

To Be a Third Culture Kid...

By a CLO Summer Hire

As I prepare to enter my senior year of high school, I find myself looking back on my life. Granted I'm only 16, but each year provides a lot more to reflect on and by spending my summer in Moscow, I have found the time. I was inspired by reading two articles concerning life overseas and being a Third Culture Kid (we affectionately call ourselves TCKs). There is a debate over the value of the particular lifestyle we lead, which is understandable, but personally I wouldn't have it any other way. As far as I can tell, most TCKs are able to appreciate the unique experiences of their lives and handle challenges being thrown at them with ease. And many TCKs plan to spend their adult lives in the same way, traveling through the world and absorbing new cultures.

In life, everything is a compromise and growing up overseas is no exception. In the case of a TCK, one (or one's parents) gives up the security of roots and a hometown in exchange for opportunities unequal to anywhere else. It can be a tough decision, but ultimately I thank my parents for what they chose. Though it hasn't always been easy, I am constantly thrilled by the life I lead. I have traded jewelry with a 6-year-old in Irian Jaya. I have friends who are from, and who live in, countries all across the globe. I have been to 4 high schools in three years, after being evacuated twice. I have lived in limbo in different temporary housing for a year at a time. I have felt that I am from nowhere and I have felt that I am from everywhere. I have seen my school gym filled with students packing supplies for Indonesians displaced by floods and I have seen their excitement when receiving our packages. I have considered five countries my home. I have conversed with adults who confuse India with Indiana. I have questioned the morals of tourism. I have ached at not feeling connected to a country I considered my home at that time. My experiences are by no means unique among TCKs.

Besides the opportunities provided by living outside of the U.S., I also have the friendship of other TCKs. There is an unknown, silent connection bonding us together, whether strangers or best friends. We share the confusion and have the same sense of wandering... and most of us love it. From siblings who have gone off to college I've heard of the longing for other TCKs – other people who can understand what you've been through. We do not fall under the "international kids" classification, yet we are not Americans in the sense that the others are. We grew up without ever being a local and we remain that way upon returning to the U.S. We belong to a third culture – a wandering world where we are connected by the international schools we attend – and in this small world

everyone's lives are intertwined. We are all distantly connected by our past lives. Someone's friend's brother was your 6th grade lab partner. Your best friend's closest friend was yours in elementary school. For a TCK, the experience of living in a country that is home to so few of us is the first step in building a friendship.

Though we're all gathered in Moscow at present, my group of friends is already beginning to split as they fan out across the world. These groups are constantly changing as people come and go. I've only been here a year yet I found a welcoming community within Moscow which brought us together. Within this there are sub-communities: the newcomers, the NEC dog owners, the compound girls and the Pokrovsky boys. Upon arrival the newcomers bond, the dog owners meet and greet each other, and the students are nervous and excited to be together again. By winter the groups have been formed and the communities are complete. The newcomers have branched out to get to know everyone. The dog owners have learned each other's names, as well as those of the dogs, and find themselves too often in the dog park. The lunch tables are steadily the same. The compound community knows each other now that everyone has found their niche.

As TCKs and as students, our primary community becomes that of the school. I can say that I have comfortably settled into this community and am happy within it. However, I am saddened by the way our desire to explore our host country is smothered by the long days at school and the shortened days during winter here in Moscow. I do feel as though I am lacking a connection to Russia itself. As TCKs, we are only able to see our host country's culture from a distance. Even the locals attending the international schools are not representative of the whole culture as they are TCKs themselves.

As I prepare for my final year of high school, my goal is to connect with Russia. I need to. Regrets are especially hard to amend once time and distance have come into play. So *carpe diem*, seize the day, without regrets. I will embed Russia into my soul, incorporate cultural aspects into my personality, and I will leave Russia as a different person.