

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

September 24

This was a fairly relaxing day! The seven of us took a van to Jiazhou in the morning and got settled into “my” old hotel. During the day the other group arrived. This group of 10 is headed up by Sven Ohm, who was our former Swedish Baptist mission secretary. Sven is now in his early 80’s but as capable as ever. The people in Sven’s group were just people who are mission interested and wanted to participate in the ceremony on Wednesday and to see some of our old mission stations.

Two young Chinese women also joined us. One is a professor of history at a university in Jinan and the other is her student. The student, who called herself Alice, has been doing research about our missionary work here. They both stayed with us for three days and probably got their fill of history!!

I took a stroll down “memory lane” with some of the group to show them the old school building (girls’ school) that still stands. It is very dilapidated and probably should be torn down. But the government has “given it back” to the church so it is being used. Even in the two years since I was here, there have been many changes on this main street. Many of the old buildings from the 40’s have been torn down – including our friend, Feng’s home – and new high-rise buildings have been put in their place. In the evening we had our first meal together as a large group – 17 people.

September 25

This was a busy, but interesting, day. We had ordered a bus to drive us to Zhucheng and Gaomi, two of our mission stations. I had never been in Zhucheng, so this was very interesting. This is where one of our missionaries, Matilda Persson, ran an orphanage for girls. We were met by a large group of people at their church. We were invited into a conference room where the pastor gave a history of the Swedish Baptist work in their city. He had prepared a very interesting power point with



The church presented each of us with a scroll with beautifully written calligraphy of a Bible text. Picture this conference room. We were all seated around long tables facing each other in two rows on each side – probably about 60 – 70 people altogether. Tea was served to all – and beautiful displays of fruit (fresh dates, tangerines, and grapes) were placed before us.

We were then taken to a modern hotel for a cafeteria styled lunch. Here we ate our fill, with even some western foods available. Next stop was to see “THE TREE”! Outside a missionary home (the Andreens) was planted a ginko tree. The house has been gone for many years and high-rise apartments have been built around the area – but their ginko tree remains. So the church leaders thought it was important for us to see this token from the past!

We had already had a busy day, but we needed to hurry up to get to Gaomi! This Church is quite amazing. Three years ago it was in the process of being built – today it is completed and it is beautiful. They have about 10,000 members. The church seats over 1000. The building was paid for by their own members before it was completed. Their ministry is extraordinary – and their minister is dynamic. Again we sat around the obligatory tables and munched on fruit and tea as we learned about their work. They run a nursing home – which is housed in one of the old missionary residences – a clinic and a Bible school. We met with the residents of the old folks home as well as with the very upbeat, exceptional young people in the Bible school.

After a full afternoon of visiting various sites, we returned to the church for a meal -- prepared by the pastor’s wife and a group of other women. This meal was also exquisite, with about 15 different dishes – from fish, to meat, to vegetables, to shrimp, to soups, etc. I’d wager that no US church dinner would be as good!! We were a tired group that made our way home to our hotel that night!

September 26

The day of the “unveiling” of the statue had arrived! We were picked up by bus from the hotel and taken to Jiaozhou #1 Middle School. We were herded up to a conference room – where tea and fruit were provided!! ☺ Then, without further ado, we were told to go to

the statue for the ceremony. It was to begin at 10 – but, it began at 9.30!!! This is called Chinese planning!! ☺ The event was rather disorganized!! Chairs had been placed in front of the statue, which was covered by a red cloth. The school had rented hundreds of potted plants that lined the path to the statue. I saw the statue last Thursday and there was only mud around it!!! But today, the path had been laid and things looked quite presentable.

It seemed that Yin Ying had one order of the day's program – and the school had another!!! The school won out!!! I have a feeling that they were afraid that if it was left to Yin Ying it could become too much of a Christian ceremony! Sven Ohm had prepared some remarks – but was never asked to speak!!! ☺

Instead the vice principal (my friend!!), Mr. Liu was the MC. He read some statements about Wang – then a director of the board of education spoke, as did one of Wang's former students. Yin Ying, of course, spoke as well. Then Lally spoke!! She did an amazing job! Everyone else read their speeches (except Yin Ying) – but Lally spoke from the heart and people responded very well! That's my sister for you!! The ceremony was over in about 30 minutes. Ha Bo Shan did the unveiling of the statue. He is the son of my grandfather's cook – who, of course, attended the school as well!!

Then we spent a LONG time taking pictures!!! Everyone wanted to be photographed!





After a brief rest, we were to be at the Jiaozhou church at 3 PM to meet with the pastor and some of the congregants. This is our “home” church. They also provided us with fruit and bottled tea, prepared around long tables in the front of the sanctuary. The choir, robed in their blue robes, sang for us. The pastor welcomed us and spoke highly of the work of the old missionaries. Beside him he had the minister of religion from the government, so there was much talk about how the government allows religious freedom and gives them much support, etc. It was a very stilted affair – not much joy in this meeting. I think this church has suffered a great deal with having pastors who have been afraid to speak out in fear of what the government would do.

The good part of this visit was that we were “home” on our home property! The new church is built in “our yard”. The house where Hellen and Oscar lived is still standing, and we were able to go inside. Our family home has been gone for many years, but through the church window we could still look in on “our” yard. That part was a good feeling.

Otherwise the large property that our mission had for the school and the church, has all been torn down and huge apartment buildings have crept up all over. The church is hidden from view from every street – so it is not visible and you have to know what you are looking for! Is that the government’s way to hide the church?

A few of our old friends came to see us at the church. They are mostly part of the house church movement, which is illegal in this country. But whenever we come, these friends come to greet us and spend time with us. Among them was my kindergarten buddy! Always so sincere in their love.

The pastor insisted on inviting us to dinner. By this time it was only 5 PM – and we had eaten a huge lunch – and no one was ready to eat again. But they insisted. A few of the Swedes opted not to attend that dinner, but a few went along. I had other plans for this evening so I opted out as well.

My plan was to go to visit with Jiang Lin and her family. She is a teacher friend from the school who was very helpful to me when I was here two years ago. Her mother-in-law was going to show me how to make “boa boa” – steamed bread that is popular in this region. I’ve made boa boa for years, but mine turn out differently every time – sometimes great, sometimes not so great!! Well, no wonder!!! I had promised some of you in the States (Dodo, Meilynn etc.) that I would write down very specific instructions!! Well, it’s a little bit of this and a little bit of that – and then you feel if the dough “feels” right! You get the point! Hers turned out beautifully – but she had started the dough three hours before I got to their house. Yes, it’s an all day affair!!! But I will try her method the next time. It is my grand-children’s favorite meal at my house – boa boa and sifen!!

I think this is enough for today!!!

Margareta