



020124 Fun At Banquets

We arrived in Yantai late Saturday night (Jan05), bagless and tired after our 29 hour journey. We were met at the airport by my friend Hu Jie who I had met at English Corner at Didi during my year as a teacher. We have emailed back and forth ever since and so it was fun to get to see her. We checked into our hotel after some haggling over the price and then went to have dinner. The restaurant bathroom was Jeff's first view of an eastern toilet which I think unnerved him a little, but he hung in there. Actually, Jeff was really good about food during the trip. All that he asked was that I never order dog meat which was fine with me because the one time that I had eaten dog was when I had gone out of my way to find it at a restaurant.

We awoke early the next morning to go to the Catholic church in Yantai. I used to teach an English class there every Sunday along with my friends Kiquis and Shannon. The three of us were connected not only because we taught at the church, but also because we had all volunteered at different times with the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta. Unfortunately, both Kiquis and Shannon were absent due to traveling for the winter holiday. In fact, Kiquis was in the process of traveling overland from Yantai to Katmandu and then down to Calcutta. But, nonetheless, it was really good to be in the church again. I felt so much more connected to that church in Yantai than any church that I have found in Copenhagen and it was a source of strength for me when I lived in Yantai.

After church, we set off to English Corner at Didi Hamburger. I really like Didi, not necessarily because of the food, but because the people who work there have always been very kind and friendly to me. It is also a very good place to meet people :) or just to sit and to write in your journal. Didi hosts the English Corner every Sunday so that people can meet to speak in English for a few hours. So, the attendance of a foreigner is most welcome and we were swarmed with requests to sit at this table or that as soon as we entered. Once you get past the questions like "Do you like Chinese food?", English Corner can be a lot of fun since you can learn a lot about China and peoples' opinions. Talking slowly and clearly with dozens of people for two hours nonstop tends to wear me out, so I was worried about Jeff on his first day. But, he took his own table and jumped right in.

At English Corner, we also met the current WorldTeach (WT) volunteers: Amy, Liz and Jeff and the field director, Aileen. I have corresponded via email with both Amy and Aileen in the past and so it was really nice to finally get to meet them in person. So, after English Corner we all went to a noodle restaurant to slurp down the hand-pulled noodles and to chat. It turned out that all of the volunteers but Aileen were from New England. Amy is from Dartmouth, MA, but originally from Hingham which is very close to both my parent's and sister's houses. Liz is from Fairfield CT and Jeff is from RI. Aileen is from the Philippines, so a little removed from New England, but very cool despite not being a New Englander. The WT group was a lot of fun to hang out with and over the course of our stay, we would see a lot of them.

In the afternoon, Jeff and I went to visit Li Mei at her hutong where she presented us with gifts of porcelain figures that she had made. Li Mei has always been uncomfortably

generous. I say uncomfortably because she gives so freely from what little she has whereas I have so much in comparison. Then off to dinner at Big Advertisement (a lot of our favorite restaurants have names that we gave to them because we could not read the Chinese characters). Big Advertisement was a favorite for its squid and basi tonguar which had been making my mouth water at just the thought of them. But alas, the cook had changed and so the food was not as I remembered it.

Monday (Jan07) is when things got really crazy because I called Headmaster Hou to tell her that I was in Yantai. She was over to our hotel in no time where she quickly organized a lunch banquet. It was Jeffs first banquet in China and it was a lot of fun. I really got along well with the teachers and the administration of #5 school when I worked there and so it was really good to see them again. We laughed a lot and drank a lot, sending one too many of the English teachers back to class after lunch with red cheeks.

Later in the day, I would get to have a tour of the #5 school. I mentioned in the last email that the school has changed its physical appearance dramatically. The new dorm rooms are beautiful with no more than 10 students per room. The heat works and each student is given a thick quilt (the Chinese really know how to make thick, heavy quilts) along with space to put their belongings. The classrooms are the same, but there is a new push for the use of computers. The big meeting hall now has projectors so that teachers can deliver presentations with PowerPoint. The school is also using digital cameras to capture events.

I got to see a lot of my old students and was even asked to talk with one of my classes. It turned out that it was my favorite class from when I taught at the school. (The same students stay together in one class during their entire stay at the school. They then move up through the grades together.) I had hoped to see this class again, so I was really excited to lead a class. They asked lots of questions about what I was doing now and if I was coming back to teach. They remembered the song "I'm A Little Teapot" very well (a huge hit at my school) and so I taught them another song with Jeff's help.

The class at #5 or the classes that I would have at #9 were easy because I could just have fun with the kids and use material that I knew worked. I do miss teaching the kids. The classes could be a lot of work and the kids not always the most disciplined, but at the same time, they were a lot of fun and I miss having the kids all around. I definitely hope to return to volunteer teaching someday.

Jeff and I finished our tour of the school and ran over to meet Hu Jie for dinner at her aunt and uncle's house. Our second full day and Jeff was about to enter his second home in Yantai. We were also joined at dinner by Hu Jie's cousin and his wife who had just driven to Yanti from Zibo (a city also in Shandong Province) and had brought lots of food from Zibo with them. Dinner was very good and the whole family very kind. Jeff, however got to sample one of the local liquors which I try to avoid. It is called Three Penis Wine. I am not sure exactly what it is, but it is referred to as a medicine and is foul, foul stuff. I declined, but Jeff jumped right in and toasted though the dinner with the cousin who was the only other person drinking.

On Tuesday morning (Jan08), we were picked up from our hotel by Ms. Hou's driver and taken to the #9 Middle School where she is the headmaster. Along the way, we picked up Vica who is a Russian woman who has been studying in China and was teaching English at #9 for the week. Before I knew it, Vica and I were teaching a class together in front of a television news crew. The class would be broadcast over the evening news later in the week. Having lived in China for a year, such a turn in events was of no surprise since the presence of not one, but two foreign teachers at #9 would be sure to be of advertisement value for the school. You just give up control and roll with the events as they unfold. The class was fun to do, but Vica was very intimidated since Jeff and I were the 2nd and 3rd people from the US that she had ever met and she was nervous about her English skills. However, we would team teach a class again later in the week and she would be much more relaxed.

Following class, a banquet was held at a nearby restaurant. Ms Hou, Vica and I were in one room along with many of the English teachers from #9. Jeff was in another room along with the Party Secretary of #9 and several more of the English teachers. The banquet was fun as always and since Ms. Hou knows many of my favorite Chinese dishes, she ordered many of them. Jeff had quite an experience at this banquet. This is his story, but I will tell it to you anyway. He was sitting next to the Party Secretary, a chain smoking, big drinker who was pretty crazy. A new dish was put on the table and as the guest, the meat was put on Jeff's plate. Jeff picked it up and was chewing it as the Party Secretary tried to tell Jeff in his broken English what it was.

"I think that you call this in America, . . . um . . ."

"Yes?" Jeff asked as he kept chewing

"I think that you call this, um, . . ."

"Uh huh?"

"DOG!"

"Ah!" Jeff gasped, thinking of his two dogs at home and discretely spit it out.

I have had dog before, but I was very surprised to see it at the banquet. Unfortunately, it was not as good as the other dog that I have had.

We wrapped up the day with shopping in Yantai and then dinner with Hu Jie and her friends to celebrate her birthday. Later that night, we also met up with the WT group for drinks at a bar called Cape of Storms. Unfortunately, it is also the hang out of some sketchy foreigners who work for private companies. There are unfortunately some sketchy foreigners in Yantai who are older men with young Chinese girlfriends who frequent the Western restaurants and bars. It is for this reason that I have always preferred to avoid the Western establishments other than Didi.

 [Previous](#) | [Next](#)  | [Return to Main Page](#)
