

001120 Imagine

Imagine. You are arriving at the school that you teach at. The street is a busy one with a lane in each direction for the traffic. There is also a lane on each side for all of the bicycles and mopeds that are the most common means of transportation. The walls of the buildings to the sides of the metal barred gate are made of concrete covered brick. These squat, concrete buildings, badly in need of some paint, line the street. The first floors of the buildings are occupied by little shops selling VCD's, groceries, flowers or haircuts. There are also little restaurants tucked in here or there. The top four floors are all dedicated to people's houses. Looking up, you can see the windows of the kitchens and every now and then you can see people cooking.

You approach the gate and say, "Ni hao" (hello) to the gate keeper (or keepers). Often he is sitting on the stool in front of the little building to the left of the gate. The little building has a sloped roof of clay tiles and windows so that the keeper can look out. Inside is a coal stove to cook on. The exhaust from the stove is circulated under the keeper's hard, stone and wood bed to keep him warm during the cold, winter nights. The keeper smiles and waves. Maybe he asks you about a package that you are carrying or offers you a peanut.

You continue to walk along a paved road that goes forward. Another road is to the left, immediately after a little clump of trees beside the keeper's house. Ahead of you is the corner of the playground for the students. You turn left to walk down the street. There is a sidewalk to your right with a row of pine trees immediately beyond it. On the other side of the pine trees are some exercise bars and a sort of jungle gym. Beyond the bars is a cinder track (beware of rocks if running) that circles a large, concrete playground. There are four basketball hoops inside the track. There are also concrete volleyball courts beside the track. The playground is edged by scattered trees along its perimeter and is enclosed by buildings.

The building ahead of you is a white, five story building, tiled with bathroom tiles (very popular in China.) Each floor has a concrete balcony. This building is the boarding school (BS) building. You see the doors and windows of five classrooms per floor. As you are walking you notice that the students are between classes. The students are out on the balconies talking and playing and fooling around.

On the opposite side of the playground are the five story houses . To the right of the boarding school building is the non-boarding school (NBS) building. This building is also five stories tall and covered with orange bathroom tiles. To the right of the NBS building is a six story, white building that is home of the dormitories for the boarding school students. There are big windows on each floor, allowing you a glimpse of the students' bunk beds in each room.

There are students in the playground running on the track (just playing), playing football (soccer), and playing basketball. There are also clumps of students playing on the exercise bards or standing and talking in groups. Occasionally you see students playing

badminton without nets. As you follow the road to the end and turn right towards the NBS building, you are greeted by students calling "Gi Fu" (your Chinese name), or "Hello, Jeff". You say hello back, but there are so many students. So, you just say hello over and over and try to make eye contact with everyone.

The students are dressed in various outfits, but as these are the BS students, they predominantly wear their exercise outfits (for lack of a better description). The BS outfits are a nylon jacket and pants that are white, maroon and navy blue. These are different than the NBS outfits which are purple, white and red. On the back of all both are the words, "Overseas Chinese M.S."

You walk to the far end of the BS building where the stair case is located. You pass the nurses office and the first floor bathrooms. The bathrooms are all near the stairs as are the offices. The bathrooms are divided into boys and girls by floor. Climbing the stairs can be a fragrant experience some days. You climb the five floors of stairs, greeted at every turn by a hello. You recognize your student's faces, but you can not remember their names. You are now a hello machine at full throttle. Sometimes students want to ask you questions or to ask "what's up?" But, mostly they want to say hello.

Finally you reach the top floor and see an aluminum door frame with a window to the right. Further down the hall are more classrooms. You open the door with your keys and enter your apartment. The apartment is always pretty noisy, but especially so in the evening during dinner house when the students rush back to watch TV. But, it is big and it is home.

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