

SanMing, China

January/February, 2011

Greetings from SanMing China.

It's hard to believe another month and a half has gone by, and it's now heading toward the end of February! Wow, *a lot* has happened since I last wrote.... it's hard to know where to start. Chinese New Year is come and gone... I arrived back in SanMing on the 15th after being gone for a couple weeks. Hum... I guess I'll have to look to my journal for more specifics. :)

Jan. 12th.... wow, it's hard to believe I'm 24! It really doesn't seem that old, and I definitely don't feel old!! :) I would have never guessed where I would be on my birthday this year... the second birthday in row that I have not been at home. (Last year, I was studying at SMBI.) Life with our Father is wonderful... because He is wonderful! Who can serve him, and complain of a boring life?? Overall, it was a very special day— though different from 'normal'. :) One of the office staff picked up a cake for me, and my boys made sure I got plenty of ear-pulling and wrestling exercise.

Heading up to the Chinese New Year was a very busy time for all the staff. It's one of the biggest holidays for China, and the children are out of school for almost a month! All the children will be going back to their home villages to spend time with relatives for the holiday. Packing must be done, homework finished, and everything thoroughly cleaned before leaving. This is a big place, but by dividing it into small sections for each house, we had it mostly finished by lunch time.

For the staff, it was a very busy time overseeing all the projects and making sure everything went smoothly. For me and my boys, we were responsible to clean the five floors of the office building. The water only had enough pressure to come up to the 3rd floor, so we had to carry it to the upper floors by bucket. It was a beautiful day, so it didn't feel too bad to be working with a scrub-brush, mop, and water. Some of the other houses were cleaning up leaves and debris outside creating a huge pile. I also had some wood scraps and sawdust from the wood shop, so we decided with the good weather it would be a great time to burn it. The fire 'pit' is kind of in the corner of a concrete wall around 7 feet high. Somehow that afternoon a spark or cinder jumped the wall and started a little grass, brush, and mushroom fire on the outside of the wall. Thankfully somebody noticed it, and we were able to put it out before it did any real damage. Life here is full of the unexpected.... :) As staff, we have a little paperwork to do as semester closes, and the children will be gone. We don't get our regular day off, and things are extra busy; but after everyone is gone, the staff get vacation time too.



Life here is full... full of fun, and full of hardship... full of joy, and full of sorrow... ...some days you feel empty and emotionally drained, while other days you think you might stay for ever. It's a life that is dependent upon a strength that is above our own... wisdom that is not from man, and patience and love that surpasses what we ourselves possess. Here is a small example from my journal that gives you a little picture....

Tuesday, 1/18

'This afternoon Joyce (the principle) asked me to watch some of the younger children while they worked on their homework— she had to go to town. It went well at first, but, it wasn't too long before some of the little boys began to cause trouble... ..They soon wouldn't listen to me or do what I asked them to do. They were getting noisy, and causing much trouble and distraction. Thankfully, one of the girls saw my predicament, and ran and got Dorcas. (the former principal, who was visiting at the time.) They didn't listen to her very well either, but at least she could speak their language!' During that time I was asking for much wisdom and patience. It wasn't till late that evening that I found via email, that one of my good friends also felt like they should p for me. I checked the time they said, and it was the exact time that I needed it that afternoon. He is so faithful... so far above and beyond what we can comprehend. His grace is sufficient. Things like this encourage my heart, and strengthen my trust.

The middle school students finished and went home about 5 days before the high school students. There were only about 35 or so of us left, including the remaining staff, so I decided to try to make an American meal for everyone. I called Mother and got some ideas of what could be made without too much skill, and with my limited supply of American ingredients. We decided on mashed potatoes and hamburger gravy; steak; bread rolls; and peanut butter bars for dessert. That day the children were all out from school, so early in the morning I asked four boys to go with me to the market. Of course they were delighted to go, but were very amazed at the quantity of potatoes and

meat! The five of us could barely carry everything back up the hill.

I asked some the older girls to help me in the kitchen in the afternoon, but it was too interesting: by evening, almost everyone was there! Jason, (the head cook) helped me cook and mash the potatoes, and also helped fry steaks. The girls had fun rolling out and cutting out bread rolls, as well as mixing up, baking, and frosting the peanut butter 'bars'. I was busy running here and there baking bread, ...checking to see if the meat would 'ever' get chopped small enough to work as hamburger,



...salting steak, and making gravy. Things like 'milk in a jug', ground meat, butter, a machine to mash potatoes, or even a salt shaker for salting steak are things we take for granted in the US. We mixed our own milk with boiled water, and used some 'butter' that we had in a bowl in the fridge... left from some previous project... :)

They really gave me a hard time as they watched me make the gravy... all that meat that they had worked so hard to chop, fry and season, now got mixed with milk!! They were getting upset as I started



to make the second big pan full (our pan wasn't big enough :)) so I told them to try it. After seeing me try it, one finally got up the courage. What she discovered changed the attitude of all the rest... then they all wanted to try it! :)

It all turned out great!! ...except, we kinda didn't have enough potatoes. We fixed 50, but I guess it should have been another 10-15. I felt bad, but they assured me over and over that they were full!!! One boy even went to special antiques trying to prove to me that he actually was full! After he had strutted out the door, I burst out laughing! As the cook saw him walk by the window, she also burst out laughing. Joyce then gave them a little money as a special treat to go and buy some little snacks for the rest of the evening. I went along and decided to get them a little drink of their choice... soda, tea, juice etc. I felt bad as I knew they were still hungry... ...thankfully it ended up with everyone in good spirits. Thank you Mother and Charlou for the recipes, and for the help over the phone. The children really enjoyed it all, and it was fun for me too. :)



The next day all the children left; as well as most of the remaining staff. The cook and his family decided to stay longer due to bad weather in his hometown. I would be staying for about 10 days yet, as it's too far for me to go home, and there were some work projects I wanted to finish up. I went over all the chairs in the dining room (106 of them) as many of them no longer worked properly due to missing or loose parts. I had to make new parts for a lot of them, taking *days* of work. I also had to repair some closets where we store our extra clothing, blankets, etc. They were on the 5th floor, so all my tools, and supplies had to be carried up 8 flights of stairs. One of the closets was on the verge of collapsing due to moisture damage, and many others needed some help to prevent a similar or worse problem in the near future. I also worked on a couple other misc small projects, but I was very glad to get those two big ones completed. While I worked with no one around, I often listened to Chinese. The evenings were long and quiet, so I studied hard then as well. The cook and his family were around most of the week and often invited me up for supper... this was very nice as it's no fun to cook just for yourself. (One such time I decided to microwave some 'hotdogs' instead of boiling them. I didn't know for sure if they were precooked, so I wanted to make sure. What I ate was more the texture of burnt toast than hotdog, but oh well.) :)

I left SanMing on the train early Monday morning the 31st for the 13 hour ride to Shenzhen. I spent the next week with the Jay Johnson family. Mostly I helped them with everyday things, or helped watch their children. It was a good time of rest, but with it came a lot of culture shock being with English speaking people again. Shenzhen too is very English friendly, and it's not uncommon at all to see other foreigners... I have never seen another white person in SanMing. While I was there I was able to get in a little language study off and on in between bike rides to town, etc. On the night of Chinese New Year, I went up to the roof of their 24 floor apartment building and watched fireworks. It was pretty spectacular as people sent booming colors into the sky. Sent from the tops of skyscrapers, to the middle of the street, it was a great show! One highlight for me too was being able to go with them to an English meeting again... That was a treat; though again, quite a culture shock!!

On Monday the 7th, I went to Hong Kong for visa purposes, and spent about three days there with friends. I was even able to see John Schroder for a little, as he happened to be there at the same time for his teaching trip. One day I went up to the 'Peak' and had a spectacular view of Victoria Harbor. (below) I also had the privilege of going hiking early one morning. It was so fun to be out in



the beauty of nature again... As we climbed, it brought back so many memories and fun times with family and friends in the States. We hiked for about an hour and a half to a beautiful little outcropping of rock. By that time we had worked up quite an appetite, so we headed back down for some breakfast. It was a great view though, even if the visibility was much less than what we are used to. Overall, my time in Hong Kong was a great time of fellowship and rest. They were so kind to me, even giving me a place to stay and refusing any reimbursement whatsoever. It's so humbling at times... yet my Father is so faithful to provide for my needs.

Friday morning I flew from Hong Kong to Shanghai to see some long-time family friends who had been begging a chance to get together. Again it was a wonderful time of sweet fellowship. They took me around Shanghai a little, then back to their hometown of Hangzhou. I was privileged to be with them Sunday, but then Monday night I again got on the train for 13 hours back to SanMing!

The weather in Hong Kong and Shenzhen was so beautiful... I was even able to go without a coat in the afternoons. I think that SanMing must be in the 'Spring transition'. It rains every day, and I haven't seen the sun since I got here: but at least it's not so bitterly cold. Next week it's supposed to really warm up... but still very wet. It makes it very difficult to dry laundry etc; but other than that, you just keep an umbrella handy at all times... and stay busy cleaning floors. :) I'm very happy that at least it's starting to warm up!! The cold and wet together can really get difficult with no place to get warm.

So, back home again.... The children arrived the day after I did, and once again life returns to the busy 'normal'. Even though work returns to normal, it's so good to see the children again. Once again the buildings are teeming with activity, fun and laughter. I feel so blessed and honored to be serving here. My Father is so good, and gives me the grace to stand with him each day. His word is a wonderful companion which I greatly delight in. In Him we have strength, and in Him we live. Thank you all so much for remembering me to our dear Friend as I depend upon him. It gives great strength to know I'm not forgotten before him... you all have an important part!! As far as the language... well.... its coming.... slowly but surely. I don't have to ask 'what' nearly so often now, but it's still very easy to get me 'lost'!! :) Thanks so much for p, as it's imperative that I learn it.

I should close for now, but rich blessings from our Friend and Companion to you all!!

Edwin