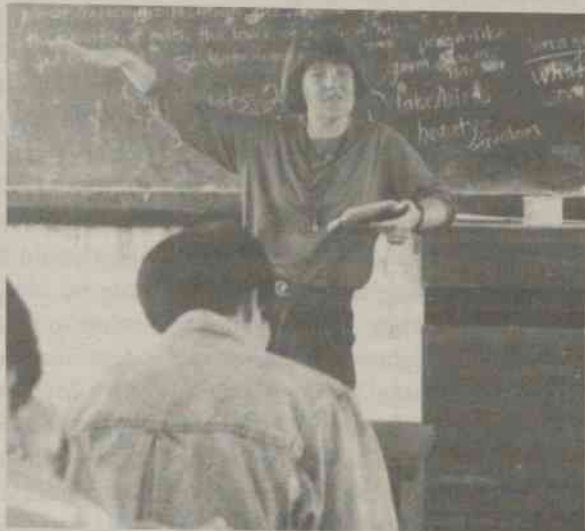


Living In The Land Of Noodles And Fireworks

BY PAM WHITFIELD

Pam Whitfield graduated from St. Andrews College in 1991. She studied in China during the spring of her senior year at St. Andrews and has recently returned there to teach for two years through the Amity Foundation. The following excerpt is from an article she wrote for the St. Andrews College alumni magazine.



I passed a water buffalo on my way to work this morning. As I pedaled into campus, choruses of "good morning" and "hi, Miss Pam" greeted me. I've tried to convince them to drop the "Miss" but the Chinese are just too polite.

I'm a volunteer English teacher in Zhangzhou Teachers College, located in subtropical Fujian Province, the ancient birthplace of tea. I see 240 different faces in my classes each week so I don't know all their names, but I'm still trying. Since I'm the first foreign teacher to call this small town home, my Western ways make me a celebrity, a mystery and sometimes even a "foreign devil."

Chinese may stare, point, even scream "hello" at me from a safe distance, but they are easily befriended and always generous to a fault. They treat me like they'd wish to be treated were they suddenly transported to America: wined and dined, fussed over, led around by the hand.

I wouldn't be eating sugar cane and slurping noodles today if it

weren't for St. Andrews College. An offhand remark made by professor Skip Clark prompted me to study in Beijing my senior year. After that spring term it was never a question of whether I was coming back just when.

After professor Tom Williams reminded me that [other St. Andrews graduates] were teaching in China through the Amity Foundation, I contacted Amity's stateside liaison, the National Council of Churches of Christ USA, who urged me to apply to the Presbyterian Church USA for sponsorship.

Amity, a volunteer organization created by Chinese Christians, works at the grassroots level to promote education, social services, health and rural development. Foreign teachers are just one program to aid China's struggle for modernization, but for those willing to devote two years, Amity provides unprecedented training, support and perks in the field. I'm here as a "mission worker" for the Presbyterian Church, which for the past nine years has been sending people to serve China's

struggling educational system.

Considered remote and poor, this college could never afford foreign teachers without Amity assistance. Many of the library's rooms and shelves remain empty. New teachers live in shanties beside the dusty playground while they await housing assignment. Students bunk eight to a room about 15 feet by eight feet. The administration wants to solve the staff and student housing crisis, build a real sports field, purchase up-to-date classroom equipment and, of course, hire more foreign teachers. But since it's not considered a key college in a growing area and serves rural students, funding is very limited.

These students are among the three percent whose entrance examination scores admit them to higher education each year. When I asked them to write a journal entry about the happiest moment in their lives so far, 95 percent of them described the day their acceptance letters from the college arrived.

China is a country of stark contrasts. She's been aptly compared to a car speeding through the darkness, moving so fast that it outdistances the beams of its headlights. For instance, Pizza Huts and McDonalds are springing up in major cities, but in the western provinces nearly one million people still live in caves. The new shops cropping up in our city streets sell VCRs, compact discs, microwaves and even cellular phones to the increasingly affluent middle class. But on the edge of town, just beyond our campus wall, peasants still water their fields with wooden buckets slung over

shoulder poles. Their wives beat the washing on flat rocks in Nine Dragon River and sleep on straw mats in bamboo thatched huts.

The Chinese hunger for Western goods, imitate Western fashions and adopt Western ideas wholesale. For many, Michael Jackson and Madonna effectively embody American cultural values. The few "culture shocks" I receive are a result of discovering my culture transplanted, and thriving, in the third world.

The Chinese celebrate the simple, accept the inevitable and make do with less, values that are missing from the West's fast food, go for it, insta-automatic society. The citizens of the middle kingdom fairly exude inner peace, harmony and balance. I came back to get a piece of the IN-action. And with the slower-paced life, I grow younger and more serene each day.

Don't be fooled: The People's Republic of China is still communist in practice. Post office policies change every time a new worker comes on shift. I need 10 different official seals on five different forms to withdraw money at the bank and some days I don't have electricity or running water in my apartment. I just accept it. China defies comprehension. The longer I live here and the more I study her, the less I understand. She is a daily challenge, a constant enigma. That's what drew me to China in the first place and that's what keeps me on my toes. I never know when I might turn the corner and come face to face with a water buffalo.

A Letter To The St. Andrews Community From W. D. White

The following is a letter from W. D. White, former professor at St. Andrews, that he wanted to us to print letting everyone here at St. Andrews know how he is doing.

Dear Friends and Family:

I am breaking my long-time resolution not to write impersonal notes at Christmas! This year, however, I have news that I am eager to share with all of you.

Arleene and I have just about completed our move into our new home. She has worked "like a young bride with her first house" to decorate and personalize our place, making it both comfortable and attractive. In August I finished my 28 years of tenured teaching at St. Andrews, sold our home in

Laurinburg, and moved to our temporary Chapel Hill address (where Arleene has been living since October 1989). We spent some weeks looking for the new place we now have, into which we moved at the end of September. This involved moving things twice: first from Laurinburg to a temporary Chapel Hill location, and then into our more permanent place. I was fortunate to have strong-armed St. Andrews soccer players to help me with both moves, which I was therefore able to do at minimum cost!

We have a guest room, and considerable space in our new place -- so we anticipate that all of you will consider this an invitation to visit us when you are in this part of the world!

Arleene's health is better than it has been in some years; and I seem

to persist without too much change. Arleene is enjoying many old (and new) Chapel Hill friends. I am "reconnecting" with University of North Carolina and Duke friends. And I have the good fortune of a very interesting teaching position at UNC.

My good friend Larry Churchill appointed me to a three-year contract as a research professor in the Department of Social Medicine in the Medical School of UNC. This year I am teaching 2nd year medical students -- biomedical ethics this fall, and literature and medicine classes in the spring. I like my students very much, and they seem to respond positively to my work. My colleagues here have been splendid in every way, welcoming me with sincerity and openness. A splendid climax to my many years of teaching!

Our children seem to be doing well despite the usual problems we all have. We are very happy and thankful for all the good things we are experiencing here, not the least of which is your continuing devotion and good will! We wish you all the best!

Much love,

W. D. White and Arleene

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