recently I was drawn to it again, when another child was struggling. The Lord has really blessed me through this passage, so perhaps it might help and encourage someone else.

In verse 14, Hagar and Ishmael were sent away – to who knows where? The rejection which they experienced must have been acute. Sometimes our children too experience rejection, for being different, for not fitting in, for having a disability which no-one really understands. We can feel at times as if we are wandering in a desert.

In verse 15, Hagar ran out of her own resources – the water was gone. We pour so much effort into our children, and yet sometimes our resources are puny in the face of their needs. In verse 16 she experienced despair, and gave up, sobbing under a bush. Are there any missionary parents who have not wept for their children? The problems may be diverse – homesickness at boarding school, difficulty with peer groups, acute re-entry shock, bullying, lack of assertiveness, turning away from God, drugs, alcohol, apathy, lack of direction... We can be there with Hagar, every time.

However, looking at verse 17....God heard the boy crying, and He spoke to Hagar. She wasn't a woman of high status – the very opposite, in fact. In the New Testament she is seen in Hebrews as a 'slave woman'. Yet God noticed her and lovingly gave her instructions. First, 'Do not be afraid'. God is really the only person who has the authority to tell us not to fear...He knows everything that will happen, and the surprises around every corner. 'Lift the boy up and take him by the hand' – be a mother again, a leader and a carer in the situation. Hold his hand and require him to walk. Act as if you know that there is a future, even if you still feel despair. Then there is the promise: 'I will make him into a great nation'. He is not going to die of thirst, and this present crisis will not be the end of his life.

In verse 19 'God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water'. How often do we sing, 'Open our eyes, Lord'? This needs to be our prayer, that we will see the well, and know where to go to

draw water for our children. Hagar had to be proactive, and go to the well herself to draw water. God did not miraculously refill the skin that she carried, but gave her a task to do. We too may have to draw water ourselves, 'out of the wells of salvation', from the word of God. During the second incident where I succumbed to despair, God clearly showed me that I must proclaim blessing over my children. It is good and right to proclaim the promises of Scripture over them, whatever their current state. Many years ago when our children were small, the Lord gave us the promise, found in Isaiah 54:13, 'all your sons will be taught by the Lord and great will be your children's peace.' During our time overseas we frequently clung to another promise from Isaiah, chapter 49:25. Whatever came against us as a family, we put our trust in the fact that God would contend on their behalf.

Going back to Hagar, we see that there was indeed a future for Ishmael. He grew up, developed skills and got married. In worldly terms he lived a normal successful life according to the context that he lived in. God has a future for our children too – he has laid up provision for them, whatever their area of need. In common with Habakkuk in chapter 3:17-18, we may not yet be able to see the Lord's provision in the situation. Yet we can rejoice in Him, and let him strengthen us to 'go on the heights', and see things from God's perspective.

This article is anonymous in order to protect the privacy of the children.

## Raising Children in Restrictive Societies

- A lifetime of being viewed as an object of temptation.
- A constant feeling that you are a target.
- Hiding behind walls and veils to avoid prying eyes.
- Living in dangerous cities where crime is rampant and riots, kidnappings or muggings could take place at any time.
- Growing up feeling intimidated by forceful adults and older children
- Living with surveillance
- Knowing that you could have to leave at very short notice and having the bags packed ready to do so if needed

For many children these are the realities of life that they face.

Visiting a number of countries recently, I have been struck by the need to prepare and counsel families facing restrictive societies.

Many parents and agencies recognise the need to support and protect girls who can face constant harassment in the form of stares, abusive remarks and groping if they venture out of the confines of their homes. The risk of abuse can be very real and vigilance is needed at all times. Damage is done too though, even if physical contact is avoided. Girls can learn that they are second class people, objects of temptation who are in need of being hidden away or veiled so that men can remain clean and undefiled by seeing them. They can learn that it is "normal" to face crude and suggestive remarks every time they go out and learn to accept the unacceptable. They can learn that it is somehow wrong to be a girl and carry that through in to their adulthood and struggle with their identity as women.

Recognising these problems though can be a help in the battle to correct this negative input. We must protect, teach and provide correct role models for our girls. Protection in terms of guarding them against abuse and maintaining homes, schools and social venues as safe havens, teaching the Biblical view of femininity and womanhood as well as personal security and prevention, role modelling true and godly family life in our homes.

But what about our boys? What are the effects on them of growing up in such societies? There are two main areas of potential difficulty – direct and indirect.

In some places there is a very direct risk of abuse to them too. Homosexuality and pederasty may be tacitly or even openly accepted; there are parts of the world where men in positions of authority would view it as their right to claim the sexual favours of boys. This kind of behaviour is often linked with strict sex-segregation rules in the society. Our boys may be foreigners, but that does not grant them immunity to predatory adults of this type. There are also other places where sexual teasing to the point of harassment and abuse is the norm for local boys. This can take the form of older children and adults “jokingly” groping the genitals of little boys as they walk or play in public areas. In these cases our boys need the same sort of protection and teaching as the girls; they need the same training in when to say “no” and in freedom to tell, the same adult supervision and vigilance in public places and the same care in the guarding of the home as a haven.

The indirect effects are more insidious and can occur even when boys are more confident about looking after themselves. These are the effects of constantly seeing women and girls in subservient roles and of rigid gender-segregation. Many families will consider sending girls to the protection of boarding schools when they come to the teenage years, but they should also consider sending the boys. Sending just the girls for their protection gives the same message again to the boys and can leave small peer groups of teenage boys in a gender-segregated group by default. Boys can adopt the local mindset of male dominance and a distorted view of femininity as a result of this.

Growing up with the tension of insecurity is another huge area of concern. If children live with the threat of the need to leave at very short notice, either because of a deteriorating security situation or because of the threat of deportation from unrealistic visa demands on the parents, they can display all sorts of problems in terms of stress and health complaints as well as behavioural and social difficulties. If sudden departure is forced on a family, confusion, anger and grief on the part of the children can all add to the practical difficulties that this brings.

Have you faced evacuation or visa related sudden departure?

Are your children growing up at risk of sexual harassment from adults and older children?

Has strict gender-segregation affected you or your children negatively?

Do you have any other observations on these or similar issues?

This article is only meant to be a starter to a discussion and a forum. There is so much more that could and should be said; some issues have been mentioned, but no more. Over the years relatively little has been written about living with these kinds of restrictions. There are some excellent exceptions to this listed below.

It may be that you are living with some of these restrictions and learning how to handle them either as children or as parents on behalf of your children. We'd very much like to hear from you and to be able to pass on your insights to others. We will publish anonymously too if needed.

#### References

Raising Radiant Daughters in Dark Places; Emily Van Dalen, reprinted in Fitted Pieces by SHARE Education Services (mail order from SHARE), first printed in Interact May 2000 & Oct 2000

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Sudden Removal from the Field; Raising Resilient MKs available by mail order from ACSI