Lessons Learned as an MK
By the Bohman girls

Africa was a foreign country to our parents, but for us—their children—it was home. When our parents arrived in Africa, it was a whole new world to them; it was the mission field to which they had surrendered. On the other hand, having been born in Africa, we did not think of surrendering to live there—we actually preferred it. It was all we knew and we loved it! Living on the mission field has been a blessing to us in many ways, and we would like to share a few reasons why we are thankful to be missionary kids (MKs).

One incredible blessing was the knowledge that God could use us in ways He could not use our parents. Our family ministered as a team, yet, even at young ages, we understood that God could use us individually. There are several stories we could tell, but here is one: the manager of a store we frequented was a Muslim lady. At first, she did not want to talk to our parents about religion or even form a friendship. However, in our innocence, we greeted her with smiles and hugs when we saw her. Since she did not feel intimidated by children, she started talking to us each time we would go into her shop and soon a friendship resulted. On certain holidays we would make her cookies and enclose a Gospel tract. Slowly, seeds were planted. She would sometimes ask us to pray for her or for a problem in her life. Those “seeds” were watered. Although we never saw her salvation before we left that town, we saw that her heart was tender and her mind apt to receive the Gospel.

God used us individually and also blessed us personally. One of our earliest memories of this occurred when we were very young. Where we lived at that time, crayons were hard to come by. Since the African children did not have crayons at home, coloring was an activity the children looked forward to each week in Sunday school. One week, we noticed the Sunday school crayons were worn down to stubs, and the Lord placed on our
surprise at hearing about a man who lived three days in the belly of a whale or three men in a fiery furnace who were not burned. Seeing their amazement made it exciting to teach them more about the stories that were familiar to us. As we got to know the children better, another need became evident: the physical. When we would bring snacks for our Sunday school class, the children hungrily ate everything we brought and asked for more. We were saddened to find out how long it had been since they had eaten a decent meal. We noticed that some girls always wore the same dress to church. That was because it was the only one they had. One toddler boy would come to Sunday school wrapped in an old curtain because he had no clothes. What fun we had the day we went home and gathered up some clothes to give them! How grateful they were! What joy a few clothes that we could spare brought them! After seeing the joy and fulfillment that serving brought, we desired to do more.

The mission field also enriched us with a better perspective for life. It taught us to be friends with people who spoke a different language, ate different food, and had different ways of doing things. We saw that being different is not always a bad thing. The mission field taught us how to adapt. We had the benefit of learning that it was actually fun to "make do" with what you had or get along without what you did not have. Frequent water and electrical shortages taught us flexibility. One memorable Thanksgiving, the electricity went out just as we were putting the turkey into the oven. Who knew that turkey could be cooked just as well on a gas stove top? And did you know mangoes make a great substitute for apple in apple pie? For several months we did not have a washing machine. At first, washing our clothes by hand seemed too arduous a task to be enjoyable. Although it never was a favorite pastime, it was fun to work and laugh together and—especially on hot days—to get soaking wet with the cold water! Of course, we were thankful when we did get a washer, but we will always look back on that experience as a fun time that we would not have wanted to miss. During water shortages we took sponge baths and learned that you do not have to take a bath every day! Power outages were no big deal—we just lit the kerosene lamps and played shadow games on the wall. The mission field better prepared us to meet the challenges of life.

It was easy to be thankful for the blessings we had when we were daily confronted with the needs of others. We distinctly remember visiting the tiny dwelling of one of our faithful widows. She was pleased to have us in her home and eagerly related to us how good God was to her. While she conversed with our parents, we girls had a chance to look around the small room. There was not much to see—the couch we were sitting on, the coffee table in front of us, and a chair in the corner were all covered with homemade doilies. Behind a curtain that divided the small house into two rooms stood a single bed. Once we returned home, we asked our parents where this lady kept the beds for her three boys. The answer shocked us: “One sleeps on the chair, and two sleep on the couch.” Suddenly, our wants and desires dimmed in importance as we thought of those boys who did not even have a bed.

Once at Sunday school, we noticed a young girl who was visiting for the first time. She was carrying a little bag of breadcrumbs, carefully eating one after another during the lesson. Whenever she accidentally dropped them, the timid girl bent down and picked up every one. After one of these episodes, the teacher suggested she throw the dirty crumbs away. Straightening herself, the little girl replied, “But Teacher, this is my breakfast!” How ashamed we felt when we thought of the times we had complained of our food, and here was a little girl with only crumbs for breakfast! After that, thanking God for our meals became more than just a habit. We learned to be thankful for the little things. Many of our African friends did not have shoes. When we saw the soles of our barefoot friends thickened by years of walking without shoes, it made even our hand-me-down shoes beautiful to us. Living among the needy was sometimes discouraging until we saw God—Who is rich unto all that call upon Him—provide for the African Christians, and sometimes He used us to meet their needs.

The lessons Africa taught us will always be a part of our lives no matter where we go. To us missions is the greatest thing in the world! We thank God for the privilege to be called MKs and for the lessons learned on the mission field.

The Bohman girls (Erica, Deborah, Heidi, and Julia) served with their parents in both Kenya and Tanzania. Eric and Lori Bohman have served with BIMI for 23 years, and he is presently the Africa Field Director.