

MARCH
2013

Educare



Contents

1. A West African Childhood;
Interview with Bev Grylls Pg 2
2. Response to Dec 1012 Edition on
internet & mobile phone use. Pg 5

"A third culture kid is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside their parents' culture." Dave Pollock

A West African Childhood

Q Can you tell us a few basic facts about where you grew up, and why you lived there?

A I was born in Scotland, in Aberdeen to be precise, but I don't have any memories from there as we went to Sierra Leone when I was just 11 months old. I'm one of 4 children with two older sisters and a younger brother. We lived in Freetown until I was 5 and then spent about a year in Northern Ireland on home leave before moving on to Monrovia in Liberia where we stayed until I was 12. My father was a community leader and ran bookshops in Freetown and then Monrovia. I remember having loads of books and boxes around the home. My mother taught in the international school on the ELWA radio compound in Monrovia.

Q What was the Scottish connection, is that where your parents are from?

A My parents aren't Scottish, my mother comes from Belfast and my father from England, but he moved all over the country as a child so doesn't really identify one place as home. We just accepted whatever home was provided for home leave, and we needed home leave a few times in quick succession as the four of us were all born in the UK and are very close in age. I know that I have lived in or visited a number of places around Britain, but have no memory of that as I was too young at the time.

Q Do you remember much about your time in Freetown?

A Not really because I was still young when we left. Interestingly though when I went there as a 19-year old I felt very much at home. The noises, the smell and the general experience were all very familiar. I remembered the ferry journey across from Lungi where the airport is to Freetown. I had no sense of culture shock during my visit.

Q What memories do you have of your home in Liberia?

A We lived in a mostly Liberian area with some Lebanese around. It wasn't in the same part of town as the school where a lot of our classmates lived. We had a good number of Liberian friends but only played with them in organised and supervised contexts. This was largely because of a fear of physical threat and crime which were both real dangers. We employed a watchman and a couple of local boys to help deter crime and keep hagglers away, but that didn't prevent us being burgled on one occasion where we lost a fair amount of money.

I remember that we had loads of pets, mostly cats and dogs, but we also had a mongoose for a while - trying to wash it under the tap earned us a few scratches! None of the pets were ever allowed into the house, as is normal in West Africa. I think that my attitude to animals is shaped by this - much less attached and sentimental than most Westerners.

Q What about diet?

A Rice, rice and more rice. I imagine that we must have eaten bread as well, but rice is the dominant memory as we ate that for just about every main meal. Liberian food is very spicy, too spicy for young children meaning that it had to be toned down for us. We had plenty of Kool-Aid and Coke. Vitamin tablets were part of our rations. The thing that I really didn't like was the tinned powdered milk which never tasted right to me. More positively we enjoyed barbeques on the beach.

Q What was school like?

A I loved school. For a while I was quite naughty there until it reached a point where my parents had to be informed. From then on I was completely reformed being determined to please my parents. We went to the school on the ELWA compound where my mother was teaching. I remember starting very early in the morning and generally finishing at lunch time. The school used an American system and most of the teachers came from America, although the children came from all over the world. There were a few Liberian children with the rest of us being expatriate TCKs. I remember that we had a class for each school grade which meant that it must have been a reasonable size, but I can't remember the actual numbers there. The education was strong on basics such as language skills and mathematics covering these areas in more depth than the British school that I went to after re-entry. We had regular vocabulary and spellings to learn followed up by spelling tests. Of course I learned American English there writing with US spellings and idiom and speaking with an American accent. My best friend at school was Stephanie Van Reken, the daughter of Ruth who co-authored "Third Culture Kids" and wrote "Letters Never Sent".

Q What difficult experiences were there during the time in Liberia?

A The most difficult is when we went to play in an area nearby that we weren't supposed to visit. A Liberian boy about 10 years old grabbed me and held a knife to my throat. The others with me ran off to try and get adult help so I was alone. It didn't go beyond the threat, the boy concerned left me and ran off himself. I blocked this memory until I was 15 when my sister related the account to someone else. At first I couldn't remember but quickly the incident came back to me very vividly. I've had nightmares about this incident and am still very fearful of knives. I always feel very jumpy around anyone who looks remotely drunk or dangerous and will do just about anything to avoid them so this has had long-term effects on me.

More generally I developed a fear of the police and am still wary even in the UK. I know I don't need to be but the ingrained fear from my childhood experiences of them doesn't go away easily.

It was a challenge to live between wealth and poverty. Most of the Liberians we knew didn't have as much as us, but many of the foreigners were much richer. We got to know a lot of business families from the USA who brought their wealth and higher expectations with them. My parents were very much make do and mend people which was a good thing as we didn't have huge support, plus there were 4 children. I very rarely got anything new and learned that there wasn't a lot of point in asking. Not all of this was bad though as I learned the value of money and very much live with the philosophy of never wasting money now. We have 4 children of our own so being able to make the most of our resources is a good skill to have.

Q What are your warmer memories from those times?

A As already mentioned I loved school with my friends there. The sun and warm weather all the time were great. We were very friendly with the local zoo owner raising money to help with the zoo through the school and visiting fairly often. I really enjoyed the barbecues, which were always on the beach near to where we lived. It was a very safe beach for us to go down to regularly. We always seemed to be outside doing something or playing. I still love to be outside now and jump at any chance I have when the weather is warm enough.

I value the strong moral teaching from school, children's classes on Sunday and home. We developed a very wide knowledge of theology, much more than if I'd been in the UK and attended school there. I absorbed my parents' values through stories, songs and reading - I still appreciate that and am glad that I had my "sheltered" childhood.

Q Why did you leave when you were 12?

A The instability in the country grew after the coup and takeover by Samuel Doe in 1980. The counter-coup in 1985 failed then was followed by repression and instability. We didn't know most of this as children as the adults sheltered us from it, but as tension grew families had to leave before the situation degenerated even more.

Q Could you tell us about that experience of re-entry.

A I remember being quite excited at first as we knew that we were leaving in advance. We left at the end of the American school year in late May. My first impressions were that England was really cold, I couldn't get over the green fields with cows in them (I don't think I'd ever seen cows in Liberia), and I found it hard to believe that the children were still in school for another 6 or 7 weeks when our school year was already finished.

I was moved back a year in school, partly because of the mismatch of systems and partly because I'm young in that school year anyway as an August-born child. I found the academic side generally OK, although a lot of it was quite different including the spelling and use of language from the American English that I'd learned. The maths was very different: I'd mastered long division in Liberia only to find it wasn't even needed in the UK. The overall impression that I got was that my UK school curriculum was wider in subject matter but not as strong on the basics of maths and English grammar.

The biggest shocks though were in social life. My upbringing had been sheltered and conservative making me naive about many areas of life. I realised that not everyone shared our values. I didn't know any of the swear words, sounded like an American, and had no knowledge at all of current pop and TV culture. Moreover I wasn't at all interested in any of that preferring my own tapes and music from my "sheltered" background. All of this meant that for the first 2 years of senior school I was teased and bullied. Strangely it stopped when I had my hair cut really short at the start of the 3rd year. Somehow this gave me a new and more acceptable identity leading to an end of the bullying.

Q You met your husband, Matt, when you were still quite young. How did that work out?

A I was working as a live-in nanny for a rich family in Maidenhead about 40km west of London. Matt moved to the area and we were attracted to each other from the start. It wasn't long before we were together, but we waited for a few years before we got married in order to finish college studies. Early on in our relationship when I was only 19 we visited Freetown as part of a team. As I mentioned earlier everything was so familiar to

me whereas Matt had never seen anything like it before with culture shock as a result. Things that we took as normal as children such as the battered roads, poverty and regular power cuts are a huge shock to someone like Matt seeing them for the first time.

Q Some would say that a marriage between a TCK and a monocultural person is a form of cross-cultural marriage. Is that your experience?

A There are definitely some differences. The conservative background means that I see things as very black and white. For instance I would never accept bad language and struggle with anyone professing belief who uses it whereas Matt was and is surrounded by it. Of course, he doesn't approve of it but tends to downplay it more than I do. It's the same for TV, DVDs, computer games and reading matter - I'm very clear about what I will and won't accept for our children. Our childhood years of living without much money yet seeing provision mean that I expect this now. If there's a financial or other problem I see that there must be a reason and that eventually there will be provision to turn things around. Matt's background means that he doesn't see things this way at all, he can be very anxious about financial problems.

Q How much do you feel committed to Sierra Leone and Liberia now?

A I always tune in immediately when either country is in the news or if someone is going there - much more so than for any other part of the world. I don't meet that many people who know this part of the world but it's exciting when I do and can immediately relate to their experiences. Recently there was a TV programme about midwives in Sierra Leone shown here in the UK. It's rare to have programmes like that so I made absolutely sure that I was able to watch it!

Q Would you like to go back to Sierra Leone or Liberia any time?

A When we were children my sisters and I wanted to marry someone who shared our values and return as NGO volunteers. We wanted to make sure that the work didn't come before any children we had - we'd seen some of that around us in Liberia. That phase passed as I adapted to life here in Britain. It seems like the African childhood has become an ever smaller part of my life although it remains a huge part of who I am. When I went as 19-year old I felt at home but didn't have any inclination then to go and live there. More recently Matt has visited Liberia, even spending some time with a local leader in Monrovia who used to work with my Dad as a teenager. That visit has sparked something again in me I think. We're in no position to go and live there now with numerous family commitments, but the idea of visiting regularly is very much a possibility. Our eldest daughter, Stephanie, is in high school now and when she finishes there she is keen to train as a midwife to work in Liberia after qualification. She draws her desire for this from both me and her grandparents.

Bev and Matt have 3 daughters and a son and now live in a village called Broughton Gifford in Wiltshire close to Melksham about 160km west of London.

Pictures below - Then, Bev (left) in Liberia with her sister; now, with Matt and their children in rural Wiltshire in South-West England



Response to Dec 2012 edition on internet and mobil phone use

We had a lot of feedback to our last Educare on the benefits of good internet and mobile/cell phone use and the dangers of their misuse. Mostly the feedback agreed that this is a huge issue that we need to be tackling, but one correspondent working in an international school replied in more detail. Here's most of Megan's response with some really useful information and websites.

Thanks very much for the informative, balanced and highly relevant issues that you have tackled in your article for TCKs. This is an area that I have raised as important in the international school that I am working in.

I would like to see parents and teachers being offered a session in internet issues and practical advice and support. From my experience parents are not as aware as they could be about the dangers or about how to equip their children adequately to navigate the internet safely.

I have been researching sites that offer training for parents, educators and children/youth on how to approach the internet and how to keep safe. These are organisations I'd recommend that provide information for all the family, even lesson plans for teachers to use, and advice on how to install filters. The best measure friends have found is the system where a record of all the sites your child has visited is emailed to you or a nominated person, so there is an accountability element and chance for mentoring. This means that even if the child deletes the history, there is still a record of the sites they have visited.

We have a 9 and 13 yr old, and have installed **Net Nanny** with different settings for each person. This tool is available from Content Watch and works well - it certainly denies access to questionable sites but also allows the administrator to overrule this if necessary. You choose what your settings are and so feel more in control of what your kids have access to, although of course you still need to guide and watch over them. I totally agree with the relational aspect of open conversation in the home.

I also feel that parents don't necessarily know which filters to get for their computers and how to install them on to phones/iPods. We decided that the only way to make our son's iPod safe was to uninstall the safari browser that is on it - this can only be re-installed when opened with a password. We have yet to find a filtering system for **apple iPod!**

[We need to know...] more in the way of practical tools for actually making the internet searching experience safer. E.g.

- How many parents know about the safety mode on **You Tube**?
- How many have read and understand the Parent Guide on **Facebook** use?
- How many understand how a **google plus** account works?
- What about safe search security setting on **google images** search?

Some people think filters don't work or they don't want to pay for them. *[In many of our passport countries]* the internet providers often provide safety features *[as part of the package]*. When you are in a foreign country you are probably going to have to purchase your own.

Check out these sites if you are not already aware of them:

www.contentwatch.com/
www.covenanteyes.com/
www.thinkuknow.co.uk
<http://www.common sense media.org/educators/curriculum>
<http://www.safermedia.org.uk/toptips.htm>
<http://www.safetynet.org.uk/thefacts.php>
www.getgamestmart.com



Then in response to a request for further information

Mary Kay, founder of **Your Sphere**, a safe social networking site designed solely for children and teens, also has a parents' site offering articles on how to train your child in internet safety, and instructions on how to install safety settings on the browsers we use such as **google, You Tube, Yahoo**, also iPods, iPads, and mobile/cell phones.

Her site is: www.yoursphereforparents.com

The safety mode for You Tube is at the bottom of every You Tube page, it can be activated and it can also be locked. This needs to be done on every browser that is used to search from each laptop etc.

The safety mode on google searches is at the top of every google page - put it on and you immediately see a difference with google images. To lock it on you need to click on the drop menu under Safe Mode and tick *strict filter* on your google account preferences and SAVE it at the bottom. You may have to have a google account to do this.

It's not difficult to find out how to buy safety filters or install them for different sties - there is lots of information on the net. The issue is getting parents to understand that they need to research and install these filters, and that they need to be more clued up about how the sites that their kids are using work. For instance Facebook has a whole **parents guide** section. It takes a lot of time to look into everything and get things set up, I am not an expert at computers at all but feel I have to get ahead for the sake of my kids. On-line games are also a major hobby with kids here, so more information on the effects of on-line gaming, in particular violent games, would be good. I think *[our]* parents are mostly aware of game ratings.

Could somebody be commissioned to gather as much information as possible and share it in a practical workshop with people like us? Or maybe have a few people work on it and share their findings..

This organisation: <http://www.internetsafetyproject.org> has good practical information and advice on issues like the benefits and dangers of google plus.



Educare is a free e-magazine for TCKs, their families, support staff and any other supporters.

It is distributed quarterly and can be sent freely to anyone who would benefit from it.

Direct free subscription from mk_tck@yahoo.co.uk