



# NEWSLETTER # 2, September 2019



## 2020 PNG-KLS-SPLC Reunion

**October 8 (Late Afternoon) to October 11 (Early Afternoon) 2020**  
**Mt. Olivet Conference & Retreat Center, Farmington, Minnesota, U.S.A.**

### Ruth Van Reken



In this second edition of our 2020 KLS Reunion Newsletter, we are highlighting Ruth Van Reken's books as a preview to her presentations at the 2020 reunion.

- *Letters Never Sent* — Ruth's personal journaling written as she sought to understand the long-term impact of her cross-cultural childhood.
- *Third Culture Kids*<sup>\*</sup>: *Growing Up Among Worlds*  
<sup>\*</sup>Third Culture Kid (TCK) is defined as a child who spends a significant period of time during his or her developmental years growing up in a culture outside the parents' culture.

One of Ruth's current passions is to see how learning from the "Petri dish" of the MK (missionary kid) experience also applies to other types of cross-cultural kids (CCKs) who may interact with many cultural worlds in their immediate environment, even if they may or may not have traveled globally. Common factors such as questions of identity and belonging can be present for others such as refugee or immigrant children, those raised in foster homes, bi-cultural or mixed race children and so forth. She will share some of the ways she has learned to use our experiences in ever broadening circles in today's world.

We've also included some personal comments from a few reunion wontoks who have read her books and can identify with her thoughts and how those thoughts have impacted their lives and thinking. If anyone else would like to send us comments, please feel free to do so. We'll publish them within the constraints of future Newsletter space considerations.

## Else

We met Ruth at a Global Mission Event in the late 1990's. I attended her session and spoke with her afterwards, and I found her very caring and down-to-earth. Our whole family had read her first book, "Letters Never Sent," and then some years later we read the book about Third Culture Kids.

Two of our daughters and I had all attended boarding schools, and we resonated with the "letters" very much. We also cried while reading it, and "felt better" once we'd finished it. Each of us had different boarding school experiences and griefs, many of which we have been able to share with one another. Ruth's book also gave us permission to do this.

## Cynthia

After reading both '*Third Culture Kids*' and '*Letters Never Sent*', I am glad I did. I think '*Third Culture Kids*' reads more like a textbook discussing the who, what, where and why of being a TCK with many case studies and examples. '*Letters Never Sent*' was written because of the spiritual and emotional struggles of Ruth's personal experience.

## Dianne

Reading *Third Culture Kids* helped me understand not only my own reactions to and feelings about living in PNG—in contrast to my home culture and environment—but also the different ways my siblings and PNG friends felt about those experiences. This book and *Letters Never Sent* provide an opening to share and work through memories with other TCKs.

Ruth makes the case for using our experiences as third culture kids to make a difference in our world. I believe the experience of being in the

## Sam

I read both books - *Letters Never Sent* a long time ago. I guess what struck me most about that book was to read of the pain suffered by parents who had to show a "brave face" as they

Our family has talked a lot about our being third culture kids, especially in connection with our children's reverse culture shock after moving to the USA—which had never actually been "home" to them. Sometimes I think I'm a fourth culture kid, but despite many needed adjustments, especially with every move/major change in our lives, I am thankful for the adventures and opportunities I had as a TCK to live in different worlds and to struggle with the ways others see and interpret the world and their faith.

Ron and I are so thankful that Ruth can join the PNG reunion and share her wisdom and perspectives.

From my perspective, '*Third Culture Kids*' depicts head knowledge, and '*Letters Never Sent*' depicts heart knowledge; two different perspectives on the TCK experience. Both spoke to me in different ways. I hope that those interested will pick up one or both books. If you pick up one, and you are seeking more, then be sure to read the other one.

minority culture in PNG made me more open to listening to and learning about the many cultural groups in the U.S.

I wish I had been introduced to *Third Culture Kids* years ago, and had the opportunity to share and discuss it with my parents. I look forward to learning from Ruth at our 2020 reunion about how we can make positive use of our TCK experiences. I appreciate her willingness to give us opportunities as individuals and as a group to speak with her.

sent their little ones off to be raised by people they really didn't know much about. Many of the coastal kids had the benefit of making this trip in 7th grade but that wasn't an option for

highlanders even for those kids at Asaroka or Goroka. There are a few in our reunion group who had the experience of growing up as missionary kids and then sending their kids off to boarding school - it would be interesting to hear from them.

*Third Culture Kids* seems kind of intimidating and includes lots of information compiled by both Ruth and her collaborators. Lois told me she thought it was like a textbook. I didn't read it to remember all the details. What really struck me though was how it provided some

## Phil

I did enjoy reading Ruth's books but I'm not sure they fit me that well.

I think the main reason is that I went to KLS at the same time as my only sibling (Jon) and so always had a close confidant. Jon and I were virtually inseparable and closer to each other than we were to my parents. So boarding school for me always seemed like home, just with more kids. Jon and I often got in trouble for forgetting to write our folks while we were at KLS. When we did write, our letters were pretty skimpy according to Mom who I'm sure is right. The second reason, and perhaps more important one, is that we left New Guinea for

## Dawn

I am about half-way through *Third Culture Kids* which reads like a textbook. It provides an interesting perspective on our upbringing and perhaps more clarity about times that were not so easy in our lives. I was a Coastal kid so I was lucky to stay at home so long. I had a sibling in high school with me, which gave me a sense of always having family with me.

It was probably most difficult when I first returned to Canada to finish my grade 12. Many things were a little hard for me to understand. Some social aspects were different, and

insights into the problem I have relating to people who haven't had the same international experience I have had. It was also quite surprising to think of the large number of Third Culture Kids that are out there. I seem to recall Ruth's book indicating something like 12 million. I had read at one time that there were 1 mill Americans in international schools around the world.

I am looking forward to hearing what Ruth has to share with us and am excited that Cynthia was able to make that happen.

good before my 10th birthday. While I have vivid and fond memories of New Guinea and KLS, my real formative years were in conventional old Iowa. I don't really know if I register as a true 3rd culture kid.

I sort of suspect that to be a true 3rd culture kid you need to have passed at least some of those difficult pre-teen and teen years in a 3rd culture where you begin to develop a personal worldview. I love remembering my time in New Guinea and at KLS, but other than my unusual accent I'm pretty thoroughly a small town Iowa kid.

classmates had grown up together in Canada through primary and high school. At university, the playing field evens out because of all the foreign young people in one's classes. In addition I worked with many foreign trained people in my career and always felt very comfortable with them.

The book gives one pause, to think about why we are the way we are. It has stimulated a number of interesting discussions with other friends who grew up in similar situations. I would recommend it.

## Les

I have read "*Third Culture Kids*" or at least most of it. I was so impressed with her early descriptions of relationships and emotions that TCKs go through. I realized that I experienced them, and it was not just me and my upbringing. It explained to me why I am sometimes stand-offish (Why get too deeply involved, I won't be here that long anyway?) and yet curious about other cultures (Why was it easy to make friends among foreign students in college, and more difficult among Americans?)

Ruth's description of a fictional, but typical experience of a TCK going back to Singapore was so insightful and helpful. This fictional TCK had felt so at home there and had a good friend, but when she went back, she found she

## Paula

Although *Third Culture Kids* was like a textbook, I sure could relate to everything Ruth Van Reken was talking about. It pretty well spelled out why we PNGers are the way we are.

## Mark B

I read both the books *Letters Never Sent* and *Third Culture Kids*, and read Letters again just now. I felt they were very different. Letters is a much more personal thing for Ruth, and *Third Culture Kids* more a research or educational book.

As far as her experiences in Letters it was similar to us who went to boarding school at KLS at age 6 or 7 and didn't have an opportunity for a town school or home schooling like Ruth had. For the most part we didn't know the difference and we expected it to happen. I have some vague memories of 1958, and one is that I was excited to go to KLS. I was there from first

just didn't fit in there any longer. Her childhood support system was no longer available to her. She had to fend for herself, and it was extremely difficult.

It was helpful as well when Ruth explained why we didn't really fully adapt back "home." It was because so many of those subtle understandings that you absorb growing up were just different from those that kids back here absorbed. Instincts are different. And yet there is virtually an instant sense of familiarity with other TCKS, even from other mission fields.

So I did enjoy what I read and found it very insightful.

Having taught many Navy kids who moved around a lot, and who felt like they didn't belong anywhere, I could empathize with them because of my PNG experiences.

through seventh grade. In hindsight one maybe wishes things had been different, but then we would have to give up all the experiences we had and there would not have been a reason for the PNG/KLS/SPLC planning committee to exist.

The other thing I feel is being boarders may have made us bond more with our siblings than our parents at that stage in our life.

I'm very excited to have the opportunity for Ruth to be at our reunion and to talk more about her books. I'd definitely recommend everyone read *Letters Never Sent*.

## **A Few Questions For You—PLEASE LET US KNOW**

In each Newsletter we will ask general questions that can help us plan this reunion. This Newsletter's questions are:

- **Did you attend KLS? If YES, what years?**
- **Did you attend SPLC? If YES, what years?**
- **In what role did you or your parents serve in Papua New Guinea? In what years?**
- **For those who haven't responded yet, are you planning (or hoping) to attend this 2020 reunion?**

**Your answers to these questions are an important planning tool. Please reply to this email by inserting your answers and pushing the REPLY button.**

**We appreciate any and all of your feedback. We all look forward to seeing you in 2020.**

**Your 2020 Reunion Planning Team:**

**Mark Brandt, Sam Brandt, Fred Brandt, Dawn (Daechsel) McClean, Phil Davis, Paula (Schulz) Mitchell, Barb (Hueter) Reardon, Cynthia (Mansur) Schoonover, Gary Schoonover, Mark Singh-Hueter, Dianne Tuff, Les Walck.**