

# SAYING GOODBYE

An insight into mission boarding schools and the life of some missionary children



Saying goodbye is never easy, and it doesn't seem to get easier as you get older. My experience, however, was not unique. From a sample of 10,000 MKs (mission kids) 80% spent at least part of their childhood at boarding school. (Wickstrom, 1994, p.377) It can be quite a traumatic time for members of the family.

In our case the long 5 day drive back to our mission station was harder for my parents to endure than us 4 kids. I went to a missionary boarding school in Congo at the age of six and because of the distance I saw my parents at holiday times. One of the biggest factors that helped me was my parents' positive attitude. My overall experience was wonderful and it had a lot to do with my parents' perspective about the life God had called them to as well as to how they presented their calling to us and how they lived their Christian lives.

As my wife and I raise 4 MKs of our own, my prayer is that we are able to exercise a similar wisdom and understanding of our God given ministry as Christian parents. My parents were able to effectively balance their roles of parents and ministry, always viewing ministry as a family affair. We were all "missionaries" and were all "called" to minister to others. As children our ministries changed as we inevitably grew up but we were a team in ministry, sometimes separated, but nevertheless a team.

The way I have perceived ministry has been moulded by:

1. My background and family life;
2. The value that my parents' mission agency placed upon family.

Family relationships provide the crucial window for ministry. Particularly in the Third World, as those to whom we minister watch our families closely. How we relate to each other will have a large bearing upon the effectiveness of our ministry and how it is received. A recent study, based on a study of 608 Adult MKs, concludes, "Positive correlations between father warmth and closeness to the AMK (Adult MK) stood as a significant factor in (the MKs) spiritual well being and

(the MKs) sense of life purpose and life satisfaction." (The Family in Mission, p131)

Prayer was an important and integral part of the family. When my parents returned back to the mission field for the first time without their family, the one thing I missed most was family prayers. After breakfast and after tea-time the family came together to pray.

Humanly speaking it seems strange how a family could be separated so much and yet be so close. I had often wondered about that and yet looking back I see 3 clear reasons for this closeness. Attitude, attitude and attitude played a major role in keeping this family together in ministry. I never doubted the love that my parents communicated via their letters and the times we had together, which were made special. They loved their work and the people to whom they ministered, but we were always most important to them. We were "a part of" the ministry as opposed to "apart from" and were, therefore, included early in decision changes and prayed together through them.

One of the major contributing factors for missionary families leaving the field is children's education. A good example of this has recently happened in West Africa. With the recent war in Ivory Coast 3 missionary boarding schools have closed. Many of the children's parents worked in the six surrounding countries in various ministries. Some of these families (approximately 180) have relocated, but most had to leave the mission field for educational reasons. The consequences of this departure are far reaching.

Recent studies (MK/CORE) in Adult MKs have revealed some interesting results. These studies have shown that the children of missionaries were on the whole much better prepared educationally, socially, spiritually and emotionally than other children in these studies. For some time many of us MKs have been advocates of the MK life. Most of my peers that I have spoken to would not change their life if given the opportunity. They would want to be born back into a missionary family. Why? Is it too rich an experience to pass over?

Maybe there is a closeness developed in the absences. What struck me, as the quote from Family Mission indicates, was the significance that the father's warmth played in the wellbeing of his children. The time spent by the father with his children when they were home was crucial to their perspective and views of who they were and what part they played on the mission field. My parents gave me the time, in particular my father. It's all about positive, encouraging relationships. From my early years in Africa, I learned to place relationships before TIME, something which I have found difficult to shake off! I really have to work at time management while here in the West. When running late for an appointment, I have often thought that in Heaven there is no time issue, it's all about relationships, therefore, may be we need to learn a bit more of what heaven is telling us.

In conclusion, my views on missionary schools are positive. There are not many primary and secondary education establishments which can boast a Christian faculty devoted wholly to the wellbeing of the children in their care. It is a great privilege to grow and develop spiritually in the care of loving and caring Christian staff. These staff are not there because of promotion, financial reasons or for status, but rather because they have obeyed a God given call to this ministry. I ask the question, could there ever be a better place? One thing of which you can be absolutely sure is that God cares for missionary children as much as he does for any other, and he does not consider them expendable.

MKs are not an insignificant part of their parents' work and ministry. God has a ministry for them, too, and he is working in and through their lives. There are sacrifices that need to be made. Few places are as comfortable as home. However, sacrifice is an integral and essential element designed by God to benefit both us and the people we touch. ■

Steve Morris is an Adult MK, married to Rhonda and they have four daughters. They worked with MK's in Ivory Coast and have just gone to Tamil Nadu in Southern India to work as teachers at Hebron School.