Educare September 2005

As promised last time, this issue is devoted again to the two issues of living with restrictions and re-entry. We have included contributions on the re-entry experiences of 2 different MKs, but are still welcoming more and have already invited others to contribute to the December/January edition. As ever, we welcome correspondence on any MK issue, whether private or for publication and the wider **Educare** readership.

One **excellent** resource for re-entry is Carole Steedman's "Going Home; A Re-entry Guide for Younger Children". This excellently-presented guide is exactly what the title says it is. It has a section for parents to work through themselves and then with their children. It also has a range of activities and thought-provoking ideas for the children themselves. It is ideally geared for children of elementary/primary school age.* It is available on a CD for the cost of the CD (£1 or €1,50 or US$2) plus postage to your part of the world. The cost is so low because we are keen to have this resource as widely available as possible and it is sold on a not-for-profit basis only. Contact us to get your copy on SteveGill@mkea.freeserve.co.uk

*There are several file pages on the same CD to help older children ask the right questions to help them through re-entry.

Re-Entry Experiences

My name is David Bryant and I am a student at the University of Southampton studying Physics. I grew up in Bourofaye Christian School, Senegal, West Africa.

My parents went out as missionaries to Senegal in November 1990, at which time I was three years old. Both my parents were teachers at the school. We were there for four years, followed by a two year gap and then five more years. When I moved back to England on home leave at the age of seven, I found the experience strange - it was as if I was in a different world. It was cold and I had to wear uniform to go to school. Everyone here was rich, while most people in Senegal were poor. It got dark very early in the winter. On trips to the beach, we never went in the sea, as it was too cold! It helped to have people in the church that really cared about us because at times those two years were very difficult.

I had a different experience of Bourofaye to most people. My parents were teachers there so I didn't have to board. Sometimes I felt guilty about this, a feeling which was exaggerated occasionally through comments made by others. I had another friend who lived at the school in my class, so I wasn't completely alone during holidays. It also helped to have someone in the same situation as me. I found sometimes it was difficult to have my parents teaching me as they would take on a different role. The advantage was that if I needed an adult to talk to, my parents were always there.

I came back to the UK to live here permanently in 2001. It felt strange to suddenly think that I would not be moving around so much again for a very long time. The first few weeks back were exciting, although at times they became tedious after a little while. I would have the same comments and questions from almost everyone I met. This time was actually easier in that we had been back one year before on a short home leave for the British summer. Previously, it had been gaps of two or even three years between these returns to the UK.

I was very nervous about starting back at school in this country. My starting date was the 6th of September, which seemed very early in comparison to what I was used to. I knew teaching here would be a lot more formal and the close, friendly atmosphere of the small classroom would be lost. The classes were three or four times the size I was familiar with in Senegal.

Although I made a friend early on, the relationship went sour a few months later, and that was when the difficulty of being back in this country really set in. I found the culture really difficult. The lessons were fairly enjoyable but break times were a trial, when I had no one to sit with. Everyone was squashed into two small spaces at lunch time. Sometimes I would escape this by going to the library, but even there it wasn't always quiet.
One thing that really helped me through this time was picking up cycling as a hobby -initially just at the weekends. I started in the late autumn, so it was restricted to just weekends because of limited daylight hours. A broken ankle put a temporary stop to it after a few months, but six weeks later when the ankle was better, I got back into it in earnest. At first I had to be careful and could only do short rides, so I cycled more often as a result. This then led me into cycling twice during the week. It was about this time the original friendship had gone sour, so cycling helped me get through the difficult school days.
I would recommend a constructive hobby such as this to anyone re-entering. It gives something to look forward to and also helps get rid of any negative feelings of longing to be back in the host country endlessly. It helped me see things in perspective and that God had reasons for bringing us back to this country.
In the sixth form*, I started to make friends more with someone from my church. This had been building gradually, on and off, for the past two years. In the sixth form, break times became much more enjoyable, because privileges such as having a separate common room helped. This meant we could be apart from the younger years. Sixth formers were also allowed access to computers at break times. Since starting sixth form, the relationship with my friend from church has steadily grown, and I have also started developing other friendships. Another piece of advice I would give is not to rush into friendships. It is better to think first, and then to go in gradually. It is also good to have more than one friend. If there is an argument, you still have other friends who can help you get back together again. Also where possible, try to avoid making friends with two people who hate each other, unless you are an expert at reuniting people and sorting out arguments. This is a mistake I made.
The sixth form wasn't all easy. I was suddenly introduced to a culture of binge drinking and nights out. Everyone expects you to go along with the flow and to not drink or only drink very little is looked down on as a sign of weakness. Everyone seemed to like noisy night clubs, which I had no desire to go to as they are expensive as well as unpleasant.
Another think I found difficult was how Britain-centred everything was. People thought I'd been in South Africa even though I'd said West Africa. I've also met people who believe that immigration into this country should be stopped. I've seen Senegal, a comparatively peaceful country, and I can see exactly why people leave the extreme poverty to seek a better life, so I was quite shocked at some of the selfishness I saw.
I can see where God's hand has been through the whole experience, however. I am trusting that He will continue to be with me and that the difficulties I encountered were meant for me as part of a greater purpose, which is to help others struggling with the same things.

- Sixth form – the final two years of school in the UK at ages 16 - 18. Pupils study for their A levels or similar qualifications to allow university or college entrance. Schooling at this level is not compulsory.

Karla's story below brings another angle on MKs and re-entry. The classic image of an MK who was born or moved as a baby to "there" and returned years later doesn't fit the experience of many. Those, like Karla, whose parents serve in sending countries and move around the developed world, even around Anglophone countries, have experiences that bear all the hallmarks of the TCK lifestyle and they may well face re-entry just like any other MK.

Karla's Story

Could you tell us a little about your background.

I'm a New Zealand passport holder, the youngest of three children and my parents have worked with SIM for many years. I grew up in four different countries – Nigeria, New Zealand, Australia and The USA. I lived in Nigeria until I was 6 before moving back to New Zealand.

Where were you in Nigeria and what memories do you have of this time?

We lived in Jos where my mum was the matron of the mission hospital and my dad was the manager of the Challenge Christian bookshops and a Christian radio station. For memories it's like having video clips in my mind. Going to the market, I remember buying sugar cane and seeing the flies at the meat stalls and the vultures circling overhead. More appealingly, I can see the jacaranda trees and the bougainvillea flowers in the garden and eating mangoes straight off the tree – mangoes are still my favourite fruit. The church that we went to was a simple concrete building with the Sunday School taught outside underneath the trees. I can remember an old beggar who always seemed to be sat outside the front of the local Challenge bookshop. One of my favourite memories is of the local zoo where there was a train for the visitors and I remember staring down into the crocodile pit as they writhed below and being entranced as the hippos opened their huge jaws at feeding time. At the age of 5 I did a year of school at home with the New Zealand Correspondence School and my mum was teacher and supervisor. Overall, I have very good and warm memories of my early childhood in Nigeria.

What do you remember of your first re-entry experience to New Zealand?

It was a time of transition for the whole family. Mum & Dad were praying about what new ministry God had for them. This meant that it only lasted for just over a year, but I remember it as a good time generally. I went to the local primary school and enjoyed it and it was good to have my extended family around, especially spending time with my grandparents. I thought that our house was really cute - albeit small, so that I had to share a room with my brother. We lived at Raumati Beach near Wellington so it was a wonderful novelty to be able to go down to the beach each day as Jos is so far inland that I'd never played by the sea like that before.

After this year or so in New Zealand what came next?

My father was asked to take over as national director of SIM Australia in Sydney which meant that we spent the next 5 years there. I went to the local school and had to face another move with its challenges as well as another cultural change.

What difficulties did you encounter and was there anything that you found helpful to overcome them?

I found the adjustment to a new place difficult. The children at school weren't that friendly and always seemed to falling in and out with each other. I was very shy and withdrawn at first; so much so that my teachers were concerned and called my parents in to discuss the problem. I really needed time to adjust and by my second year I had come out of my shell more, but as I did so my "strange" accent confirmed my foreign-ness to them. I clearly remember some of the racist taunts relating to my time in Africa that were thrown at me by so-called friends. My class teacher intervened and explained to the class why this wasn't acceptable. It helped to some extent and as time passed by and I learned their lingo I felt that I belonged more, but I had the contradictory feelings that so many TCKs can identify with that I felt as though I belonged, yet didn't belong.

What was the next stage in your journey?

My parents were asked to work at the SIM International Headquarters at Charlotte in North Carolina and I lived in the USA for the next 14 years. I went through junior & senior high school and university at King College, Bristol, Tennessee where I majored in French and English. I then worked for three years as a children's storyteller in a public library. I found the early adjustment to the USA very difficult. The use of language was one problem; even though we all spoke English there were times when we struggled to make ourselves understood because of the different use of words and idiom. I didn't want to adopt an American accent, as my identity had been shaped elsewhere and I didn't feel that it was me. Having said this, there is a slight American twang there now! I also found that there were cultural differences. We found people very affirming, but I didn't always feel that the affirmation was genuine. Nevertheless, I found myself seeking affirmation and compliments from others, partly due to my own desire to fit in and be liked, but also partly shaped by what seemed to be the done thing in that culture. It was only after I'd been to university that I could say I was happy living in America as the university drew together people from all over the USA as well as international students which made me feel much more at ease there. Despite this I still lacked a sense of "home" and I came to a point where I needed to decide whether I would make the States my home or whether I would go back to find more of my Kiwi identity in New Zealand so I returned after all those years away and took a job as a library assistant at the Bible College of New Zealand in Auckland where I worked for the next 3 years.

What was it like to finally re-enter as an adult?

It took 2 years to feel like I fitted in; something that I realise now is quite normal because this "home" was actually a new culture to me. I found the Kiwis to be very relaxed which is mostly cool, but sometimes they can be too undemonstrative and low-key, at times self-effacing. Yet again, I found that language was an issue and I felt like a deaf person having to ask others to repeat and speak up. It just seemed that people ate the second half of their sentences! In church life I enjoyed the house group and that helped me settle in well. I loved having the extended family around me even if I didn't see them all the time. What really made the difference though was in a group of friends that we formed one summer. Some of these friends had lived in New Zealand all their lives and this gave me a sense of a smaller and more personal country and a feeling of being "grounded" there. The group would often spend weekends together down at the beach or tramping through the hills. I could also see objectively that I'd come back "home" to a beautiful country.

So why did you leave the "beautiful" country?

At church one night I felt called to the challenge of leaving my comfort zone. I needed a new challenge and a new beginning as an independent adult in my own right. I applied to the embassy to be a language assistant in French schools. I studied French at university and have wanted to live there for years, so was very pleased to take up this job. I've already worked one short-term contract and will take on another one in a few days time; both of them in Avignon.

What do you think are the long-term consequences of your TCK lifestyle and re-entry experiences?

I thrive on new experiences and love moving around; meeting people is my passion. Would I like to settle permanently in one place? – Maybe – one day. I find that I can be indecisive, but I'm not sure if that is part of my personality or my MK upbringing. Strangely though, I can make the big decisions about moving countries more easily than the smaller ones where I can end up procrastinating needlessly. I have spent time with a counsellor and this has helped me understand a lot more about myself, as has reading "The Third Culture Kid Experience" where I recognised so much of myself. It took me a long time to acknowledge that I was an MK. For me MKs were children who grew up in South America or Africa, not children who moved around the different mission home bases. Recognising this has helped me learn much more about myself and why I think and act like I do. One negative impact has been through the lack of long-term continuity in friendships which has meant that I can feel insecure in myself and in forming new relationships. There are a number of places where I feel a link to. Am I a Kiwi? Yes and no! Am I American? No and yes! I feel that the many times where I have needed to adjust, including the two "re-entry" experiences have made me into a "rolling stone" with no sense of rootedness. Would I change it all? No; life has been and still is rich. Would I go into mission myself? Maybe; it is possible that at some time in the future I could join a mission agency like my parents did. On the other hand, I see what I am doing now as the mission God has for me.

Karla Stanley; September 2005

The Younger Children in the Family

It has been observed a number of times that when a whole family "returns" to the passport country it has been the youngest child, especially if he or she is of school age, who has had the hardest time during re-entry. Why should this be? Often the reasons are linked to the fact that the need for re-entry was caused by the eldest child reaching the end of on-field schooling and their need to return for senior school years or further/higher education.

1. The older children have often reached the logical end of their overseas schooling.They have graduated or completed IGCSEs or International Baccalaureate etc., whereas the younger child has not, and is left to imagine what could have been.

2. The older child may well have outgrown the pleasures of the overseas lifestyle, and may have felt restricted by lack of freedom in the school setting they left behind or cultural restrictions (especially on older girls). The younger child was still in the secure and often child-friendly environment.

3. Some schools focus much more attention on the needs of the older children, in terms of graduation or final exams and re-entry. Schools may well spend much more time on re-entry preparations with senior students and the

presentations of certificates and/or diplomas at the end bring a greater sense of completion than for younger children who obviously leave part-way through the process of school education.

4. Younger children who have not had as much formal education are often closer to national friends, especially in villages or small towns. Older children may well have already grown apart to some extent by attending different schools.

5. The older children often move into a more mature sixth form, college or university environment, in the same way as they would have done on completing a phase of schooling in the "home" country. The younger child is faced with several years in what could be a large and intimidating high school. Additionally, the academic standards in many international schools are higher and children's behaviour is better. The young child can be faced with boring lessons, repetition of work and the drag down caused by indiscipline. Not surprisingly, some of them don't like school.

6. All of the reasons given may be compounded by a sense of resentment. "We came back because of you!" may be a thought in the child's mind about the older sibling. They may even say it.

7. Although even very young children will feel a sense of loss, it does seem that it is especially difficult for children between 11 and 14. This is partly because of the age of the child coming through into early adolescence, but also partly due to the changeover of the schools from primary/elementary to senior levels. These senior schools are much bigger and more impersonal and can represent an enormous jump in size and organisation from many smaller international schools. It is not unusual to move from a school of about 50 on roll to one of 1000+. This in itself can seem an overwhelming challenge to a child, even without the extra dimension of re-entry culture shock and the sense of loss at what has been left behind.

We need to pray for our children and remember the special considerations that our younger children have. If we understand their thoughts, fears and feelings and listen to them we can help them to make a better transition. On the positive side, we can encourage them to see the good things in their new situation. Spending time with them to give them an experience of the good features of their new home will help. We can let them know that we don't see their elder brother or sister's needs as any more important than their own, just that they follow on a few years after the older one. Explain their situation to their new school teachers too, who may not have been told by the school's administrators who the new child in their class is.

Ensure that the older siblings understand their younger brother or sister. They can easily cause upset by making careless remarks about having had "enough" of the past school or country. They may express surprise that their younger sibling can't settle as well as they can.

If the MK or international school doesn't do much to mark the end of the child's time with them, then lobby them to change the policy. Ignoring or not doing enough for the younger children, whilst celebrating the the graduation or completion of exams for the older ones, is an approach to be challenged. One practical measure would be to introduce the school to the "Going Home" CD and book that can be printed from it and handed from the school to the child. If the school still does little or nothing, then ensure yourselves that their time in the school is celebrated. Parents can work through "Going Home" with them themselves. The younger children need to know that they will be allowed to work through their leaving experience in order to properly complete their time and prepare for re-entry and the next stage of their life experience.

Re-entry for seniors

A few tips from students who have been there and done re-entry. Worth a read!

When you are preparing to leave: It is good to express your feelings about all that is going on around you. Many have found that writing them down in the form of poetry or ordinary prose is helpful. If you are more artistic, you may even find that drawings are beneficial – either to express feelings or to record memories of places and people, or both. Others have found that a diary or journal with a lot of short entries is more useful, as their feelings change as the leaving time approaches or from day to day. Such changes are normal so don't think that you are weird in any way! Talking things through is good too, both with your family and with other trusted friends and teachers. Remember that the whole family is going through this experience but that everyone is different and so will not all be reacting in the same way at the same time.

Some have made the mistake of "leaving before they leave", in other words they break away from their friends and detach themselves, sometimes months before their actual departure. Others in doing this have seen all the negative things in the place they are in and became hyper-critical. Suddenly everything is wrong – the food, the climate, the school and its staff, the local customs…. This could be caused by denying the grief of leaving or by wanting to get the leaving process over and feel settled again. Doing this however will alienate you from others and will leave you with future regrets. You need to think a lot about the future and make your plans, but don't live there at the expense of living for the present.

Get in touch with people in the passport country. It would be great if you could have contact with other young people from your church and school in the "home" country who can tell you what it is like there and what is currently "in". This is better than relying on memories from a few years ago or what you pick up in bits and pieces from the international media. Be careful though that you don't rely too heavily on one person for all of your information, you can get a biased picture that way.

When you are leaving: Make sure that you say goodbye to everyone and don't be afraid of expressing grief when you do. Everyone grieves at times like these and expresses it in their own way, so expect all sorts of reactions when it comes to it! This experience will allow you to finish off your time properly and not leave unfinished business behind. Some who didn't say goodbye properly in the last minute hurry ended up having to write the goodbyes later. It is better to do it at the time.

You may choose to give yourself time to think or to occupy your mind with a book or the in-flight film, it's probably best to do a bit of both. Giving yourself time to think will help you to work through the issues of leaving and re-entry, especially if it is a long journey. You may well be familiar with the journey that will take you there, but remember that this time it is permanent and that no matter how many times you may have done this, it will feel very different to all your other travels.

When you arrive: Allow yourself time to adapt. There is no set time after which you can say that you have adapted – it depends on so many things, including the type of person you are. The West African proverb "little by little, like the bird building its nest" is applicable. For some, it may work simply to plunge into the new situation and take it all on board as fast as possible, but not for others. There are things that you can't avoid, like having to go to a new school or accepting the new climate, but sometimes you can choose how quickly you do new things. For instance, if you want to join a sports' club, but don't feel confident straight away, then wait until you feel ready before giving it a couple of trial runs to see if you like it.

Do keep in touch with your old friends. E-mail helps to make this much cheaper and easier, but don't become a net-nerd in the process. Also, making new friends and keeping in touch with your old ones on a reasonably regular basis can go together – you don't have to choose between them. Excessive e-mailing to old friends can be one of any number of ways of withdrawing from the world. Remember that a lot of people have escaped into all sorts of things to avoid facing difficulties. Reading, watching TV, solitary hobbies and even schoolwork have all become retreats from the real world. Devoting some time to these things is not wrong, but beware of using them to avoid human contact and committing yourself to the new situation.

Remember that you are different – like an immigrant, except that your appearance doesn't show it. Watch out for these pitfalls:

1. ***Denying who you are and where you came from because you are so desperate not to stand out from the crowd.*** You may want to be the same as everyone else and you may be able to blend in like a chameleon, but you will remain different. Your background has given you the privilege of seeing a broader picture of the world and knowing many people from different cultures. Although it may not always be easy being an MK, you do have a wide experience of life.

2. ***Feeling that you are a victim in some way will eat away at you and make you angry or bitter.*** This may arise because you have had to move around so much, because you have had to say goodbye to your friends or because you are likely not to have as much money as friends and neighbours around you in your wealthy "home" country. That bitterness will push friends and family away from you when you most need them, and will make you feel distant from them and from God.

3. ***You have an international and mobile background BUT that does not make you superior to your schoolmates.*** Avoid taking on a superior or defiant attitude towards them or your new home. Be ready to listen and to learn and to adapt without burying your past. If you make real friends, they will be ready to listen to you in the end. Don't hide your background, but don't go on and on about it.

In all of your re-entry process be honest with God. If you are hurt, angry or grieving then tell Him. You can't hide it from Him anyway! Honesty with Him now will spare you pretence and maybe even anger at God later. Jesus was the ultimate "MK" who

knew the glory of heaven and yet came to Earth only to leave it and ascend to heaven again with His mission accomplished. He knows what you feel and will lead you safely through re-entry if you will let Him.

How much do you know about your passport country?

1. Who is the Monarch, President or Prime Minister?

2. Do you know the names of any other government minister?

3. Who are the big name pop and sport stars?

4. Do you know the names of any big sport teams? Are there any sports that you don't play where you are now which are popular there?

5. What kind of music groups are currently "in" and with which kind of audience? E.g. boy bands, rock groups, pop idols. Are traditional forms of music still popular among young people?

6. What are the well-known TV programmes and who are the actors in them?

7. Which other people are very important in the country's life? Why?

8. How will the wealth level of the country and your family compare with where you are now?

9. Are money and possessions very important there or is it more people-centred?

10. What is the school like that you will go to in terms of discipline, behaviour and work expected? Do you expect to be ahead or need to catch up in any subjects?

11. Where will you be living? Will you have more or less space?

12. How big is the church that you will be part of? Do you know its leaders and how the young people's work is organised? Do you know any young people there yet?

13. What are the big social problems there? Are there problems with drugs, vandalism, lack of respect for authority, crime, immorality, poverty, HIV/AIDS, poor health care, corruption etc.?

14. More positively, what do you think are the plus points of the country? Does it have good schools with sound discipline, care for the weak and vulnerable, good health care, plenty of things to do in leisure time, trouble free streets, a culture of honesty, a strong church etc.?

15. What are the local sites of interest such as ancient buildings, beautiful countryside, beaches, wildlife parks or leisure facilities etc.?

16. What opinions do you have about some of the questions that you have answered? Why?

Security and Living with Restrictions

I remember attending a day course for mission agency workers with Dave Pollock speaking in Dakar back in 1999. Dave asked how many people had experienced evacuation during their overseas service. This was West Africa! A forest of hands went up, people evacuated from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau along with others like us from the Casamance region in the south of Senegal. Some had left many or most of their possessions. All of us had left behind national friends. Dave's next question was just as revealing; he asked how many had been debriefed or counselled after this experience – almost all of the hands went back down again. There had not been the necessary support given at the time and in some cases it was years later that the evacuation experience was properly closed with support and counsel. Lessons were learned, partly through

seminars like the one Dave led, and when the next big evacuation came round in West Africa with the civil war in Côte d'Ivoire, agencies were better prepared and the majority of evacuees were given much better support.

Interestingly, the latest edition* of the Interact magazine that we received is devoted to the issue of security risks. One of the articles that I really related to is by Faye Borlase, partly because we have worked together on a visit to her part of the world, but also the subject matter. Faye raises the issue of helping children cope with evacuation and speaks from her own experience of debriefing children when the agency families left her country for a safer one, either voluntarily early on or by orders from the ruling regime later. The adults were receiving counsel and debriefing, but nothing was being done for the children. Because of this, Faye and another teacher organised a programme for the children based around the re-organised school in the new location. This debriefing went on over the remainder of the school's time there and helped those children work through their experiences. Eventually, when it became obvious that the children would not be able to quickly return home, the school organised a farewell service and celebration to properly close the children's time there.

Faye's observations of typical children's reactions would very much tally with what we saw in West Africa – such as

- Anger, which may be internalised and produce withdrawn and depressive behaviour, or it may be externalised as aggressive behaviour or deliberate defiant acts
- Sadness and dejection
- Loss of appetite or comfort eating
- Poor concentration at school
- Sleeplessness, disrupted nights, nightmares, bedwetting
- Fear - of being driven out again; for national friends; or resulting from disturbing experiences such as hearing gunfire and explosions, being trapped by crossfire (or by violence aimed at foreign nationals), or high-speed and possibly disorganised, even panicky, evacuation
- Clinginess, especially towards other family members
- Confusion in the new situation and feelings of being overwhelmed

Some of these can be produced by many stressful situations, but others, like the fear of being trapped or of gunfire and explosions are directly related to traumatic experiences around the evacuation. No doubt, others could add many more, but we certainly saw the ones above. The reasons for sudden removal from the host country may not be related to civil war or insurrection. Many families live in the shadow of unreasonable visa demands, with the imminent risk of expulsion for failure in some area. Recent news articles from the UK, where legally-resident families have been split when a foreign-born spouse of many years standing was refused a re-entry visa, show us that no country has a monopoly in this area and in causing unnecessary distress to all concerned! Children who suddenly find themselves expelled from a country like this may show the same reactions and need a lot of the same counsel and debriefing as those evacuating from violence. Some of them may well have anxieties relating to feeling that they were constantly under surveillance.

The challenge of this article is to agency, school and organisation leaders to have plans that cover these eventualities. Just as most of us have been forced to think through evacuation plans, so we also need to think through the full implications of the after effects. We need to have plans that include post-evacuation or expulsion counselling and debriefing and we need – yes NEED, this is no optional extra – to include children in those plans.

**Winter 2005; Faye's article is on pages 17 & 18*

We highly recommend Interact to all Educare readers. For those who want to subscribe to it, you can find details on the website which is now under www.interactionintl.org (Note; for those familiar with Interaction this is a **new** web address)