OVERVIEW

The following is a provocative compilation of quotes defining third culture kids and some of the emotions and experiences they face. These definitions are helpful to any youth leader who works with kids who have travelled extensively and lived in many lands.

They’re individuals who have spent a significant part of their developmental years in a culture other than their parents’ or other than the culture that issued their passport. They develop a sense of belonging to all the cultures of which they’ve been a part—without having a sense of identity in any. No place is home.
—David Pollack, in Evelyn Bence’s interview

My passport says I’m an American, but that’s not what I feel in my heart.
—David Pollack, in Evelyn Bence’s interview

a TCK’s international community is made up of people who are, in a certain sense, displaced. They feel rootless.
—David Pollack, in Evelyn Bence’s interview

When...parents get ready for furlough, they talk to their kids about ‘going home’. Their kids usually don’t contradict them, but the truth is the kids aren’t going home; Mom and Dad are going home.
—David Pollack, in Evelyn Bence’s interview

If there’s a problem in Asia, TCKs aren’t as inclined to say, ‘Why don’t we just go in there and bomb them?’ They know that a mother who loses a child in Cambodia feels as much grief as a mother who lose a child in Chicago.
—David Pollack, in Evelyn Bence’s interview

Michelle Peltzer says there’s no place like home. Literally. ‘Sometimes I really don’t know what country I’m in, and it really doesn’t matter. I feel I can just adjust wherever I go.’ This isn’t glib braggadocio; she speaks five languages. But more importantly, she experienced something that gives her an open passport to the whole globe—a multicultural childhood. She fits a unique mold that some experts claim is the prototype for the world citizen of the
future: rootless, keenly adaptable, multilingual, and globally oriented. ‘They have the potential to be the cultural bridges in an increasingly internationalized society,’ says Dr. David Pollack. ‘They’re really members of a growing worldwide community.’ —El Paso Times

...studies have shown for decades that while adult expatriates may return to life as usual in their home countries, their children almost never do. —David Pollock, El Paso Times

‘Moving back to the States was like moving back to a foreign country,’ says Tom Cecil, an 18-year-old Foreign Service child born in Kenya and subsequently raised in Tanzania, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Mali, Oman, and Tunisia. —David Pollock, El Paso Times

Global nomads are very good mediators. Whenever TCKs move into another culture, they become very good, objective observers. They’re like cultural sponges. Those skills translate into ideal requirements for combating racism and advancing social and refugee work. —Norma McCaig, El Paso Times

TCKs ‘incorporate pieces of different cultures into themselves and appreciate them, but there’s no sense of ownership—many are loners. They don’t belong, not even to the place on their passport.’ —David Pollock, El Paso Times

Mobility is a powerful force at an early age. The idea develops that nothing, including relationships, lasts forever. You become very adept at developing a deep relationship very quickly. But you also only go so deep. —Norma McCaig, El Paso Times

...the upside of multicultural upbringings—the curiosity about the new, the tolerance for the different—far outweigh the downside of being strangers in a strange land. —Norma McCaig, El Paso Times

The problems are that TCKs may appear arrogant (if not actually arrogant) to monocultural people because of their wealth of knowledge and experience. Their rootlessness may keep them switching from college to college or from job to job. Their grief
because of all the good-byes they have experienced over and over again, if unexpressed and unresolved, may lead to deep seated anger or depression. Their experience of frequent good-byes may also make them hesitant to form close relationships for fear of being hurt again but that can result in terrible loneliness.

— *Up the Ghat*, M.C. Tegenfeldt

David Pollack also warned about the extra adjustments that are required when a TCK married a monocultural kid....if at all possible the couple should visit the country or countries which have been significant in the TCK’s life. The strong bonds that exist between TCKs is often threatening to their monocultural fiancés or spouses...

— *Up the Ghat*, M.C. Tegenfeldt

Many of the friendships are deeper and closer than family relationships and graduations may feel like funerals.

— *Up the Ghat*, M.C. Tegenfeldt

...parents may become former diplomats or missionaries or school staff members, but there is no such thing as a former TCK.

— *Up the Ghat*, M.C. Tegenfeldt

In truth, children who live abroad often feel more patriotic than teenagers who have lived in their own country all their lives. Unfortunately, this feeling is often based on romantic movies, vague childhood memories, stories told by parents, and hasty impressions that the children themselves made while on home leave. When they finally return home for good, they may find that their own country is more foreign than any land they ever encountered, even though the whole time they fancied they knew exactly what the place would be like.

—Karen McClure

Yet another difficulty arises because children at home who have had the same friends all their lives are not likely to be as open to newcomers as the mobile international set abroad. Teenagers have a particularly hard time establishing themselves socially in a new environment because typical high-school culture encourages the exclusion of ‘unusual’ people. In contrast, overseas groups are often so small that everyone’s survival depends upon accepting new people who arrive.

—Karen McClure
A TCK is always leaving or being left. Relationships are short-lived. Someone is always going home on furlough and friends leave. The end of the school year comes and a whole segment of the school population leaves to go home on furlough. And it’s not just the loss of this friend or that friend, but the loss of the entire group.
—Trans World Radio, Dave Pollock

TCKs who return overseas as teachers often have the greatest impact. They have walked the same path. They can tell their students: ‘I went back to the States, I went through college, and I’m back again. I want to tell you that I’m glad I’m a third-culture kid. And this is the way I felt and these are the things I went through and here are some of the things you need to be prepared for.’
—Trans World Radio, Dave Pollock

TCKs are cross-culturally mobile children, born into a first culture and raised in one or more additional cultures. Their emergent lifestyle produces a third culture that lacks national or cultural boundaries. TCKs are marginal, mobile in body, soul, and intellect. Their roots lie in uprootedness. They fit in everywhere, nowhere in particular. They are simultaneously insiders and outsiders. TCKs perform a mediating role between cultures. TCK writers play the role of cultural mediator, while other TCKs move to the center of the worlds of global business and politics.
—Ayla Delin, Istanbul, writing in *Time*, March 1, 1993

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