

A TCK's Story

Hello, my name is Andrew Luedtke and I'm a TCK. (Yes... its 'the phrase' that many of you may know all AA attendees say before they share their story) Just like alcohol, you never get over it, but there are some things I found that help me deal with it. I didn't realize I had a specific set of issues until 2006 when I read *Third Culture Kids* by Pollock and Van Reken. I would read half a chapter and cry for a week. Not the 'dampen your cheeks' sympathy tears, but, you know, the deep, heaving 'I'm gonna throw up' crying you do when something deep inside you gets identified and stirred up. If you spent any time as a kid internationally you are a TCK too.

The goal of this article is to give a sample story and some questions to help PNG TCK's write their own stories before the next Bung, July 2022 in Boise Id. The particular kind of vulnerability associated with being a TCK, is a known set of issues with language and concepts to help deal with the issues it raises. The goal is that we provide space for TCK's to experience some healing by sharing their story, and maybe find compatible stories that enable the journey toward wholeness.

One year from now, July 2022 in Boise Idaho, my current home-town, we will be hosting the PNGMS BUNG. The theme will center around missionary kids who are TCK's. I believe it will be an experience that helps others just as it did me. Hearing other TCK's and their stories is a part of healing for TCK's. We want to have PNG TCK's share their stories, and we will compile them for everyone. You can find all the stories from former missionaries on the new PNGMS website. This article is like a guide to those who would like to share their story. I'm going to share some of mine and then provide a short outline of guiding questions that might spark some thoughts for you.

My mom and dad are Jan and Todd Luedtke who served with the LCMS in PNG from 1969 through 1984, and then as volunteers with PNGMS from 2009 – 2018. I was born at Mambisanda in Feb 1970 and lived in Enga till I was 7. Dad taught at Amapayaka and Pausa. I remember my days being filled with playing cowboys and Indians (I know not PC right...) Riding the little bus to school, playing tag and "rounders" with Mr. Green, struggling through writing



with Mrs. Hilgendorf, failing at math with Mrs. Eckert, scaring the girls with rhinoceros beetles, Easter Sunrise service behind Kunerts house at Pausa, riding my bike, riding motorcycles, playing in the mud, vacationing in Madang at the guest house, snorkeling at Lions Beach, body surfing at the black sand beach, exploring the local gardens and swiping sugar cane. Mom and Dad love to travel so I remember lobster on a beach in Indonesia, a wedding in the Australian outback, warm milk in Paris, lions in Kenya, dim sum in Hong Kong, The Dome of the Rock in Israel, buying olive wood Jesus' carvings on the streets of the Old City of Jerusalem, big snakes in Bangkok, Disney in LA, a family farm in Illinois and clean trains in Tokyo. You know, just a normal life.

In 1977 we moved to MLS in Lae and I had to learn to adapt to an international community. Our elementary school had 26 different nationalities and only 6 of us were from North America and that included Canada. I learned the hard way what it was to be a minority since Americans were not liked, especially it seemed by Aussies. I wasn't able to get breathing room until I started fighting. It got me in trouble, but nobody picked on me anymore. Mom and dad decided not to send me 'down south' for high school. They wanted to keep the family together so when it came time for me to enter 9th grade they prayed, and God very clearly directed us to return to the USA. I always thought it would be amazing to 'come home' to the US, but when we actually did and it was not all vacation and Disney Land, the reality of figuring out how to live in the States set it and I quickly realized I was not 'normal.'

Lutheran High School in Portland was a caring place to learn and for that I'm grateful. But just like any high school, teenagers need to find their way and that process can be brutal. When I added to that mix the additional 'baggage' of having lived in an exotic location, traveled the world, seen, experienced and done things they couldn't even imagine, or saw in National Geographic... well It didn't take long for the lines to be drawn. The crazy thing was all those experiences were 'normal' to me. But unless I was willing to talk about things that interested them their eyes glazed over within 20-30 seconds. Yes, I actually counted to see how interested people would be. I was not hated but not accepted either. How to cope...? I had learned from past mistakes and I wanted to be positive. I focused my pain on academics and sports. I'm above average at both, and with a highly motivated, pain fueled, anger driven effort I became quite proficient. But running from your issues can only last so long. I hit a wall by the end of high school and though I was able to earn a BS from The University of Oregon I had spent that time drifting questioning, rebelling... God got in touch with me at the end of college. Without drama I can say He came and spoke with me. I asked Him to because I had concluded that all religions were essentially the same even though they were each culturally unique, even Christianity. The only thing that would give Christianity an edge was if God in Jesus were actually real. I was at an end, desperate to stop drifting so I begged Him to show up.

He did... and my life changed. I just wanted people to know how astonishing and life-changing His love is. I spent the next 20 years in Idaho working at an LCMS camp, getting married, growing a family, serving as a youth and family pastor in an LCMS, Presbyterian, and ELCA

congregation and helping to plant a Christian Church. It was during this time getting my Masters at Fuller Seminary that I read *Third Culture Kids* and it rocked my world, but at the same time ministry had become empty. My motivation had shifted subtly and it was about performance and perceptions and program... I knew I needed leave to rediscover my love for Jesus. In 2013 I withdrew from ministry and began a career in transport.

The Children of missionaries raised on the field in PNG are a special blend of vulnerable people. In scripture we can identify them as part of a group called sojourners or strangers. Israel is reminded to be compassionate toward them. Ex 23:9 *"You shall not oppress a temporary resident for you know the heart of the stranger and sojourner, seeing you were strangers and sojourners in the land of Egypt."* The Stranger and sojourner are often mentioned in the same verses and category as the widow and the orphan because of the vulnerability they endure. Ps 94:6 *They slay the widow and the transient stranger and murder the unprotected orphan.*

The following is a three-part list of questions to use as a basic format for a 2-3 page reflection, your Story. It can obviously be longer or shorter if you like.



We will be offering the Bung via live-feed for all the group proceedings that weekend. No matter where in the world you are, Australia, India, USA, Canada, Asia, Russia, Europe, Africa... you can be a part and connect with other PNG TCK's

The World as best you remember it: (Questions to get us thinking...)

I was born (where, when) My parents are...? I moved to/born in PNG (when, where, for how long) I enjoyed PNG because...? I disliked PNG because...? Where was home? Where were your friends from? How often did you move? Do you have a significant furlough experience? Where did you attend school? Significant school memories? What did you think of your parent's culture? What cultures did you identify with/enjoy, or not? What were your struggles, joys? Where did you get your sense of grounding... school, peers, parents, culture, church...?

What was adjusting to returning to your parents' home culture like? Did you feel like a foreigner, a hidden immigrant, adopted or did you try and mirror the culture? Do you appreciate your overseas upbringing or regret it? Why?

Your TCK Profile? (Questions to get us thinking...)

Compare how your expanded view of the world is a benefit and a source of pain. Describe your experience of enjoying many cultures while being ignorant of the subtleties of your 'home' culture. Compare your adaptability to your lack of deep cultural engagement. How do you balance blending in with keeping your identity? Are you able to focus on the now instead of always looking forward to the 'new and different'? Do you need to constantly move? Do you typically go deep early in relationships? How has losing many friends over the years influenced your relationships now? Did you find yourself rebelling later in life rather than the teen years? What hidden losses do you sense/know within you? Have you felt the permission to grieve over the losses in your life? Have you had time to process? How have you expressed your unresolved grief?

Building a foundation (leveraging TCK uniqueness for wholeness...)

What strategies do you employ now in transition to help you cope? What have you learned about reconciliation in relation to moving on? If you have children how do you prep them for transition? How do you provide for your kids education and cultural exposure? What unique family traditions have emerged in your life? What artifacts/objects do you find yourself hanging on to...why? How do you deal with false fears and expectations differently now than before? Do you have someone to talk with that can identify with your experiences? Have you named yourself a TCK yet? How does knowing you are a TCK help you? What negative behavior patterns can you trace to TCK issues? Can you name your losses, wounds, choices, blessings?