

Elsie Purnell

A number of years ago I met a very compassionate lady who had worked for many years in the missions community primarily in Thailand. Elsie Purnell was one of the first people I met who was actively involved in helping TCKs make the transition from living outside their passport country to life in a world that was supposed to be their home country. Elsie was a quiet and very nurturing person. When she found out that I was a TCK, she instantly took an interest in me as a person and then in my career as a counselor.

Elsie had eight support groups for adult TCKs from Santa Barbara to San Diego, all in southern California. Although she never passed up an opportunity to talk with TCKs of whatever age and wherever she met them, she did not base any of her groups on college students. She felt they weren't old enough to really process their experiences. The age she preferred to have in her groups was 35 and older; some were in their 60s.

She formed support groups that would continue to meet without her—this was never her goal—and help one another. The support groups were for ATCKs to meet, discuss issues, and be a help to each other. Occasionally, if she couldn't be there for some reason, one of the group might try to facilitate the meeting based on what Elsie had planned. But these were one-off events. However, they didn't run for long without her and ceased to exist after she could no longer meet with them. She was indispensable to the groups because of her empathy, her varied experiences, and her ability to connect with TCKs. She showed videos that TCKs felt reflected their experience and introduced and chose readings that would create insightful and lively discussion.

She gleaned much knowledge from what she learned from these "kids." Her own experience with her own TCK children, observations, extensive reading of the literature regarding TCKs, and discussions with groups such as the one where I met her at a Missions and Mental Health Conference, gave her a wealth of wisdom. Sadly, Elsie died after a long struggle with cancer.

---Taken from: "Belonging Everywhere & Nowhere: Insights into Counseling the Globally Mobile" by Lois Bushong Pgs. 260-261.