

JAARS SPEEDING THE WORD TRANSCRIPT

Speaker
**Sue Schmidt, Leigh Ann Nelson
and Emily Parker**

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Interviewer
Arthur Lightbody

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Being a “missionary kid”

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People Group (if named)
N/A

Announcer:

Welcome to *Speeding the Word*, coming to you from the JAARS Center in Waxhaw, North Carolina, where JAARS speeds Bible translation for all people. And now our host Arthur Lightbody.

Lightbody:

Today we will be listening to a chat between two missionary kids—we call them “MKs.” Leigh Ann Nelson, who has spent some time in Kenya, Africa. Her parents were working there, and now they are at JAARS. The other MK is Emily Parker. She’s been with her parents in Mexico and is now here in Waxhaw. Right now in the studio, I have Sue Schmidt, who has been a school teacher with Wycliffe. We will let her tell you about that and what kinds of teaching roles she had.

Schmidt:

The first time I went and taught with Wycliffe, I was in Bogotá, Colombia, in South America. I was single, and it actually was two of the best years of teaching I’d ever had. It was an international school, and I had combined grades. The first year I had third, fourth and fifth grade and the second year I taught fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth graders together. That was my first experience with Wycliffe. I’d actually had three years of teaching in the United States prior to that.

Lightbody:

That experience helped.

Schmidt:

Absolutely. Then after returning to the States for a short time and meeting my husband, we went to Ghana in West Africa. There I was what they called an “educational resource teacher.” I was an itinerant teacher—went by bus or whatever means of transportation I could find from village to village, helping the parents who were homeschooling their children. In Tamale, in northern Ghana, I managed a resource center of materials and things the families could use. The third place we moved to, and where I taught, was Cameroon, Central Africa. Again I was helping with an educational resource center. I did some more itinerant teaching, but I also did a lot of teaching there in the capital city of Yaoundé for other people, as well as for my own children. By then we had started our own family. Lastly I was teaching in the high school there, the Rainforest International School.

Lightbody:

Now let’s listen to the two young ladies, Leigh Ann and Emily. Leigh Ann speaks first.

Leigh Ann:

I was 8 when my parents were called to be missionaries. One day my parents sat me down, and they said, “We’ve made a big decision, and we’re going to be missionaries in Kenya.” I was so excited.

The first thing I asked was, “Are there going to be elephants there? Am I going to get to see all those cool animals?” I was thrilled.

It really wasn’t too bad an adjustment for me. It was kinda hard moving to the JAARS Center for training beforehand, but once we got over there, it was like those were the best years of my life. But you were younger when your parents decided to become missionaries?

Emily:

Well, I was actually born in Australia, because my parents were doing a short-term assignment over there. After Australia we moved back to Montgomery, Alabama, my dad's hometown, where he was working at the family business. I was there from around 2 until I was 5. That is when my parents joined Wycliffe, so Montgomery was pretty much the only home I'd ever known. Before we came here we were in Mexico. My dad and another man from our church in Montgomery were helping teams that would come down from different churches to help build the [school for the Deaf]. After that we came here [to North Carolina]. That was also a big adjustment. It wasn't quite as exciting for me, I guess because it wasn't such an exciting place to move from—it was still in the States and you knew you could be back with your family in a few hours. It was difficult, but I see now that God really provided. I and my sisters have friends and a great school. So I'm glad we came, and I'm glad everything is the way it is and that I am here now.

Leigh Ann:

A lot of missionary kids have trouble about where they identify with—like where they are from. For me, I still think of myself as a Texan even though I've lived less than half my life in Texas. Do you feel the same way about Alabama?

Emily:

Yeah. I mean, that is always kind of an awkward question—"Like, where are you from?" It's like, "Well I'm from ..." But I do, I still consider Montgomery kind of home. A lot of family is there, even though we've lived here longer than we've lived there now. But I think it is kind of not necessarily where you've lived the longest, but kind of where your roots are and the first places you remember, and stuff like that.

Leigh Ann:

I guess a better identification is probably just "MK," because there is so much culture just in the missionary world itself. Like when we go to school, all the missionary kids—we are the kids eating the weird food and all this. It is amazing; it is, in a way, a totally different culture.

Emily:

I think it makes things a lot more interesting when you have more stories. And there is just a lot more to talk about, too. You kind of have a lot of things that are the same—there are a lot of similarities, but then you've been to different places and seen different things. It kind of all comes together when you can be with a group of friends and talk about stuff like that.

Leigh Ann:

A lot of kids don't get the experiences of going overseas and seeing what it is like. Some kids in our class—the senior class trip was the first time they'd ever flown on an airplane. That's just amazing to me because all the different things we got to do in Kenya. I mean, I've pet a cheetah, and we ate termites. We did all kinds of stuff over there that people just think is out of the ordinary.

Emily:

I think like you said, [for] a lot of it is just the opportunity to have these kinds of experiences, and even if you are not living in Kenya or whatever—like even we just went to Mexico, but still seeing that other side, I guess, of the world and seeing a different culture and how it is not always the same in other places [as] it is here. Even if it wasn't trying to reach other people with the Gospel, and witnessing, etc., just seeing another culture is an experience in itself, and just getting to see how other people live is cool, too.

Leigh Ann:

My brother is two years younger than me, and he has been to the most schools. He went to a different school just about every year for five years in a row. You really

get used to just having that first conversation with people, saying, “Hello, my name is Leigh Ann.” You just really learn how to make a connection with people in that way.

Lightbody:

We’ve just had a good time listening to Leigh Ann and Emily share some of their experiences as missionary kids. What is your impression, Sue?

Schmidt:

I think missionary kids are great. You could just tell by listening to Leigh Ann and Emily that they are easy to talk to. They’ve had lots of experiences in other cultures. They’ve had world experiences that kids here in the States have not had. Instead of just having seen it on the news or in pictures, they’ve experienced it. I think they really are kids who not only are easy to talk to, but they take their studies pretty much seriously. They have some goals in life and they also have a heart for the lost in the world. As a teacher I never really had discipline problems with the students in the classroom. There were always a few quirky kids, but we worked that out and they were a joy to teach.

Lightbody:

Now, they mentioned trying to describe themselves a little bit. Their situation was such that they’d not been overseas extensively, but they still felt they were somewhat different. They weren’t quite like everyone else. They’d moved around a lot because of their parents being in Christian work and had had some overseas experience. The one said, “Well, we’re missionary kids. That’s who we are.” There is another term that is commonly used. What is that, Sue?

Schmidt:

That’s “third-culture kid.” That term has been around for quite a few years. That refers to anybody, a missionary kid, an Army brat, someone who has traveled with their parents for business in the embassy, and they are growing up in a culture other than the home culture of their parents. So the parents are in a different culture, they are growing up in this other culture, and what they are doing is basically taking the best of all the cultures they encounter. What’s best from their parents’ home culture, what’s best from the culture they live in. They don’t really relate to a geographic area. They relate to other third-culture kids, or “TCKs,” we call them.

Lightbody:

What would be some of the difficulties of being a TCK?

Schmidt:

Answering people’s questions when they come home.

Lightbody:

Like, “What do you eat?”

Schmidt:

“What do you eat? Where are you from?” Do you mean, where is my passport from? I think, too, moving and making transitions can be difficult for some kids, because it takes longer for them to go through that period of adjustment. For the most part I think it is really an advantage for kids to be a third-culture kids. They are becoming our leaders, not only in the business world, in the mission world, but definitely in many, many sectors.

Lightbody:

We’ve noticed it in our government now too, with our president.

Schmidt:

That is exactly right.

Lightbody:

Now one of the challenges with this moving is that often it is hard to develop deep relationships, because you know you might move again. So they have those challenges. What kinds of things does Wycliffe do, or can mission organizations and churches do, to help their third-culture kids?

Schmidt:

I think TCKs, when they need to take a furlough with their parents—that time of leave back in the United States or in their parents' home country—often when they are coming back, they see that place where their parents grew up as the foreign culture. They need ways to understand what they are going to be encountering. I know churches we've supported have always sent our kids DVDs and CDs that would help them get used to what the culture is going to be like here. We also knew the dress, the talk and the hairstyles. So you can imagine how kids, especially in their middle- and high-school years, if they are not in tune with something that is really up-to-date and popular, it is not going to do much for their self concept. I praise God for technology. Our kids have kept up a lot of their good relationships with their friends around the world. Some are still in Cameroon; some are in England now, and in Canada and other parts of the world. They keep in touch through email, Facebook. We can even get on Skype and talk to people. There are different ways to keep that communication. We've also gone to the extent of flying them to visit different people. Here in the States they've latched on to other TCKs, and right there, there is a bond that they know they won't ask the hard questions of each other. There is an automatic acceptance. They also attend a school—I don't know if they totally understand missionary kids, but they really have a heart for missions.

Lightbody:

You've had some experiences as a teacher. Are there any you'd like to relate?

Schmidt:

Teaching missionary kids can be pretty adventurous, and exciting too. I know as an itinerant teacher not only did I get to teach kids in various villages, but the fun things that were along with it. It's true; you do see elephants and all sorts of strange creatures. Just experiencing other cultures is great.

Lightbody:

It is a neat way to be part of Bible translation work worldwide. How do people find out more? What is the Web site?

Schmidt:

You can always go to www.wycliffe.org. There is another site that is good for teachers. It is called missionteach.org, and that will not only connect you with schools that we as Wycliffe will send teachers to, but where other missionary kids around the world need teachers. Right now with Wycliffe we have needs 280 teachers by this next September.

Lightbody:

What kind of certification would they have to have? Would they need teaching experience?

Schmidt:

It is best for everyone if a teacher has teaching credentials—been to college, gotten a teaching certificate and has at least one year of experience under their belt. As a teacher, we all know the first year can be kind of crazy. Then if you are going into another culture, you want to have your teaching experience down.

Lightbody:

Sue, thanks for being with us. God bless you.

Announcer:

We hope that you have enjoyed *Speeding the Word*. Arthur Lightbody would love to hear from you personally if you are interested in becoming part of the Bible translation movement. He welcomes your call at 1-704-843-6048. You may look us up on the Web at www.jaars.org.