

China News Update

Ron & Evelyn McFarland

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Our Final Semester

We have been back in China for about six weeks. Sometimes it feels like *have nothing new to write*, and it's true we have been very busy, but it's also true that sometimes we get a little lazy about communicating. We are well into the swing of the new semester and all things are just fine. We've become old hands at lesson preparation and are able to use PowerPoint's and good activities that we have previously developed and tested; so the classes are not too challenging.

Our extracurricular activities are always presenting something new and are often exciting. Last week we had four big "baths" at our house; two teachers and two students. We are now the place with the facilities. Actually we have adapted a big, old wooden shipping crate with a sheet of heavy plastic. It works well even if it does require some set up and take-down time. Of course this means that studies are going well. All the different house groups are producing. We are always refining our teaching approaches to be as effective as we can for the present and prepare our students to be able to function independently when they leave the university. For the third year we attended a workshop in Beijing with about thirty others who do the same work as we do and were blessed with great fellowship and new insights on how to do our work more effectively.

The new semester brought new teachers to Jingzhou. One young man from England has now been installed across the hall from us. We have our three apartment rooms, and previously had use of three empty rooms across the hall that we used for storage and SS classes. Well, they put the new young man over there so we have lost some of our generous space. Being Americans we have accumulated "things" to an unacceptable degree and we are busy condensing and paring down. Our Motel 5 1/2 with the extra bed is gone so we have had to retract some invitations for visitors. Over on the Central Campus there is a new middle-aged couple from our home group. We hope that will fill in for some of our number who have moved away.

Last year while we were at home in America a friend asked us about the women over here. I am happy to report that they are going strong with their own study times several days a week. There is good interest and leadership there which is highly commendable. They are active in benevolence and attendance.

Last week all over China they were celebrating "International Women's Day". It gets much attention here. Evelyn received no less than three bouquets and two single roses as well. She said, "I felt like the 'Queen for a Day'." Notice in the picture the flower arranging style used by everyone here.

Spring is creeping in slowly. We are just beginning to see the trees bud and green up. It will be Peach Blossom Festival time soon enough. We are certainly ready for warmer temperatures. The cold seems to "set in" the concrete and tile of the buildings like it sets in your bones. However, we are no longer running the heat at full blast or wearing two layers of underwear. There have been a few nice, sunny days. I suppose that means it's time for the rainy season.



Evelyn, with Jackie and Green. Here are some of the flowers she received on International Woman's Day.

Below you can see how each flower is completely wrapped in tissue, hiding all the greenery. This is the common style for bouquet arrangements here.



Our Trip to Wuhan

Last weekend we made a trip to Wuhan, the capital city of our province. It is a huge city of 9 million, with very crowded buses and terrible traffic. But it is also where three of “our girls” now live and work as nurses. We were able to connect these three sisters with a family group there and they were very happy to meet a brother, Andy, from that family. We also were able to see Susan Bates, a new teacher there that we met in Nashville in January. She and three young men are beginning a group of students to study each Sunday. We were excited to spend the Sunday morning with them and see the eagerness of these new students. A special surprise was learning that one of the young men, Adam Smith, is the son of David and Susan Smith of Harrisburg, PA. Susan was a teenager when we moved to the Dover, DE, church in 1980. Over the years they have been very active workers and supporters of Camp Manatawny, where Adam and his brothers were campers during Elementary II week, which I directed. Last year it is was another camper-grown-up, Jessica Custer, who worked in Yichang, about one hour away.



Donna, Evelyn, Susan, and Wanda in Wuhan.

Reverse Culture Shock

Reverse Culture Shock is the name given to reactions to your home culture that are similar to those which people experience when they begin to live in a foreign culture. It just means that after living in another culture Americans can have the same stressful reactions, sometime even more so, upon returning home. We already feel some of that, but ours are probably mild reactions as this point, especially since we are still in China. But we think we see it coming.

We have certainly become impressed with how much “stuff” we accumulate as Americans. They gave us one wardrobe with about three feet of hanging space for all our clothes. With the two of us having summer and winter clothing, plus coats and jackets, we knew we needed more. We had one three foot shelf and no drawers at all for all our underwear, etc. we normally keep in a chest of drawers. Our local friends thought we were crazy when we bought two more three foot wide wardrobes, this time with three drawers in the bottom of each. After four years all are full and our coats hand between two of them on a split bamboo bar. There are very few of our clothes we look at and say, “I don’t need that.” But we know we could get by on less, and our Chinese friends have one quarter of our volume, or less. So we have begun to feel a little guilty about having so many ourselves.

Eating out on our trips home has also become a bit of a guilt trip. After fishing with 14 students and friends Saturday, we went across the street from the university for lunch at a “hole in the wall” restaurant run by a local brother. They cooked our fish and we ordered eight other dishes for the 11 who could have lunch together. Total cost for the fish (we pay the local pond owner by the lb.) and the meal was 120 RMB. I considered the \$18 for the outing and dinner for 11 people a good deal. Then, since she does not especially enjoy catching or eating fish, I took Evelyn out for dinner to a new, very nice, restaurant where we enjoy a fine meal for about the same price as it cost to go to the Pizza Hut, our place to find true “American” food in Jingzhou. Out cost was 117 RMB, basically the same as the morning outing. But this time we only fed two of us. Spending \$18 for one meal is rather extravagant here. So imagine how we feel when we pay \$25 or more for two of us in America at an average restaurant, plus a tip which is not customary here.

The Chinese think all Americans are rich, but we have always insisted that we are not rich. But now I am having a harder time saying that with a clear conscience. We have so much in America that I fear we have lost much appreciation for it. Our homes are not only huge by Chinese standards, but most all of them have heat and air conditioning, things missing in the more cramped quarters of most all the people here. New homes now often include this “luxury.” Homes in the north usually have heat. When you live just south of Siberia, it is a requirement. But most of the central part of the country, with weather like the central US, have neither. The climate here is comparable to Nashville, TN in the winter, but students have no heat in their rooms. I fear they will freeze in the bitter cold we sometimes have, but they weather it without complaint. It is “normal” for them. The university does put heat in our apartments, I think for fear all the Americans would go home immediately otherwise!

Americans have two cars in most families, sometimes three for only two people! Many teenagers have one also. While car sales are booming here, a personal car is still a rare luxury affordable only to a small minority. Most families have a motor bike or electric scooter for the “family car” and many still function with only bicycles. Seeing three or four on one scooter or motorbike is not unusual. One lady who is a nurse has brought her son to our English Corner the past few weeks. She works with a brain surgeon who brings his son and learned about it from him. In

talking with her (through a translator) we learned that she takes her 5 yr. old son to preschool every day on her bicycle—a one hour trip—before she goes to work. Parents and grandparents travel in city traffic on a scooter with youngsters as young as two standing in front of them, between their arms, as they maneuver in and out of the heavy traffic. You would be arrested in America for that, but it is the best most can afford. Many of the university teachers arrive at work every day on a bicycle. Dr. Pan, a sister who was the head medical officer at the university until she retired a couple of years ago, rode her bicycle every day. She could not afford a car, and she had a good job. How can I look at all these things and still say, “I am not rich.”?

How will we deal with these experiences when we live back in the US where most of what we have is far beyond the reach of our friends here? Will I feel guilty every time I drive my car to the restaurant and enjoy a good meal, knowing a family of three could eat for two days here on what I will spend?

Our Biggest Surprise in China

We learned most of what we knew about China, and Chinese culture, prior to 2007 in the mid-60’s while attending Harding. After that the news of the 70’s was about the Cultural Revolution, a period about as far from modern China as one can get.

Of course, we were aware of the rise of their economy and their producing many products we buy in the US, but had no updated insight into the lives of most of the people or the political climate. So we were very surprised to learn how most all of the business here is really free enterprise - capitalistic in nature - not owned by the government. We were also quite impressed with the huge modern cities like Beijing and Shanghai.



A Chinese “parking lot” on a busy day.

But there was one thing we were totally surprised by. The students are always extremely kind and generous to us, eager to be helpful in any way. But this spirit is limited in surprising ways. For example, Chinese never say “Thank you” to family or friends, only to strangers or casual acquaintances. Why? “Because family and friends are *expected* to help you, but strangers are not.” This translates into a concern for those close to you, while there may be total disregard for all others. Courtesy toward strangers is all but nonexistent. So, we can be standing in front of the elevator and when the door opens, students we do not know will barge in front of us and jump on, leaving us standing outside. Those who know us would never do that, but if we are strangers it is different. No one seems to notice or care, except perhaps some of our friends who observe this.

We had heard about the ritualized courtesy of the orient, so we had expected to find that. It seems that it is more characteristic of Japan than China. Tonight while shopping we experienced two more examples of the kind of behavior we consider extremely rude. We got out of the taxi and two young ladies waited while Ron paid the driver. Then before they could get in two other young ladies ran up and jumped in ahead of them. While in the supermarket, Ron was about to hand the man who weighs vegetables some apples when a middle aged lady reached around him to hand the clerk her item first. This is quite common and happens on almost every trip to the produce department. We have come to call it the “me first” attitude. It seems to be a “law” for all drivers that no one must be allowed to go in front of you! Tonight our taxi was about the tenth car in line, but as soon as the light turned green he began to blow his horn.

We are reminded about the instructions we live by to rise above such behavior (Luke 6:33), and even to love our enemies. Sometimes we forget how much the values of the Master have influenced everyday behavior in America, even if many people no longer know the roots of values like kindness to strangers, generosity to the needy, and self sacrifice in service to others—even those who do not know us or love us. We have much for which to be thankful.

We are especially thankful to our father for all of you and your unfailing encouragement and support these past four years!

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