

Around the World ----- Backwards II
Journal by Margareta Jonell
September 9 – October 4, 2012

September 18 – 19

After breakfast this morning, Carey and Holly drove me to Zurich airport. The time spent in Kandern was a wonderful time to re-group, rest and do some laundry. It was fun getting to know Holly in a deeper way, as our contact in the past has usually been with many other people around. They will be heading to China in two weeks, leading a group of people who will be ministering here.

The Zurich airport is a great place – easy to find your way around and full of beautiful brand name stores. But the best part is the people! Standing in lines I was trying to decipher what languages were being spoken around me – German, French, Chinese, Spanish, Japanese, English, Italian were just some that I could recognize. It was an interesting conglomeration of people. And all seemed to live up to their cultural patterns in their actions and speech.

The flight to Beijing on Swiss Air went well. The plane was filled to capacity and I felt a bit cramped in my window seat. Since we left mid-day I wasn't really tired enough to sleep. We arrived in Beijing at 5 AM. I picked up my luggage and had to check it through to Qingdao. The flight to Qingdao is only a little over an hour.

As I picked up my luggage I was greeted by Wang Peng, "my" driver, and his wife, Zhang Qun, an English teacher. It seemed like we took the long way around to get to Jiaozhou! We came to a tollbooth – with at least 12 booths – but only one was open! So five lanes of traffic tried to squeeze into one lane. After a half an hour of inching our way in between cars, Wang decided to turn around and drive a different way! Traffic is totally disorganized and everyone blows his horns constantly! Taking another route we ended up on the 25-mile new bridge completed last year. This bridge connects Qingdao to Jiaozhou. It is wide – and seems to be steady!!! I don't know if I'd want to drive on it when there is a typhoon blowing rain at 80 mph!

The three of us went to eat lunch at a jiaozi (potsticker) restaurant. Yummy! The hotel manager welcomed me, as did the woman who "guards" the third floor!! We had good memories from the last time I was here. This is the hotel that has glass walls into the bathroom. There is a semblance of privacy since there is a shower curtain that can be drawn for modesty! The manager is very protective of me! He told me that I must tell him when I go out because "it is not safe"!! But I feel perfectly safe walking these streets. But there were demonstrations even in this city yesterday because of the conflict over the islands between Japan and China. I hope that conflict will be resolved peacefully.

I took a short “lie down rest”, but sleep evaded me. Then I walked about a mile down to the grocery store that I used to frequent to buy something to eat and drink. For \$1.50 I purchased two large baozi (my favorite steamed bread), a bunch of huge grapes, a half a canister of potato chips, like Pringles, (for the salt!!) and two bottles of water. A very balanced meal indeed! That will keep me going till tomorrow morning. Right now I’d rather sleep than eat!! It is fairly hot – about 80+ degrees, with high humidity.

September 20, 2012

Sleep does wonders when you travel. The bed is hard as a board, but I slept well. This morning’s breakfast was served buffet style with choices of baked sweet potatoes, baozi (meat filled steamed bread), millet gruel, and five plates of various salty pickles. I ate a small sweet potato, a baozi and a little millet gruel.

One of the teachers and the assistant principal, Mr. Liu, picked me up to go to school. Wang Peng and Zhang Qun were supposed to come, but Zhang Qun’s grandfather died early this morning so she, of course, didn’t go to work today. At school I met quite a few of the teachers I knew.

I “taught” – actually talked to – one of the senior classes of students I had two years ago. It was mostly a question and answer period. They come up with many topics: What is your favorite country? What advice do you have for us to succeed in life? What do you think of the Japanese/Chinese conflict over the islands? (pretty touchy there!) Who is your favorite basketball star? Should teenagers have boyfriends? What’s the typical high school day like in the US? Well, you get the point – diverse questions. There is a huge difference in their confidence level in speaking English from two years ago. Much improved!

Another period I met with about 30 students whom I had had in classes two years ago. We sat in the conference room around a large table. I asked them what they want to do after finishing this school. All plan on university studies. This school is considered the best in the county. Among the answers I got were: economists, bankers, lawyers, politicians, doctors, becoming rich (!), becoming famous, author, musician, operating her own company, translator, etc. All spoke of how their parents are pushing them toward high-ranking jobs. One girl, who said she wanted to study music, said her parents want her to go into medicine, because music can’t be a career. A boy wants to become a politician because of the Japan/China conflict and “will join the army and fight for my country if I need to.” Everyone applauded when he spoke!

The school day has a two-hour break for lunch and rest. I went back to the hotel for my rest period. In the afternoon I had two classes of second year students (like our 11th grade). Their teacher had them prepare questions to ask. I gave a brief background of

our family history in China since my grandmother, Hedvig Rinell, began the school in 1905. Again the students asked questions about the American school system, sports, entertainment, etc. No wonder that American schools are falling behind! These kids are in school from 7.30 AM to 10 PM every day, including some Saturdays. The evening “classes” are homerooms where they work on their homework. Our high schools go from 7.15 AM to about 3.00 PM! Just think what complaints we would have from students and teachers if we had to attend school on Saturdays!!

I really enjoyed seeing the kids!! They are amazing – and amazingly happy in spite of their heavy schedules. They are so driven and goal oriented.

For dinner, Mr. Liu had invited a group of English teachers and a few others to a dinner at my hotel. The whole second floor of the hotel has private dining rooms with large round tables. Twelve people came to this dinner. I counted at least 18 courses – some were just plates with pickles, but most had substantial amounts of food. Tonight we ate shrimp, cucumbers, a type of green salad, boiled peanuts, boiled sweet potato slices, edamame, three types of fish, mushroom soup, pork cubes, slices of unknown meat, sea slugs (which thankfully were only bite-sized pieces!), “mientang” (noodles in a broth), meat-filled steamed bread, potstickers and watermelon slices.

Throughout the whole meal the host, Mr. Liu, followed by all the other folks, had to “gambei” me for being there and teaching! Their style of “gambei” is bottoms up, with beer or other drink. I can’t even swallow a glass of water without sipping, so they think I’m pretty bad who just wets my lips with the gambei glass! There is a definite pecking order, but before the dinner is over everyone has gambeied everyone at least 10 times. As the honored guest my job is to say thank you at the end. Which I did! At the end of the meal everyone had to walk me upstairs to my room! I was afraid that there would be a slumber party!! But they politely left when they saw that I was “safe”!!

Tomorrow I go to Qingdao.

Margareta