

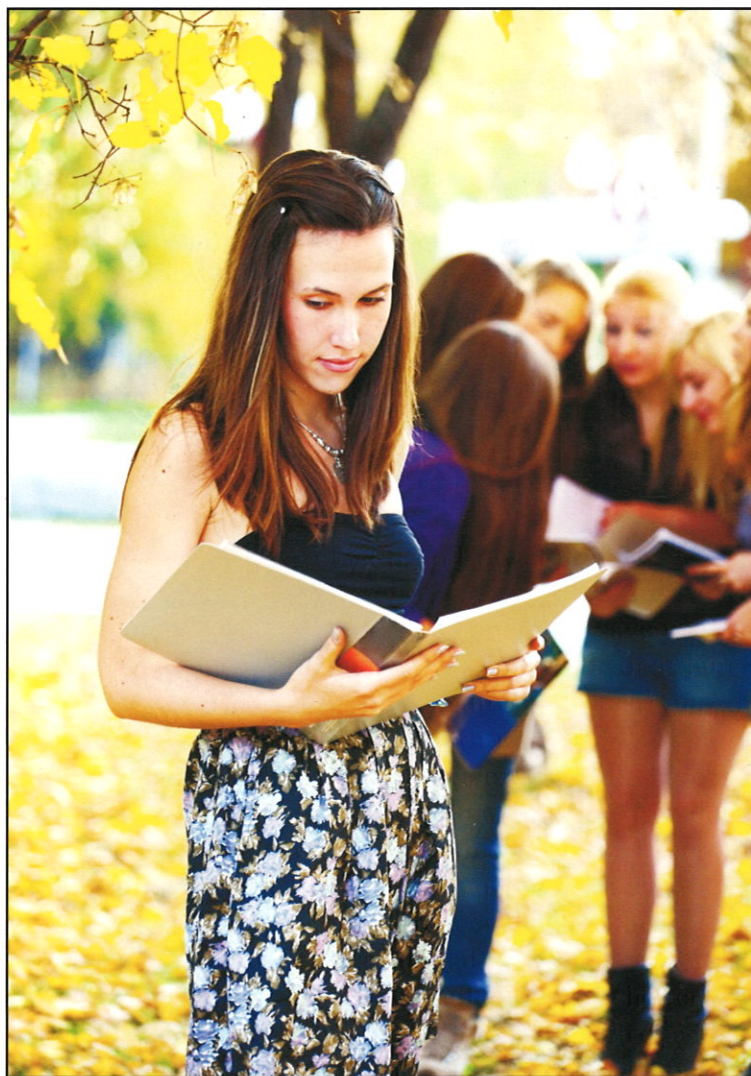
COVER STORY

Introversions: Dysfunction or Strength?

by Susan Howell

“God did not save you to be an introvert!” read the sign outside of a church in my hometown. If you are a card-carrying, Myers-Briggs personality type introvert as I am, you might be offended at such a statement. You might find yourself dodging other vehicles and pedestrians as you do a double-take. “Did it say that? Really?” A second look confirming the first, you feel miffed as you recall your excellent listening skills, or talent working with others one-on-one, both frequent strengths of the introvert. You later report your outrage to an introverted friend, who reminds you that introversion is not a condition in search of a treatment. Thus affirmed, you remember you are not second-rate and those who put up church signs do not always know of what they speak. You are able to let it go. (Well, you hang on to it long enough to write an article about it, then you let it go.)

You might, however, have always been told you are too quiet, that your hobbies are boring, that evenings at home are dull and you need to get out more. Without knowing much about individual differences, you know you are more comfortable in small gatherings than in large groups. When others try to “bring you out” you wish they would let you be, while you secretly wonder if they are right and you are



somehow lacking. When you see the church sign, your feelings of being defective are confirmed and you can't quite let it go.

If you are an extravert you might have passed by the church sign without giving it a second thought, not realizing its impact on the introverts in your life. In either case, a deeper understanding of introversion and extraversion might be helpful to you.

While different “experts” describe introversion and

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extraversion somewhat differently, I like the explanation used by the developers of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). Accordingly, *“extraverts are those who focus on, and are energized by people and events outside of themselves; introverts focus on, and are more energized by their internal world.”*¹ Introverts love thinking and reflecting. Notice that being shy or friendly are not necessarily the defining characteristics of these different personality types. Introverts aren’t necessarily more shy or less friendly than extraverts, but are energized in different ways.

While the MBTI creators maintain that neither trait is healthier than the other, each possesses its own strengths and challenges. Introverts, for example, often find large gatherings of acquaintances quite taxing if we’re expected to mix and mingle. This external stimulation, added to what is generated within, is simply too much. Extraverts often try to convince us these events are brimming with fun if we could only relax and enjoy ourselves. For us, “fun” comes in a different form: generally in time spent with family or a few people in a quieter atmosphere. We are energized by reading a book, thinking through problems or situations, or

getting to know others more deeply than would be possible in a large crowd making small talk with a host of acquaintances. We value quiet times and solitude and make acquaintances more slowly.

Extraverted personalities’ strengths are apparent to most of us: comfort with groups of people, particularly with those they don’t already know. Extraverts see meeting new people as exciting, after all, “the more the merrier.” Extraverts have no trouble talking with people they don’t know well and often are said to “never meet a stranger.” A lot of external activity energizes them so the big party with a lot going on leaves extraverts feeling ready for more. They are action oriented. For these reasons extraverts can become the life of the party and be admired for the ease with which they interact.

In the extreme, however, this preference can become a liability. Going more in-depth with a few people, spending time alone with one other person, and lengthy periods of silence or reflection aren’t their strengths. Without external stimulation, they may feel bored and distressed. As students, they may prefer social activities to hitting the books alone and writing their assignments!

Although both introverts and extraverts are found in every

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President:
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Founder:
Dr. Clyde M. Narramore

Editors:
Robert and Melanie Whitcomb

Art Director:
Richard W. McDill

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LAST LAUGH



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culture, different cultures tend to idealize different personality styles. Our American culture especially values the outgoing style of extraverts. But you would never see a church sign in Japan or Thailand exhorting you to be an extravert! Quietness and reflection are highly valued in those cultures.

So, back to the church sign, did God save me to be an extravert? Definitely not! A better question is whether as an introvert I have strengths my church and the larger body of Christ need. Well, let's see...as an introvert I probably wouldn't enjoy door-to-door evangelism. The constant meeting of new people and discomfort in talking with strangers would not suit me. In fact, when I've tried it, I felt more than a little guilty praying fervently that no one would be home! The extravert would likely be a better fit for this job. The same for organizing any large-scale activity that requires near constant interaction with a lot of people (i.e., coordinating an overseas mission trip for 50 youth and their 10 chaperones). Give that one to an extravert, please! I also believe an extravert must have thought up the idea of interrupting contemplative worship to greet whoever happens to be sitting in the next pew on Sunday morning. This part of the service stresses me and makes me want to rummage through my purse for gum.

But do you need to put together a committee that requires working closely with a few people to accomplish a specific task? Pick me! Pick me! I feel comfortable in that role. It allows me to get to know a few people more fully while contributing to the church's operation. I enjoy that.

I also like working with small groups, such as a Sunday school class. Here I already know the people somewhat and can get to know them better as we discuss our feelings and experiences around certain topics or scripture passages.

Solitary pursuits fit me well too. I enjoy (in fact, require) time for individual meditation. Personal Bible study for large chunks of time does not bore me. I love it. I'm also invigorated by hours of sitting at a computer, as I am now, writing, debating word choice and sentence structure. Can it get any better! And would you like to have just one or two prayer partners? I may be a great choice!

The point is: we all bring something to the table. The church is rich with diversity and functions at its best when we value our own gifts and those of others. As the Apostle Paul put it "There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord...Just as a body, though one, has many parts...so it is with Christ...The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you.' If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it," (*I Corinthians 12:5, 12, 21 and 26 NIV*). Was I saved to be an introvert? You bet! And we really do need each other. †

¹ Myers, I. B. (1987). *Introduction to type*. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc.

Susan Howell is Professor of Psychology at Campbellsville University in Kentucky where she teaches courses in Personality Theory and Psychology of Religion. She and her husband Wayne have two children, Katelyn and Patrick.

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MKs Complete 2011 Re-entry Program

Imagine 31 eighteen-year-olds who have grown up in 32 different countries on five continents coming together for two weeks to process the huge transition of moving to live in the United States long term for the first time in their lives. They are not only moving to a new country, they are moving to a new college campus thousands of miles from their parents and they are moving developmentally from adolescence to adulthood.

Since their parents are missionaries serving in other countries they may not see their families for up to two years. In addition, they may never again live in their “home” country where they grew up, may never see their childhood friends again, won’t be able to visit their favorite places during Christmas vacation or head home

for a taste of their Mom’s good cooking over spring break. Some of them have grown up in three different countries so they don’t really have one true “home.”

Is it possible to help 18-year-olds process all of that and give them tools for adjusting successfully to both the United States and college and add in a little fun while they’re at it? It just happened at NCF’s 32nd Annual MK Reentry Program. Although complete adjustment to our culture will take years, these MKs take major strides toward a successful transition during NCF’s reentry program.

These sons and daughters of missionaries came from countries including Albania, Argentina, Costa Rica, and Croatia through Russia, Taiwan, Thailand and the Ukraine. Their par-

ents serve as linguists, church planters, professors at Bible colleges and seminaries, pastors, community development specialists, directors of mission agencies, and nurses. Some are involved in ministries to Muslims in some of the most difficult regions of the world. Some had to send their children to live in boarding schools far from home because no schools were available nearby or it was too dangerous. And all have served Christ’s Kingdom sacrificially for many years.

We’ve just finished saying good-bye to the last group of MKs heading to the airport on their way to college and most of them left with a full heart. On the final evening of the program, the MK’s shared about the highlights of the program and also their prayers and hopes for the future.



2011 MK Reentry Participants

*We shared our hearts, our stories, in one mind
And now we leave and leave ourselves behind
To live each day as days were meant – to live
To laugh, to love, to gain, to grieve, to give
But here is why our time was such a help
I opened up your heart and found myself.*

-Joel Dettweiler, MK Reentry Participant, 2011



MK’s listening attentively during morning lecture.

Highlights

"I am learning to say goodbye in order to say hello to my future."

"I've learned tips for not getting stuck in the turmoil of transition but moving through it one step at a time."

"This is the first time I have ever roasted hot dogs and marshmallows over an open fire."

"I rode a school bus (to the beach) for the first time."

"Six MKs who grew up in six different countries who never met before, shared deeply and openly and spoke into each other's lives in small groups each day."

"We came as 'unknown' to this country and each other and left bonded in deep community."

"Several of us introverts found our voice."

"Extroverts learned to enjoy quiet and grew in listening effectively."

"By sharing bits and pieces of our lives we began to paint a picture of our future."

"We are learning to understand ourselves so we can better understand others."

"We shared untold stories of trauma, waded through our loss and grief, and began to come out the other side."

Prayer Requests

"I don't have any family in the area where I'll be going to college and I feel like I'm going into the jungle with no maps."

"Please pray I will find someone to be a culture guide to help me learn and adjust to this place."

"Please pray that God would put an adult in my life as a mentor." †

New Counseling Center to be Founded in Turkey

John and Becky Leverington, counselors with SIL International, are working with TEAM and the Narramore Christian Foundation to help develop a counseling center to serve people living and working throughout Eurasia. Situated just North of the Mediterranean Sea, Turkey is accessible to people in Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Syria as well as most European countries.

Some of those countries are closed to public Christian outreaches and, in fact, in some, proselytizing is against the law. Consequently Christians living in those countries face intense pressure and even persecution. Bombings of Christian churches and attacks on Christians are not uncommon, and anyone who converts to Christianity can be punished, deprived of their rights, jailed, or even killed.

Although Turkey is a Muslim country, it has a predominantly secular government so there is a measure of religious freedom. Although Christian Churches are generally not allowed, it is permissible for groups

of Christians to meet together. Coupled with the good climate and location on the Mediterranean, this makes Turkey a natural place for people who need to take a break from their work in neighboring countries.

In the Fall of 2010, Dr. Bruce and Kathy Narramore and the Leveringtons traveled to Turkey to consult and explore the possibility of helping found a counseling center in that region of the world. The Leveringtons have agreed to serve on the planning team and the Governing Council. The Council has completed developing its mission statement and organizational structure and is now actively recruiting clinical staff with the goal of opening the center in 2012. NCF will continue to support the center, consult, and help develop and select staff to make this vision a reality. Please pray for all involved in this process. And if you know of a Christian mental health professional who might be interested in serving in Turkey, put them in touch with Dr. Narramore. †



John and Becky Leverington (right) and the counseling center planning team.

Trauma Through the Eyes of Missionary Kids

By Becky Leverington, LMFT

Missionaries and their children experience many more critical traumatic incidents than the average U.S. citizen. They often witness or experience situations firsthand that the majority of people in our home countries only see on the news. During the Narramore Christian Foundation's recent reentry program for the sons and daughters of missionaries, co-sponsored by Barnabas International, 31 seventeen to eighteen-year-old MKs were asked to get into groups of four or five and list on large sheets of white paper the traumas they had experienced on the mission field.

One group of four students had experienced five car accidents, the death of two close family members or friends, six earthquakes, three death threats, six robberies, five cases of emotional abuse, three instances of sexual abuse, five fires, and nine suicides or suicide attempts by acquaintances!

Think of it. By eighteen years of age

these young people have gone through a series of traumas that most of us won't see in a lifetime. Other groups of four or five students had similar experiences but added bullying, terrorism, muggings and near death experiences. These young people's traumatic experiences fell into two categories: natural disasters like tsunamis, earthquakes, and fires; and trauma caused by other people which we refer to as "being sinned against." "Sinned against" included being held at gunpoint, child sexual abuse, religious conflict/violence, burglaries, robberies at gunpoint, kidnapping and forced evacuations from their homes or countries.

The following case example exemplifies many of the typical effects of trauma, and the key components to successfully processing trauma to overcome its potentially destructive impact.

The Smith Family*

Bob and Jane and their two children, Dan (10) and Patty (16), have been serving with XYZ Organization for two four-year terms in West Africa, where Bob

does translation work and Jane helps in the library one day a week at the international school where their children attend.

Bob and Jane were at home in the city when they learned that fighting had broken out in the north of their country between rebel forces and government troops. They didn't think too much of it at first since there had been several coup attempts over the years, which typically died down after a few days. This fighting, however, went on and they soon learned that the rebels had taken an increasingly large area of territory and the fighting was moving toward their city. They learned that their team members were trying to evacuate from the northern part of the country to the capital but had only sporadic word whether they were safe or not, whether their homes were destroyed, or whether their national colleagues, who had to remain in the area, were safe.

Then Bob and Jane were alerted by their administration that they either needed to evacuate or stay in their home as the fighting was moving closer. Since it moved much more quickly than anyone could anticipate they were pinned down in their house before they could evacuate. They spent one-and-a-half days in their inner hallway, with mattresses to cushion the sound and provide additional protection, with only occasional forays to the kitchen to get food and water. They heard constant gunfire, cars racing through the streets, and then eerie quiet. They spent time singing praise songs quietly together, reading Scripture, praying, reading fun books to get their minds off the situation, and trying to play card games to pass the time. But their ears seemed trained on outside noises. They startled easily and were on pins and needles. They did have cell phone contact with their team leaders twice a day and were able to listen to the news by radio. That did not help calm them.

When the fighting moved on, Bob and Jane and their children were eventually able to evacuate safely to the capital, where they stayed in their team guest house surrounded by friends and team-



Missionary daughters sharing traumatic experiences.

(MKs): Part One

mates. As the coup continued, however, everyone in their organization was forced to evacuate the country completely within the next two weeks. Bob and Jane were due for furlough in several months, so began it early. They are scheduled to return in a few months, but it doesn't look like the country will be stable enough for them to return there yet.

Ten-year-old Dan is still experiencing nightmares of the fighting he heard and experienced around their home. He doesn't want to sleep alone in his bedroom, has lost much of his appetite, and gets scared any time one of his parents needs to leave the home, fearing they won't return. Sixteen-year-old Patty gets sick to her stomach when she sees any violence on TV shows. She hates being in enclosed places, like elevators and long hallways, and startles at loud sounds. She doesn't want to talk about the situation and spends a lot of time just "spacing out" when she's supposed to be doing her homework.

Bob gets irritated at his son's clinginess and finds himself snapping at his wife and children, even though he apologizes and resolves to do better each day. It bothers him that he isn't able to get much work accomplished, and he feels rather listless. Jane has headaches that don't seem to be getting better and experiences a great deal of anxiety if the children don't come home on time. She is finding

# of times	Type of Traumatic Incidents
III	Natural Disasters
III	Bullying
IIII	Terrorism
IIII	Medical Problems
IIII	Kidnapping
III	Violence
III	Death
IIII	Vehicle Accidents
II	Fire
II	Rioting

# of times	Type of Traumatic Incidents
3	Seen a fatal car accident.
3	Terrorist threat.
5	Earthquake
4	Suicide/attempted suicide
5	Divorce
3	Robbery
2	Mugging
9	Death of family/friend
2	Near death experience

it difficult to go to sleep at night and wakens easily at outdoor sounds.

The Smith family had already been evacuated once prior to this and Jane is not sure if she has the ability to start over again trying to set up house in a third overseas location. Sixteen-year-old Patty is angry at God for yanking them out of their country and away from her friends. Then she feels guilty for her anger. She also worries about her national friends and is finding it hard to pray for their protection since God didn't protect many of their family members who died in the fighting. She often finds herself weeping during worship, wondering what God has for them next, and if she has the strength to follow him into another new situation. Ten-year-old Dan is worried about their pets that were left behind in the fighting and wonders why God would allow such an awful thing as war.

Bob has made one month-long trip back to the country and got into their area. He was excited to see how the work was progressing, even in his

absence. His heart is there and he is beginning to see real fruit from their last eight years of labor. He's afraid if they pull out now the efforts will not yet be sustainable, as the national staff are new in their responsibilities, and don't have funding within the country. But the rest of the family experienced great levels of anxiety while Bob was away and are conflicted about returning.

In Part II we will discuss the typical effects of traumas such as the Smiths endured and what the Smiths and others like them need to stabilize, and to process and grow through such extreme difficulties.

*Names and identifying information have been changed. Look for Part II of "Trauma Through the Eyes of Missionary Kids" in the Fall 2011 issue of *Psychology for Living*. ☩

Becky Leverington is a licensed marriage and family therapist and Director of the Child Safety Office for SIL International.



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