

# TCK Academy's First Teleclass

## “7 Things Every TCK Should Know”

by Ruth Van Reken, Paulette Bethel and Brice Royer  
<http://tckacademy.com>



The above material is adapted from *Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds*, co-authored by David C. Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken and other material Ruth has developed. Used by permission but all rights reserved.

# A message from Brice

**Re: We are each other's country**

**From: Brice**

Wow, I'm still getting my head wrapped around what we just accomplished on Monday.

Ruth is right, we made history. For a first-time teleclass for TCKs, it went better than I expected. OK, so that's not entirely true, because my internet connection was conveniently spotty during the class...

I could barely get any sleep because I've been swamped with emails from attendees.

Here are a few:

- "I have tears just falling from my eyes. I hear tears from others too. It is powerful to hear so many others validate my experiences."
- "It makes me feel like a bird happily flapping around in a bird bath. I felt so 'at home' with you all yesterday."
- "I would STRONGLY recommend the teleclass to anyone thinking of joining in."

So what happened on this teleclass?

Ruth gave a great overview, there were insightful stories, a lot of healing, new connections, and intimate conversation.

One caller shared this quote: "We are each other's country". It's a perfect metaphor for this teleclass because everyone felt and shared a deep and meaningful connection.

So what is next?

There are more teleclasses! Now that we covered the overview, and

The above material is adapted from Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds, co-authored by David C. Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken and other material Ruth has developed. Used by permission but all rights reserved.

the "WHY" behind those concepts, it's time to focus on the "HOW".

My goal is to get everyone the results they want right away and leave them with some practical tools they can use. I really want people to take action.

Personally, that's where I always had difficulty. I understand the concepts, but how do I get started? What do I do exactly?

Well, I'm happy to tell you that we have lined up expert guests in the next teleclasses to give you practical information you can use right away.

Make sure to check the blog for more information and news.

<http://tckacademy.com/class/blog>

Talk to you soon,

- Brice Royer, TCK Academy

June 16, 2008

"Thanks for being part of our call. I'm sorry it was impossible to answer all the great questions that came in but we are seeking to get many of them addressed in further ways. Also, since my style is interactive in any group I address, using that method while "blind" to you and finding my way through the outline via this approach might mean you didn't quite fill in all the blanks...particularly as many of the answers came from our wonderful online responders. So here is my "cheat sheet" with the blanks filled on the questionnaire we sent out. Hope this helps if you missed some slots along the way! "

- **Ruth Van Reken, TCK Academy**

## 7 Things Every TCK Should Know

From all the questions you've submitted, these are seven of the common themes that keep appearing:

1. How can I make and maintain friendships, especially with non-TCKs?
2. How do I sort out who I am or where I belong when I can't get past the feeling of belonging "everywhere and nowhere?"
3. How do I deal with the grief I still feel from long ago losses of country and friends?
4. How do I stop the cycles of separation and loss I continue to create for myself because I can't seem to stay in one place more than 2-3 years max?
5. How can I not lose my past while moving towards the future?
6. How do I deal with the extreme loneliness I sometimes feel, even when others are around?
7. How do I learn to recognize and develop fully the gifts I received from this experience?

### **Introductory musings...**

Living a healthy life...whether physically or emotionally...depends on many interrelated factors. We all know physical health starts with healthy genes. One misconfiguration can cause any number of serious problems. We need

The above material is adapted from Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds, co-authored by David C. Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken and other material Ruth has developed. Used by permission but all rights reserved.

the right food to nourish our cells and give us energy to accomplish our daily functions. Without physical exercise, our muscles become weak and ultimately useless.

So it is for the emotional side of life, for TCKs and non-TCKs alike. The family we are born into can be a healthy, nourishing environment to our hearts and souls, or one which creates a sense of fear and rejection for a host of reasons. We need friendships with others to develop the sense of belonging we all crave. For that to happen, we long to find others who are willing to get to know us and us them. We need a place to express our thoughts and emotions safely, somewhere we can be creative. And we need to know our life matters, that in the end who we are has some significance in the grander scheme of things.

If we understand these things we have in common with every other human being in the world, then we can begin to take a clearer look at our TCK journeys. What is it about living a cross-cultural, highly mobile lifestyle, that seems to leave many of us with questions related to these places of our deepest human needs? What is it about this upbringing that also adds such richness to our lives despite...maybe because of?...the struggles?

These are some of the important questions we will look at in this first teleconference so we can begin to unravel some of the answers to the many questions reflected in our "7 Things TCKs/CCKs Need to Know" summation.

To do this, we will look first at an overview of what the basic realities are of a globally/culturally nomadic lifestyle as children. From there we will consider what are the two greatest challenges many of us face. Then we will examine more closely how they interact and affect so many of these other perhaps seemingly unrelated matters raised in our "7 Things..." The good news is that as we do that, then the positive effects also begin to sort out and help us deal with the other questions in our lives.

Here's a outline you can use to follow the call as we begin...and fill in the blanks even through the Q and A time as well.

# Quick Review

## **1. What/who are TCKs/CCKs?**

Third Culture Kids (TCKs) are:

*"Children who accompany their parents into another culture [usually for a parent's career choice.]"*

—Dr. Ruth Hill Useem, Sociologist, Professor Emeritus at Michigan State University,  
Originator of the term

*"A Third Culture Kid (TCK) is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents' culture(s). Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCK's life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background. "*

—David C. Pollock, developer of the TCK Profile, founder, Interaction, Inc., co-author Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds

An Adult TCK (ATCK) is a person who has grown up as a TCK

Cross-Cultural Kids (CCKs) are

*A Cross-Cultural Kid (CCK) is a person who has lived in—or*

*meaningfully interacted with—two or more cultural environments for a significant period of time during developmental years. An Adult CCK (ACCK) is a person who has grown up as a CCK.*

- Ruth E. Van Reken, co-author, *Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds*, 2002

TCKs/CCKs represent any and all nationalities/ethnicities/economic groups

Please look at the CCK definitions posted on the website and notice that enlarging our vision of the ways a crosscultural childhood can occur, we can see that some people have lived in multiple types of cultural mixing rather than only one. This may add some new awareness as to why some of us may have additional layers of confusion as to our cultural and personal identity compared with others. This is still an area open to much more research.

## Using the TCK experience as a prototype

Evolving understanding...

In 1984, Ted Ward, sociologist at Michigan State, stated that Third Culture Kids (TCKs) were the prototype citizens of the future. By looking at the TCK experience in depth, we can begin to see what else applies to other types of CCKs as well.

### **1. What are the two basic overlays of any TCK experience?**

a. Cross-cultural childhood

b. High mobility – our own and the world around us – we, or the people we know and love are always coming and going

2. What are at least four gifts most of us receive from growing up as TCKs?

The above material is adapted from *Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds*, co-authored by David C. Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken and other material Ruth has developed. Used by permission but all rights reserved.

- a. Great opportunity to see much of the world firsthand.
- b. Larger world view. We know from experience that there are many ways people think and act in various cultural settings
- c. Adaptability/Independence. We have been in situations where our usual ways of doing things may not be available and we have to improvise and learn we can.
- d. Language. Many of us (not all) have learned a second language within the normal context of interacting with two or more cultures
- e. I'll add a fifth...thinking "outside the box." Perhaps because we have had to consider creative ways to deal with the "ordinaries" of life, or we have had to try to find a way to negotiate different cultural milieus, this can be one of the skills developed along the way

### **3. What are some of our common challenges?**

Often they are flip sides of the gifts.

1. Seen as unpatriotic if we try to present another culture's potential viewpoint
2. Isolation or guardedness in forming close relationships. Positive independence can become isolation where we refuse to need others, likely for fear of losing them anyway in the end.
3. "Itchy feet"...the rootless and restless syndrome. "There" is always better than "here"
4. May not deal well with conflicts. It has always been easier to "outwait" them, knowing another move is soon coming, then to deal productively with them.

### **4. What are the two most common challenges?**

- a. Issues related to identity...which of all the many "selves" am I?
- b. Unresolved grief

**5. How do any or all of these challenges relate to the two basic overlays we talked about in question 1?**

The issues of cultural identity are primarily related to the cross-cultural nature of our upbringing.

If we consider the traditional ways in which a person learns culture and a sense of cultural balance, it is to learn the rules of this culture as a child, test them as an adolescence, internalize them and move on to operating within these normal bounds as an adult. This type of cultural balance gives a sense of deep belonging for those who know the operative rules for this community are an "us" and those who don't are a "them."

TCKs and CCKs learn culture as traditional "monocultural" children do...by and from interacting with their environments. The difference is that unlike the basically monocultural communities of the past, their worlds have been filled with many cultural worlds. For me, as a 13 year old who grew up in Nigeria, I knew how to operate well in that many cultured world of my childhood. I could negotiate between the different groups with ease. When I took a plane ride back to the US, however, all the operative rules changed. Just when I should have been testing the rules, I had no idea what they were. This is why the issues of identity become complicated... particularly because we still live in a world that assumes you have to be "either/or" rather than "both/and". One of the things TCKs/CCKs need to learn is that we have the great possibility of claiming several places of belonging, knowing, as one TCK Dirk said, "My life is like Windows. I know all the programs are open in the background and I can access them anytime I want to, but I have to operate in the one that's on the screen at this moment."

High mobility is the main factor that relates to unresolved grief.

Anytime there is physical mobility from one place to another, ours or someone else from our close environment, we go through a transition cycle (a topic for another teleconference perhaps?). Each transition involves loss because we (or the others) are leaving, even though it also involves the gain of what we will encounter on the other side.

The main issue, however, isn't the loss. That is part of life. But often our losses have not been validated (as the loss coming from a relative's death might be validated) or we had no way that we knew of to deal with these losses as they happened. For that reason, the effects of them accrue. We can anesthetize ourselves to the conscious pain for quite awhile using the various responses we do (see question 7) but eventually they catch up with us. Meanwhile, our very reactions to try to avoid feeling this pain have often resulted in our pushing others away and we only increase our ultimate pain. This is the most common thing I see in a bottom line way behind so many of the questions and struggles countless ATCKs/ACCKs all over the world have told me about.

## **6. What are the 4 basic reasons that it is seemingly so hard to deal with loss in the TCK experience?**

1. Lack of awareness. Losses are often hidden, invisible, unnamed in many circles
2. Lack of permission to grieve
  1. Grief is discounted
  2. Grief is compared to the higher good
  3. Grief is denied
3. Lack of time to process
4. Lack of comfort

## **7. How do the effects of loss often manifest in our lives? Why?**

## 5 Stages of Grief according to Dr. Elisabeth Kubler Ross

- \* Denial
- \* Anger
- \* Sadness
- \* Bargaining
- \* Acceptance

It can also be expressed in delayed grief..something felt much later than when the event happened, or displaced grief. Before I had any idea of loss in my life, I was passionate about civil rights in the 1960's. While, without doubt, that was a most worthy cause, I look back and realize it was a place I worked out all sorts of things that related to my unnamed losses because it seemed legitimate to focus there but not on myself.

In the end, however, for me it was an underlying, although intermittent, depression that first presented while my husband was an intern and immediately after we had spent part of his senior year in medical school, that finally made me realize at age 39 that there was something more than all the circumstances of my immediate environment that was behind it. This is what led me to do the journaling that became my first book, Letters Never Sent, and it was in doing that I understood for the first time that when I left Nigeria at age 13, my world died...but I was still alive and going on to "wonderful" things...how could there be grief? But here, 26 years later, the tears came for a long ago loss that I had no idea was so big.

As I look back, I realize the basic problem for me was that I felt that if I were to say there had been any losses or less than perfect realities, I was somehow denying the wonderful good I had always appreciated about my life. I didn't understand that I would not grieve for something I hadn't loved..in other words, grief is an affirmation of the good, not a negation or denial of it. I also had to realize that it was still possible to do the work of mourning for those losses even years later and that I could learn to live comfortably in the great paradox of the both/and of gain and loss and their impact in my life. Even to realize that learning to deal with the challenges has ultimately become one of my great gifts..

## **8. How do these issues surrounding loss relate to our decisions about making and keeping relationships? Or “rootlessness”?**

As said before, if we are caught long term in one of these stages and never work through to acceptance, our anger, our depression, our denial, can keep us from being able to fully engage in relationships with others for we fear letting someone in too close lest they get past our unconscious mask of defense and we are forced to look at the losses themselves. The amazing thing for me, however, was to discover when I no longer ran in fear from the depth of feeling or re-feeling the losses of my past and took the time to explore them, I could also open my full heart to others for I didn't need to fear what they might also discover about me or somehow force me to look at. We know longer have to keep moving to stay “ahead of our inner selves” but can rest in one place OR move if we want to because of choice, not to get away from ourselves once more.

## What can we do to help ourselves and others?

### **9. 4 things you can do to deal with unresolved grief**

1. Name your losses (obvious & hidden).
  1. Journal
  2. Scrapbook
  3. Talking to someone who will listen without “fixing”.  
(e.g: <http://tckid.com>)
  
4. Validate your story
  
5. List what has been gained from each place you have lived
  
6. Give yourself permission and time to grieve.

2. Take care of any unsaid goodbyes or other unfinished business.

1. Write a letter
2. Make a phone call
3. Develop your own rituals of mourning – a particular way we say goodbye, or, as the caller said, burying in the earth symbols of her loss, etc.

3. Look particularly at the issue of comfort vs. encouragement

1. Were you given permission to recognize and face the losses as they happened?

2. How can you validate now some of the things you lost even while not ignoring all that you also gained?

3. If needed, find ways to do “closure” for past transitions

1. Write letters to old friends
2. Journey of clarification – traveling back to the places of your childhood

4. “Listen to life”

1. If you/they have extreme reactions to relatively simple situations, try to name the bottom line feeling and see how it might or might not relate to other situations or losses in your life.

2. Build on/with the skills of this mobile lifestyle  
Consider: Has/how has your ability to be mobile helped you and your family/student personally/professionally?

3. Take a look at places you are already using the skills you learned through mobility and affirm them as well. Make a list here of three you can think about.

4. How could you/they intentionally use them even more?

## **6. 4 things to consider when wondering why your relationships**

The above material is adapted from *Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds*, co-authored by David C. Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken and other material Ruth has developed. Used by permission but all rights reserved.

## **aren't what you would like them to be**

1. What are you expecting from this relationship? Do you see this person as a friend or as the one who will rescue you from this inner sense of loneliness and not belonging?

2. Are you willing to seek them out or waiting for them to seek you out? Never forget others have a life story too and you can learn from every person you meet.

3. Can you begin with places of commonality or find a shared interest regardless of whether or not this person is a TCK /CCK or not? What are shared interests – music, nature, sports, etc?

4. Is there a pattern you see that has happened over and over with every relationship (like pushing them away)? Have you generally found yourself blaming others for the problems before looking at areas of unfinished business in your own heart? If so, start to take a deeper look inside. This might be a great time to talk with a professional counselor to help you explore the reason for these patterns.

## **7. 4 things to remember when you begin to fear losing the past that you have known or been**

1. You can never lose what you have received from your past...it has shaped you forever

2. You have an enormously deep foundation on which to build. As you move into each new experience, each new "world", it is an addition, not a subtraction to the whole.

3. You can be both/and as far as finding places of belonging. You can feel at home in your host country and learn to relate and feel at home in your passport culture without denying in any way the richness or validity of the other.

4. Don't forget my ATCK dad's advice to me: Wherever you are, unpack your suitcases...mental as well as physical...and plant your trees. If you don't do that, you'll spend your life waiting to really live and you'll miss

it all. If you don't stay long enough to eat from the trees, someone else will and they'll be grateful you took the time to plant them"

## **8. 4 ways to consider how your gifts can be of use in today's globalizing world**

Whether in a career sense or personal lives, the following gifts we often receive from our cross-cultural background have great significance. Don't be shy about listing them somehow on your resumes!

1. Potential to be a cultural bridge in many situations, including international organizations

2. Language skills...you may serve well as a translator formally and informally

3. Thinking outside the box...bringing creative solutions to problems faced in organizations, home, community, etc..you've already seen more than one way to do things

4. Observational skills from the times of having to assess the cultural situation you are entering can serve well in many situations you encounter throughout life...

The point is that there is so much to use and grow from in this experience. In your relationships you also have much to offer as well as much to receive when you dare to take the risks of opening yourself to these situations. There will be future classes with far more professional answers on ways to look at and deal with grief and the related relational issues for the above can only scratch the surface, but it is the way I found for me, coupled with much prayer and I hope you will find some help for yourselves as well.

## **Last words**

Thanks again for attending the class. To Brice for organizing it, to Paulette for helping field the questions, adding her comments, helping a non-techie like me with those parts. Stay tuned for some great sessions in the future.

Ruth E. Van Reken – Teleclass Leader

Paulette M Bethel – Co-Leader

Brice Royer – Host

<http://tckacademy.com>

## **Partners and Friends**

[FIGT](#)

[Among Worlds](#)

[Mukappa](#)

[Girl Scouts of the USA](#)

[MTW Global Youth & Family Ministry](#)

[Team Expansion](#)

[mkPlanet](#)

[Expatriate Women](#)

## **Resources & Links**

[17 ways to help TCKs.](#)

[Top 10 Resources for TCKs](#)

[5 Ways Therapists can help TCKs](#)

[How can schools help TCKs?](#)

[27 things Every TCK should know](#)

TCK Research

<http://tckresearch.com>

TCK World

<http://tckworld.com>

TCK classes and programs

<http://tckacademy.com>