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## FOREWORD

From the moment I attended my first Families in Global Transition (FIGT) conference in 1999 I knew I was in a special place. At no other international gathering can you meet so many people who care about other people who live, work, learn and move between cultures. Those who attend FIGT come from the worlds of international corporations, the military, mission and education. Some are people like me who live this life and want to know more, to learn and to understand and help the people we care about.

I came to FIGT as a journalist and then editor of Woman Abroad magazine and as a speaker. Today, 11 conferences later, I attend because this is my home, the people here are the folk I turn to for a quote from an expert for a piece I am writing or a book I am publishing. Here are the people who know the answers. The experts, the gurus, the leaders. Here at FIGT is where I find both my professional network and my support team. This is where people ‘get me’. It has often been said of the event that it is a place where ‘best friends meet for the very first time’.

A percentage of profits from this book will be donated to the David Pollock Scholarship Fund, which provides the funds to allow at least four people a year to attend the conference.

This book was compiled because those who are lucky enough to attend FIGT want others to know just how great it is. This book is for those who are unable to attend for whatever reason. It is to show you what you missed and share what we learned, but importantly, it is to encourage you to join the fun. Go online, follow FIGT on social media, become a member, be part of the network, join the family.

**Jo Parfitt, Kuala Lumpur, January 2015**



# THE HISTORY OF FAMILIES IN GLOBAL TRANSITION

## How it all began

In late 1997 four women from the newly formulated Association of International Women in Indianapolis were gathered around Ruth Van Reken's kitchen table for coffee to discuss what they could do to help families such as their own deal with the adjustment issues of international relocations. Each of them had experienced difficulties on a personal level and they were committed to the idea of starting something from the grassroots level up to help each other.

Marjorie Becker, an Eli Lilly spouse, and Ruth Van Reken, an Indianapolis author and speaker on global family issues, approached Caterina Blitzer of the International Center of Indianapolis (ICI) about hosting a forum at the International School of Indianapolis to assess interest in the topic. Christine Dowdeswell and Janet Fischer, two co-founders of the Association of International Women in Indianapolis, helped implement what became a full-day conference. David Pollock an authority on third culture kids (TCKs), transitions and internationally mobile families agreed to speak.

Through the support of Mitch Armbruster, Manager of Global Relocations, Eli Lilly and Company, and the financial sponsorship of both Eli Lilly and Company and F.C. Tucker, the first FIGT conference was held at the Eli Lilly Corporate Center, Indianapolis, Indiana on May 16, 1998. Of the 85 attendees, over half traveled from outside Indianapolis.

<b>1998</b>	First FIGT Conference held in Indianapolis, Indiana
<b>1999</b>	Conference expanded to a weekend at Indianapolis, Indiana
<b>2000-2001</b>	Conference attendance continued to grow and became a weekday event
<b>2002</b>	FIGT incorporated and successfully applied for 501(c)(3) status
<b>2004</b>	Conference relocated to Dallas, Texas
<b>2005-2007</b>	Conference relocated and held in Houston, Texas
<b>2008</b>	FIGT celebrated its 10th Anniversary and recognized the contributions of Norma McCaig, David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken
<b>2009</b>	Conference continued to be held in Houston First chapter formed in Boston
<b>2010</b>	Trailblazer Awards presented to Jo Parfitt and Robin Pascoe for their contributions to expatriate families and support of FIGT Second chapter formed in Seoul, South Korea
<b>2011</b>	Conference relocated to Washington, DC

Since a small group of dedicated individuals started FIGT in 1998, we have:

- Engaged more than 1700 attendees from over 30 countries
- Held more than 300 sessions on topics addressing the needs of globally mobile families and the organizations that support them
- Empowered employees in more than 150 organizations
- Expanded FIGT spotlight and made FIGT a ‘household name’
- Increased distribution from 670 organizations and individuals in 2004 to over 3500 (+400%)
- Over 100 individual and organization members since launching membership in Spring 2012

FIGT’s focus has been and will continue to be on families relocating around the world.

Taken from the [FIGT.org](http://FIGT.org) website

## THE WRITERS AND THE PARFITT/PASCOE WRITING RESIDENCY

In 2013 Jo Parfitt asked the board of FIGT if she could recruit, train and mentor four new writers who had never before attended the conference so they could write about it. Not only did she want to give new writers a lucky break and introduce them to new writing markets and experts, but she also wanted to find a way to spread the word about her favourite conference, mostly using social media. Thus the Writing Residency was created and first took place in 2014.

Jo Parfitt had first attended FIGT alongside her own writing inspiration, Robin Pascoe, who was also a journalist, author and publisher specializing in expatriate issues. Robin and Jo both travelled the world writing, speaking and teaching about what they had learned from the expatriate experts. In 2008 they were both honoured to receive Trailblazer awards at FIGT for their work in this field. The pair have always felt they were cut from the same cloth. When Jo had her idea accepted by FIGT it was inevitable that the residency would carry Robin's name too.

Four writers were selected and trained during the three months prior to the conference. While at the conference they became Writers in Residence. Each writer was responsible for covering every session that took place – the Keynotes, the Concurrents, the short snappy Ignite sessions and the informal Kitchen Table sessions, so named because of the way FIGT began round a kitchen table. However, they also interviewed a selection of the presenters and board members so that you could have a better picture of what goes on during these action packed few days.

Justine Ickes, Sue Mannering, Dounia Bertuccelli and Cristina Bertarelli were chosen from many applicants – for their passion for writing about expatriate issues and their willingness to use social media and start a blog.

Several others had shown interest in the scheme and either applied too late or were not first time attendees but were also keen to get involved. So, we were delighted to add Alice Wu, Becky Matchullis, Terry Anne Wilson and Nikki Kazimova to the team of eight writers who provided the content for this yearbook.

You can find out more about the writers in the later article, *The Writers*, in the Interviews section.



# SPRING AWAKENING – HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FIGT 2014 CONFERENCE

**By Becky Matchullis**

My anticipation grew as the plane took off from Denver headed to Washington Dulles airport. An early morning flight had brought me from Calgary, one on which I dozed off, trying desperately to keep my head from falling onto the unknown shoulder next to me.

Families in Global Transition Conference 2014 was about to begin. My fifth time attending and fourth time having the honor of presenting – excitement brewed within. Memories of FIGT’s past flashed across the billboard of my mind: unknown feelings at the first conference, quickly replaced with a sense of ‘at home’ – an unusual feeling for an ATCK (Adult Third Culture Kid). As a professional, I have gained new learning and tools to add to my tool kit. Networking is always a favorite part of FIGT. Their move from Houston to Washington – an ‘I-fit-here’ sense with each conference I attended. A place where understanding, respect and open-mindedness were mutually shared through presentations and between people. A bond created from both the excitement as well as the pain of international living.

What would make FIGT 2014 unique? It didn’t take long to find out. I hadn’t stepped both feet into the lobby, when I heard my name and there was a friend. Someone I had met at a previous FIGT. Others that were online acquaintances. Many this year were new to the FIGT community, which added vibrancy. It felt like a family reunion – the kind where you’re enveloped in hugs, accepted for who you are, and challenged through questions and thought provoking conversations.

The theme was *The Global Family Redefined*. Many topics were similar to past years – caring for the global family, transitions, Third Culture Kids, Adult Third Culture Kids and the accompanying partner, to name a few. What took me by surprise was the emotions that awakened in me throughout the various presentations.

A smile came in the opening Keynote when Ray S. Leki, director of the Transition Center for the US Department of State spoke of accompanying partners as ‘spartners’. We just don’t know what to call them, do we? Trailing spouse sounds like something dragged behind a truck. Accompanying spouse

brings the image of another piece of luggage. Could this be an affirming, empowering word that allows us to keep smiling?

In a Concurrent session, Patricia Stokke, a college professor teaching global management, presented doctoral research findings that Adult TCKs act global-mindedly beyond the norm. This confirms what many of us knew already. Gratitude permeated my soul, realizing my three young adult kids fit this category. Over the years, I've seen them feel the pain of loss and the struggle to find identity. Supported and empowered, they've emerged as globally minded leaders.

During the Ignite sessions, each speaker had seven minutes to engage the audience, all the while a slide show flashed along automatically. It was fast paced, covering the positive power of difference in cultural diversity, the benefits of cloud based technology for expatriates; then mentoring for TCKs transitioning into adulthood and the need for documenting the expatriate experience. Finally, the relationships and appreciation built for those who serve in our homes. The excitement and buzz in the room was tangible, as each presenter spoke in their area of expertise.

One Ignite session was especially poignant. Julia Simens, author of *Emotional Resilience and the Expat Child*, shared wisdom and personal stories of appreciation for the many host country people that come and go in our lives. I was transported back to being a young child, growing up in Malaysia. As a teenager in Hong Kong. And as a spartner in Indonesia, Cambodia and Kuwait. I saw each cook, house help, gardener and night watchmen – and recall significant memories of laughter, connection as humans (specifically those who were mothers), and their acceptance of my language blunders. With new eyes I realized they were a part of our family. I saw them in this new light because they 'saw' me and gave sacrificially of their love. Tears of love and admiration flowed freely.

In her keynote address Dr. Fanta Aw, AVP of Campus Life at American University, reminded us that it takes a village to raise a child. "We live in a web of interconnected relationships", she said, "Family are the people we claim and who claim us." I began to name all the people who have claimed me, who I have claimed over the decades of my life, in all the different places I've lived. Jubilation sparked within. What a reminder for us as global families, who live far from extended blood relatives. Our family is made up of uncles and aunts, cousins, nieces and nephews that are multi-cultural and diverse.

Those who come from our expat and host communities, our children's schools, and our business/organizational circles. Those that touch us with friendship, help, understanding and honor.

Saying goodbye was challenging, as it always is for a TCK/ATCK. Knowing I had added more members to my family made it significant. As I returned to Calgary, snow was falling and winter was hanging on. However, spring had emerged within me at FIGT. My passion has been rejuvenated in working with individuals and families who choose this life called 'global'. Thanks presenters, planners, and all those who participated.

## **RESOURCES**

### **• Websites**

[www.figt.org/2014\\_conference](http://www.figt.org/2014_conference)

[www.figt.org/2014\\_keynotes#WelcomeKeynote](http://www.figt.org/2014_keynotes#WelcomeKeynote)

[www.figt.org/2014\\_Ignite\\_Sessions](http://www.figt.org/2014_Ignite_Sessions)

[www.figt.org/2014\\_keynotes#SaturdayKeynote](http://www.figt.org/2014_keynotes#SaturdayKeynote)

### **• Books**

*Travel Wise: How to be Safe, Savvy and Secure Abroad*, Ray S. Leki, published by Intercultural Press

*Emotional Resilience and the Expat Child*, Julia Simens, published by Summertime Publishing



# THE WRITERS' FORUM

## Led by Jo Parfitt

**By Terry Anne Wilson**

*The Writers' Forum took place as part of the event's pre-conference activities.*

Imagine glancing at tarts in a French patisserie window and musing to yourself, “Hmm, *French Tarts*, what a great name for a book!” And then to follow that through with writing, research and publishing. This is exactly what Jo Parfitt did between the ages of 20 and 24. Since then, she has gone on to author 31 books and an array of articles, as well as having her own publishing company, Summertime Publishing. I wasn't the only 'relatively new writer' at the Writing Workshop to be impressed and motivated by Jo's opening story.

This three hour Writers' Forum was attended not only by the Writing Team at the conference, but also by those that ask themselves... is it possible that I could write and perhaps one day be published? This group was not only receptive to instruction, but also for inspiration from this author, publisher and mentor to writers. Jo has also been successful in mentoring would-be authors to bring their book ideas to fruition. When she conducts these workshops she speaks from experience of years in the business; a business she loves.

How indeed does it happen? The process of turning an idea into published reality. Jo was able to break the process down into elements which a new writer can not only comprehend, but also – hopefully – act upon to transform ideas into a published piece of work. Jo believes that, first and foremost, you have to have a story. You have to have something to say.

### **What is a Story**

We often hear the adage, 'everyone has a story'. As true as this may be, one must be brave enough to put pen to paper. As Jo points out, “you need to be creative, to take the initiative, to be persistent and even a little cheeky.” As a 24-year-old, this is how Jo produced her first book *French Tarts* after two years of research. Not only did she invite herself to dinner and ask her hosts to make her a tart, she also asked for the recipes too. In exchange, she said, she would publish their recipes in her book.

Ideas for stories, Jo impressed upon us, come from our own life experiences, our own hardships and vulnerabilities. It is imperative to write with passion about your own life. We like people when they're human, when they suffer and strive just as we do. Jo mentioned two books that dealt with difficult life experiences both published by Summertime Publishing: *An Inconvenient Posting* and *Harvesting Stones*. Both these authors reveal very personal and painful experiences in their writing, yet have no regrets in having done so.

On a broader level, who you are and what has happened to you should be authentic and speak to people. We're reminded that it isn't narcissistic to reveal these stories. "If your words can support or inspire someone else," Jo says emphatically, "you should be writing your story."

### **Elements of a Successful Story**

A story must do at least one of these:

- Inspire
- Inform
- Support
- Entertain

Readers want a story that resonates with them, provides insight or takes them on a journey. Often a narrative will convey a journey, which shows how a crisis was resolved. Jo's anecdote of being crippled with fear after a recent move to Malaysia and how she resolved it, was a good example of this. Problems to solutions, sad to happy, or ignorance to knowledge are all things you could write about. Needless to say, many of the expats in the room related to the suggested writing topics such as culture shock, loneliness, empty nest, re-inventing oneself, and putting down roots.

However, Jo also advises that we often need to start small before we take on a book project and as a new writer, I can attest to this. These can be short stories, poems and blog posts, for example. In fact if you've been fortunate to have attended one of Jo's writing retreats – as I have – there is a saying on the bottom page in her workbook. It reads: 'A memoir is just stories, strung together, like stars.' Writers, start writing those short stories as one day they may be the basis for your book. I personally incorporate pieces into some of my blog posts that I had previously written when the emotions were fresh. Jo also emphasizes the importance of a blog.

I'm afraid I resisted starting a blog myself until recently under the pretext that I couldn't find the right name for it. I now realize it was paralysis by analysis. Not only does a blog commit you to write, the practice is imperative as are the contacts you make for when that book is eventually published. Three months later my blog, [www.notesonaboardpass.wordpress.com](http://www.notesonaboardpass.wordpress.com) has followers scattered around the globe and I feel a certain commitment to those that follow it. Jo's advice is to start a blog one year before a published book and, like her, I can't emphasize the importance of this enough.

## S P I C E

After analyzing countless successful stories and memoirs, Jo has broken down the important components that help writing come alive. They are:

**Specifics:** Name details such as the street or the building, type of car or the kind of flower. For example, 'White tulips and purple hyacinths' instead of 'spring flowers'.

**Place:** Where were you, what could you see, hear or taste? 'My crisp linen shirt was quickly drenched in sweat as I heard the call to prayer from the onion-shaped dome' instead of, 'I heard the call to prayer and it was hot'.

**Incident:** 'With the crumbling fort as our witness, we sped away, the sand swirling behind us on the narrow desert track' instead of, 'we drove away quickly on the desert road'.

**Character:** 'The bus driver drove us through London,' becomes 'The skinny bus driver was munching on fish and chips as he wound his way through the busy London streets.'

**Emotion:** 'She was very much alive and vibrant; life's rich tapestry woven to this poignant moment as she sat under the Tuscan sun.' Instead of, 'She was happy they were all together in Tuscany.'

By using these elements you can bring spice to your writing and paint a visual picture. We were able to put this to practice at the end of Jo's session as we each wrote a short story. Sharing it within a small group for feedback and inspiration was testament to another of Jo's adages. Writers need other writers, we are united by our words. With her openness and expertise, Jo had inspired and empowered those that aspire to write.

With her guidance, I finally took the plunge after years of procrastination and I conclude with a quote from my blog post entitled, ‘So you want to be a writer?’ I wrote:

*The most integral member of that group and the reason we were all there, was Jo Parfitt. We blossomed under her nurturing guidance, her magnanimous manner and her colorful scarves that greeted us each day. Because of her, we became writers... we became a writing family.*

Whether you are fortunate to have been at this Writer’s Forum or in Tuscany where I first met Jo Parfitt, you cannot help but to be inspired.

## **RESOURCES**

### **• Websites**

[www.sunnyinterval.com](http://www.sunnyinterval.com)

[www.summertimepublishing.com](http://www.summertimepublishing.com)

[www.notesonaboardingpass.wordpress.com](http://www.notesonaboardingpass.wordpress.com)

### **• Books**

*A Career in Your Suitcase – a practical guide to creating meaningful work, anywhere (4th edition)*, Jo Parfitt and Colleen Reichrath-Smith, published by Summertime Publishing

*Sunshine Soup*, Jo Parfitt, published by Summertime Publishing

*Harvesting Stones*, Paula Lucas, published by Summertime Publishing

*An Inconvenient Posting*, Laura J. Stephens, published by Summertime Publishing

## **THE INTERVIEWS**

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INTERVIEWS TOOK PLACE OUTSIDE THE CONFERENCE, BY EMAIL, FACE-TO-FACE OR SKYPE. MANY OF THOSE WHO WERE CHOSEN HAVE WRITTEN BOOKS, OTHERS ARE HIGHLY REGARDED IN THEIR FIELD AND OTHERS ARE PEOPLE TO WATCH.

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## Ruth Van Reken

**By Dounia Bertuccelli**

Certain names immediately come to mind when thinking about Third Culture Kid (TCK) research: Norma McCaig, Ruth Hill Useem, David Pollock and of course, Ruth Van Reken.

It is difficult to find just one word that defines Ruth, who is a missionary kid, an Adult Third Culture Kid, author, teacher, public speaker, and advocate of TCKs, among many other things. She was born in Kano, Nigeria to an American mom born and raised in Chicago, and an American ATCK dad born in Resht, Iran. She spent much of her childhood in Africa, returning to the US for high school. As an adult, Ruth went to college, became a nurse, and then met and married her husband, David. Also a missionary kid and TCK in his own right, having lived two years in China as a child, David is also a doctor and as he wanted to work overseas, Ruth continued her expat life with her husband, raising three global nomads of her own in Liberia and the US.

As an Adult TCK, daughter, mother and grandmother of TCKs, Ruth knows the impact of this lifestyle and the importance of understanding it. She is dedicated to helping others understand their journey and to spreading the word about this global community. Without Ruth there would be no TCK 'bible' (Third Culture Kids: Growing up Among Worlds) and no Families in Global Transition conferences.

### **Finding Words for Her Story**

The two publications Ruth is most known for, *Letters Never Sent* and *Growing up Among Worlds*, were written under very different circumstances, but they both helped Ruth (and others) understand their own TCK background.

#### ***Letters Never Sent***

Although she had led a happy life, as an adult Ruth found herself battling depression various times. It was triggered again when her oldest daughter left for the first time to return to the US for school, and Ruth realized it might be linked to her own childhood. A year later, in 1986, the whole family returned to the US, settling in Indianapolis, which was a new adjustment for them all. It was during these periods that Ruth started keeping a journal, which would later be published as *Letters Never Sent*.

Finally writing about her experiences, at 39 years old, helped her process the emotions she had felt growing up as a TCK, especially about leaving home and going to boarding school. Expressing those emotions allowed her to finally address them and cope with them.

“This was not a book about a topic but simply a process of self-discovery,” she explained.

Her story resonated with many readers, and it continues to do so today, having sold over 32,000 copies. But when Ruth first wrote *Letters*, she had a hard time getting it printed because publishers didn’t believe there would be enough interest in her story.

“They said [...] that not enough people would care about it as not that many had lived it,” she recalled. “Finally a friend who was a printer said he would print it for me for free and I could repay him if I sold it.”

From there Ruth did the selling herself until her collaboration with author and publisher Jo Parfitt, which allowed her book to receive the exposure it deserved. Jo revamped *Letters* by adding photos, an epilogue by Ruth, and making it available in print and kindle ensuring Ruth no longer had to sell it herself.

The book initially shunned by publishers would go on to impact people all over the world, who realized they weren’t alone in how they felt. By sharing her experiences and emotions, Ruth has helped others to learn from her lessons and ultimately live better in their understanding.

“*Letters* showed me there was a well of grief that I had not been able to own or express,” she said. “And when we are protecting against the pain, we also cannot dare to live in the fullness of the joy.”

## **Growing Up Among Worlds**

It was while working on *Letters* that Ruth and David Pollock first connected. He was preparing a conference on TCKs and she sent him a letter asking if he was doing anything to help adults struggling with their TCK experiences. That one letter led to a great friendship and collaboration.

Working on *Growing up Among Worlds* was a very different process to writing her journal. David had done much of the research but someone needed to put it in writing and make it available to others. In addition to writing it, there was also a need to clarify the whys of such a lifestyle, which were the challenges Ruth took on. Trying to explain the impact of growing up as a TCK also helped her understand herself better.

“As I tried to sort out the why do these characteristics emerge, I began to get new insights into my own story,” she recalled. “I could then use my story and hopefully expand to help others have a language for their story too.”

### **The Creation of Families in Global Transition**

FIGT had very humble beginnings in the Midwest USA. While trying to adjust to life in suburban Indiana after living overseas, Ruth realized that not enough help was being given to relocated families. Although relocation packages included nice benefits and practical information, they lacked support in other areas.

“Topics such as transition, TCKs or spousal matters were not covered,” she said. “There seemed little awareness or appreciation for the enormity of the emotional/psychological/social issues that they or their children faced.”

In the meantime, Norma McCaig had started *Global Nomads* and David Pollock was talking about TCKs to international schools and organizations. Ruth’s memoir, *Letters Never Sent* had been published and people had begun writing to her, sharing their own similar experiences.

“It was apparent that issues related to global family living were real out in the world but they seemed invisible where I was living in Indianapolis,” she recalled. Then one day while sitting at her kitchen table with three friends, discussing the book she was writing with David Pollock, they realized it would be great to spread this information to a wider audience.

And so began the preparation for the first FIGT conference.

They found a venue, set a date (May 16th 1998) and created a logo, which is still used today. They even found a star speaker: David Pollock. At the time he was Executive Director of Interaction International (formerly Manhattan Youth Services), which he had co-founded in the 1960s. Few locals attended

the conference, but many people traveled into town to hear David speak and ‘the magic of FIGT began’.

Although that first conference only had two sessions, it was so successful a second one was planned the following year and by 2001 FIGT had become an official organization. The conference was eventually moved from Indianapolis to Houston where there was a larger international community due to the oil industry, before moving to its current home in Washington, DC.

“Throughout the process, incredibly dedicated and capable board members [...] have continued to lead the way to making FIGT what it is now,” she said.

Although David Pollock is gone, his legacy continues, not only through the knowledge he has left behind, but also through his son Michael, who led a Concurrent session with Ruth at the 2014 FIGT conference.

### **The FIGT Bookstore**

Another evolving aspect of FIGT is the bookstore. At the first conference there was no bookstore – there wasn’t even a book table. Ruth’s husband sold them straight from the boxes in the lobby towards the end of the conference.

“No one believed there was enough interest in such a topic to generate many sales,” Ruth recalled.

The main books available at the time were *Letters Never Sent* by Ruth and *Strangers at Home* by Carolyn Smith, a US diplomat’s daughter. The following years there were more, including *Growing up Among Worlds* as well as publications from Jo Parfitt and Robin Pascoe. But unfortunately the choices remained quite limited. Today there is an online bookstore and a physical bookstore at the FIGT conferences filled with myriad expat and TCK-related books.

### **Future Research and Passing the Torch**

Ruth is currently working on new research regarding Cross-Cultural Kids (CCK). She wants to see how certain lessons can apply to all children who have experienced a globalized upbringing or some form of displacement from their parents’ home/culture.

“The details of the stories for a refugee child and an ambassador’s daughter are world’s apart,” she noted. “But both have lost the stability and connection to one world around them where they would have traditionally grown and had their identity mirrored back to them.”

Her hope is that by understanding the TCK experience it is also possible to help children from other cross-cultural backgrounds. She hopes to expand our views of who constitutes a global nomad and to use our past lessons to benefit them.

“If we have identified the gifts TCKs often receive from their cross-cultural childhood [...] then is it possible those with other types of cross-cultural backgrounds [...] have the same kinds of giftings?” she questioned.

She is also hopeful that future generations of TCKs/CCKs will continue to carry the torch for the global community. “Now we are in TCK Phase Two, watching your generation move into its place in the history of the world and build on the past so lessons learned can be applied to the present and prepare others to live well in a future where I believe CCKs of all backgrounds will be the norm and not the exception,” she said. Although she speaks of passing the torch to the next generation, Ruth is far from done with her work. She continues to travel to conferences and schools speaking about TCKs and how to help them understand and make the most of their experiences.

Meeting Ruth was a highlight of the conference for me – I was immediately won over by her kindness, humor and warmth. She seems to have time for everyone, despite being in constant demand. She is modest and humble, almost to a fault, which only makes her more charming. She has done so much for this community and yet always downplays her contributions, preferring to give the credit to others. Thankfully those around her are willing to sing her praises and give her the recognition she deserves.

Ruth had endless wisdom to share, both when we spoke at FIGT and when I interviewed her after. She knows that growing up as a TCK/CCK is not simply good or bad. There are challenges and sorrow, but there are also amazing opportunities and happiness. Sometimes we forget that the ups and downs are both necessary parts of life. “The joy doesn’t negate the pain of the loss and the pain of chronic cycles of separation and loss also doesn’t negate the joy,” she said. “Never ever forget you only grieve for losing something you loved.”

After these many words of wisdom, she shared one final piece of advice, which she has carried around her whole life. Her ATCK father told her: “Ruth, no matter where you go in life, always unpack your bags and plant your trees [...] Maybe you won’t be there to eat the fruit from those trees, but someone else will.”

In an increasingly mobile world, perhaps that is the greatest piece of wisdom.

## **RESOURCES**

### **• Websites**

For further information visit Ruth’s website [www.crossculturalkid.org/](http://www.crossculturalkid.org/)

For further information on Families in Global Transition [www.figt.org](http://www.figt.org)

### **• Books**

*Third Culture Kids: Growing up Among Worlds*, David C. Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken, published by Nicholas Brealey America

*Letters Never Sent*, Ruth E. Van Reken, published by Summertime Publishing

*Writing Out of Limbo: International Childhoods, Global Nomads and Third Culture Kids*, Edited by Gene H. Bell-Villada, Nina Sichel, Faith Eidse and Elaine Neil Orr, published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing

*Unrooted Childhoods: Memoirs of Growing Up Global*, Edited by Faith Eidse and Nina Sichel, published by Nicholas Brealey America