

Where in the World are Beth and Ruth?

June 20 - July 29, 2007

Thursday, December 20, 2007

More Photos

While going through almost 1500 photos from her trip Beth found a few more to post:



The Forbidden City, Beijing



The Temple of Heaven, Beijing



The Great Wall of China



Ruth's classroom



Ruth's classroom



The Yellow River at Lanzhou



The Protestant church in Lanzhou




Beth leading a bible study at the Protestant church in Lanzhou



Countryside on route to Dave's village



Beth and Ruth with villager friends of Dave's

posted by Niel - W0VLZ : 2:58 PM [0 Comments](#) 

Wednesday, August 1, 2007


Home in Rochester

I am back home now and wanted to post one last time. The final leg of the trip for me was taking Amtrak from Milwaukee to Red Wing, MN. I arrived in Red Wing about 10pm and found Niel waiting for me on the platform with a bouquet of roses. It was really great to see him! He had arrived in Red Wing by Amtrak earlier in the day from his Holden Village trip. We drove home to Rochester and I have been sharing stories of my adventure ever since.

Ruth should be at her missionary conference in Kenosha now. On Friday she will fly out to Washington to visit our dad and then be moving into her condo in Vancouver, WA.

The around the world adventure was amazing. I certainly saw many new sights, met many nice and interesting people and stretched my comfort zone for trying new things. However, after 5 1/2 weeks I am ready to be at home for awhile.

Thank you for reading this blog. It has been fun to share this special time with others.

posted by Beth Wiegand : 9:29 AM [1 Comments](#) 

Monday, July 30, 2007

Warsaw

I am writing this from Jim's apartment in Milwaukee so Ruth and I will try and add some pictures after I do the writing.



Our 2 hour flight from St. Petersburg was smooth and we arrived in Warsaw about 3:30 pm. We took the city bus from the airport into Old Town where the the hostel was located. We felt pretty proud that we could figure out the stops and saved a lot over paying for a cab. Unfortunately, it was raining when we got off the bus so by the time we reached the hostel we were quite wet. We had packed our umbrellas in our suitcases which had been checked through to Chicago. We ate supper from our supplies while we dried out.

About 7:00 we were dry and the rain had stopped so we went out exploring. The Old Town area was destroyed during WWII and was rebuilt after reproductions dating from the 18th century. It was charming with its cobblestone like streets and many flowers. It is a popular place and many people were walking the streets listening to music and eating ice cream.



In our wandering we saw four more bridal groups. Two were taking pictures and we saw two others at the church for the actual wedding. These groups did not have the beautiful weather that those in St. Petersburg had but they all looked very happy anyway! We returned to the hostel as it was getting dark(much earlier) and went to bed by 9:30.

Sunday morning, we walked around more, spent down our Polish money on souvenirs, and




returned to the airport by bus. Security was tighter since we were headed to the USA and we had to toss a couple of items.

Our flight was 10 hours but we were fed twice and we saw a couple of movies so it wasn't too bad. We arrived in Chicago and caught a regional shuttle bus to Milwaukee. Jim picked us up and took us out to eat before going to his apartment. It was fun to show him pictures and tell stories so we managed to stay up until 11:00. I had been awake almost 24 hours but it is a good way to get over jet lag quickly!

Ruth and I have been repacking and doing laundry this morning as we will be splitting company later today. I will be leaving on Amtrak late this afternoon. Ruth will stay another day and then go to a missionary conference in Kenosha, WI tomorrow.

I will plan to do one more posting tomorrow after I am back in Rochester.

posted by Beth Wiegand : 8:43 AM [0 Comments](#) 

Friday, July 27, 2007

St. Petersburg

Our time in St. Petersburg has been very enjoyable. We have experienced beautiful weather and have had no glitches. There are so many beautiful buildings and nice parks and green belts. In two days there has been just enough time for a sampling.

The first morning we had a walking tour. As with all the walking tours we've had, it gave us an orientation and the guide answered questions and gave suggestions as to which sights are the very best.

Ruth and I then went back to the room for showers and naps. In the afternoon we went out walking. We walked through a couple of shopping areas. It was fun to compare the prices and what was available to other cities we have visited as well as what we would find at home. We ate supper at what is supposed to be the best bakery in St. Petersburg. We had some pizza-like dishes plus splitting a piece of cheesecake and what we thought was carrot cake but turned out to be more like fruitcake. All were delicious.

We returned to our room by 9:30 but it was full daylight and the streets were still full of people with many stores still open. The sun does not set until around 10:30 and rises around 4:30.



Yesterday we had a nice breakfast at the hotel (included with the room) and then walked to the Hermitage. Because we had the tickets that Carol and Derek were not using, we could bypass the big line and go directly into the museum. The place is huge so we knew we would just see a small fraction. We went through the Russian Art exhibit and then saw some various other European Art exhibits. I especially enjoyed seeing many Renoir paintings. We also enjoyed just looking at the palace which housed the displays.

We next walked to the river to catch the hydrofoil out to Peterhof. We had a 40 minute ride and then had time to explore the grounds surrounding a palace. This was Peter the Great's answer to Versailles and was very beautiful. We sat on a bench and had a picnic lunch we had packed. We didn't have time to tour the palace but enjoyed the grounds with their fountains and statues very much. Then it was time to return to the city on the hydrofoil.




Our next activity was attending a Russian folklore performance. We saw dancing, singing, and musical acts. The costumes were gorgeous and was very enjoyable. It also felt good to sit. We then walked back to the hotel stopping for a late, light supper.

It was a banner day for seeing wedding parties out taking pictures. This is something we have seen in every city since Ulaanbaatar. Apparently the tradition is for the bride and groom and some amount of entourage to take photos at beautiful spots in the city following



the wedding. Ruth and I got to saying, "Bride Alert" and there would be another group. We saw them in the city and out at Peterhof. We saw a total of 19 groups! The cars or limos are often decorated with flowers and two gold rings. I think the first one we saw in Ulaanbaatar got posted earlier. I will post some more as soon as I am able. (Niel is at Holden Village so I can't just send pictures to him and have him post them. I was going to try myself but I haven't been at a computer that has directions in English for several days.)

We leave in about an hour for the airport and then on to Warsaw. It will be a 20 hour stay in Poland but we will make the most of it. Then tomorrow we will fly to Chicago. It has been a great trip but will be good to get home also. I am looking forward to seeing Niel! I hope to post again soon with the Poland story.

posted by Beth Wiegand : 11:12 PM [1 Comments](#) 

Thursday, July 26, 2007

Moscow



On Tuesday, July 24 we met a guide for a walking tour. The first part was orienting us on how to use the Metro, Moscow's subway system. We then walked by the Kremlin, into Red Square, and on to some of the theaters, monuments, and historical buildings in the central area.

When that was finished about noon, Ruth and I were on our own. We went back to Red Square and went into the GUM department store (actually more of a shopping mall) for ice cream.



We walked along Red Square and toured St. Basil's Church. We spent an hour trying to find where we could get a boat ride on the Moscow River before giving up. We considered it time to people watch and just get more of a feel for the city. We returned to the Metro stop taking time to enjoy the gardens along the way. We successfully navigated the Metro back to our hotel.


On Wednesday we braved the rain to take in the Kremlin tour. We rented the audio tour and saw many beautiful icons in the various churches within the Kremlin.

We then took the boat ride on the Moscow River. We had found out from Carol and Derek where to catch the boat. This was not a tour but is part of the public transportation system, rather like a water bus. While it was windy, overcast, and cool it still was very nice and relaxing too. We went past the Kremlin, parks, and passed under many bridges. We rode it to the end of the line and then got on the Metro. We went to several different Metro stops to see the artwork in some of the stations. Ruth and I can really navigate the system including changing lines. It really is a people mover. Trains come every 1-3 minutes.

Wednesday evening we took the overnight train to St. Petersburg. There was confusion about the train tickets but by careful comparison and deduction we got it all figured out. Carol and Derek and the two of us made it to St. Petersburg this morning at 6 am.

Ruth and I found the people of Moscow to be rather serious. However, people who have been in Moscow in the 80's or 90's, tell us there is more smiling, laughing, etc. than before. We noticed how much people read. People on the Metro, in cafes, and anytime they are not walking down the street seem to be reading a book, newspaper, or magazine.

Our trip will soon be over. However, I still hope to post about our stay in St. Petersburg and our short stay in Warsaw.

posted by Beth Wiegand : 12:48 PM [1 Comments](#) 

Monday, July 23, 2007

Trans-Siberian train

We are in Moscow and I am posting from the business center of our hotel. We arrived about 3 hours ago and have had time to get a much needed shower and buy some food for a quick supper. We haven't downloaded any pictures today so I will just stay with text for now.

Our three day train trip went well. We shared a compartment with Carol and Derek. This was a newer train car and better maintained so made for a pleasant trip. The forced air system worked so we stayed comfortable. The bathrooms were cleaner. The only down side is that after three days we all really wanted a shower!


I was surprised by the scenery we saw on the journey from Irkutsk to Moscow. I had imagined it would be flat and barren. Instead we saw lots of birch and pine trees interspersed with meadows that often had colorful wildflowers. The dominant color when looking out the train window was green. We would pass by villages and small towns that seemed to focus on the railroad. The station often was the biggest building we saw and many were painted in bright colors. The further west we went the more populated the areas became.

We played games in our compartment including Boggle, Tile Rummey, Double Solitaire, and Facts in five. We also read books and visited with each other and other travelers. Whenever there was a long enough stop we would all pile out of the car onto the platform. We would walk around and sometimes buy food from the vendors.

We ate one meal in the dining car and the rest of the meals came from our own supply.

Unfortunately, a gentleman in the compartment next to us got very ill on the train ride. We had visited with him the first night, a very friendly guy from Australia who had finished a teaching job in China. As we passed through one of the small towns and made a quick stop two medical people came on board to check on him. Then at the next city five medical people were waiting and checked on him again. It was decided he could travel on to the next big city. There, three people were waiting and Bruce and his wife got off. It seemed like he was getting good attention but some things were lacking such as having a wheelchair for him. He made his way off the train and then there was no place for him to sit and there was a long walk ahead of him. I hope he is doing okay.

A couple of observations . . . There are many smokers in Russia! Once a building is not being used it doesn't seem to get torn down. We saw many shells of buildings or in various stages of falling down. All for now.

posted by Beth Wiegand : 9:39 AM [2 Comments](#) 

Thursday, July 19, 2007

Lake Baikal and Irkutsk

I am writing this from an internet cafe in Irkutsk. I have spent a long time just guessing on which buttons in Russian to push. I hope it will post.



We had a very enjoyable time staying at a village on Lake Baikal. The weather was beautiful and the scenery very nice. The village of about 500 is located on a delta at the edge of the lake. There was little other development on the lake that we could see. We stayed at a traditional Siberian log cabin along with Derek and Carol with whom we have been together since the ger camp and Mike from Canada, Helen from Australia, and Sue from the UK. There was an outhouse, but very clean. There was also a sauna which we used both afternoons. Tamara, our hostess, cooked all the meals and we ate a lot. I found that I rather like Russian food. The first afternoon we had a walking tour of the village. The full day we were




there

involved a 8km trip to a fishing camp along the lake. We biked the first half and walked right along the shoreline the second half. We ate lunch at the fishing camp and had a chance to swim or wade in the lake before returning to the village. The walk was peaceful and scenic. We passed by a number of people camping. In some ways it looked like an American campground but the garbage needed collecting and cows were wandering through. During both evenings we played games, Tile Rummy and Bananagrams. Everyone was very congenial and we lightheartedly decided it was Homeland vs. Colonies. (The Homeland won.)

We then came back to Irkutsk for a 2 night home stay. Derek, Carol, Ruth, and I are staying at a flat with Olga and her husband. We have been exploring the city on our own. Olga fixes us a wonderful breakfast but we take care of other meals. We have done a lot of walking, people watching, and soaking up the atmosphere. Today we leave for the 3 day train trip to Moscow. After this internet cafe we will buy some food for the train and take one last shower at Olga's flat before our departure.

I should explain more about Derek and Carol as we will be with them a lot. We have the exact same itinerary so stay at the same hotels, have been put in the same train compartment, etc. We first were assigned to the same ger in Mongolia. Carol is a retired Spanish teacher from North Carolina and is a very youthful 73. Derek is a recently retired firefighter from the UK and is 52. He and Carol met in India on a trip a few years ago and are traveling buddies. Derek is married and Carol is engaged. After St. Petersburg Carol will go to Derek's home to get to visit Judith, Derek's wife, before returning to the states. We all get along well which is good since we wind up being together a lot.

I am assuming we will have an internet connection at our hotel in Moscow so I will plan to post more then. Hopefully, I will add pictures from our time here in Siberia. All for now.

posted by Beth Wiegand : 8:25 PM [2 Comments](#) 

Sunday, July 15, 2007

Beth and Ruth are in Russia!

I spoke to Beth this evening. Their train had gotten in a little early and they were in a van heading for the village of Bolshoe Goloustnoe . She reported that the countryside around Irkutsk/Lake Baikal reminded her a lot of the IH90 route through northern Idaho.

They had a smooth trip from Ulaanbaatar to Irkutsk. Beth and Ruth shared a four person berth with a 73 year old lady and her 50-some traveling companion. They had all met at the Mongolian Ger camp. As expected, the Mongolian/Russian border was a 11 hour wait but no problems.

From the Russian Experience tour brochure here's what Beth and Ruth will be doing for the next few days:

Monday - Transfer directly from Station to the remoter village of Bolshoe Goloustnoe (110km on rural roads). Your local guide shows you the village, the Old Church, and lake shoreline. Get the 20th Century out of your system in a real Russian banya (sauna) which will sharpen your appetite for home-cooked food for supper. Sleep soundly-the modern world is far, far away.


Tuesday - Leisurely lakeside walk (8km) to Ushkani Cape, and visit our friends the fishermen for lunch at their cabin. Leisurely walk back to Bolshoe Goloustnoe Village. Supper, then relish the hushed silence away from the tourist throng.

Wednesday - Transfer to Irkutsk (110km) and overnight in city apartment with host family. Day free to explore the city.

Here is a link to some pictures taken by another visitor around the village of Bolshoe Goloustnoe:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/expectdelays/sets/693011/>

Niel

posted by Niel - W0VLZ : 4:41 PM [0 Comments](#) 

Friday, July 13, 2007

Mongolia

We very much enjoyed our train ride from Beijing to Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. We had first class accommodations which meant we had our compartment all to ourselves. There were two seats which doubled as beds with a small table in between. There was plenty of space for luggage and lots of little hooks and shelves so we could organize our belongings. Besides watching the scenery we played games, caught up on our sleep, and explored the train. We ate all three meals from our supply of food.

As we left Beijing we encountered some dramatic scenery with rocky mountainsides, lakes, rivers, trees, and passed through many tunnels. After a while we traveled through a broad valley ringed with mountains. We saw grapes growing and I saw my first rice paddies. We passed by towns that generally had the traditional style courtyard houses.

About 9:00 in the evening we started our first passport and paperwork check as we approached the Mongolian border. It took about 2 hours to change the wheels on the train to fit the different gauge track. We stayed on board so we could observe the process. They basically move the train cars into a large shed, jack up each car, and switch out the wheels. By the time we were finished with the change, actually crossed the border, had another passport check, had officials checking under the ceiling panels in the hallway for smuggled items, etc. it was about 2:00 am.

We woke up the next morning to see a dry, flat Mongolian landscape with no people and few animals. The scenery gradually got greener and more populated. We started seeing gers (what I thought of as yurts) and other housing. We did see one herd of yaks. We arrived in Ulaanbaatar, the capitol, about noon. We got a hotel and settled in for the rest of the day.



The following day, Wednesday, July 12, we went to the opening ceremonies of the Naadam festival, the most important national holiday of Mongolia. We saw colorful costumes and participants for the three sports involved with Naadam-horseracing, archery, and wrestling. In the early afternoon we connected up with the Russia Experience group. This is the agency through whom we got all our trans-siberian railway tickets and arrangements up through St. Petersburg. We were taken by mini-van to see part of the Naadam festival. We drove out of the city with throngs of others to see the horse racing event. We got there just in time to see the finish of a 15 km. race for children. It was interesting to see

the huge crowds and high excitement. We got back to the stadium just after the archery and wrestling had concluded for the day. Oh, well.




We were then driven out to the Ger Camp where we spent the next two nights. This is a collection of gers set up for tourist groups served by a central dining room and bathrooms. We stayed in a ger that had 4 beds. Meals were served in the dining room and we were free to participate in any of the activities. These included wrestling demonstrations, a walk to a family ger, horseback riding, learning Mongolian games, and trying out the traditional archery. We did everything except I opted out of horseback riding. It was a beautiful setting and I enjoyed being away from the city. We had time to visit with other tourists, about 90, from various European countries, the US, and Japan. The weather was warm to hot during the day but cooled off nicely at night. At mealtimes some Mongolian food was offered so I got to try Mongolian tea which has a lot of milk and a little salt, fermented mare's milk, a type of rice pudding, yogurt, fritter doughnut type things, and this hard chunk that is made from the residue from making vodka.



Yesterday we drove back into Ulaanbaatar and had one night in a hotel. We went on a walking tour of town which included touring a Buddhist monastery and seeing the big town square with various government buildings. Ruth and I also did some shopping and ate out.

At noon we check out and will get back on the train to head towards Russia. We will be on the train for about 36 hours and our next stop will be at Lake Baikal. I am not sure about internet access as we will not be in hotels. I am not sure when I will next be able to post but at least for now, I am all caught up!

posted by Beth Wiegand : 7:10 PM [1 Comments](#) 

Thursday, July 12, 2007

Final Chinese Adventures

I am back from the visit to the Ger Camp and we have a day in the city of Ulaanbaatar with only a walking tour scheduled. I am hoping to get this blog completely caught up before we head out on the train tomorrow. I appreciate Niel keeping the blog updated with the basics when I have not a chance to post.


Now back to our time between the visit to Barry's village and when we boarded the Trans-Siberian railway in Beijing. We arrived in Xian on the speed train in the evening and planned to stay at a youth hostel. We decided to get our train tickets to Beijing while we were at the station so that the next day could be fully devoted to sightseeing. That turned into quite a mess as Barry and I waited in long lines for tickets which we were unable to purchase while Ruth was watching the luggage. We gave up for the night and got a taxi to the hostel. However, the driver took us to the wrong place and we eventually took a hotel which turned out to be more expensive than we were led to believe. However, we did get some sleep and started out the next morning on the quest for tickets to Beijing which we had thought originally would be no problem. We waited in line at a travel service and were lucky enough to get tickets on a sleeper train that would leave that evening. By the time we got back to the hotel and got all checked out there was just enough time to do the terra cotta warriors before we would need to get to the train station.

I did enjoy seeing the warriors up close. Tourists get to walk around the three excavation sites and at some points are quite close to the soldiers. I estimated I was less than 20 ft. away at one place. I really hadn't comprehended how many warriors there were and there are still more to be excavated.

We left in the late afternoon and proceeded to the train station. We checked the luggage in a storage facility while we found some supper and walked around some. We enjoyed seeing a gentleman playing traditional music outside his flat and saw a couple of groups playing badminton in the street.

We went back to the station and found it was a real zoo. There were big lines just to get into the waiting area. We pushed and shoved with all our luggage and managed to make it on the train. The train was nice and clean but there were berths three high in each compartment. Of course, Ruth and I had top bunks. I wasn't sure how I was going to get up and hoped I wouldn't feel claustrophobic once I was there. However, it worked out and I actually got a pretty good night's sleep.

In Beijing we stayed at a very nice youth hostel and caught up with laundry, repacking, buying food, etc. Daniel was also in Beijing on translating business and met us there. We were supposed to meet his parents but that didn't work out as their plane from Lanzhou was delayed. The next day we caught the early morning Trans-Siberian train at the train station right across from the youth hostel. Daniel picked us up and helped us with our luggage, bought fruit and water for us, and saw us off.

posted by Beth Wiegand : 7:41 PM [0 Comments](#) 

Wednesday, July 11, 2007

Pictures

Beth and Ruth sent a few more photos from their journey:



A Spam and Cola ceiling cover in Barry's village



Doorways in Barry's village




Countryside NW of Beijing as seen from train window



Beth and Barry at the Xi'an / Terra Cotta Warriors



Train compartment, waiting to start for Ulaanbaatar


posted by Niel - W0VLZ : 7:35 PM [0 Comments](#) 

Tuesday, July 10, 2007

They are in Mongolia

I spoke to Beth today (we try to touch base every couple of days). She and Ruth had an enjoyable train ride from Beijing to Ulaanbaatar. I had forgotten that they had along Scrabble, Boggle and "Facts in Five". They spent some of their time playing games. Now they are checked into their hotel and looking forward to seeing the sights around Ulaanbaatar followed by a couple of days at a Ger camp.

Niel

posted by Niel - W0VLZ : 1:08 PM [1 Comments](#) 

Visit to Barry's village

Barry was a student of Ruth's last year and Ruth and my brother, Bob, visited his home village last summer. This will be an account of our visit there last week.

After the rush to get Ruth packed up, we headed to the bus station. Several students and one teacher came to the station also so we had a great Chinese send-off. We soon left the city behind and were traveling through rural areas. At one of the stops Barry and I got off to purchase some food for supper. We were told that this area was famous for its chicken. We decided to get some and I helped pick. It looked quite a bit like the roasted chicken that is seen in American grocery stores. When we got on the bus and started to split up the meat Barry asked which of us would like the head. I hadn't even noticed the head was still attached! He was very surprised that neither of us wanted it as it is usually given to the eldest or most honored guest. He ate the head with gusto and Ruth and I enjoyed other parts.

We arrived after dark at the city where Barry's sister lives and is fairly close to the village. They had arranged for us to stay in a hotel.



The next morning we walked around the city and went to the school where Barry had gone to the equivalent of high school. The results of the national exam which is used for college admission was posted outside of the school on a huge banner. Quite a few people were looking over the results which include names and scores. The school is in a campus style and many of the students live in dorms. We happened to be walking between two of the main classroom buildings when a bell rang to signal the end of a class period. Evidently we were noticed because in a couple of minutes everyone was gathered in groups outside or at the windows of upper floors, gawking and waving. Finally one student was brave and came over to talk with us. Then everyone came running over and we were in the middle of a huge crowd. We wound up talking to two English classes during the next period before we had to leave.



We took a taxi to the village arriving about 1:00. We met Barry's

mom and younger sister who was home during the 12:00 to 2:30 break in the day, rather like siesta time. We then walked through the neighboring village where a market day was happening. We then walked back to Barry's house. It is built much like Dave's but has a dirt floor rather than cement. The courtyard is planted as a garden rather than the bare dirt. Barry's mom prepared soup and homemade noodles for our supper. In the evening we walked around visiting several of Barry's relatives. He also made a visit to his father's burial spot and brought photocopies of his school awards to be burned at the grave site. This was in the Taoist tradition.

When it was time for bed Ruth and I walked across the road to the Primary School where we were allowed to use their outhouse. Several of the teachers live on site and we were invited into the headmaster's office/living quarters where we visited with several teachers. Our sleeping arrangements were similar to our other village visit except the raised platform was big enough just for Ruth and me. Barry, his mom, and sister slept in the kitchen which also has a bed platform.



In the morning we had breakfast and then it was time to leave. We started in a taxi and shifted to a bus when we got to a larger area. We visited one more aunt in a town 30 or so miles down the road. As we traveled along I saw so many kinds of transportation. I noted donkey carts, bicycles, motor scooters, motorcycles, taxis, cars, and small, medium, and large trucks.


We eventually wound up at a city where we planned to take a train to Xian, our destination for the night. This is when we found we could take a speed train which Niel described in an earlier blog entry. It was so amazing to be riding in this very modern, sleek rocket train when I had been seeing donkey carts earlier in the day.

posted by Beth Wiegand : 6:29 AM ✎

Sunday, July 8, 2007

Phase 2 Has Begun


I spoke to Beth tonight. It was Monday morning in Beijing. Beth and Ruth had just pulled out of the Beijing station on the train to Ulaanbaatar and were settling into their cabin. Daniel had gotten a platform ticket so he had helped them get their luggage on board and saw them off. They have a 31 hour ride ahead of them and planning to get to know some of their fellow travelers better. Also expected is time to catch up on reading, sleeping and writing.

posted by Niel - W0VLZ : 5:00 PM [0 Comments](#) 

Beijing Again

I received email from Beth this/Sunday morning. She and Ruth were back in Beijing. Beth reported that today was their day in Beijing to regroup and reorganize. Ruth went out and bought the cord that got left behind in Lanzhou. Now they can use the computer again. It was really nice to get to read several messages from people when the computer came up. Their email address while traveling is rklavano@yahoo.com .

Niel

posted by Niel - W0VLZ : 8:44 AM [0 Comments](#) 

Last Days in Lanzhou

My, the title sounds dramatic, doesn't it? I am rather far behind in the blog but I will try to cover the time from returning from Dave's village to leaving Lanzhou.

Ruth became ill the evening after we returned from the village. It appeared to be a 24 hour stomach flu. Ruth was never sure whether it was from eating something she shouldn't have or if it was some kind of bug.

Sunday morning Ruth was not up to going to church. She called one of her students, who is Christian and attends the same church to escort me. Derek took a bus from campus to Ruth's apt. and picked me up. We took another bus and arrived at the Protestant Church in time for the second service. In Lanzhou, a city of 3 million, there is one large Protestant church, several smaller ones, and a number of home churches. We were at the large church which seats about 3000 people. The church was full. Derek helped me follow the service by showing me some of the hymns in a bilingual hymnbook and the Bible readings in a bilingual Bible. It is quite a moving experience to be singing Amazing Grace in English along with almost 3000 people singing it in Chinese. The sermon was about 45 minutes but now and then Derek would whisper some of the main points to me. The previous week there had been a Baptism of over 400 people. This was a communion Sunday so I got to participate in that as well.


After church I had Daniel choose which restaurant he would like and I would treat him. He chose KFC. He said he had eaten at KFC once before and that he loved western food. So I got to see what this American restaurant is like in China. My chicken sandwich was not really like KFC but was a deep-fried batter coated chicken patty on a bun. The Pepsi was very familiar. Derek had fries for his side which were just like American fries. My side was a salad of chopped celery, corn, and cucumber in a sauce. There was a birthday party going on near us. The favor that each child received was a plastic coat hanger.

After lunch we returned to the church for an English language Bible Study which Ruth and another Amity teacher lead. The group has been studying Matthew and I had been asked to speak on one of the parables. I chose the Parable of the Mustard Seed and the Parable of the yeast. I spoke for about 30 minutes, including telling some about myself and my family. I showed mustard seeds and yeast, both of which were unfamiliar to the people. One of the members would translate what I said into Chinese periodically. Ruth arrived to help lead the discussion along with David, the other teacher. They have two discussion groups of about 15 members so I just participated in the group discussion. There was a wide range of English abilities in the group as well as people ranging from committed Christian to some who are just curious about Christianity. Everyone was very nice and there was a lot of visiting afterwards. This was Ruth's last time so she got many thanks, a gift, and warm farewells.

After we returned from church on Sunday until we left on Wednesday afternoon the focus was on getting all of Ruth's final school reports done and getting her apt. packed up. Ruth was still recovering completely and I didn't feel too well on Monday and Tuesday, though I was never as sick as Ruth. Many people stopped by to help and say good-bye which often took longer but was such a kind gesture. Ruth did not get much sleep the night before we left but we made it. There

was a nice send-off at the bus station.

In my next entry I will describe the visit to Barry's home village.


posted by Beth Wiegand : 8:15 AM [0 Comments](#) 

Friday, July 6, 2007

Friday Evening nearing Xi'an

I spoke to Beth this morning. It was Friday evening there and she was on a crowded "bullet" train heading for Xi'an. Beth reported that Thursday had been lots of visiting with Barry's family/friends and that Friday had been mostly traveling to Xi'an via a variety of modes. She'll fill in the details when she has a chance to blog.

Niel


posted by Niel - W0VLZ : 1:37 PM [0 Comments](#) 

Wednesday, July 4, 2007

Wednesday July 4

Today is the day Beth and Ruth leave Lanzhou for Barry's house and then on to Xian. They are to leave at 2 pm and take a bus to Barry's sister's house where they will spend the night. Then tomorrow they take a taxi to Barry's house and spend tomorrow night there. Then it will be on to Xian where Beth and Ruth plan to stay in a hotel or hostel. Beth thinks they will be out of touch until they get to Xian. On Saturday they should be able to tour Museum of Qin Terra Cotta Warriors and Horses. On Sunday, July 8, they will travel to Beijing so that they are ready to catch the Monday train to Ulaanbaatar.

Niel

posted by Niel - W0VLZ : 5:28 AM [0 Comments](#) 

Tuesday, July 3, 2007

Village Visit Part II

The cab dropped us off at Dave's home in a village of about 300. We immediately attracted attention as we were the second group of foreigners to ever come to this village, the first being Ruth when she visited earlier this year. We were greeted by Dave's grandmother and mother. Both the grandfather and father are deceased.

The house is built in a courtyard fashion. We entered through a gate and were in a hard packed dirt courtyard with rooms around the edge. One was a kitchen and one was a combination living room and bedroom where we spent the majority of our time. I didn't see in the other rooms but at night the family donkey was brought inside the courtyard and seemed to be tethered across the courtyard from where we stayed.

We were served tea and snacks and greeted the first group of people who came to see us. Conversation was minimal as Dave was busy helping and Ruth knows just a few phrases. Needless to say, I smiled and nodded a lot. However, this did not seem to be a problem as they seemed to genuinely be interested just to see us. The women all were wearing their best blouses with their pants.

We next went on a walking tour of the village while the mother, grandmother, and Lily fixed a fancy dinner. Dave escorted us through the village and out to the surrounding farm fields. Wheat is the primary crop. It was a beautiful scene as there were all the green fields fading off into mountains. People were finishing their day's work and heading for the village, some carrying their hand tools or leading a cow. We got many curious but friendly stares.

After we returned to the house we started on this nice meal of several dishes. Potatoes are often what Dave's mother and grandmother eat but we definitely had the company meal with dishes of chicken, duck, fish, and several vegetable dishes. Soon more people arrived and the pattern for the evening was set.


Ruth had taken many pictures when she had been there before and had brought prints for everyone as a gift. Dave would hand out the photos and people were so happy to see them. There was much laughter and passing of the pictures. After we finished dinner we just greeted people. It was like an open house all evening. Dave and Ruth took pictures of anyone that did not get a picture taken last time. Ages ranged from babies to grandparents. It was a most interesting time and I really felt like a celebrity.

Finally, about 11:30, everyone left and we went to bed. There is a raised platform across one end of the room and mats were rolled out on it. Dave, Ruth, the grandmother and I all slept there. I assume Lily and the mother were in another similar room. There is electricity so Ruth and I even used our CPAP machines. However, there is no running water. There is a community well and a community outhouse across from Dave's house which we made use of before the gate was locked for the night.

In the morning we had breakfast and greeted a few more people. Several women brought us gifts. I got several decorations that hang off a blouse button and several pairs of embroidered insoles for my shoes. Dave's mom had also made each of us a pair of slippers.

We then left in another taxi, sharing it with a teenager and her kitten. We stopped to visit Dave's uncle, aunt, and 2 cousins in the big town before catching the big bus back to Lanzhou. We arrived back at Ruth's flat about 3:00 pm.

Dave had told me, "The people in my village are poor but warm-hearted." They certainly showed us wonderful hospitality and it was a fascinating experience.

posted by Beth Wiegand : 2:58 AM [2 Comments](#) 

Sunday, July 1, 2007

Village Visit




Dave acting cool for the camera

On Friday afternoon Ruth and I joined Dave, one of Ruth's students, on a visit to his village. We took a cab from Ruth's flat to one of the bus stations and caught a bus that went west out of Lanzhou. I got the front seat so had a great view. Besides the driver there was a man that acted like a conductor. While we were still in the city he would jump off the bus at stops and shout to see if anyone needed this route. Meanwhile the bus is slowly moving along. The conductor would help passengers onto the bus while it is still moving and then jump on himself. I was glad we got this bus at its beginning point!

We left the city and entered into dry land with steep hills. As we moved along it gradually became greener, especially in the valleys. We made several stops along the way (and these were actual stops) and vendors would come on board selling drinks and snacks. When we reached the big town (about 4 hours) near Dave's village we left our large, somewhat air conditioned bus and caught a taxi to his village. It was a 3 wheeled cab that seemed a bit flimsy but it got us there. I got in the front seat next to the driver. Dave, Ruth, and Lily (Dave's sister who had met us in this town) squished into the back seat. Then there was a mother and son (about 5 years old) who also needed the cab. The mom climbed into the back area with the luggage, and the boy sat on my lap. The road was dirt and full of deep ruts. The cab just wove all over the road seeking out the best path. This was not a problem as I think we met maybe one car and two motorcycles in the 30 minute ride.

I seem to be having some trouble with the computer erasing things so I will post this now and later write Village Visit part II.

posted by Beth Wiegand : 6:27 AM [0 Comments](#) 

Saturday, June 30, 2007

Week in Lanzhou

I will describe the four days spent at Ruth's apt. and going to her school by topic rather than day by day. This will cover Tuesday morning until Friday noon.

One of the main activities of the week was going to Ruth's Oral English classes. She was giving final exams to her eight classes. The students had been given a choice of doing a group presentation or having an individual test with Ruth. The group skits were first and they were so fun to watch. Some were variations on fairy tales such as Cinderella or The Three Little Pigs. Others were original skits about family relationships or finding true love.. There were some that were presented as a short debate on topics such as whether there should be a TV in the college dormitories or whether good deeds should be rewarded. Next Ruth would take part of the class to her office for the individual testing and I would talk with the other half. Niel had gotten together about 25 photos before I left and these were the basis for my talk. I shared about my family and the types of activities we do. It was a lot of fun and afterwards I would usually have a small group come and talk more with me. I got some of the most reaction when I explained that my husband and sons also help cook. Niel working for IBM also often got a reaction.


During one morning Ruth had no class. I stayed here in the apt. and helped with domestic chores. It was interesting but time consuming to do laundry as her machine has separate agitator and spin portions and doesn't work quite right so I had to hold a button to agitate. Ruth's sun room has a clothes line so I could hang the laundry there. The fresh fruit here is wonderful! However, it takes a while to get to eat it after buying it from a street-side vendor. First, the fruit is soaked in bleach water, then rinsed in water that has been boiled, and then dried.

One afternoon, Ruth arranged for a student to show me around town. Roma brought two friends to help and we had a nice time crossing the Yellow River at the Iron Bridge and exploring White Pagoda Hills Park. The students were protective of me and did a good job as tour guides. I observed a ceremony at a Buddhist Temple in the park. The students said that since I was a Christian I could just watch while they lit incense. There were women in robes chanting. It was quite interesting even though I really didn't know what was going on.

Two evenings involved going to fancy restaurants. One was the official farewell dinner for the foreign teachers which I got to attend also. There were about a dozen people and we were seated in a separate room with a couple of attendants who tended to our every need. We were seated at a round table with a lazy susan in the middle. The dishes were presented so beautifully. Some dishes I liked quite well and others not so much. The other dinner was one that Ruth gave for the young Chinese teachers. It was similar to the first dinner but not quite as fancy. I have found that I really like Chrysanthemum tea.

I have had no trouble with stomach or intestinal problems. I try to be careful and am especially cautious about the water. I have eaten food from street vendors but it is always cooked right in front of us.

All for now. My next entry will tell of a visit to a village in the countryside.

posted by Beth Wiegand : 5:25 AM [1 Comments](#) 

Wednesday, June 27, 2007

Lanzhou

Today I turned down an offer to have a student show me around a part of Lanzhou as I wanted to write in this blog, prepare my Bible study presentation for Sunday, and just let things soak in. I feel like so many interesting experiences are just stacking up and I hardly have time to process them.

In my last posting I basically covered my first day. I will try to summarize what I did during the rest of my visit to Beijing. On the second day, Saturday, we had "errands" to run such as check out the train station we will be using later, make our reservation at the hostel and print out the info Ruth still needed for her visa. Of course, doing all this in a huge city is quite a process. We rode the bus and taxi. I was always looking around taking in as much as possible. In addition to the type of buildings we had already seen, we saw big high rises that could perhaps be seen in any large city. For lunch we thought it would be fun to try one of the fast food chains from the USA that have come into Beijing. We had seen KFC, Subway, Burger King, and MacDonald's. We went into MacDonald's. It was very crowded even though it would be too expensive for most people. It looked very much an American MacDonald's and I ordered the small hamburger. It tasted just the same. When I went to the bathroom, it was very clean but it was a squat toilet so I knew I was in a different part of the world!

In the afternoon we went to visit The Temple of Heaven. It is a beautiful park which features a circular temple that has been restored. The colors on the building were so pretty-blue, green, red and gold. It was also nice to walk around the peaceful and cool parkland. In general, Beijing was hot and humid. Fortunately, our hostel was air conditioned as were some of the taxi cabs.

In the evening Ruth and I went to a performance of the Beijing Opera. It was interesting but neither of us felt we needed to go again.


Sunday was our trip to the Great Wall. We hired a car and driver and left first thing to keep the trip as cool as possible. We drove about two hours to get to a section that neither Ruth nor Daniel had seen. It was interesting to get outside of the big city and see some countryside. The terrain changed from flat to hilly. It was very thrilling to come around a corner and see the wall snaking across the mountainside. This section is not one of the main places that tourists go. We paid the land owner a small fee to hike up through his land. When we got to the wall itself, we climbed a ladder to get on top. Part of this section had been restored and part was original and in need of some work. We walked along the top of the wall and went into one of the square tower sections. It was one of the times I felt I needed to pinch myself to see if I was dreaming. We had wonderful views and took many pictures. I hope to get some pictures posted eventually. We had lunch on the way back at a restaurant where we had several good dishes and a tea that is good for hot weather.

On Monday we had planned to fly to Lanzhou in the morning but Ruth needed to stay because of the hangup at the Russian Embassy on Friday. Daniel needed to get back so he left early. My ticket could be changed and Ruth just had to bite the bullet and get a new ticket.

It was a little scary having our translator and helper gone, but Ruth is an intrepid traveler and we just carried on. She arranged for a car and driver through the hostel rather than us trying to take taxis alone. The driver first dropped off Ruth at the Russian Embassy and then took me to the Summer Palace. This large park which used to be just for the emperors' use was even bigger than the Temple of Heaven park. I strolled along taking in the beautiful grounds around a lake and looking at beautiful bridges, pavilions, and buildings. The driver returned for Ruth and we met up around 1:00. We had a designated meeting place but cell phones helped us get together earlier. I am glad to report that Ruth got her Russian visa so the last half of our trip can continue! We continued to look at other parts of the Summer Palace including the marble boat. We did a lot of walking and saw many Chinese and international tourists. We met our driver at the gate and he took us to the airport.

Our flight to Beijing was very nice. All the announcements were done in Chinese and English even though I think Ruth and I were the only ones who needed the English. We were served dinner on this two hour flight. Ruth and I chose mulberry and mango juice to drink. When the flight attendant saw us sampling from each other, she gave us two more glasses so we each could have a glass of both kinds. Everyone was offered a newspaper and we were given the English edition of China Daily.

After we arrived in Lanzhou we caught a bus from the airport to a downtown hotel. Daniel was there to meet us and had a bouquet of flowers to welcome me to the city. We then took a taxi to Ruth's apt. It was very nice to get a shower and fall into bed!

posted by Beth Wiegand : 10:49 PM [2 Comments](#) 

Sunday, June 24, 2007

Sunday, June 24

This is my first entry from China. I am writing from the Far East Youth Hostel where we are staying during our time in Beijing. I hope I am successful because all the prompts and directions are in Chinese. I just try to remember where I pressed keys when I did my practice blog while visiting in Washington state a couple of weeks ago.


Since my arrival at 4:30 am Friday it has been a whirlwind of new sights and adventures. I am really glad we scheduled some down time this afternoon and evening so I can process what has been happening and get started on this blog.

It was really great to see my sister Ruth and her Chinese "son" Daniel walk into the Beijing airport. The first new adventure was driving into Beijing from the airport. Because it was so early, traffic wasn't bad but I have seen some mega traffic since. It was interesting to see the mix of buildings. There are many concrete boxy looking buildings but mixed in are some old neighborhoods, called hutongs, where there are small one story buildings with courtyards and very narrow streets. The hostel is located in one of these areas and it is very interesting to walk through seeing the small shops, living areas, and mix of transportation. On these very narrow streets there are taxis, cars, three wheeled motorized trucks, and bicycles.

The first day Ruth worked on her visa at the Russian Embassy while Daniel and I toured the Forbidden City. It was much bigger than I realized. We would see one impressive palace and then walk past it and there are several more stretching off in the distance. There were lots of tourists from all over the world. We were looking at a stone carving when some soldiers shooed us all away and some dignitaries were whisked in for their own viewing. A ring of bodyguards stood around them and then away they went to the next sight.

We also experienced an internet cafe and ate supper in a park where we could sit on a bench but not walk on the grass. I managed to stay up until 10:00 and then slept very soundly. Jet lag has not been a big problem.

Even though I have only reported on one day I will close and see if this actually posts.


posted by Beth Wiegand : 1:13 AM [1 Comments](#) 

Thursday, June 21, 2007

Beth is on her way

Kenny and Niel saw Beth off Wednesday afternoon. She phoned home as she waited to board Air China flight 984, non-stop LA to Beijing. Beth arrived in Beijing over an hour early and had made it through customs by the time Ruth and Daniel arrived to pick her up. When Niel phoned Beth (cell phone roaming works in Beijing also) she, Daniel and Ruth were heading for their hotel to drop off luggage before a day of sight seeing (for Beth and Daniel) and Russian visa paperwork (for Ruth).

Until July 29 Beth can be emailed at Ruth's email address: rklavano@yahoo.com


posted by Niel - W0VLZ : 6:11 AM [2 Comments](#) 

Monday, May 28, 2007

More details on Lanzhou section

Ruth has planned a number of interesting events while I am with her in Lanzhou. I will get to visit her English classes at the university. We will also be going on visits to Dave's home and Daniel's home. This will provide a view of real life that would not be seen on a typical tourist's itinerary. I will also attend church with her and help with a Bible Study. We will also visit Barry's home in conjunction with seeing the terra cotta warriors in Xian.

I know that I will be taking planes, trains, and buses on my travels within China. I also will be making good use of my feet. I probably will come home in better shape. For starters, Ruth's apartment is on the 8th floor and there are no elevators.

posted by Beth Wiegand : 12:27 PM [0 Comments](#) 


Wednesday, May 2, 2007

Around the World in 5 1/2 weeks

Beth is leaving Rochester on June 20 for Beijing, China where she'll be met by her sister, Ruth. The two of them will spend a couple of days in Beijing before returning to Lanzhou where Ruth is wrapping up a two year teaching position. After seeing the sights around Lanzhou (and getting Ruth packed for her move back to the US) they will head for Mongolia and then the trans-Siberian Railway, Moscow, St Petersburg and Warsaw. On July 29 Beth will return to US after traveling around the world in 5 1/2 weeks



		Travel/Activities	Night Accommodations
June			
20	W	Leave Minneapolis 18:00 Plane change in Chicago Arrive Los Angeles 23:05	Plane
21	T	Leave Los Angeles 01:40	Plane
22	F	Arrive Beijing 5:20	Far East Hotel
23	S	• Great Wall	Far East Hotel
24	S	• Summer Palace	Far East Hotel
25	M	Leave Beijing 8:00 Arrive Lanzhou	
26	T	• Visit Ruth's English classes at the university	
27	W	• Visit Dave's home, Barry's home and Daniel's home	
28	T		
29	F	• Attend church with Ruth and help with a Bible Study	
30	S		
July		• See the terra cotta warriors in Xian	
1	S	• Farewell dinner, sponsored by the Communist Party secretary from the English Dept	
2	M		
3	T	• Dinner at the Red Hotel with Ruth's young teacher friends	
4	W		
5	T	• Pack up Ruth's stuff for move home	
6	F	• Soak up local color	
7	S		
8	S	Leave Lanzhou Arrive Beijing	Hotel
9	M	Leave Beijing	Train
10	T	Arrive Ulaanbaatar	Hotel
11	W		Ger Camp
12	T		Ger Camp
13	F		Ulaanbaatar B&B
14	S	Leave Ulaanbaatar 20:10	Train
15	S		Train
16	M	Arrive Irkutsk 8:27	Fisherman's Cape
17	T		Fisherman's Cape
18	W		Fisherman's Cape
19	T		Fisherman's Cape
20	F	Leave Irkutsk 16:20	Train
21	S		Train
22	S		Train
23	M	Arrive Moscow 16:42	Hotel Zarya
24	T		Hotel Zarya
25	W	Leave Moscow 22:50	Train
26	T	Arrive St Petersburg 6:00	Hotel Vesta
27	F		Hotel Vesta
28	S	Leave St Petersburg 15:30 Arrive Warsaw 15:30	Hostel Kanonia
29	S	Leave Warsaw 12:10 Arrive Chicago 15:10	

posted by Beth Wiegand : 12:20 PM [0 Comments](#) 

Where are Beth and Ruth Going?




I've found videos at <http://www.youtube.com> that show some of what Ruth and Beth will be seeing on their trip. Use your browser "back" button to return to this page:

- [The Forbidden City](#)
- [Random Lanzhou](#)
- [Xi'an](#)
- [A village near Xian](#)
- [Xi'an Terra Cotta Warriors](#)
- [Beijing to Ger Camp](#)
- [Lake Baikal, Russian Siberia](#)
- [Ulaanbaatar to Moscow](#)

- [Moscow - a city tour](#)

- [A Whirlwind tour of Saint Petersburg](#)

(These downloads are all in the 25 - 75 MByte range so a high speed connection is recommended)

posted by Beth Wiegand : 12:19 PM [1 Comments](#) 



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