

Gansu Province Team 2016

Phyllis Merrit's emailed reports, with pictures

12 July 2016:

We have concluded our second day of classes and all agree that we have the most wonderful students, best place to live, greatest climate, and best food of any of the Teams. (We have not seen where they are, but those places couldn't be any better).

We do cause quite a stir going down the street as everyone is so friendly and does desire to take a mobile phone picture of and with us.

Church services were quite moving on Sunday as we entered to hear the choir sing and then there were prayers and a good sermon---we read from the scriptures used. About Lazarus and life everlasting. As usual, the people have their Bibles open and take copious notes. The concluding prayer brought out tissues for Sara and me. All the people prayed at the same time, very softly all over the church, some kneeling prostrate at the altar or in the aisles. Then I was invited to say words of welcome from our churches back home and we went to see the children's SS class. They sang for us and showed us their Bibles and lessons. There were pictures made all around. Even someone in the choir took our picture during church!

Beginning classes the first day went well, but students were much more relaxed and uninhibited in their free speech today. Seems all our hard planned lessons will work!

We have two helpers full time with a third to start for me tomorrow. My current helper has a one year old baby and she needs to spend time with her.

I have begun to learn the rudiments of working with a really Smart Board. Think NCIS or Hawaii 50 with hands moving stuff across the screen! Fortunately I have Nigel in my first two hours and he and I are going to be able to make it work.

Tomorrow (Wednesday) will be a tougher afternoon as we each teach two different one - hour specials in the afternoon---finishing up Special One and Starting Special Two. So we have to change subjects with only a ten minute break. But we can do this, we are English Teachers. My first one is about Teaching Activities and the second on Pronunciation. Lots of stuff for the walls. (But I have my kazoos ready).

So many more words could be used to tell about these wonderful people, but I need to get ready for classes!

Much love to all!

Phyllis





16 July 2016:

Team Texas finished our first week of classes successfully . . . everyone is still intact and Chinese English teachers are telling us that they are beginning to wake up thinking in English.

Our class members are really working hard, and are delightful. We have had fun introducing them to new teaching methods and they are becoming fearless in trying them out. One told me that normally in teacher training classes they must sit and listen as someone lectures. Nothing of that kind here! We are moving about, and having lots of opportunities for them to practice conversation.

We have eaten many meals at the hotel restaurant and observed lots of wedding celebrations going on. But have also been taken to eat beef noodles two or three times (Joel's favorite, besides dumplings) and to eat at the "buckwheat restaurant" as well as hot pot---but the kind of hot pot where you get your own pot and choose your own vegetables and spices! (That is my favorite kind of hot pot).

Our Teaching Assistants are Regina and Ella (at first we thought she said "Anna") and I have Clark, (Monica was subbing for him the first of the week while he was passing his driving exam. He did, but as yet owns no car).

Saturday gave us a nice break from classes. The guys on the team (Dennis and son Joel) went to climb a mountain---swinging bridges, 150 steps up the final climb, etc. Whilst we girls (Sara and I) managed to go shopping for a bit and even made some purchases at the pharmacy--for just in case. We also found a large mosque, just up the street from the movie theater which shows previews outside on a large screen---very mod. We met one of Sara's students on the street, Miracle, on his way to the gym to work out. Then we went on to an outdoor market. We are always the cause of mobile phones coming out and requests to "take a photo." If they know any English they ask where we are from and we are told "Welcome to China." A convoy of advertising trucks actually stopped so the lead driver could lean over, roll down the window, and take a picture of us! We have taken 2 or 3 (hundred? thousand?) pictures ourselves. There are always some precious babies around who somehow capture our attention.

After a big lunch of Beef Noodles at the Halal restaurant Saturday afternoon, we went to see the park, which has a museum, monument, and pagoda about the place here where three branches of the Red Army met in 1936 as part of the Long March. They had also recreated the city gate, so it is all very pretty and lots of people come here to pay a visit. I can see it out my hotel window, but couldn't tell from here how many Kodak moments it has. There was even a couple there having part of their wedding pictures taken.

BEST OF ALL

We had church services this morning and it was even more special than last week. Lucy, who teaches the children was coming in by bike as we started through the passageway to the church. She had prepared a new song sheet to teach the

class. She graduated from Qingdao University in Shandong province (Lottie Moon land) but returned home three or four years ago and must be a wonderful teacher for the children (no babies, but pre-school up to and including teenagers).

We arrived in time not to have to be ushered to the front pews. But rather, sat in three pews in the middle with me on the first, Sara and Dennis on the next and Regina and Joel behind. I was sitting by the loveliest older woman, such a serene face. She reminded me of a Hawaiian grandmother (maybe because we are doing Hawaii Day tomorrow afternoon). Then another woman came and we scooted over, she pulled the red velvet cushion towards her end of the pew and we sat together. She had an older style Bible, and held it close to her face to read. She knew all the hymns so did not need the hymnbook she carried. The lady to my right had me help hold hers, though it did me little good as it was in Chinese. (After the church service, we stayed and visited with the pastor and others, but still many waited to take a picture on the steps of the church)

The sermon was from Matthew 24---Jesus will come again, we should be ready, we do not know when. It lasted a good 1 hour and ten minutes. Afterwards Regina helped me speak with the one who preached the sermon. He is a physics teacher at the Number 1 Senior School and became a Christian in 2003. So he is a lay leader in the church. More pictures were made on the steps of the church, and then the older lady who had come to sit beside me earlier during the service invited us to follow her home. We learned that she is the 90 year-old widow of the former pastor. He died only three months ago. It was such an honor to be with her. She had a special glow. We met her daughter, granddaughter and great-granddaughter. She also has two sons and other grand and great children. She said there are 6 generations of Christians in the family. Her parents were also Christians. We could only imagine the things she has seen in her lifetime. Her husband's brother is now the pastor and we think the one who gave the blessing at the end of the service.

We were served watermelon. Her house is all in one long room, with a bed and couch and desk and chairs. And there are beautiful calligraphy scriptures on the wall that her husband had made. His picture was turned to the wall (a custom), but she had Dennis take it down and turn it over to show us.

She was lovely. She uses a cane but still gets up and down the stairs and down the street, crossing with the light!
I think in heaven she will have a mansion while some of us will get more what we deserve!

We visited for a few minutes, had photos taken, and then came back to eat at our hotel restaurant.

So, we will "do our best" next week and try to provide some inspiration and give some practice to our classes.

Love,

Phyllis









27 July 2016:

Team Texas has been marveling . . .about:

how wonderful this assignment in Huining, Gansu has been,
 how fast time flies when you have new adventures almost every moment,
 how much we love those teacher assigned to us,
 how comfortable our accommodations have been,
 how great and varied the food is,
 how hard these Chinese teachers work to improve the English of their students,
 how dear it has been to worship with brothers and sisters at the church here,
 how total strangers stop us to take pictures, or tell us in the few words they can muster, "Welcome you to China,"
 how cool and crisp the weather is here. . .

Oh my, we sound like the epitome of a Texan . . . bragging on and on. We are certain that we have been prayed for and protected during our three weeks of sharing here in Huining. Thank you.

Monday afternoon, we presented a cultural lesson on American Thanksgiving, Tuesday we had a Field Day, where they named their own teams and chose their own colors (among them: Glory, Leaves of Grass, Dreaming, Winner, Happy Life, Lucky, etc.). My station was to man the three-legged race, with feet tied together with those bandanas from Texas Day . . .you have to use everything you bring!

Gold medal chocolate coins were presented to the two second place tying teams and the first place team.

Yesterday afternoon we had Christmas and today our Chinese English teachers will present a Talent Show for us. ("English Teachers can do anything!") Mornings have included conversation topics and studies from the book "Learning English." But today we do a morning Holiday Rotation, and will continue practicing "pleasure," and "famous," and those pesky "Th" sounds.

Evenings are usually caught up in lesson prep. However, last night we went to my Teaching Assistant's family home and ate from their garden: eggplant, tomatoes and eggs, and other delicious dishes prepared by Clark's mother. His father is also an English teacher---self-taught. He used to have 80-100 students in his classes. Now only 40.

We held Clark's 4 month old son and 4 year old daughter and visited with his wife and sister. An amazing and sweet experience at the side of the mountain in the 6 room home built by his father ("English teachers can do anything,") where they all live together. Clark's wife is a nurse and will return to work after six months maternity leave. Alas, Clark has been absent a few days this session as he prepares for the third of a four part driving exam so he can get his driver's license. Now that they are a family of four . . .

Tuesday night we went to eat hot pot at a karaoke music bar as guests of Dennis' class. We had a private room, no one smoked, we drank water or tea, and heard songs that were not too loud that ranged from Chinese opera to Silent Night to love songs, to a Mongolian song. We can hardly wait for the Talent Show. I had vowed to never set foot in such a place again. But it was the best experience of its kind I have had. I was wrong about Huining! This place is a delight in all ways.

Today, after lunch, Sara and I will take a quick venture off with a student to find the embroidery store. I will remember that there is still a weight limit going home. We leave here Saturday morning for Shanghai, with church service at Grace Church Sunday morning and sharing session with other teams Sunday afternoon . . . before I return home to Jack on Monday and the Hortons tour for a day in Shanghai and then take a train ride to Beijing for a few days before returning home.

We are taking a big breath and praying to finish strong! Our Teaching Assistants, Regina and Ella, are already mourning our departure with sighs of "you only have ten more days," or "In five days you will be gone," or "Only three days left." Everyone has been helpful and kind.

We are blessed,

Love,

Phyllis



