

001017 Another Day In China

I had planned on sending out the weekly email on Monday after classes, but events that unfolded Sunday night prevented this from happening. I had gone out to dinner with friends after which I decided to go running. It was 9PM, but I could run despite the darkness on a cinder track in the school yard. I actually do this quite often as it is quiet and a good chance to think by myself. And as the alternative is to wake up at 5AM to beat the traffic and the accompanying smog, running at night is more appealing.

I had already run several laps and as I began to increase my stride, it happened. I stepped on a small rock and my ankle rolled and popped. I lay (I didn't fall, but I sat down) in the dirt as images of pain and having to wear a cast shot through my head. But, it was nonsense as I had only sprained my ankle. I hopped up to my room and put the ankle in cold water to keep the swelling down.

The next morning, I found that putting weight on the foot hurt and it was a bit swollen. However, it did not hurt otherwise, so I predicted that it was indeed just a bad sprain. I got dressed (walking on the foot all the while) and went downstairs to find Ms. Wang, an English teacher who often helps me with problems. I explained that I had class in an hour, but as I could not stand, I would need to cancel. She was awesome and took care of the class and insisted on a trip to the hospital which I intended to do anyway.

We took a cab later that morning to the Yuhuangding Hospital, the best in Yantai. I had been here once before in March when I got very ill from some food I had eaten. I knew a doctor at this hospital who spoke English and was recommended by IAMAT, an international health care program of which I am a member. We found the doctor and she once again refused payment, despite her being an expert at the hospital. She ordered x-rays to be taken and we went to the scariest x-ray place I have ever seen.

Well, actually all of the hospital is scary with dark, grotty halls and just not very clean looking. However, a new building is still in the works. The double doors from the hallway opened to a big, grotty room with the x-ray machine and a booth for the technicians. About the x-ray room and outside the open doors, patients waited for the name to be called so they could hop onto the platform. No one but the technicians was protected from the radiation. I hopped onto the table that had just been vacated by a man getting his guts x-rayed. Ms. Wang stood next to me as the images were made. I shudder to think of how much radiation I was exposed to that day. However, two x-rays only cost Y20 (~\$3).

Anyway, we went back to school after the x-rays as the development would take about two hours. The school sent me a meal from the cafeteria and I waited to return to the hospital that afternoon. Ms Wang came back during a visit by Lisa, our field director. Ms Wang showed me the results of the x-ray. Broken. Game over, as my students would say. About the size of a piece of rice, she explained. "I have a crack about 2mm thick in my ankle?" I wondered. Suddenly, whether due to all of the walking or due to the knowledge that I had broken my ankle, it began to hurt.

We went back to the Yuhuangding Hospital to find that the expert doctor had left for the day, but another doctor specializing in bones was present. He looked at the ankle and at the x-rays and said that surgery was necessary. He showed me where a bit of bone had broken off of the femur and was now floating free in my ankle. So, there was not a crack, but a bone chip the size of a piece of rice floating around. "No big deal, we just go in and cut it out," he explained. "Not happening," I thought. But, then he went on to conclude that since I was not an athlete, the piece of bone probably did not matter, so I would just need to wrap the ankle in gauze. (Hello, I broke it running!) He went on to tell me that I should stay off it for four weeks, but as crutches were not available, I should do so by hopping on one foot. For four weeks.

We thanked him, explained that we were going for a second opinion, got the x-rays and went to another hospital. The ankle was really hurting now. We went to Mt. Yantai hospital. What a difference from the Yuhuangding Hospital! It was modern and spotless and unlike the Yuhuangding Hospital, there were not crowds of people. The Yuhuangding Hospital gets the crowds because it is the best and people come from all around Yantai to get treatment there. People are not as eager to to Mt. Yantai, I later learned because a year earlier a man had received the incorrect shot and had died. No big deal, that happens in the US as well and I just have a broken ankle.

We were seen by a great doctor who prescribed a cast, crutches and traditional Chinese medicine for the ankle. The cast was a funky web cast that can get wet. Once the cast was put on, we were told the price and the haggling began. Haggling in the hospital! Now I have seen everything. Ms. Wang got the cost down by Y200. Try that in a US hospital. In all, the whole experience cost around Y600, about \$75 for three doctors, a cast, x-rays and awful, nasty crutches. I spent two hours Monday night attacking the crutches with my Leatherman to file down the splinters and the sharp corners that were tearing apart my hands. I knew that being an Eagle Scout and a Professional Engineer would pay off someday.

So now we are trying to figure out what to do, due to the conflicting diagnoses. The break has been described by one doctor as a Malleolar fracture, whatever that means. I am not planning on leaving China early unless surgery really is necessary for this sort of break. In that case, I will head back to Boston to get the cutting done. Andrew, one of the other WT volunteers said that he had a similar break occur a few years ago. It was described as a March Fracture which occurs when a ligament is pulled from the bone, taking some of the bone with it. It can not be fixed, so rehab is necessary. I will be sending my x-rays to his dad who is a doctor in Dallas to have them examined to see what he thinks.

I do not want to leave Yantai unless I need to leave for surgery. Hopping on crutches is going to be awful as I walk everywhere in Yantai and do so all of the time. The market, the grocery store and the internet cafe are all walks that need to be made. I thought that I got stared at before. This is going to be a nightmare! But, I will get to explore what being handicapped, even just temporarily is like in China. I can still teach which is why I am here. I will just need to rely on my students to help me with the blackboard. This will definitely be an interesting month here in China. And I am in pretty good spirits, the ankle does not hurt and my friends at the school and in Yantai are being awesome.

So, please keep me and my ankle in your prayers. Hopefully we can nail down a diagnosis soon so that I can get back to running at night.

I wrote all of the above on Monday night using a computer at the school and I had saved it to disk. I had intended to add it as a footnote to the email that I had already written for the week. (Get it, footnote?) Anyway, I hobbled to the internet cafe to find that my disk was suddenly unreadable. All of the work had been destroyed. Bummer. Needless to say, it has been a really bad week.

But, I have some updates since this email was written. The x-rays have been FedExed to a doctor in Dallas. Apparently, Andrews dad is a pretty famous doctor who is planning on showing it to a very good bone doctor. The bone doctor is not just good, he is the doctor who invented the recovery procedures for this type of break, so I am told. So, I should be getting a very good diagnosis from the States in a few days.

WorldTeach in Boston has also consulted doctors who are saying that for this sort of break, a rigid cast is not the proper procedure. WorldTeach is recommending an immediate trip to Hong Kong to see a doctor there who is a specialist. I may be leaving as early as Friday. I have always wanted to go to HK, but not like this.

Xiao Li (Helen) was very helpful and found me a much better pair of crutches. However, finding crutches for someone of my height in China is a difficult task. We were able to drill new holes in the crutches to make them taller, but they are still too short. So, my back is now killing me even more than normal due to the short crutches.

People on the street have actually been awesome. Cars actually stop to let me across the street as a hobble about. And in places like the FedEx office or the computer store, people get me chairs, water and the like to make sure I am comfortable. Being on crutches here will not be as bad as I thought on Monday.

So, we shall see what happens. I will keep you posted.

Take care,

Jeff

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