



020128 At Least One Good Egg

Karaoke

The day after our banquet, Sunday (Jan13) was spent by going to mass and then to English Corner. Afterwards, we visited with friends including the parents of Liz, one of the WT volunteers. They had just arrived in Yantai and were a lot of fun. In the evening, we went to dinner with Ms. Li and Jenny, two teachers from the #5 Middle School. At the dinner, they surprised us with gifts of paintings done by a former calligraphy teacher from #5. The paintings were of older Chinese characters which our friends could not read. So, the painter translated the paintings into Chinese and Ms. Li translated them into English for us.

After dinner, we went to a karaoke hall for a little singing. Karaoke is immensely popular in China because it is an inexpensive form of entertainment that the whole family can enjoy. We went to a place where you can rent a 15'x10' room by the hour. In the room are a few couches, a coffee table and of course, a TV with karaoke. You can even order tea and snacks if you get hungry. The calligraphy teacher knew the owner and so we were given lots of snacks as we sang. The karaoke machine had lots of English songs such as the Carpenters, Neil Diamond, or Bob Denver and it would grade your singing once you finished based on pitch and if you kept good time with the music. I used to shy away from Karaoke, but now I find myself reaching for the microphone to belt out a song or two.

Last Day in Yantai?

Monday (Jan14) was to be our last day in Yantai. We purchased our airplane tickets to depart for Shanghai late in the evening so that we could spend the day saying goodbye to people. We packed our bags, threw them into left luggage after checking out of our hotel and set off for lunch with Li Mei. We devoured jaozi in what turned out to be a very sad parting. We also met our friends from WT at the new coffee house to bid farewell to them. Afterwards we wandered about until it was time to meet our entourage at our hotel to be driven to the airport.

We were met by several of the teachers from #5 as well as Ms. Hou. However, as we drove to the airport which is a good 30km from the city, the fog which had rolled in that evening got thicker. We arrived at the airport to find that our flight was delayed. Calls to the airport in Shanghai revealed that the flight had not even left there yet because Shanghai was fogged in as well. The hour was growing late so we took the option to have our tickets stamped so that we could return them the next morning for a refund rather than to spend the night waiting for a plane that might never go. Especially since we did not want our Chinese friends to be at the airport all night waiting with us since they all had early mornings. So, we would gain another day in Yantai which was not a bad thing.

On a quick side note, perhaps it is for the upcoming Spring Festival, but for some reason the police force in Yantai had a presence that I have never seen before. There were policemen at the major intersections to make sure that cars and bikes actually stopped for red lights, thus snarling up the traffic that usually just flowed. The traffic rules in Yantai are funny. You see cars that make left turns by driving down the wrong side of the road until they are able to get over. Cars just pull out of streets and are avoided by the cars which are already in the road. The intricate dance that all of the traffic is constantly performing in an endless motion is mind-boggling. Driving on sidewalks is ok, but as we found out at the airport, crossing a double yellow line at the airport drop off is grounds for a fine. The driver had just barely cross the line which divided the drive from the sidewalk when a policeman came over and asked for his papers. It looked like a fine was coming until a second policeman came over. It turned out that the driver knew the second policeman and so the fine was dropped and the driver was allowed to park the car. It always comes down to who you know.

Surprise

We fared no better with our travel plans the next day (Jan15). We went to the China Eastern ticket office, but they told us that it was unlikely that the Shanghai flights would go that day. They refunded our money and suggested that we call the airport in the afternoon to see if the flights would go. If so, we could just buy our tickets at the airport rather than having to go through the hassle of buying and returning tickets again.

Since everyone thought that we were in Shanghai, we were able to surprise Amy and Aileen (WorldTeach) as they ate breakfast at one of the hotels. Liz had left with her parents to travel, so we moved our bags to the WT office where there was now an extra bed so that we could save money on the hotel. The fog never cleared, but rather turned into a downpour unlike any I had ever seen in Yantai, dampening all hope that our flight to Shanghai would go that day. This was confirmed by Ms. Li and Ms Hou who called the airport as we ate a final lunch together.

Since the flights to Shanghai were canceled for the day, we opted to go to Qingdao the next morning by train instead. From Qingdao, we planned to travel by overnight train to Beijing. We bought our train tickets and spent the rest of the afternoon with Amy. In addition to teaching her classes at the school, Amy had been tutoring in English the daughter of a dress maker. Since she had the connection, Amy had bought several custom made silk pants and shirts. It is one of the mysteries of China that custom tailored clothing costs less than clothing that you can buy off the rack in one of the department stores. Plus, Amy could show the dressmaker the design that she wanted and the dressmaker could make an identical piece out of any material that Amy chose. Since Amy had the connection Liz, her parents, Jeff and I also had things made. Jeff bought all sorts of silk clothing for his wife. So, we returned to the popular dressmaker so that Amy could pick up some things that she had ordered and so Jeff could take some pictures.

Amy left to go to a farewell banquet and Jeff and I went to have our final dinner in Yantai. Our train would leave at 7:30 the next morning. Amy was also leaving Yantai the next day. She would catch a 9:00 train along with Aileen and Jeff to go to Shanghai. From Shanghai, Amy would fly to Thailand to spend a few weeks before then going to Vietnam and Cambodia.

We met back up with Amy later in the evening at her apartment at the Yantai Experimental School, where she taught. Both the WT office and Amy's apartment were located in the same building as the dorms for the elementary school students and the cafeteria. Every night when the students return from their classes to get ready for bed, they would call out Amy's name and watch for her at the metal gate that separated the dorms from the WT offices. Amy went out to see the students and told them that this was her last night in Yantai. The little girls were so cute. They wanted to hold and kiss Amy's hands to say goodbye.

You can see video of the students at:

The ironic part of all of this is that Amy is from Massachusetts. She grew up in a town called Hingham which is about 30 minutes from where my parents live and even closer to my sister Laura's house. Amy's parents now live in Dartmouth, which is still close to my parent's home. We grew up very near each other, but I had to travel to the other side of the world to find her. I never usually talk about my personal life in these emails, but Amy is the person that I met during our travels in China. Amy and I had actually corresponded via email this past summer as she got ready to go to Yantai. Lots of people who are interested in WT email me for more information about WT after finding my web site and I am happy to help. And Jeff and I were leaving for Qingdao the next day, meaning that we had to say goodbye the next morning.

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