

Interview Questions for *Parents of Missionaries: How to Thrive and Stay Connected When Your Children and Grandchildren Serve Cross-Culturally*

1. Why did you want to write this book?

My oldest daughter and her husband were sent by our church as missionaries to a country in Eastern Europe. They were young and had been married only a few years, and it was very hard for my husband and me to let them go, even though we supported what they were doing. I began looking for resources to help us adjust and discovered that there was nothing. At the same time, our church was sending out other missionaries as well. My co-author, who is a licensed counselor, was asked to lead a group for all the parents. She also discovered there were no published resources available, and eventually we decided to develop something together.

2. The Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays are coming up. How do holidays affect POMs (parents of missionaries), and what can they do to get through the holiday season?

These holidays can be especially meaningful to families, and when a chunk of your family isn't there to celebrate with you, it can be painful. Especially when there are grandchildren involved and you only see them every two or three years.

POMs need to plan ahead and create new traditions. Think about ways to include your missionary children and grandchildren in your celebration or to be a part of theirs. Some ideas include making your own "books on tape" for grandchildren, writing and sending an e-mail "journal" about your holiday preparations and activities, exchanging photos, and even opening gifts together while on Skype or Facetime.

Also, losses must be grieved, and giving up the commonly held expectation that throughout life you would be able to enjoy your adult children and your grandchildren is a loss. So try to evaluate before the holidays where you are in the grieving process, and let go of the "oughts" of the season, including how you "ought" to feel. It is normal to feel distress in the face of loss, even if your Christian faith is strong.

3. Is it difficult for POMs to admit that they are grieving when their children become missionaries?

It can be incredibly difficult, often because they think there is something wrong with their faith. When we have done workshops for POMs, as soon as people realize they are in a safe space with others who understand, the tears start to flow. But it is very normal to have strong faith, be proud of your missionary's work, yet grieve deeply over what you are giving up when you become a POM. To resolve grief, we need to be able to recognize and accept it, and others do too. Typically those involved with sending the missionaries are focused on that effort and not on the experience of the family members left behind. Fortunately, this is starting to change, and that's good, because grief that is kept hidden or is considered not socially acceptable is *disenfranchised grief* and becomes nearly impossible to heal.

4. What are some steps POMs can take to resolve and heal their grief?

First, recognize it and accept it. Second, connect with God, of course, but also connect with others. We tell the stories of so many POMs in our book, and POMs tell us that just reading it they feel less alone. Finding other POMs to talk with is wonderful too. And if you are facing other stage-of-life issues as well, such as death of a spouse, divorce, illness, or job loss, understand that you may need to talk with a counselor or pastor.

5. Is there a plus side to being a POM?

Absolutely! Your world gets a lot bigger. Your prayer life and your dependence on God will grow. You can be a stabilizing force for your grandchildren when they come back for visits or college. You have a wonderful opportunity for personal growth, and you'll become more empathetic with people who have experienced all kinds of losses. You'll have a reason to travel you didn't have before, and you just might find your own interest in missions growing too.

6. Are there ways parents can prepare for becoming POMs?

Definitely. Saying good-bye well is important. This means spending time with your missionary during the preparation phase and before departure, maybe taking a vacation together. Talk through misunderstandings or

difficulties from the past. Ask for the information you need about this new venture, and learn about the place your missionary is going. Commit to creating and maintaining a strong emotional connection even though there will be miles and an entirely different culture between you.

7. What's it like to grandparent as a POM?

Children change so fast, especially when they are young, and POMs miss out on being there for important milestone events. Mostly, POMs worry that their grandchildren will grow up not knowing them. But we advise POMs to be proactive and reach out to their grandchildren across the miles, and many grandparents share in the book all the different ways how they have done that.

8. Tell us a little more about the book.

It's divided into sections. First we help POMs learn to recognize and deal with their grief and other stressful midlife situations that might be going on at the same time. There's a section about POM life—the preparation period, departure, understanding missionary life, and getting the most from furlough times. In the section about staying connected, we talk about grandparenting, using technology, traveling to the field, and of course getting through the holidays.

9. What's the National Network of Parents of Missionaries?

From 2003 to 2010 my co-author and I hosted a website for POMs and led workshops at missions events. We also developed and led a group of POMs in the Greater Cincinnati area—meeting together every few months for fellowship, education, and support. And we tried to help POMs in other places find groups to meet with. There is still a page at www.pomnet.org that lists resources for POMs today.