



Karen Wong and her sister Joyce grew up in Hong Kong, Japan, Thailand, and Dalat International school of Malaysia. Karen is completing her studies at Hong Kong University.

Article from Growing up Global, Cindy Loong, Shepherd International Church Limited, Hong Kong.
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In July 2007, Sky and Karen planned and ran a camp for MKs in Hong Kong. Below is Karen's summary of the camp, which includes reflections on her own life as a MK. Mission agencies and churches can consider sponsoring MKs to return to their parents' home country during the summers for camps, career internships, to teach English, or to study Chinese. The idea is to let them make like-minded friends, learn useful skills and their parents' first language, and be acquainted with the culture and society in creative ways. More and more MKs will choose to return to their parents' home country for university education. It is not too much to suggest that churches can sponsor these youths to fly back to their parents' home country during the summer if they wish to. – Editor -

It all started with Sky Siu, Cindy Loong, and I. We all came together during a lunch meeting and began to talk of the idea of having a MK camp. However, our busy schedules stopped us from continuing to plan, until I realized that Hong Kong Alliance Mission would be having an anniversary with a large group of missionary families returning to Hong Kong that summer. Then, I realized that this would be an opportunity to get the kids together and to run the camp. The camp was initially prepared for 5 to 6 kids, and it was meant to be a small camp rather than a big one.

Around March, the planning became more intense and detailed. Around the month of May, we started to look for a campsite. Auntie Helen (Cindy's mother) kindly volunteered to search for a campsite and find financial support. Finally, we decided on High Rock in Shatin to be the campsite. However, due to our busy schedules, and Cindy being away in the States, we didn't have time to visit the campsite until a week before the camp.

We began to send letters out to missionaries around the month of June, and gradually attendees gathered and signed up for the camp. I was quite amazed. There were several I knew from Dalat International School in Malaysia, and also from my parents' mission field. The schedule was set, and looking back, I am still amazed how we managed to plan everything in spite of all the chaos that was going on in all our leaders' lives.

On the first day, we met up with Gordon, MK ministry staff of Hong Kong Association of Christian Missions, for lunch, to talk about the camp, and to run through some final logistics. Then, the kids came, and we met up at the Shatin KCR (train station).

We went up to High Rock Camp together and settled down. We started out with some ice breaker games and got to know each other. The camp was planned for 15-18 year old youths. Many of them were not shy and they were very active and cooperative with the games that Sky and I had prepared for them. I also noticed how several of them began to talk to one another, and the girls warmed up with each other faster.

One of the games that we played was "I have" instead of the usual "I have never," in a fruit basket style. This game helped each kid to talk about the unique things they had done. Those who had never done the thing that the person in the center mentioned would have to change seats. Kids began to find similarities with fellow campers, and also come to understand that they were indeed special. The game was followed by a simple sharing by Cindy, Sky and I. The youths in general were very attentive.

On the second or third morning, Sky and I got together and prayed before we had our fellowship. I really felt God's Spirit moving as we prayed. I was amazed at how well-behaved the campers were, and how willing they were to join in the activities that Sky and I had prepared. Not only that, but we also caught them conducting devotions on their own in the mornings with no instructions given by us.

By watching them, I was challenged and encouraged at the same time. I grew up in Dalat, a Christian international school in Malaysia. Since graduating from high school, I have talked with several of my friends from Dalat, and heard stories about my peers. Some have adjusted well in their new environment, while some have turned away from God. I believe every missionary kid is susceptible to such a danger.

Kids are often the victims, but also the benefactors of their parents' work. They get the firsthand experience of God's work, but sometimes it comes with a great price. During our time at the camp, we were able to address some of the issues that we encountered as missionary kids. Some kids mentioned not being able to spend time with parents and being left at home alone from time to time. Some kids were sent to boarding school at a very young age, thus creating a relational gap with their parents. But despite their experiences and pain, they all showed great care for their parents' ministry in one way or another, and it was something precious that it really touched me.

It was weird running the camp, as I was seeing things from the "other side". But interestingly enough, I saw a lot of myself in the kids. Despite their playfulness and silliness, each and every one of them showed a sense of maturity when it came to understanding their parents' ministry and what it takes. If you were to ask the kids, they could easily give you an explanation of their parents' ministry, and what their parents are trying to achieve in the mission field.

The camp provided a place for the kids to feel free to openly share their frustrations. It is hard for kids when they are with their parents on the mission field; a lot of them were even required to be co-

workers with their parents. However, by being surrounded by other missionary kids at this camp, they did not need to guard themselves; they also didn't have to explain to others regarding their identity as a "MK". They could simply be themselves. I may have over analyzed some of the situations, but many of the things I've shared also apply to me. Often times, I feel encouraged and relaxed when I'm hanging out with other MKs, because it is a safe place where you don't have to do much explaining for others to understand you. Each of the participants have experienced their share of pain in cultural adjustment, language barrier, separation from parents, and ultimately, the simple obedience.

As I always share in different churches, I never wanted to become a missionary at the age of 6 when my parents decided to pack up their bags and move to Japan. I didn't feel God's calling at the age of 14 when they believed it was their time to move to Thailand and to obey what God had planned for them. It wasn't my decision to want to be enrolled in a boarding school. However, all those "it wasn't my decision" Includes and structure who I am today. I believe all those "it wasn't my decision" were one of the common things that we all shared in the camp. Despite how many things we as missionary kids have experienced that have been contrary to our desires, each and every one of us have learned to embrace our lives one way or the other. The wonderful thing about the camp was that I truly believed that the youths wanted to be there and that it was a great experience for each and every one of them.

I have shared in one of my sharing times that as a teenager, before I came back to Hong Kong to study, I didn't remember Hong Kong being a fun place. To me, Hong Kong was a drag and I detested it. The idea of routine church visits, questions about things that seemed trivial to me, and the constant critiques by others about my Cantonese or the way I held my chopsticks, were not things I looked forward to.

The camp allowed us to become friends, especially those who were returning to Hong Kong, either alone or with their parents. It was actually a way to change their views about Hong Kong. Even after the camp, I know that several of them took the initiative to hang out. Ultimately, that was the goal I believe God wanted us to achieve. Instead of getting the kids to understand themselves more as missionary kids (although that is important), more importantly, we created a place where kids from similar backgrounds were able to find another person to just share their lives with. It was about "living together".

Some of the kids who participated in the camp didn't go to boarding school, and some did. Despite differences, everyone was able to just hang out and talk. However, coming out of the camp, I felt a greater burden for the kids, because I saw so much of myself in each of them. I cannot say my missionary kid life was a wonderful one; there were many ups and downs. It is really by God's mercy that I am able to reflect today and be grateful about it. One of my prayers now is to pray that each and every one of the missionary kids will come to see the gift that God has given them. I pray that instead of turning their backs on their identity and experiences, they will be able to accept the healing that God can provide through His grace and love.