

# *An Eternal Journey*

## Foreword

This was my Yr 12 Ext 2 English Major work for the HSC 2006.

I wrote it for individuals who wish to empathize with and understand those who are third culture kids or are now third culture adults. Secondly I wrote it and dedicate it to all my fellow MK's who have experienced similar journeys and can closely relate with my emotional journey.

This story is the story of my life. It is not word for word, and some characters have been fictionalised to allow the story to progress, however the fundamental emotions and storyline within hold true to my life. I hope and pray that it sheds some light on how Third Culture Kids think and feel.

Keiran Sampson

*“A Journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step”*

**Lao-tzu**

Alone, alone, all, all alone, Alone on a wide, wide sea!

Before me lies a sea of people, rushing around.

Me, I've chosen my path, my yellow brick road,

and I am taking my journey through life...

I am the outsider. I'm standing behind the library; I'm hiding, hiding behind its grey brick walls. My heart's beating a million times per second. My skin feels clammy to the touch. My stomach is twisting

and turning, butterflies making me feel sick. My eyes start to swim and uneasily I lean against the cold brick wall. I know that I need to calm down.

“You’re being ridiculous,” I tell myself, “It’s not a new school, it’s not even a different year group. Get a grip. It will be all right. You’ve been here before! Come on, you can do it! Be strong!”

Peering around the corner, I take a look at all the faces. I don’t belong here. This is not my world. Why am I here? *Why am I...?* I just want to run away, hide in the shadows, and cry. Holding my head in my hands, I take a deep breath. In...Out...and another...In...Out... *You can do it!* My foot trembles as I take a step forward. *My journey of a thousand miles begins with this single step...* another foot forward...then another...and another... soon I reach the sea of faces. I search through them all. Why am I searching? What am I searching for? *Searching for...?*

The dogs are going berserk. Running up and down the concrete-block fence, the four Doberman-cross-Rottweilers are barking furiously. “*They’re all bark and no bite.*” *Remember, that’s what Henry said.* Taking a deep breath and mustering all my courage, I open the gate and step inside. Sure enough, the four dogs go into a frenzy of barking, and go as if to attack me but stop about a metre away. Slowly I edge my way across the lawn towards the back door. I don’t totally trust everything Henry says and these dogs... They leave me alone though, and so I knock on the whitewashed door. There is movement somewhere inside and a shadow passes by the kitchen window.

“Hey, Sean!” says Mrs Wegener opening the front door.

“Hi Mrs Wegener, I was wondering, is Henry home?”

“Where else would he be?” She smiles.

“MUM DO YOU KNOW WHAT’S WRONG WITH THIS STUPID COMPUTER?”

Henry’s shout echoes down the hall.

"No?" She replies

"OH, OK."

"HENRY!"

"WHAT?"

"PARDON!" She counters, her eyes taking a glance up at the ceiling. "It's not what, it's pardon! And Sean's here!"

"SEAN!" Something crashes as it lands on the floor. His familiar footsteps run up the hall.

I cannot help smiling. Henry and I have only known each other for three years, but it seems like forever. I remember the first day we 'met', though technically, we had met years before but I never really knew him.

I remember it so well because my dad forgot me and left me at work. My dad was building a second storey addition to the Bible College. I went because I wanted to earn some Kwacha. I had heard that an American family had just come back to work at the Bible College and well; I was a bit bored working for dad, so I went over to see who this 'new' kid was. Four hours later I came back and Dad was gone. The Wegener's invited me to stay the night to save my dad the ten-minute trip back into town. So I did. Since then we have been inseparable, at least whenever he's home from boarding school in Kenya. *We are like two peas in a pod his mum says. We understand each other.*

"Where do I go now?" I look at my timetable and try to figure out where I'm supposed to go. The last time that I was at a school I was in Year 6. *I've been home schooling.* I'm trying not to panic, but it's not working. "I'm going to be late to my first class, on my first day. Great! I'm going to look just like the typical new kid." I mutter to myself.

“Don’t worry, just follow us. We have to go to an assembly first.” It’s a girl. I don’t remember her being in my year.

“I didn’t think I was speaking loud enough to be heard.”

She laughs, “Well...you did!”

“Oh...”

“You’re Sean? I remember you from Year 6. I’m Christine.”

“Christine. Are you the girl who went to Papua New Guinea in like, Year 1?”

“Actually it was Yr 2! But yep, that was me!”

*A common tie...*

I wake up. Blinking my eyes I look around my room. Its exactly as it was when I went to sleep. “So this is what it’s like when your 13.” I say to myself, quietly so that I don’t wake up my brother. “No balloons. Nothing. Great.” I lie there for a minute before getting out of bed. Getting dressed I can’t help thinking that if mum was here it would be different. “Why did she have to have a nervous breakdown now?” I think as I walk out into the kitchen to see if there’s anyone else up. They’re all still in bed. I try not to feel selfish. It’s hard.

Mum is a housewife, our schoolteacher, a matchmaker (she got two of our friends married through her matchmaking skills...). She even used to work in the mission office doing the accounts as well. Well she did until two weeks ago, but she wore herself out. She’s been so stressed that she’s had a nervous breakdown; she’s suffering from depression and an extreme case of stress. Dad sent her back to Australia for a month last week weeks ago to have tests in case it’s more, but he doesn’t think it is. The

doctors in Australia have told her that she needs to stop doing so much. She comes back in two weeks. I don't know what it will be like. I just hope that things are better, and that she doesn't breakdown crying over every little thing. I hope that things go back to normal.

*Tuyuni tuzibene mililo*

*“The little red birds know each others singing”*

**Zambian Proverb**

I saw a black guy this morning. I was on the train going to Penrith to see a movie. I was alone. The train was pulling into Emu Plains station. I don't remember why I looked out the window, maybe I saw him from the corner of my eye. Whatever the reason, I looked out the train window as we pulled into the station. He was waiting on the platform opposite our train. His skin was as dark as an African night; I think he was one of those Sudanese refugees. He was sitting alone on one of the station's wooden seats, looking extremely uncomfortable. You couldn't blame him. Everyone on the platform seemed to be staring at him or attempting not to. I was shocked to see an old lady clutch her handbag tightly under her arm as she passed him by. Even I was staring, though I tried not to; it was hard. He didn't fit into the scene around him, our white, western world. I felt sorry for him. I even considered jumping off the train so that I could tell him that it would be all right. But I didn't. *Why not?*

I know something about how he's feeling...like a fish out of water, an outcast in a foreign land, just wishing that you could disappear, that you could vanish into oblivion.

I wish I was invisible; then I could disappear into oblivion. Like the cool easterly breeze that blows before the rains begin, but vanishes without a trace the moment they arrive. Instead I stand out, like a white boy in Africa does. Everywhere I go, the locals' gawk and gaze at me - I am white. It's unsettling sometimes having people stopping everywhere you go, stopping to stand and stare. *Don't they know it's rude?*

We're visiting our worker's church. It's near Mukunashi, a small township about half an hour from home. Church just finished a couple of minutes ago ...*at last...* Carefully I squeeze my way through the throng of people leaving the mud-brick building. Outside I step away from the crowd leaving the building, and lean against the wall, next to the door. *Fresh air!!!* You will never know the meaning of B.O until you've sat through a three-hour church service in the middle of the African bush, in a building packed with over five hundred villagers! Add to that a forty-five degree day and then you will know!

An old woman sees me standing to the side. Walking awkwardly with her walking stick, she hobbles over. Out of respect for her age I crouch down and clap several times as I greet her, "Mutendae mwanay".

"Viepe mwanay, em mwanay sankyou mwanay, em mwanay," she returns my greeting, avoiding my eyes. She's greeting me like a chief. I hate this; just because I'm white I'm treated differently, as if I'm royalty, some super hero. As if I'm more important than anyone else. It sucks, big time!

*I don't belong here...* I sit on a plastic-white bench in the plaza, just watching the people streaming past, going about their lives. A mother and her little boy are over by the Coles entrance. He's lying on his back kicking and screaming fit to burst.

"I want one! You promised! GIVE ME ONE!!!"

"Please be quiet Aaron. Shhh..." the mother looks around, embarrassed by the scene he's making.

"No Aaron, I said you could only have one if you did what mummy said! You didn't so you're not having one!"

The kid's not listening; instead he starts to scream louder. A couple of old ladies passing by shake their heads and start whispering furiously between them. They look disgruntled at the display. A group of young girls walk past, all dolled up trying to look twenty years old, wearing clothes made for Barbie dolls. They're talking about their new mobile phones. *It's sad.* People aren't happy with what they have. They're caught in the rat race, a race that has no end; they're searching...for what? They don't know. They don't understand what they've got. All they want is more and more. People are never satisfied; they get one thing and are 'happy' for a minute, until they see something else they want, then they're back to square one. Round and round their lives go. *Their yellow brick road is a cul-de-sac.*

Don't they see that there is so much more to life than this? Two paths diverged in a yellow wood...

*Umwana ashenda, atasha nyina ukunaya*

*“A child that hasn’t travelled, praises its mother as being the best cook.”*

**Zambian Proverb**

Church is over. It doesn't go for long here, only about an hour and a half tops. *Not like Africa...*

A woman who looks vaguely familiar wanders over, she speaks, "So Sean, how did you like living in Africa?"

"It was great! It..."

"Was it really exciting?"

"Yeah! There was this one time that..."

"Did you ever happen to see some of those magnificent animals in the wild? Lion's, Elephants...Rhinos?"

"Yeah we did. Just about every time we went into the game parks, we would see something. But, unfortunately poachers have..."

"Oh, I'm so jealous! You don't know how lucky you are!"

"I am very grateful for the..."

"Yes of course you are. But, I bet you're awfully glad to be home again though!"

"*Actually,*" I think. "*I'd rather be there than here right now!*" But I don't say anything to the old woman talking to me. Instead, I just nod my head, as if in agreement and keep smiling my 'warm smile'. I keep telling myself over and over, '*She doesn't know anything different*'. She's a sweet old lady but she's never been out of Australia before. She's never experienced the 'real world'. All that she's heard about Africa is from those documentaries that come on T.V about the "Botswana Bushmen" and the animal documentaries on 'The World Around Us'. I'm not being cynical. I'm just stating the facts, as I know them. And I know them; because that was all I knew.

A memory hits me. From before, before Ndola, before Mukinge, before Africa...

That ad is on again. The starving kids with their ribs sticking out and thin sunken faces. They're almost scary. "For just over a dollar a day you could..." *Only a dollar a day? As if. How could someone live off only one dollar a day? I only get a dollar a week in pocket money and I'm lucky to get twenty-five red and green frogs for that!*

Pictures of kids are flashing up on the screen; dirty, dark skin covered in sores, runny noses, flies crawl all over them... *Why don't they brush them away?* Their protruding ribs stand out against their obesely fat stomachs... *Fat stomachs? How can these kids be starving? It must be a mistake!*

Africa's on the other side of the world, how could someone live there? I don't know. I mean, don't they all live in mud huts and dance naked around fires? That's what they do on TV. What about electricity, running water, hot running water...flush toilets?

Then again, it couldn't be that different from camping really...actually, it would be really cool. Just think, I could go hunting lions and tigers out on the vast plains of Africa, tracking them down with the help of my black tracker. I could discover unknown tribes speaking strange languages. I could be an explorer. I could be like that guy, what's his name? My parents gave me a book on him for my birthday... David Livingstone. I could be an explorer, like the great adventurer Dr David Livingstone, braving the dark jungles of Africa, taking the wonders of our modern world to its black people...

*“Everyone thinks of changing the world,  
but no one thinks of changing himself.”*

**Leo Tolstoy**

“Something has to be done and YOU are the people to do something about it!!” The speaker out the front is getting really worked-up. He’s waving his arms around like a conductor.

“Now, I know what you’re saying. ‘That yes, something does need to be done to help these starving children and it does need to be done now. But, what can you do? You’re just kids. It’s not like you can do much to help them.’ But can you? What can you do? You’re still at school, you can’t just up and leave and go be a missionary overseas. You’re not old enough. But do you know what you can do? Get a sponsor child! Just about everyone in this room here today can afford to spend \$40 a month. By sponsoring a child you can help feed them and send them to school giving them a chance to break free from poverty! You can make a difference! You can even help raise awareness just by talking to your parents. By telling them about what’s happening in our world you can convince them to help these people. You can persuade them into doing something about these poverty stricken people!”

I turn away and stare instead at the photos he’s projecting up onto the screen. Photos of starving kids from all sorts of nations around the world appear, flashing onto the screen, kids in all sorts of situations. Some living in rubbish dumps, scrounging for food through the rubbish. Other kids live on the city streets and in the slums. Their eyes glare at us, hardened by their lives. It’s our fault. Their eyes betray their thoughts. It’s true though, it is our fault. We are the ones who can do something for them. But we don’t. Does this man realise that it’s no use? That people don’t want to listen? That they won’t make a difference? I watched a movie not too long ago. It was called ‘Hotel Rwanda’. Watching it makes your stomach twist into knots, it makes you want to cry. Some people do. There’s a line in the

movie that describes the west's reaction to Africa's plight. The white journalist sums it up with one sentence when he says, "If people see this footage they'll say, 'Oh my God that's horrible, and then go on eating their dinners.'"

The rich get richer and the poor get poorer. That's just the way it is. The west doesn't care.

"The west, all the superpowers...they think they're dirt, they think they're dung." To them, they are worthless. I am ashamed.

In front of the serving table, stand the long line of malnourished orphans. My heart aches when I look at them and their ironically fat stomachs. *Why? Why them? What have they done?*

No reply.

Two orphans, a boy and his sister are next in line. They look up at me and hold up their cheap, tin bowls. Reaching into my pot of beans, I dollop a spoonful of the brown, mess onto their rice. They smile a thankyou back, turn around and run over to the tables.

They know that if they eat fast, they might just be 'lucky' enough to be allowed to scrape out the bottom of the pots. The pots have a thick layer of burnt beans on the bottom of them. The first 10 finished, get the 'treat' of scraping them out. The woman next to me hands me her spoon and turns away. It's her first time.

The first time I saw it I had to turn away. I couldn't bear to let the kids see me cry. The things I have seen in the time I've lived over here... An eternity. How long has it been, four...five years? I don't know how much longer I can stay here. *I don't know if I could go...*

*“Are you there?*

*Say a prayer for the Pretender*

*Who started out so young and strong*

*Only to surrender.”*

**Jackson Brown**

18

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He's doing it again. He's baiting me, trying to make me react. I'm not in the mood for this. I've had more than enough at school. I don't need my own father trying to bait me. I've had enough. He's asked for it and I'm going to take it hook, line and sinker and I start to yell.

“What is your problem with me? I have had it with you always putting me down! Whatever I do is never good enough for you! I go out of my way and help you out and what do I get? Nothing! All you do is want, want, want and you never, ever give! Does it ever occur to you that maybe I need help with something? That I'm struggling? You wouldn't even care if I told you about the hassles I have to put up with at school! Isn't your home supposed to be where you get your support? All you do is tear me down. You're complaining about life here. I was the one who didn't want to leave Africa in the first place! Why didn't you listen to me for once? Why did you bring me back here?”

I can feel the release of tension inside of me, like a burden has been taken off my shoulders. Tears roll slowly down my cheeks as I turn and walk away, heading for my bedroom.

An hour's passed. It wasn't long before my dad turned up at my door and apologised. It's not his fault. I need a release. Unfortunately for him he was my victim.

It's raining now...*that's appropriate*...I love the sound of rain with its constant rhythm on our corrugated iron roof. I lie back on my bed. The rain sparks a memory and I smile to myself. It reminds me of Africa in the rainy season, where it lulls you to sleep every night.

I wake up with a start. Lying still, I wonder what woke me. Light streams through my curtains, casting shadows of monsters from other worlds onto the bedroom wall. I get out of bed and throw them open, and stare out into the night. The sky has cleared, revealing the moon as it is in Africa. *As it is in Africa*... Something inside me shatters and a sob breaks free. Tears stream down my face as the emotions I've held locked inside my heart, behind walls of concrete and steel, break free. *WHY?* My mind screams out. *Why did we leave Africa? What was the reason?* There is nothing for me here; I am alone.

I'm trying so hard to keep the tears back. We're sitting in the departure lounge, waiting for the bus to arrive to take us out to the plane. It's raining, *that's ironic*. Glancing back at the door through which we just came, I see Henry peeking through the small window over the top. I guess that's one advantage he has in being six foot four! A smile forces its way onto my face, ripping my heart in the process. I just want to run away and hide, to cry.

*Why are we leaving?* I don't think any of us know the answer. The intercom switches on. A woman's voice booms through, "Flight SA375 to Johannesburg is now boarding. Please make your way to the boarding desk and bus now. On behalf of South African Airlines, I would like thank you for flying with us today. Thankyou and enjoy your flight."

"Time to go everybody!" my dad says, picking up some hand luggage. He's trying to act like we're going on a holiday, like we're going to be coming back. I know we won't.

Picking up my bag I walk over to the departure desk. I quickly glance back to the window. He's not there anymore. That's it. Walking through the departure door and out onto the runway, I hear someone call out, "Hey, Sean!" Turning around I see Henry. Somehow he's managed to climb up onto a railing so that he can stick his head around the building. My gut twists into a knot. It takes everything I have to hold back the tears as I give a quick wave and turn away. The next couple of minutes are a blur. Somewhere within that haze we caught a bus out to our plane, boarded it and stowed away our extremely overweight hand luggage. As time slows down again, I realise that I have a window seat on the right side of the aisle. *Is this a game to you God?* Out the window, I can see all our friends - our adopted families - waving goodbye. My heart wrenches, a tear breaks through...and another...and another. My mum's sitting next to me and takes my hand and holds it tight. It makes it ten times worse. We've been in the air for an hour. My face is saturated and my eyes are red from crying. Tissues lie scrunched up on my lap. Still I can't stop crying. I'm crying like there's no tomorrow. For me there no longer is.

Why did I get out of bed at all? It's Saturday and there are dark clouds outside my window. I shut my eyes against it all, and crawl back beneath the sheets. Underneath the blankets, I can't see at all. *Even if I could, it would all be grey...* There are voices in the hall. Mum opens my door, she's standing there whispering my name, "Sean...Sean...are you awake?" She waits, waiting for a response. I don't reply. She closes the door softly behind her. There are muffled voices in the hall again and then silence. The front door slams and a minute or so passes. The car starts and slowly drives up our steep driveway. *Where are they going?* They've left me alone. I'm always alone. I am alone in a world full of people.

Lying there despondent in the darkness, I want to cry; I want to scream. I want to tear the world apart, make everything the way it should be...but I can't. I want the world to make sense... sense so that I know it's alright. I've had enough. All I want is one thing, but even it's not given.

*What did I do to deserve this?* I wait for an answer. Nothing comes. It never does.

I just want...I want...

*Why can't there be a backspace on life? Why can't I go back and erase my past?*

Why am I alone? Why don't I fit in? Why have I been chosen to be so different? Did I make a decision some time long ago that led me on this path? Did I make the decision that brought me to this day?

Why can't I be like everyone else? *WHY...?*

*O many gods, so many creeds,  
So many paths that wind and wind,  
While just the art of being kind  
Is all the sad world needs.*

**Wheeler Wilcox**

I'm leaning against the classroom wall under the veranda eating my lunch with Christine. I have on a jumper and jacket; it's getting cold, winter's set in. Christine can't stop shivering next to me; her legs are covered in goose bumps.

"Here, have my jacket," I say offering it to her, but she shakes her head.

"I'm alright."

"Are you sure? You look really cold."

"Yeah, I'm fine. But thanks."

*Sure you're fine...* We keep eating in silence.

“SMACK” an orange hits the wall behind my head, splattering me with pulp and juice. Getting up slowly I brush some pieces out of my hair. A group of guys on the other side of the courtyard laugh with each other over their accuracy.

*What have I done to them to deserve this?*

“Sean. Are you alright?”

I look back at Christine and see genuine concern in her eyes. For a moment, I let my reserve down but quickly regain it. “Yeah I’m fine. Could you watch my stuff though while I go clean myself up? The orange juice is beginning to seep through my jacket.”

“Yeah... Are you sure?”

“I’m alright.” I flash a convincing smile and quickly turn and head for the bathroom. *Who am I trying to convince?*

I go to the toilets in the opposite direction to the guys across the courtyard. The bathroom is empty. As the door shuts behind me, I fight the urge to hit something. I want to break something, to tear it to pieces. Leaning over the bathroom sink a sob breaks free, but I quickly stop it and force it back to where it came. I turn the tap on, and fill my hands with the icy water. I pour it over my face again and again, the shock forcing back the tears. My body’s shaking.

What is wrong with this not-so-good-earth? *What is wrong with me...?*

Everything’s questions, I ask, but get no reply.

*Give me one more time around, one more chance to go back and change.* That’s all I ask...

I scream, yet no words come out. My silent anguish goes unheard. Inside I feel alone.

A single tear rolls down my cheek. I leave it there. It is like me, alone. It is alone on a wide, wide sea.

The change, the moving around...it’s changed me. Everywhere I go, I try so hard to adjust; I can’t. I feel that it’s useless; it won’t make any difference how hard I try to fit in. I wrap myself in a cocoon, never attaching myself to anything...anyone.

I am afraid. Afraid to trust others with what I know, what I've learnt. I feel vulnerable. My mind tells me not to - to be strong, to get myself out of this hole, this void of self-despair. I want to be accepted... I want to relate with people, to understand them. I need to relate with someone.

*...Footfalls echo in the memory  
Down the passage which we did not take  
Towards the door we never opened...*

**T.S Elliot**

I'm lying on the lounge reading a book. Mum's in the kitchen, I can hear her moving pots and pans around. She's making lunch; we have our main meal in the middle of the day. My older sister Wendy is on the other couch; she's reading something for Biology. I can hear my brother Tristan somewhere outside; he's calling for the dogs. He can't sit still for a minute. He needs to be doing something all the time. Celeste comes out of her room. She's walking down the hall towards me. *She wants something...* She twists me round her little finger sometimes. Then again, I am her big brother...

Hurried footsteps are coming up the driveway, they're dad's... *Why is he home?*

The front door wrenches open, "THAT'S IT! I'VE HAD ENOUGH!" My dad slams the door behind him, slapping me in the face. The world stops spinning. The sun goes out. I'm falling, falling into a swirling void. I 'm blind; I can no longer see the way.

*We are going...* I want to protest, I want to shout and scream that it's not fair, that this is a family decision. He can't make this decision by himself. I am not just a little kid anymore! *I want to...I want to...* But I do nothing. Instead I sit there in the lounge and feel my heart stop beating.

Its lunchtime and I'm sitting by myself, again. No one can understand what it's like, to come to a place you once knew, but no longer belong. I am stuck between two worlds. I'm not of this world now; but I'm no longer of my own world anymore. I can't breathe; I'm sinking. My world is descending into darkness. I feel alone here. There's no one to share with, no one who really cares. I am isolated.

I am always on the outside with my face pressed against the glass looking in.

"Sean"

I lift my head and look around. It's Christine. She walks over and sits down on the wall, next to me. She doesn't say anything for a minute, but finally she asks, "What's the matter? Everyday you come and sit down over here by yourself. If you don't want to tell me then that's cool, but everyone's getting worried. I'm getting worried. What's up?" I look at her, thinking about what she said. "You won't understand."

"Understand what? What it's like to come back to Australia after living overseas for half your life? To find out that nobody remembers you anymore? To feel like you're an outcast? To be misunderstood everywhere you go? To be dragged from church to church every week and have to tell your story to people you've never even met? Don't tell me what I don't understand." She sits there, waiting for me to start talking. I don't know what to say, so I say nothing. She gets up. Brushing herself off, she starts to leave but has second thoughts and turns around, "When you were in Africa, did you feel complete?" Looking back at her I slowly shake my head.

“In PNG I didn’t either”.

“Why did you have to bring us to this stupid place? I hate it here! I hate you!” ‘CRASH’ my door slams shut behind me, almost breaking off its hinges. Hurling myself onto my bed, I beat my pillow, again and again and again; losing all control. Screaming words of hate and abuse, I finally run out of energy and burst into tears. We’ve been here two months now and the novelty’s wearing off. Adding up in my head I work it out; there’s six hundred and fifty-four days remaining. When will it end? *Where will it end...?*

*Time past and time future*

*What might have been and what has been*

*Point to one end, which is always present*

**T.S. Elliot**

Western society tells me where to go, what to do. It tells me what I 'need to know', who I need to be.

*Why can't I decide for myself?*

There has to be more to life than these empty conversations full of empty words. *Christine...*

Christine has been in my class as far back as I can remember; yet I never knew her. I have hazy memories of her in primary school before she left for P.N.G, shy and quiet, seen but not heard. *She still is a bit.*

Christine is the only person who ever took any real interest in my past. She is the only one who wants to understand me. She wants to know who I am...really am...

The crisp night air is calm, only the sound of the crackling fire breaks the silence. Everyone else has gone to bed, exhausted from the days' walk. We set off from school at seven and hiked 8km along the beach today with heavy packs. Well most of us did. My friend Annette strained her ankle an hour into the walk, so I ended up with her pack as well for most of the way. My shoulders are killing me!

“Sean.”

I turn around. It's Christine. “Hey. I thought everyone had gone to bed?”

“I was just about to, when I saw you sitting here by the fire, and I thought I'd come over. What are you doing out here by yourself?”

“Looking at the stars.”

“They are pretty cool.” She says, looking up at the stars before sitting down beside me.

“They're nearly as clear as they are in PNG! Probably like Zambia as well!”

“Yeah...”

“How are you handling things at the moment? I mean I know how hard it is coming back after living overseas for so long. Most things you say about your life relate to Zambia, but that's because that's where you've lived since you were 10. Most people can't relate to what you're saying. I guess they get tired of hearing about it quickly. They did for me too.” A look of sadness flashes across her face for a moment, but it disappears as quickly as it came.

“But I do really want to know. I want to know what it was really like in Zambia? What are you struggling with? Can I help?”

I twist a stick between my hands, and poke the fire sending a shower of sparks into the sky.

“Nobody ever wants to know what it was 'really' like. If someone asks me, I usually just say all the great things about it. Because that's all they really want to hear... So I tell them how you can go down to the markets in October and November and buy fireworks because it's near the Indian New Year. I talk about how we went hunting out in the plains, though we never actually got anything. Then for all the fire maniacs, about how you can light grass fires anywhere, anytime you like because they help keep the fields clear... It saves on slashing. I tell them all about the amount of freedom there was.” The fire's starting to die, so I reach over and throw another log on before continuing.

“How can I describe it...? Living in Zambia with all the other missionaries was like being in one giant family. Each member of the family understands you, and what you’re going through. They are there with the same goals, and they have the same needs as you. It brings you close, knitting you together. You need each other. Sure there are people you don’t get along with well; no two people are the same, but the majority you do get along with.”

Christine nods in agreement.

“I don’t know how to describe it? Great friendships that will never fall apart, people with common goals, helping each other out, mateship...like, I can't describe it... Its just part of me, something I can't explain or express.”

“I know what you mean.” I can’t describe how I feel about PNG, it’s... I don’t know. It’s a part of me now.”

“Exactly!”

“What are you struggling with the most about living back here?”

“Mmm...” I sigh. “Where do I start?” I say nothing for ages, trying to get my thoughts together.

“I think...” I trail off, starting slowly, piecing together my fragmented thoughts. “I think I’ve come to accept Australia as ‘home’ again. Then again, what’s home? I feel like I’m stuck between two worlds, in between Zambia and Australia. I don't think I mind living in either. My family seems to struggle a lot of the time, re-adjusting to the western world, but for the moment, I think I’m pretty much accepting that we’re here to stay. I absolutely hated Australia when I first came back from Zambia. I wanted to be anywhere but here. I’ve had trouble with some of the guys in our class as you know, and it looks like to me at times as though I have no friends. And I don’t mean that in a bad way. It’s just that at times I feel like no one understands or cares.”

Christine nods her head in agreement; she doesn’t say anything. She doesn’t have to.

“Now...things seem to have quietened down. Like with those guys, it’s taken a while but I think I’ve learnt how to get along with them. They don’t give me a hard time as much anymore. Maybe they’ve changed?”

“I think it’s you who changed,” Christine says.

“I mean, when you first got back you just sat by yourself all the time. It was almost as if you didn’t want to fit in. I understand what it’s like to come back, but for everyone else, they don’t. They just expect us to fit straight back into where we left off. You’ve changed - I did too. We had to! We had no choice. It was so hard coming back from PNG in primary school though. People didn’t care that I had gone there at all. I wish there was someone that could have helped me then. That’s why I want to help you. It’s what I wish I’d had.”

“You have been more of a help and tried harder to help me settle back than anyone else. I don’t really know how you can help anymore. You’ve tried harder to help me settle back in than anyone else. Thanks!”

I lie back down and look at the stars.

“What I say about Zambia is how I remember it being. How I felt about living there and what I experienced there. There simply aren't words to describe what Africa was like. I have this feeling deep inside of me that can't be described... It's like a fire has been lit in my veins and it can't be extinguished. Maybe that old saying is true... Once you've been to Africa it gets into your blood, and you can never move on.”

Christine starts laughing.

“What?” I ask.

“Oh, its just that they say pretty much the same thing in PNG, that once you’ve been there it gets into your blood. It’s funny.”

“That is funny! But it’s true.”

“I know.”

We sit there in silence for a few minutes before Christine slowly gets to her feet.

“I think I’m going to go to bed. We have a long day of canoeing tomorrow. What time did the teachers say we have to get up? 6am wasn’t it.”

“Yeah. I’m going in a minute.”

“Well have a good sleep!”

“Yeah you too.” I reply as she walks away into the darkness. “Night.”

*“I am invisible; understand,  
simply because people refuse to see me.”*

## Ralph Ellison

*What am I doing here?*

I feel powerless, unable to connect. I just want to give up; I don't want to try any more. It's too hard. I wrap my cocoon tighter around my shoulders. I want to step away from everything... everyone; it's easier. I don't have to think anymore; there's no one around reminding me that I do not belong.

“Sean.”

I look around; there's no one there. I swear I heard my name.

“I know he is.”

Looking around I spy a group of people, almost totally hidden from my view. If I hadn't heard them, I wouldn't have known they were there.

“...Sean...” There it is again. My name. *Why are they talking about me?*

I know I shouldn't, my heart's beating too fast, I know it's wrong. I move closer anyway.

I wish I didn't...

*Wandering in darkness grope,  
Finding not a glimpse of hope...  
Floundering in this self made hell,  
Warmth increasing as I dwell,*

*Within the confines I create,  
Screaming as myself berate,  
Giving in to this, my fate.*

**Marilyn (Unknown)**

*What have I done...?* The afternoon sun throws its last cold rays onto my body. I shiver and zip my jumper up more. I sit on my queen-sized double bed and stare out my window at nothing in particular.

*What have I done...? What haven't I done...?* I don't know what to think. Have I caused this? I feel abandoned. That's my fault. I've pushed people to the side. I've ignored them. I've lived in my box and I've been alone. I abandoned myself.

People warned me, I should have listened to their cries, their warnings...their whispering behind my back...

*"All he has ever thought about is himself..."*

*"Why does he hate us so much? All we want is to understand where he's coming from, but he won't let us...so how can we know? Are we not good enough to know?"*

*"You know, Christine's the only one who understands him..."*

*“No, Christine’s the only one he wants to understand him...”*

*“He only thinks of himself and Christine. What about us? He thinks he’s so high and mighty...”*

I want to cry, not for myself, but for what I’ve done. I lie curled up on my bed praying, crying out for one more time around, one more chance to go back and change. *That’s all I ask...*

I pick up my pillow and hug it against my head as my world breaks, shattering into countless pieces. My mind is no shelter from the voices crying out my name. I cry as if I’ve never cried before. The rushing world whips round me, chilling me to the bone. I’m incomplete. I can’t face this world alone.

I wake up to darkness. There’s no light streaming through my curtains. I roll over and glance at the alarm clock - it’s 1:30. I shut my eyes and try to get back to sleep, but my mind’s awake. I get out of bed and pull open my curtains. There are no stars; there is no moon. The sky is a lifeless grey. I sit on the edge of my bed and stare at the night.

What will tomorrow bring... the day after... and the day after that...? What does the future have in store for me?

I look up at where the moon keeps watch, hidden from my view. Its silent eyes watching the world grow older.

My past has formed me; it has moulded me into who I am. I’ll always long for the past. We all do. Will I ever go back? I don’t know. Things change...people change. It wouldn’t be the same. Perhaps I’ll be content to live with my memories...

I don’t want to leave here. But I don’t want to stay. The past is tangible.

My life is moving on.

I celebrate my past...my heritage...my upbringing. I am who I am because of it.

Africa in all its diversity, all its matchlessness has shaped me; it has moulded me into whom I have become. My future is laid out before me; I feel a sense of anticipation, a longing to see what will come next.

The past year has been the hardest year of my life. But, it is only one year after all. Through this hardship I have found who I am inside. I have found hope in this world...*Christine.*

Suddenly a memory comes to mind. Something a friend in Africa said to me at the airport as I left.

"Sean, before you leave, I want you to know that no matter where you are you will never be alone. In your darkest moments I want you to remember that hope is being sure of something you cannot see..."

You know what? He's right. I need to stop hiding behind my walls; I need to stop thinking things through so much. I need to act more. I need to live. I need to stop taking life one-step at a time, and take it at a run.

*I have studied many times  
The marble, which was chiselled for me—  
a boat with a furled sail at rest in a harbour.  
In truth it pictures not my destination  
But my life.*

*For love was offered me, and I shrank from its disillusionment;  
Sorrow knocked at my door, but I was afraid  
Ambition called to me, but I dreaded the chances.  
Yet all the while I hungered for meaning in my life  
And now I know that we must lift the sail  
And catch the winds of destiny*

*Wherever they drive the boat.  
To put meaning in one's life may end in madness,  
But life without meaning is the torture  
Of restlessness and vague desire—  
It is a boat longing for the sea and yet afraid.*

**Edgar Lee Masters**

*I have lived an eternity, but my journey has only just begun.*

