

Chengxian, Gansu Province, China  
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你们好!

(*Nimen hao!* = Hello!)



Summer has arrived here in Chengxian! Nearly every day we enjoy bright, sunny weather, around 30 °C. The countryside is green and lush, thanks to occasional nighttime rains and some humidity, and on walks in the countryside we admire tall climbing roses in farmers' yards. (My scrawny climbing rose in Sweden pales in comparison!) Farmers pull wooden carts of vegetables and fresh, sweet, local peaches into the market, and this week the farmers have been busy harvesting wheat by hand.

Time has flown by since last we wrote and we have kept very busy. I had my first birthday in China, which we celebrated at a lovely farmer's restaurant outside of town, together with our colleagues, Thad, Michelle, and Sarah. In the middle of April it was warm enough to sit outside in the evening! Then at our apartment we shared a Chinese cake. Chinese cakes barely look real; they are brightly colored and lavishly decorated. We are starting to get accustomed to the taste as well.

The following weekend we went on a little excursion. We found a retreat located in Three Beaches National Park, called Moon Canyon, which is only two hours away. We spent two nights in a clean, but rustic and unusual hut. The surrounding nature was



pristine, with almost no other people out except for the occasional local farmer we met on the trail. The green, almost tropical scenery was unlike anything else we have seen in China before. It was a very rejuvenating weekend.



The first week of May we went to Xi'an for the Church of Sweden's regional conference. Coworkers (missionaries) from Asia and Latin America met for a week of study, devotions,

and outings. It was great to sit outside on the grass (something people do not otherwise do here in China) and have our devotions, singing well-known hymns together. It felt comforting to spend a whole week with people who share the same background as us, and meeting the other coworkers really made us feel that we belong to something bigger. We especially enjoyed these devotions, since the church that we usually attend is heartfelt but musically-challenged, with nearly 2-hour sermons in a dialect of Chinese...



Represented at the conference were coworkers from China, the Philippines, Peru, and Costa Rica. The meetings and study time were interesting, but the best part of the week was undoubtedly to meet our coworkers. There were 10 children in our group as well. The Chinese people that we met were totally crazy when they saw the blonde, blue-eyed children, many of whom are still quite young. At

restaurants, the waitresses would sometimes walk right up to the youngest children and carry them off! Whenever one of the parents would stop with their stroller, a crowd would gather around the child and they would stare, laugh, and take pictures of the child with their cell phones. It was quite a sight to behold. Some of the children, however, found all of this attention frightening. Once we heard a child say, in Swedish, “Mommy, the Chinese people are laughing at me and it looks like they do not brush their teeth.”



After the conference, Andreas Backlund and Anders Salomonsson, from the Church of Sweden, came back with us to Chengxian. After an 11-hour, gorgeous but sometimes nerve-racking drive on winding mountain roads, we finally arrived. During their short visit we showed them all around town and school, including to the old part of town with

Chengxian’s unique mosque, to the markets, and everything in-between. They visited one of Tomas’ classes, which the students appreciated (“They are very humorous,” the students told Tomas later). We enjoyed the visit, especially since it feels important that people from our sending organization now really know and understand where and how we live here, in the middle of nowhere, as it sometimes feels, in the middle of China! It was also a time for us to get to know each other better and to share our Chinese cultural



experiences with people from home.

After all of the excitement, and quite a full schedule, we both felt run-down for a while and caught colds. Tomas coughed for over 2 weeks. His cough eventually worsened and he got a fever, but luckily that coincided with our next visitors' arrival. Thankfully, 24 hours after starting antibiotics he began to feel much better. We hope we can stay healthy now until we go home this summer. Two people told us in May, "I think you both look better now than you did when you lived in Sweden," whatever that means!



Two weeks after our 10-day sojourn in Xi'an for the conference, we traveled back to Xi'an again to meet Mom and Bruce, who were here for their first China trip. First we had a full day where Mom and Bruce shopped 'til we dropped in Xi'an, and then a week in Chengxian. Either Mom or Bruce visited each of my classes and some of Tomas' as well. Our students loved meeting them. I felt proud of my students for asking such good questions, not only "Can you eat with chopsticks?" which is probably Chinese

people's favorite question! On Monday, Mom and Bruce also visited English Corner, where they were the center of attention. (See picture). Mom and Bruce have been very supportive of us coming to China, so we were happy to return the favor by trying to be a good host and hostess. One day we visited our best local attraction, Jifeng Mountain, which they both said was probably the most beautiful place they have ever seen!



This week Tomas and I visited our local pool for the first time. The pool is across from the college, but the flashing neon "Open 24 hours" sign at the entrance puzzled us. Well, Tomas and Thad found out the reason for the sign: the pool complex is both a pool... and a bordello!!! The building was nice enough, but inside it was complete chaos! When we entered, all eyes were on us. As we swam, people pointed, laughed, or yelled "HELLO" at us. Sometimes children would swim into us, just to say "sorry" in English. The noise level was the loudest I have ever heard in such a place. Since most Chinese people cannot swim, hundreds of people were clustered in the shallow end of the pool. There we tried to give my students some pointers on how to swim. Some of them had never even stood up in deep water before! One of my students, a tiny girl, entered the pool and promptly sank like a rock right to the bottom. Tomas literally pulled her up and had to say "Just stand up", and when she finally stopped screaming she realized that she could, indeed, stand normally! We did our best to instruct the students a little, and by the time we left, they had at least seen us swim around and they had practiced the swimming movements some. Everywhere around the pool, despite "No Smoking" signs, men sat and smoked right next to the pool. It was nearly impossible to swim because of all the



people, and we were kicked, hit, and splashed on by people who jumped or dove right into the crowd from the pool's edge. But our students loved being there, (they told us later they had stayed for 8 hours!) and they have already asked us to go again next weekend.

Our first box of books has now arrived for the Book Nook student reading room. Michelle and I are anxiously waiting to receive our key to be able to start cleaning, painting, and furnishing the room. We have told our students about it, because we are accepting applications for student volunteer librarians. One student told Michelle later that she did not think it was necessary for us to purchase a couch (which we are planning to do) for the room; she said a couch was too expensive, and they were so used to sitting on hard furniture that that would be fine. Another student said, quite concerned, "But why would you want to do all of this extra work just for us?" Since I heard about those reactions, I have given this a lot of thought. Many of our students come from very poor backgrounds. So in response to the student's serious question, "Why would we want to do all of this extra work just for us?" The answer is: Because they even asked that question; because they do not think that they are worth it; but mostly, because they need to know that they are worth it.

We are grateful for the generous donations we have received thus far; however, we could still use a lot more books. Many small shipments add up, and since no donation is too small to make a difference, if you have even 1 or 2 books, please send them over! (Plus, a few books can probably fit into a padded envelope, thus reducing shipping costs). Please use the address below, or find it on our web page. Mark the envelope "Book Nook."

Now we have a few weeks left in June before we look forward to our next two visitors: Tomas' brother and his cousin from Sweden. Take care, and please keep in touch! Visit our web page, and please remember to sign the guest book: [www.e455.se/kina](http://www.e455.se/kina)

再见! (*Zaijian!* = Goodbye!)

Rachel and Tomas

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