



# CREATIVE PARENTING

## Who Are the TCKs in Your Life?

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

I've been reading a compelling book, which is new to me; and my mind is just swimming! As I read each page, I think of someone who could likely relate to the information—my colleagues who teach anthropology, the teachers at the local elementary and high schools, a family with little ones who is moving overseas, a former student from Africa who is in our community and has a young daughter. I think of my own daughter and son-in-law who live on a military base, and a former colleague who teaches English as a second language to young children.

I appreciate my long-time friend, Donna, who told me about this book; and I think of her own adult daughters finding their own life experiences reflected in the stories told. And I think of you, the readers of this column.

Has your curiosity been sparked? Are you ready for the title of this book? The title is *Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds* by David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken.

Third-culture kids (TCKs) are identified as those whose parents grew up with one culture and the kids are growing up in a second culture; and so

they become the product of a third culture, somewhere in between the other two. It can also describe someone who was born in one country, brought up in another, and is studying or living in the third. Missionary kids (MKs) are also third-culture kids, but TCKs come from families who may live in another culture for many reasons.

As I read the research and the rich personal stories intertwined in this book, I better understood the paradoxical world of TCKs. On one hand, they literally know "how to get around in this world." On the other hand, they often have more difficulty establishing a personal sense of identity and maintaining strong relationships. Some are like modern-day nomads all their lives, and others sink down roots in one place and do not want to ever move again!

They are often more comfortable with adults while growing up and have an understanding of geography, world events, politics, and speak two or more languages. While they may seem to have a sense of maturity and autonomy earlier than their peers, they have not been as free as their home-base country peers might be to test the cultural rules during their teens. The restrictions on a military base or missionary compound, or the real danger of being robbed or kidnaped, are real for them.

Some adult TCKs say they feel completely attuned to everyday life in the United States, but the majority say they are more or less "out of synch" with their age group throughout their lives. They feel different, but not necessarily isolated. Many report that they don't identify with their own ethnic group and really may not feel central to any group.

There are also issues of grief and loss. Every time TCKs move, they lose status, the lifestyle they knew, possessions, pets, relationships with friends, and "the past that wasn't." By that, I mean they recall missed holidays, graduations, and parents who were not with them in difficult or even especially meaningful and happy times. They also lacked the time to grieve, because they had to begin fitting into a new environment. Also, when their parents are saving the country from war, or representing the government, or preaching salvation to a lost world, how can they admit grief or fear?

If you are a TCK, are married to one, or just curious to learn more about their paradoxical lives, I highly recommend you read the book.

