

Longzhou, Guangxi Province, China  
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Dear friends, 你们好!

We're back! The last time we wrote, we were still trying to figure out our situation after the devastating Sichuan earthquake that also affected our school and forced our premature departure from China. Our thoughts will always be with the people affected by that earthquake, which has claimed the lives of over 90,000 people, many of them students or children. Although we have left our school in Chengxian, we are in touch with several students there, who feel sad that we had to leave so abruptly. However, we tell them that the most important thing is that they are all safe and sound, and they agree. We have heard reports that there are still frequent aftershocks/earthquakes in the area; one week in July, a former colleague told us, they experienced three earthquakes. We are proud that Amity Foundation, our organization, was immediately involved in the relief work.



After the earthquake, Tomas and I spent more than a month in Minnesota, mostly visiting family, friends, and relaxing, which we really needed after the difficult earthquake experience. We also spoke at Concordia Lutheran Church in Fertile. Perhaps you remember that after the earthquake, I rushed home to be with my grandmother who was ill (and Tomas joined me a week later). I am grateful to be able to say that she is recovering, and we were actually able to spend a lot of quality time together. Next week she turns 99!

After the US, we went to Sweden for over a month. In Sweden, along with spending as much time as we could with friends and family, we were also held two presentations on our experiences in China. Once again, we were excited by all of the interest that people have expressed in China, and in our work here, through the Church of Sweden. We also spent time working on our little house in Dalarna. In August, we attended the Church of Sweden's summer conference for all colleagues (missionaries) abroad. People working all over the globe gathered together in the beautiful old city of Sigtuna for a week of interesting discussions, presentations, and time together. Meeting colleagues who work everywhere from South America, to Africa, to Asia, left us with a lasting impression that we are all working together towards a common goal, in a global world, for a church with a global outreach.

After the conference, and after a few good days staying with friends in Uppsala, the time finally came for us to return to China. First we attended a short Amity conference in Nanjing, where we were surprised and a little worried to see that our numbers are dwindling. Right now we have the smallest group of teachers we have ever heard of, and we cannot understand why. So, if you are interested in teaching through Amity in the future or if you know someone who is, please contact us or visit Amity's web page for more information. We have experienced that teaching in China through Amity is a meaningful way to get to know young people in China in a school setting, and to help spread international understanding, democratic ideas, and Christian love through teaching at a grassroots level. At Amity's conference, we heard about the relief work that Amity has been doing in earthquake-affected areas. Now, specifically, they will be working towards building high-quality school buildings. We were happy to hear this, since such a disproportionately high number of schools were destroyed in the earthquake. To contribute to Amity's relief work or learn more, visit [www.amityfoundation.org](http://www.amityfoundation.org)



Now we are in our new location, in Longzhou, Guangxi Province, in southernmost China, only an hour from Vietnam. The stifling heat and high humidity was a shock for us, but now, after a week, we are starting to get used to it! When we first arrived at our new school, a small welcoming committee greeted us. The college president himself, some teachers, and a small group of excited students stood waiting for us when we arrived, and the male students were quickly told to carry up our

heavy suitcases for us. The boys were so small, they had to carry the bags between two of them! Once we got into our apartment, we found a card that said: "Dear Tomas and Rachel, Welcome to this big family! We wish you will enjoy every day here! From your new families." We truly did feel welcomed. That same evening, our competent and friendly co-teachers, Terrence and Millie, and several leaders, took us out for a welcome banquet. Typically in China, these banquets are a time to drink as much *baijiu* (strong spirits) as possible, but when we politely declined alcohol, we were amused that the school leaders followed suit. For the first time in China, we attended a banquet where only tea was served, and nobody smoked!



We are the only foreigners in the city, and people seem almost even more surprised and excited to see us here than they did in Chengxian. Everywhere we go, people stare, point, or greet us. (One male student, who spoke a little English, called out to Tomas once, "Hello, stranger!" with a friendly wave). In general, our first impression of this area is that people seem more laid-back than they did up north. Last week after we had unpacked all of our boxes, Tomas went to the outdoor garbage area, which is a huge cement square, with a steep staircase leading up it. He climbed up and threw in the flattened cardboard. To his dismay, a tiny old Chinese woman then approached as fast as

she could, said *xie xie* (thank you) with a bright smile, and then jumped right down *into* the garbage to retrieve the cardboard! (This is probably for cash for recycling) He felt so bad, so now whenever we carry out anything, we first look to see if anyone is watching that wants whatever we are carrying out!



We have spent this past week getting settled into our apartment. This is easier said than done, since many small details that would pose no problem at all at home, are difficult to accomplish in China. For example, just finding a certain kind of light bulb can take a whole day (accomplished!). Now things are starting to get a little better, as we have cleaned, purchased several necessary items, and even found a flower shop to buy plants. We hope to find a small toaster oven as well, in order to bake bread (no bread at all here.) Thankfully, we have a hot water heater so we have good showers; unfortunately, this shower is positioned directly over our non-western style squatter toilet...wouldn't want to slip or wear any jewelry in the shower...!

But the worst thing for me is that our apartment (on the third floor) has bars on the windows. We have never lived anywhere with bars before, and not only do the bars obstruct the view, they make me feel claustrophobic, especially after the earthquake. However, luckily we have a balcony with a normal screen door, if necessary, we could get out. Other "challenges" that we have met include the heat—over 90 inside and hotter outside—and the insects! Those of you who know me well know that I do not handle insects very well. Having previously only lived in northern locations, I had never experienced the joy of having a gigantic, mouse-sized cockroach make an emergency landing on the outside of our screen door. Nor had I ever been so challenged as to wake up with another giant cockroach less than a foot away from my head when I had been sleeping. I can now happily report that today we have procured a canopy-style mosquito net for the bed!



On the bright side, Guangxi, being a tropical area, boasts bright green leaves, banana trees, rice terraces, palm trees, and all kinds of succulent tropical fruits. We have spent several evenings sitting outside at a stall, enjoying grilled vegetables and drinking fresh mango slush. In the evenings, everyone is outside enjoying the cooler temperatures by socializing, strolling, or eating out-of-doors. It makes for an interesting culture that we are excited to be able to become a part of.





Although we are learning Chinese and people we meet become excited that we speak some Mandarin, language still causes difficulty. Last week we traveled to a nearby city for a health check-up to get our visas. The doctor and I were making small talk (in Chinese) as he did an ultrasound on my abdomen, right under my ribcage. I asked what he was checking for, and he said, *Gan*. Assuming that he was looking for my gallbladder, and trying to be helpful, I said, *Oh, wo mei you* (I don't have one).

He just gave me a strange look. Later I discovered that *Gan* in fact means liver!

The locals here also speak a totally different dialect than the one we had heard in Chengxian; this is actually a dialect of Cantonese. In some places, the locals speak pretty good Mandarin, and then we can communicate, but in others, they have almost never used Mandarin so then we have a very difficult time understanding each other.

Tomas started his classes today and I start tomorrow. Next time we will tell you more about our new school and our new city—when we have more to tell!

Our new address is listed, below, but it can also be printed directly from our web page in order to include the Chinese, under Contact Us, and then Address Labels.

Please keep in touch! It is always nice to hear from people back home!

再见! (*Zaijian!* = Goodbye!)

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