

# DESTINATIONS

February 2018

## Two mothers share the journey of expat life By Jo Parfitt and Terry Anne Wilson

with Lesley Lewis, Ian Moody, Becky Grappo, Ellen Mahoney,  
Colleen Reichrath-Smith, Ruth Van Reken, Amanda Graham & Nell Smith

Jo Parfitt and Terry Anne Wilson's soon to be published book is part memoir, part self-help, part diary. Recollecting expatriate life, then and now between two friends, it is honest, poignant and vulnerable. Living a continent apart in May of 2017, Jo and Terry Anne made the commitment to write to each other for six months - the result is *Monday Morning Emails*.

Over the past twenty-five years, the authors have created homes for their families in Japan to The Netherlands, from Malaysia to the US, from Norway to Kazakhstan to India. Combined they have raised five sons globally, supported husbands in the oil-energy business and found their passion in writing and publishing, mentoring and more.

At the Families in Global Transition Conference in 2017\*, Jo put together a forum on the Expat Empty Nest with Terry Anne, Becky Grappo, Ellen Mahoney and Ruth Van Reken sitting on the panel. With a packed turnout, there was a general agreement that it was a significant topic, yet many other pertinent issues were raised. The panel agreed that they wanted to be involved, but it was unclear just how the project grew organically as Jo and Terry Anne's emails revealed more and more issues as the months of writing passed. The afore mentioned panel experts, along with others, were then

TERRY ANNE WILSON  
& JO PARFITT

## MONDAY MORNING EMAILS



**Six months, twelve countries, a thousand  
thoughts — two mothers share the  
journey of living a global life**

with Lesley Lewis, Ian Moody, Becky Grappo, Ellen Mahoney,  
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asked to comment on what had now become a manuscript. Their expert input offers guidance and resources in the second part of the book.

This is an engaging journey into the 'exciting' overseas life, yet shares the reality of myriad issues – of Third Culture Kids, education, rootlessness, anxiety and depression, health and wellness, loss of identity, guilt of living afar from loved ones, traumatic childhood experiences, faith, retirement options and others. Uplifting but also painfully honest, *Monday Morning Emails* deals with 'tough' subjects, many of which are not only pertinent to global living – mothers are mothers, wherever home may be. Jo and Terry Anne hope this book will enlighten, guide, and offer solace to all who share this mobile life. It is indeed heartfelt, and true.



### Excerpt from *Monday Morning Emails* Terry Anne writing to Jo

Monday, May 8, Kimberley, British Columbia,

But Matt wasn't okay. Luke was on a gap year before his Master's degree and living with me at the time in Calgary – I don't know how I would have managed without him. Not only did I cry on his shoulder as I mourned my middle son's descent into reclusiveness, I wondered what I was doing in my home country after 23 years overseas. Of course, it is where I was meant to be at that difficult time. Yet still, I felt my world had turned upside down.

Living close to the university where he wasn't really going to classes any longer, Matt chose to shun medication or counselling, and mostly hid away in his bedroom in a shabby student apartment. There were two roommates and a few friends, but soon they would mostly disappear from his life as he became more and more introverted. Like his friendships, his promise to the doctor to eat well and exercise to combat depression had fallen by the wayside.

At the height of it, his grandparents visited and wanted to see him. It was Easter. I pleaded, I begged. "You need to see family, Matt. You aren't helping yourself by locking yourself away."

My father asked where his grandson was and I had to admit that he wouldn't be joining us – he just couldn't bring himself to. Sitting at my dining table, I watched my father weep and his heart ache. He cried for me, for our family, and for his talented baseball-hockey-football-player grandson. He and my mother now understood how serious it was.

The next week, I resorted to threatening my 21-year-old. "I'm picking you up at 2pm. If you are not out of that apartment waiting for me, I will physically come and drag you out!" Matt appeared and in that second, my heart broke a little more. My once exuberant, outgoing and active child stood before me, a shell of himself, like a blank book. As if someone had wiped clean all the love, the beautiful memories and the magical





experiences. All those baseball games I fanatically cheered, scored, even coached... just gone. All those hockey games his father had driven him to while managing the team...

didn't happen. All those incredible times sand duning, camping and boating while we lived in Oman. All the travelling and loving family times... all seemingly gone. Where was that go-getter who once glided across the ice as if he had been born on it? Where was that once gregarious, empathetic and well-spoken son? Where was he inside of his sturdy physique and handsome face? How I desperately wanted him back; the way he had been.

And how, just how could he be doing this to us when he had so much going for him? This unique and privileged life he and his brothers had grown up with, had none of it meant anything? Or as that the problem? There is no hometown. No life-long friends to call because they're scattered around the world. There is no touchstone. It all flashed before me. Yes, surely it was our fault because of this rootless, transient life we had given him.

But Matt was there, standing before me at the appointed time. Had he realised that he needed help? He had packed a bag. He was coming home.



## Excerpt from Monday Morning Emails Jo writing to Terry Anne

Tuesday, September 5, Bankastraat, Den Haag

There is no doubt that coming back to The Hague has been a good thing on so many levels. To some extent we all belong here and have a community. We know how things work. We

have already acquired the skill of 'natural navigation' that is required by divers – we know where we are in relation to things we recognise.

I find it soothing and expect they do too. We have never taken the boys back to Oman, but I have been back twice. I adore the fillip of recognising the familiar sights, smells, tastes and sounds. We've all been back to Dubai and though the boys were only one and two when we left, they had some sense of recognition. But for me, I only have to enter that infernal queue at passport control and I start to smile. No, I lie. The thrill begins from

the moment the plane heaves into its turn and descent that I crane to drink in every scrap of the view. And then that smell on leaving the terminal. I think it is a mix of dry ice and raw chicken mixed with musky perfume. Believe me, I have spent a long time trying to find a way of describing it and each time I return I check my description again and it still holds.

But going back to Norway? A different experience altogether. I hated Stavanger. I was depressed in Stavanger. It seemed never to stop raining and I have no recollection of ever seeing blue sky. We picked the wrong house (yes, how your Doha story



resonated) but did not move. We got burgled in the first few weeks. Sam started to show signs of unhappiness then. He was four, going on five and I expect his mood fed off mine. After years of never even wearing socks he now had to wear several layers of clothes, snowsuits topped with rain suits and fur-lined wellies. I will never forget seeing him alone in the playground at break time. He wore his yellow snowsuit, zip down because he dared not zip it up in case he never got out again. He looked so sorrowful. I used to say that I felt like the loneliest pine tree in the forest – you know, surrounded by others who looked like me. One day as I waited in a throng of mums outside the front door to fetch Sam from school my only friend, Karen, turned to me and told me she was not surprised I was struggling to connect with people.

“You never look anyone in the eyes, you know, Jo?” she said.

I was mortified but that cruel-to-be-kind message was just what I needed to hear. Karen is still one of my dearest friends.

### What the experts say...

“Wow! You both write beautifully, honestly, and with such authenticity and vulnerability,”

Becky Grappo, RNG Educational Consultants

“This book could be used for any expat mom's club or study guide. It is unique in topic and openness and never about blame, which is why it has such power!”

Ruth Van Reken, author of *Letters* and co-author of *Third Culture Kids: Growing up Among Worlds*

“Your writing is reflective and thoughtful and moved me. I treasured being allowed inside such an intimate conversation between two moms.”

Ellen Mahoney, [www.seachangementoring.com](http://www.seachangementoring.com)

“I watched the trust build as the emails progressed and could feel the momentum increasing. Wonderful!”

Dr Lesley Lewis, Psychotherapist, [Culture3Counsel.com](http://Culture3Counsel.com)

\* The 2018 Families in Transition Annual Conference will take place at World Trade Centre, The Hague, from March 8-10. For more information visit the website <http://www.figt.org/>