

**Baotou Inner Mongolia Team, 2017**  
**Phyllis Merritt's email reports:**

**16 July 2017**

Flying out from Waco early in the morning then . to Dallas . .to Shanghai and Nanjing.

Our Prayer Guide is attached so you can keep up with what we are doing and when (note: all of China is 13 hours ahead of Texas time).

Susan and I will be watching for our other two team members from Canada to join us at orientation.

Our assignment is to help Chinese English teachers in Inner Mongolia and will be in Guyang County, near Baotou, the largest city in IM.

(Will try to catch up with FB after August 7 when we return from *The Land of No Facebook*.)

Hard to believe that this is my 17th trip to teach in China. What a blessing this has been. So many memories, and friends, and what a lot of pictures!

Take care,  
Phyllis



**Team Members**

**Susan Lucenay, Hewitt, Texas, USA**

**Phyllis Merritt, Woodway, Texas, USA**

**Jennifer McDougall, Mount Forest, Ontario, Canada**

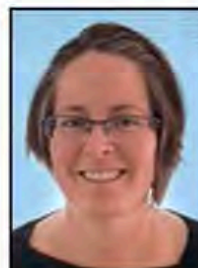
**Allie Piatkowski, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada**



Susan



Phyllis



Jennifer



Allie

We arrived at the Baotou airport about 8pm on Friday after the week of orientation in Nanjing ....all four of our team members with all of our luggage!

We were very fortunate to be accompanied by Dr. Steven Ting whose father, Bishop Ting, founded Amity 30 years ago. Steven only stays through Monday, but it has been a privilege to spend so much time with him.

We were about 4-5 hours late leaving from the Nanjing airport but while waiting they gave us a huge snack sack including a large bowl to make hot noodles (convenience noodles!). Plus we were fed during the two hour flight.

Our Education Division personnel were waiting for us and asked if we needed to eat before beginning the one or two hour drive to Guyang County. Since we had eaten at least 4 times that day, we politely declined.

Saturday we ate Beef Noodles for breakfast before visiting the Number 2 middle school where we will hold classes. The school has 1,000 students... who are currently on vacation. Some are boarding students. All village schools have been moved to Guyang so every student can attend excellent schools. So even some first graders board at their school. They learn independence early as they dress, make their beds and get their food from the canteen.

We worked on getting our rooms set up and practiced our Smart Board tech skills.

There are more than 100 English teachers in the county. About half of them went last winter to spend 21 dys in Australia. Others have been to Canada. The granting funds will allow all the teachers to go. Apparently English scores were low on the students' entrance exams and they want to change that.

We will have 80 in our program. Over half have recently visited Australia to observe classes. About ten of the senior high teachers will come a few days late as they are with their graduating students on a field trip.

So today we have Opening Assembly and will interview the teachers before dividing them into classes. Then we will finish preparing for the first day of class tomorrow. It is Show Time!

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Back from meeting our teachers this morning and doing last minute work on classrooms. They are all wonderful. Pretty high level of English. Perhaps only one Mongolian teacher though some teach at the Mongolian primary school. One has taught many years at the No 1 high school.....is highly respected .... And is a local pastor! He will be in my class, although they rotate to all the teachers.

We are excited about tomorrow.

**22 July 2017**

Report 2

So much has happened in such a short time.

We just never know what adventure will come next. But our students find out almost as soon as we do since are taken of us everywhere and posted online immediately. We went to a flower garden park that is a place where ice sculptures are made each winter. The next morning the mother of the cute child had posted pictures and our students saw them. We got to school one day and the classes knew we had eaten noodles for breakfast as the waitress had taken and posted a video of us eating. (We try to be good almost all of the time). The paparazzi are ever present. The good news is that they do not mind when we take pictures of them. And there have been more than a few taken.

Our opening assembly and interviews went well last Sunday and we placed the teachers according to their level of speaking competency. Though to all concerned it is just Phyllis Class (Blue Stars), Allie's Class (Gold Stars), Susan's Class (Green Stars) and Jennifer's Class (Red Stars). In our opinion all of our teachers are "All Stars"

They came, many early, Monday morning eager to begin. Some reported by the end of the week that they had improved their listening abilities by 50%. And they are much faster in responding and speaking to each other in discussion groups. More than that they are so interested in everything about improving their teaching skills and we have made friends quickly.

Texas Day was a huge hit, and they sang, turned bandanas into everything from two sided purses to hair bows, and made gorgeous bluebonnets. They even say "Yee Haw" without prompting. When I purchased what our Teaching Assistants termed "An Old Man" hat, they couldn't believe it when it was sprinkled down and rolled up into a proper cowboy hat.

Ten new students will appear for the first time Monday morning and we are hoping to bring them up to speed without too much difficulty.

"China is delicious." That is what Julia Childs, the famous TV chef, said in the movie, "Julie/Julia" with Meryl Streepe.

Have we ever found that to be true! In the past years with Amity, the food has been wonderful. No more losing of the ten pounds every summer. Well, this year is spectacular.

At first we went to one restaurant several times, having different delicious meals here in GuYang County (which is an hour or so away from the big city of Batou). Then one of the officials declared we might be getting tired of the "same" food, though we had never had the same dishes twice. So went at lunch one day to Dicos. Think KFC with a

Chinese twist. Our Amity friend, Dr. Steven Ting, had to leave that day to return to Nanjing. But we made him an honorary member of the "A Team."

We have since been taken to hot pot, Wallace's, where they have tacos! (for breakfast), several places that specialize in noodles, to a place serving skewers of barbeque, and the list goes on. We even went to Pizza Hut in Batou on our field trip.

We concluded a good first week of class and learned Friday morning that we had been given tickets to a huge outdoor concert, celebrating the 70th anniversary of Inner Mongolia. We wore white shirts and held up signs about a mountain for TV/boom/ drone cameras. We had VIPseating at the front on little plastic stools...low to the ground. Think pre-K. We all managed to get up from them even after several hours of sitting. There was a cast of thousands. Singers, dancers, comedians, acrobats a famous all over China vocalist, and my personal favorite, Mongolian instrument players. It rained on us a few times during the show, and umbrellas popped up everywhere, but the performers looked like nothing was wrong. Then it began to really pour so we had to leave before it was over. This was our first rain since being here.

We ate afterwards...skewers of food and big bowls of soup with nice hot tea.

We didn't leave until 8:30 for our Saturday outing....to Baotou and a Grasslands theme park. Think Central Park with tall buildings all around it. But with a Mongolian theme.

The weather was wonderful and cool most of the day. A little humid after last night's rain.

We spent quite awhile there, seeing deer (Baotou is called Deer City) photographing babies, looking yurts, climbing hills, and such. We were accompanied by the schools' official driver and his wife, Steven and Cindy our two guardians/Teaching Assistants/ "Shadows") and Miss Zhou who wanted an American name, so is now Joanna. She is afraid of her English, but getting braver by the day. She is at the school building every day, perhaps an administrator charged with making sure things run smoothly.

After touring around we went to the mall and had Pizza Hut (even Peking Duck pizza!) and then went to a mountain with more Mongolian yurts, a sort of ecological Disney park where they are trying to re-forest a mountain that looks a bit like the Sandia Mountains in Albuquerque.

Susan and Allie rode horses around a track (led by someone) The horses were branded with Chinese characters that told the name of the mountain where we were (Tian Long?).

Everyone had a good time. Steven had left us already and stayed in Batou where he lives when he is not teaching here in Guyang, to spend the rest of the weekend with his girlfriend.

We thought we were finished with sight seeing but on way back stopped at a neat Tower structure, like those on the Great Wall and is sort of a tourist welcome

to GuYang County. Then we stopped again a couple more times at potato fields, sunflower fields, watermelon fields, etc. and to take pictures of a shepherd and his sheep. We ate pork roast pieces and noodle and potato soup with wonderful broth and meat for supper when we returned to town.

We are supposed to at church at 8:15 this morning in order to get there in time for some of the pre-service song learning. We had hoped to go to the Great Wall nearby which is the oldest part of all (BC). But no driver today. Cindy said it is close enough for Steven to take us after class (in his red Malibu. We tease him that his car comes before his girlfriend!). They are not terribly keen on taking us as it is not fancy like the part near Beijing. But we want to go as it is the oldest and don't care if they don't sell t-shirts at the site.

We are treated so well and made to feel so welcome. They take every effort to make us comfortable and provide really good care for us. We are eager to attend church services and then begin planning for the week ahead. Canada Day comes Monday afternoon. Great fun as students improve their oral and aural language skills.

Love,  
Phyllis







### **24 July 2017**

Getting ready for a new week....persuaded our sweet handler, Cindy, to let us buy rolls at the bakery to bring home for breakfast this morning. We won't have to "waste" time going out to a restaurant and can get to class earlier to set up and interview the ten new students who might appear.

Sunday was too wonderful. I had mentioned that one of my students was a pastor.... Aaron, (as is his wife). We had spoken with him last Sunday in the lobby of our nice, relatively low

occupancy hotel. He had asked many questions about how to reach people. So we had no idea if his church was house-size or what. Cindy has never been to church.

Aaron said everyone would know where it was. Cindy did not but called him and we set out and bought bread at a food truck, caught the city van/bus and went down the street. We got out and started walking down a street that made to resemble older architecture, shops on either side. Friendly people walking our way, greeting us. We had gotten our hot square thick rolls out and were eating them, when we looked to the right and there was the church compound. A lovely large church with several buildings. Susan said it gave her chill bumps when she saw it.

We had been told that practice singing began at 8. We were there at 8:10. But they took us upstairs in another room to an office with couches, chairs, and a couple of beds for if a visiting preacher came Baotou or somewhere, so they could rest. We finished eating, and were led back to the church down the middle aisle and up to the front pew/cushioned bench which has a desk like feature in front of each one so you could put your things under in the shelf and take notes on the top during the sermon.

All the congregation was praying together aloud, quietly, as we came in. Maybe 800 to a thousand people. The choir began to sing a special, wonderfully trained voices....Chinese characters for songs and later sermon notes and passages on either side on screens. Over 30 in the choir. Then Aaron preached a short (by Chinese church) sermon with Scripture passages and main headings spoken in English for us. We are in Christ. Christ is in us. Christ is with us.(will send passages later).

Then more singing including Amazing Grace, Savior Like A Shepherd Lead Us, other Chinese hymns.

Then the sermon for the day, about The Lord's Supper. Nice man, soft spoken. Not but about half hour sermon and then we had The Lord's Supper. Deaconesses in white robes served it, to us first. And recollected the round trays with cups, brought in buckets of boiling water to refill in order to serve everyone. They rotated washing and refilling the cups constantly. Meanwhile the man in the choir (they had sat down on the side earlier), who had read Scripture before every hymn, and two other women choir members led us in several songs.

Then we concluded with prayer, one by me with a microphone and translated by Aaron. I chose to stay in my pew rather than go on platform.

THEN we were asked to make "a" picture with choir on platform. Much arranging and rearranging. Others came forward and we had fierce hugs by little old ladies, requests for pictures to be made by young girls and other almost endless pictures.

We had been invited to eat out with the pastor and his wife. I got in the front seat, Allie, Jennifer, Susan, Clindy AND 4 year old son in the back seat and we came to hotel for bathroom break and then back in car to second floor of fancy hotel. The choir leader was there with her husband, the preacher of the day, a woman (maybe another pastor) and Aaron and wife and Cindy and son. Electric revolving turntable! Peking duck, and other great dishes concluding with big fish on platter. And talk, And more pictures.

How gracious ... How well-treated we are.

We learned:

There are 25 pastors in the church... and 15 preaching points in villages around here where they go every Sunday,

They baptized 100 people just this past Sunday.

Aaron and his wife met by being introduced by friends. She was the daughter of an important government official, he was a shy farmer's son. "Different classes" he said. They have a 29 year old son who is in IT in Beijing. And in love with a Christian girl.

Aaron's wife is in charge of the preaching schedule.

Aaron's mother's grandmother and all generations since have been Christians..the one who told the grandmother was from Sweden.

OK...enough. We had a good afternoon, sneaking out to the grocery store down the block whilst Cindy and son napped, to get glue for Susans pinata. Then Allie and I went to another of the hotel's buildings with Cindy to the baby-sized washing machine to wash clothes, only this nice lady did them for us and brought them back neatly folded and wet for us to hang and dry. Allie and I then went to grocery store with C&S (Cindy and Son) to get pinata candy, fruit for supper (couldn't eat another big meal), and to bakery for morning's breakfast.

Love!

Phyllis

## **29 July 2017**

(I will start with the most recent events and work back to last Sunday...)

No, we did not actually ride the camels, but saw many. And horses. Hundreds and hundreds of them. Plus sheep, thousands and thousands, And cattle, including white faced Herefords. Our **Saturday of sightseeing** was out in the "Real" Inner Mongolia, a

county with the shortened nickname of “Da Mo” because the long Mongolian word begins and ends with those syllables. Just to the north lies the country of Mongolia.

We left early, 6:40am, and ate in the Education Division van with the driver, his wife, and our Teaching Assistant Cindy and her son, newly named Joseph. (Our other Teaching Assistant, Steven, had returned to the big city of Baotou, perhaps to see his girlfriend? We had supper with her when she came to Gu Yang last week and approve.)

We got to the lovely city of DaMu after about an hour and half of driving through farmlands with corn and sunflowers and into a hillier countryside with less but lovely anyway. Cindy said , "This is the real Inner Mongolia."

We thought we had arrived as we stopped at a Museum/Fairgrounds magnificent new building site. But not. We had learned that the impressive opening ceremony had begun the week before with its large processions of Mongolians from different areas. And that horse racing was scheduled for this day. We learned there was to be much more than that.

We drove at least another 1 ½ hours on roads that were in the process of being upgraded. The infrastructure in China is grand, so we knew we were out in the sticks. Soon there were no more villages, no more farm compounds, only large road construction trucks and a bumpy road. Six Flags could take lessons from this road.

After even our driver stopped to make sure we were on the right detour, we made it. Beautiful rolling hills (think “Dancing with Wolves” movie) and grazing land in all directions. In a small area was a pavilion for a table full of Mongolian dignitaries and a square surrounded by small tents to keep the sun away from spectators.

We heard beautiful Mongolian MatouQin instruments being played (something like a bass/violin with fewer strings), saw colorful Mongolian dancers and left to walk up to the site of the horse racing, just in time to see the end of that. We did get back down to the area of the bow and arrow competition, and concluded our part of the rodeo experience with Mongolian wrestling. It was 3:00 before we got back to DaMo to eat traditional food. It was delicious, made even more so by the late hour. Of course we had fruit, bread, and plenty of water in the van. There is never any danger of our being hungry here.

We hightailed back to our town because 20 minutes outside of Gu Yang is the oldest part of the Great Wall. Known as the Qin Great Wall. Cindy had never been to a Mongolian rodeo, nor to this site. So it was all as exciting for her as for our team.

Built over 200 years before Christ, it is in a lovely location with craggier, rockier hills all around. Once we climbed to the top, we could look down on the other side to GuYang. Indescribable beauty all around.

The wall itself is not terrible large here, but impressive nonetheless. Built of natural rock, it went on for a long way—once 85 kilometers, the preserved length now is 12 kilometers. (I do not know how this translates to “American.”) The sign at the site said it

was 5 meters high, and about 3 meters wide at the base. It was built to keep out the Huns.

All of this had our cup running over, but no, there was to be more. We met a touring group of older gentlemen (perhaps my age!) and they had come to rebuild, or perhaps revisit caves in the area they had lived and worked on during a time of war, perhaps with Japan, or perhaps during the 60's when China and Russia went their separate ways.

Our driver arranged a tour of one of these caves for us! Long hallway of tunnels, with many rooms. Some filled with artifacts or simulations of figures peering over maps, planning military strategies. Thankfully, that war never happened. Cindy told us that in the long history of China, there have been many wars.

It was a full 12 hour day. One never to be forgotten.

**The teaching week** went very well, and seems to have gone past in an eye blink. Our Chinese English teachers are much more comfortable speaking with us and participating in class discussions.

They enjoyed the Birthday party beyond our wildest hopes. (They themselves put on 12-year birthday party celebrations for their children that put a Hollywood opening of a movie to shame, but have never had parties for themselves). So pin the tail on the donkey, musical chairs, and making balloon animals were enjoyed beyond measure. They loved the three cakes and that it was a party for all of them.

But the icing on the cake (pun intended) was the piñata---shaped like a yurt! We believe it to be the only one of its kind ever! Completed by Susan and the A Team, it provided much joy and not a few candies.

Our teachers are now much more knowledgeable about Canada (eating maple-flavored maple-shaped cookies did not hurt; and the state of Georgia (experiment with Coca Cola and Mentos candies with resulting "explosion" and videos of Jimmy Carter working on Habitat for Humanity building homes). We have grown to love these dear teachers so much.

We also attended another outdoor concert at the square, this one put on by the Education Division and sat at the front row tables and went on stage twice in front of thousands being introduced as the teachers and getting our pictures made with the performers. The concert was wonderful, showcasing the talents of youth in the schools, and ranged from saxophone playing, to acrobatics, to Broadway meets the Beijing Opera.

Cindy invited us to her house to make dumplings one evening and again for lunch one day and we were served spaghetti...tasted very familiar. We have also had buckwheat noodles, rice noodles, potato noodles and many sizes and varieties of "regular" noodles. We seem to eat at a new place at least once a day. And we had Peking Duck twice last week, once when the church people took us out eat last Sunday and once when we met Steven's girlfriend. Gratefully, this team will try anything. Also gratefully, this team has had a lot of good things to try.

**Church** last week was one of our best experiences. We were met by my student, an English teacher for many years who is also one of 25 pastors at the church ---they have

15 preaching points, and were welcomed to their guest preacher room to finish our breakfast. Then led to the front row to hear a bilingual sermon by “our” pastor and a sermon all in Chinese by another pastor. It was the Sunday for the monthly observance of The Lord’s Supper. And the choir and hymn singing was beautiful. Most impressive to me is the soft praying aloud by all the congregation together.

We stayed afterwards for picture taking with the choir, and other members. We learned that 100 were baptized the week before, something they do at least once and often twice a year.

Our pictures are being taken constantly, and posted to all. One morning we even had ourselves video taped by a waitress as we ate noodles for breakfast and by the time we got to school everyone knew what we had eaten that day.

China is a wonderful place and we are so grateful to be here in cool, dry, welcoming Guyang. Please pray for us to continue to be healthy and to finish strong this week.

Love!







03 August 2017 22:30

Leaving Today

The whirlwind is about to slow down. But first we will have our last class, with gifts for students, closing assembly with certificates and speeches and then dash back to our hotel (after eating, of course) and leave for Baotou at 2 pm to catch the plane to Shanghai. We are leaving on Friday afternoon and will have all day Saturday for touring of Shanghai.

This week's activities included The Olympics, a field day that included a three-legged race, and preposition relay. We were taken by one of the classes to a nearby mountain of stone with a newly built temple complex and then to eat and to karaoke. We also had Thanksgiving and Christmas celebrations and many lessons that led to all kinds of discussions. We were sorry we could not cook a turkey.

We had a memorable Talent Show yesterday afternoon. One of the teachers produced, directed, cajoled, made costumes, etc for a cast of many to tell the Butterfly Love story...sort of Romeo and Juliet-ish. She managed to cut down the production to only 30 minutes and everyone had memorized their lines, AND wore head set mics.

Humor was added to the tale and it was enjoyed thoroughly by all. To complicate matters further, the part of the girl who dressed as a boy in order to go to school (Yentle?) was played by a male teacher who had to dress as a girl dressed as a boy?!?!? In addition my class provided singing, an advertisement, a Mongolian song, and a silent drama.

We believe that we have never repeated the same meal twice since arriving in GuYang. This past week we went out to eat with three of the four classes AND ate in the home of the pastor and his pastor-wife. Weight Watchers anyone?

The teachers have been more than gracious in expressing their appreciation for our coming. They like our teaching methods, humor, smiles, their ability to speak more confidently, and our love. In addition they have become fast friends with fellow teachers they had never met before attending this Summer English Program.

At last night's banquet, each teacher spoke about what the program meant to them, then sang (downloading the music on their mobile phones) or recited a poem. One woman sang a beautiful song in Russian. We needed more than our usual share of napkins---for the eyes that seemed to start leaking without warning.

Yesterday was also the day we did 4 Holiday lessons during the morning class time. They enjoyed this change of pace and learned about Sts. Valentine and Patrick, as well as Easter (termed Resurrection Suinday) in their translation and Martine Luther King, Jr.

"A good time was had by all," and we feel blessed by God to have been sent to this wonderful "village" of 250,000 people and to have worked together as the A Team -- from America: Canada and the US.

No more time to tell more as our square "pancakes" will be arriving for breakfast soon. We have taken to eating in rather than out for breakfast to save time as we prepare for classes. Cindy, our guardian angel, rushes across the street and brings food back.

Love!

Phyllis Merritt



