



020125 Worried Parent

Wednesday (Jan09) was a laid back day after the previous two luncheon banquets (which leave you drunk and full by noon). We visited the #5 school and did a lot of shopping for gifts. I think that you can find better quality items in Yantai than in Beijing for less because I know where to go for them in Yantai. Included in our list of purchases is a set of pans for making mantou (steamed bread) and baozi (big dumplings) that I wound up lugging all over China. We also purchased silk clothing and just one or two DVD's including the Lord of the Rings.

We had dinner with Li Mei in the evening. Our dinner was punctuated with the sounds of terrible karaoke coming from the banquet room next door which kept us all laughing. During the meal, Li Mei told us that her grandmother was very ill and in the hospital. I had known that her grandmother had been in the hospital several times in the past with a heart condition and that Li Mei had quit her job to take care of her grandmother. Li Mei was very upset because her grandmother is a Catholic and wanted to pray, but Li Mei is a Buddhist and she did not feel that she could pray for her grandmother. From our talks over the past two years, Li Mei knew that I am Christian (she always wanted to know why), so she asked Jeff and I to visit her grandmother the next day to pray with her. It was a request that obviously could not be turned down, so the next afternoon, Jeff and I accompanied Li Mei to the Yu Huan Ding hospital.

You may remember from my China emails in 2000, my descriptions of the hospital from my two visits (stomach, ankle). The old hospital was worn down and simply gross, for lack of a better word. The new hospital, however was beautiful with white floors and walls. We accompanied Li Mei into a ward where there were probably 8 – 10 beds with patients. Each patient had family around them to take care of them. Li Mei's two sisters and her mother were all present with her grandmother. I think that they have been taking turns at caring for her since she arrived in the hospital. I know both of Li Mei's sisters (they are all old enough that they were born before the one child policy), but it was my first time to meet her mother and grandmother. Her grandmother was definitely not doing well and I am not sure if she even realized that we were there. She certainly could not see us well due to very apparent cataracts on both eyes.

That Jeff and I went to visit and pray with the grandmother obviously meant a lot to the family. But, it was a privilege to do this little thing for a family which has always been so generous to me. And, the best part is that later in the week we would receive word that the grandmother had gotten better enough to even leave the hospital.

We had jaozi with Li Mei for lunch after the visit and then went to hang out at Didi hamburger. We hung out there with the WT group who we met in the street for a while and wrote in our journals. I also got to meet my friend Zhao Xing Yuan there for a few hour. She like I, is a professional student, currently studying at the Ocean University in Qingdao. But, she has family in Yantai and returned there to study for the big exams at the end of this month. We have emailed since I left China in 2000 and she always sends me postcards from her travels in China.

In the evening, we were picked up by Ms. Hou's driver to be taken to a huge banquet which was attended by teachers from both the #5 and #9 schools. Dinner was a lot of fun and followed by karaoke and disco, all in the same room. The table which was big enough for 18 people was moved and the TV with karaoke machine was turned on. Every now and then, they would turn down the lights and start the disco ball. These self-contained parties can be a lot of fun and everyone had a chance to belt out their favorite songs.

By Friday (Jan11) I was feeling really worn out. My Chinese had come back rapidly, but I really had to concentrate all the time to understand what was being said. Speaking was not as difficult as listening because of the extraordinary patience that the Chinese are willing to show with my bad Chinese. I have forgotten all of my tones, so people must understand what I am saying from the context. I mentioned this problem to Xing Yuan who disagreed saying that I spoke some words very well. Talk about a left handed complement. Plus with the teaching and meeting with so many people, I felt that I have to always be "on", which really wears you out over the course of a few days.

Jeff and I had planned to go to Penglai, a city near Yantai for the morning to check out the famous and beautiful sites there. We planned to return in the afternoon so that I could teach another class at #9 for publicity photos. Jeff opted to go on his own, rather than to wait. I took him to the bus station and made sure that he got his ticket. I stood in the station, watching him wander out to find his bus, feeling like a parent watching their kindergartner heading off for the first day since Jeff's Chinese skills were just beginning to develop.

I rested and began to worry when Jeff had not returned by 3 o'clock when the driver came to take me to the school. I then taught another class with Vica which was again fun to do since we could use our best material such as the song "Head Shoulders Knees and Toes" which is always a hit with all of the motions included.

By the end of the class, I was most certainly the worried parent because Jeff had not yet shown up. I could just picture him, lost on the wrong bus and not able to say where he was trying to get to. Vica was appalled that I had let him go on his own, but Ms. Hou just took it in stride. They were both humored by my responses to questions such as when we would leave for Shanghai. "Monday, if Jeff is still alive." But, it all worked out in the end when Ms. Hou called Jeff in our hotel room just as he walked in the door after a fun day at Penglai. Whew.

That night we attended a party thrown by Amy, Aileen and Liz at the WT office at the Yantai Experimental School. This was their second party of the year and they invited tons of random people including teachers, students and just people that they had met in Yantai. The party was more western in that it did not center around dinner. Instead, people talked and danced which threw the Chinese guests off a little during the first party. But, based on the attendance on Friday, the parties were a big hit. The biggest hit of the night was when they decided to start the Limbo, which proved to be a big hit.

The Limbo as well as some of the banquets have all been captured on video and I will soon put them on line so that you can see clips for yourself.

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