

## Thoughts

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### Missionary Kids ([View in PDF](#))

*"You know you're a missionary kid when someone mentions the name of a team, and you get the sport wrong."*

Anyone who has spent their childhood moving from one location to another, changing schools and friends in the process, has a good idea of what it's like to be a missionary kid (M.K.)—perhaps minus the third culture. While I'm grateful for the experience and fun I had of growing up in two foreign countries (Swaziland and South Africa), I am still dealing with where 'home' really is to me.



A tale of two monkeys

After leaving my friends overseas, I've made some new acquaintances over the years, but because time spent with them is very limited, there is never the same level of friendship with them that I've had with older friends. To some extent this is true anywhere; once you begin your career, you simply have less time to

spend with your friends because of work schedules, moving away, marriage, etc. The biggest difference however, lies in not having the memories or personal history to reminisce with someone about. When the conversation turns to something or someone you've never heard of or experienced, your interest naturally wanes because you simply can't identify with it.

In addition, if you've never experienced another culture, you cannot identify with the struggles or feelings associated with it. This prevents friendships from growing or deepening, and results in "surface relationships." Over time, having your "roots" pulled out and forcibly "replanted" because of circumstances begins to harden you from establishing new relationships, and there is a strong tendency to permanently withdraw and disconnect from social situations. You simply become weary of investing time and energy into people you share little in common or identify with, and in whom you will likely never have the time to build a meaningful long-term friendship. As the saying goes:

*"You'd rather never say hello than have to say goodbye."*

In this regard, I still feel very disconnected from both people and churches.

In a similar vein, a wise missionary shared that it's better to retain any fond memories you have of the country (or countries) you grew up in, and **not** return, since it is unlikely that anything you remember will have survived change. This is true especially for countries where significant moral and social degradation have taken place.

There is much to be gained from living in a third culture though, such as broadening your view of the world in general, being able to appreciate different languages, and simpler, slower ways of living. If given the choice, I would readily do it all over again. As with much of life, there is also an added dimension—a richer impression—of these experiences when you're a child as opposed to when you're older.

**On the lighter side, you know you're a missionary kid when...** ('cherry-picked' from [www.members.kconline.com/kerr/mk.htm](http://www.members.kconline.com/kerr/mk.htm))

1. You feel odd being in the ethnic majority.
2. You didn't get a driver's license until your 18th birthday (or later).
3. You have a hard time living with a roommate who isn't a foreigner.
4. You can't answer the question, "Where are you from?"
5. The Oklahoma City bombing didn't seem unusual to you.
6. Your life story uses the phrase "Then we went to..." five times.
7. You speak with authority on the quality of airline travel.
8. You don't know where home is.
9. You'd rather never say hello than have to say goodbye.
10. Furlough means that you are stuffed every night...and have to eat it all to seem polite.
11. Someone brings up the name of a team, and you get the sport wrong.
12. You believe vehemently that football is played with a round, spotted ball.
13. You like all kinds of music; from Reggae to Japanese Rap.
14. You know the difference between patriotism and nationalism.
15. You tell Americans that democracy isn't the only viable form of government.
16. You realize what a small world it is, after all.
17. You never take anything for granted.
18. You marry another MK. :-)
19. You know how to pack.
20. You know the difference between 110 and 220 volts.



God's hand of protection from one of two of the world's deadliest snakes: the [Black Mamba](#)



Best guesstimate: about 2.5 feet long

21. Your parents' siblings are strangers to you, but you have 50-60 "aunts and uncles" who are no blood relation to you at all.
22. You get upset when people don't finish their food, and feel worse when they scrape it into the trash.
23. You don't do well in job interviews because you were taught to be modest.
24. You think VISA is a document stamped in your passport, and not a plastic card you carry in your wallet.
25. Someone asks you where you most enjoy just hanging out, and you immediately think of happy hours spent in international airports.
26. You go to a church you have never been in before and find your picture on their bulletin board.
27. You actually look forward to the rare times the power goes off because it makes you feel nostalgic, **and** you might get a chance to see those stars that are still etched so vividly in your memory.
28. You thought those ventilation louvers were what air-conditioning meant, for years.

### **A close call with a Black Mamba**

My good friend from childhood, Allan McGuire, and I used to frequently go "bundu bashing" (read: exploring) in the unoccupied brush behind our homes. Below both of our homes, a new road was being constructed to provide a faster and more direct connection with more distant neighborhoods. As a result, there were large piles of grey dirt scattered all over the place—perfect for running up on, and then throwing dirt clods at each other, or into nearby pools of rain water. No work was done on the weekend, so there was no-one around to prevent us from having a good time. One Saturday, on a nice, sunny day, Allan and I were back; having a great time as usual. I ran up a pile of dirt, only to find a [Black Mamba](#) coiled up at the top sunning himself. I froze for a second as the fear hit me, then jumped off the pile as fast as I could. A quick shout to Allan brought him over, and we traced where the snake went—underneath a log near a bush, not far from the dirt pile. We began pelting the area with as many large, heavy stones as we could, but weren't having any success in bringing it out from underneath the log. Fortunately, a Swazi man was walking within voice distance, so we started shouting "Mamba! Mamba!" and he quickly ran over. With his help, we somehow managed to kill it.

Looking back, this was a close call with potential death. According to Wikipedia, *"The black mamba is considered the most dangerous and feared snake in Africa ... capable of killing an adult human in as little as 20 minutes."* Had the mamba felt threatened and struck me, and given the distance from our homes to get help and then drive to the local hospital, I would in all likelihood have been dead by the time I arrived. I didn't deserve it, but God's hand of protection...

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**Related links and files:** [Third Culture Kids: expatriate children](#) (PDF) | [The M.K. Song](#) (by Grady Toland, 4.17 MB)

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