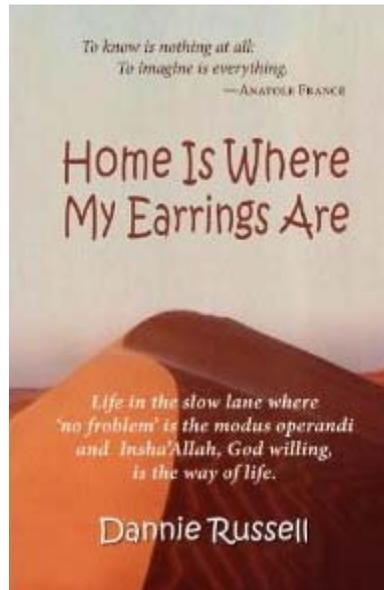


Home Is Where My Earrings Are



Those of us who grew up going to international schools have our own stories, our own experiences, our own Trivial Pursuit moments. We reminisce about cutting class and escaping to the local sari-sari store to buy cigarettes. Remember that evil gym teacher who always tortured us with laps around the track in the blazing tropical sun? The swishy typing instructor with the lizard-skin pants? Remember being caught smoking in the girls' bathroom? Or the time you leaned against the sink in there and it fell to the floor in a reverberating crash, tiny pieces of porcelain raining and tinkling all around? Amazing how fast you can run away from trouble!



Still gorgeous after all these years!

How many of us ever wondered about those hearty souls who spent their lives educating us? How did our teachers end up in a classroom in India, or Manila or Saudi Arabia (for Pete's sake!) sharing their wit and wisdom with us Third Culture Kids? Listening to us whine and moan about our tumultuous TCK lives, offering a pat on the shoulder when tragedy struck. For some reason these brave people stayed in our minds and hearts over the years. Are our relationships with our TCK teachers deeper than most student-teacher attachments?

"Home Is Where My Earrings Are" is a memoir of a life in international education. Dannie Russell's husband, Daryle, was my high school principal in the Philippines. I don't remember meeting Dannie, but I feel like I know her quite well after reading her book.

Dr. Russell was a kind, benevolent dictator, if you will. I was never afraid of him; he always had a smile, that big California grin, and never appeared stern, although he ran a tight ship. Nothing made you sit up straighter than the words, "Psst! Here comes Doctor Russell!" When my father was transferred to Singapore in the middle of my senior year (gasp!) Dr. R. was kind enough to decide that I had taken enough classes to earn my diploma. I'm not sure that was accurate, but I was forever grateful. The actual piece of paper, written in English and Tagalog, arrived in a big brown envelope not long after we arrived in Singapore. (While that may be impressive to most, I later learned that kids in Africa had diplomas that were printed on lambskin). As if that wasn't enough, Dr. Russell arranged (with

my parents' cooperation of course) for me to return to Manila in May, to graduate with my class. At the commencement ceremony, he handed me my empty diploma folder with a wink. I think he may have had something to do with me getting a blind date for the prom, but that may be stretching it a bit.



My blind date to the prom in Manila.

In her book, Dannie writes about the behind-the-scenes adventures of the wife of an international educator, and later about becoming an educator herself. She writes about their early days in the Peace Corps in Ethiopia (ever practical, laughing at the convenience of having a bidet right next to the toilet when dysentery strikes); the opulent-but-casual formality of Manila (from the intricacies of having President Marcos speak at graduation, to scuba diving lessons with the wife of the American ambassador); and their frightening arrival in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (no pictures of boys and girls together – rip, tear! No Disney videos! No chocolates, they might have alcohol centers!) Dannie's positive attitude is pervasive; she only gets down when they arrive in Saudi to the news that the headmaster Dr. Russell is replacing has refused to leave, insisting that the "new guy" will never make it. She senses that they are being socially snubbed, but that doesn't stop her. She decides that she is going to meet a new friend every month, and she does.

Living in Riyadh during Operation Desert Storm, under constant threat of SCUD attacks from Iraq was harrowing, to say the least. To diffuse the fear? Celebrate with a SPUD party! Nothing like a baked potato bar to calm the nerves. When you lose your sense of humor, you're a goner. While most schools beg and plead for more textbooks and library books; in Riyadh the Russells pleaded for money to buy gas masks.

Dannie baked cookies and personally delivered them to the American troops at the front near the Kuwaiti border. Their daughter was detained at one point by the Saudi "morality police" the *mutawwa*, for not wearing an *abaya*. This after they had lived in the country for nearly 11 years, having never worn the veil. They had always respected the rules there, always dressing conservatively.



<http://www.wisegeek.com/what-should-i-know-about-saudi-arabia.htm>

Not your typical teacher's life story, "fer shure"!

I can just imagine the conversation between the newly married Dannie and Daryle: "See honey, we're going to go live in Africa, where we won't have many modern conveniences. You're going to teach English, and one day you're going to be caught in the middle of a violent student demonstration. We're going to meet Haile Selassie, the Ethiopian emperor. Then we're going to move across the world to the Philippines, where we're going to hob-nob with big-wigs there and you're going to volunteer at a refugee camp in Thailand near the border of Laos. You're gonna go into the jungle and with a bunch of teenagers, you're gonna build a school. Then we'll go to the most restrictive Muslim country in the world, live there during a war, and after that we're going to move to Pakistan, visit Afghanistan and eat grilled sheep parts with the Taliban. What do you say?"

I can just hear Dannie ... "When do we leave?"