

Letters from the East

Dear Reader;

This weblog was my online journal for the Pathwork presentations and workshops offered in China and Japan during October and November 2009. Some of the essays are personal, some are about Pathwork, many are the sharings of an experienced traveler who discovered how inexperienced she really was.

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Monday, October 19, 2009

Letter number 1: Why, When, Where?

I write this note from Beijing, where David Schwerin and I have completed 3 presentations on Socially Responsible Business and Personal Transformation to graduate students of Beijing University. Tomorrow we speak to students of the Central Finance University before moving on to Tianjin, Shanghai, Suzhou and Fuzhou. By the end of October we will have made a dozen presentations to as many universities.

It's already been an extraordinary trip, surprising even for David (this is his 5th tour in China). He keeps telling me 'It's not normally like this!' but because it is my first trip to China. I have no frame of reference. It is simply extraordinary.

We were encouraged to share some of the trip events and details over the Leadership Circle 'live, reporting from China!' Yet it just didn't feel right to launch into the fun bits without offering some context. So I decided to share the Who, What, When, Where, and Why stuff first. The How (of preparation) was truly not much fun, but the results (in the form of PowerPoint presentations in both English and Chinese) can be downloaded from my website www.pathworktexas.org, where you can also see the beautiful cover which was designed for the Chinese edition.

David has left the reporting up to me, and so I may get some facts wrong as I have chosen to hit 'send' while the information and memories are fresh, rather than spend a week doing research and verifying details.

David Schwerin has been involved with New York and Philadelphia Pathwork for decades and served as the director of Pathwork Press for several years. His first book, *Conscious Capitalism* (1998), was translated into Chinese in 2001. The book sales far exceeded expectations, and David was invited to give presentations to the most reputable universities in China. On his 3rd expedition in 2005, after the publication (and translation) of *Conscious Globalism*, Donna Strauss was invited to join the tour, present Pathwork concepts, and meet with small groups of students who were interested in learning more about Pathwork. Donna generously shared some of her experiences (and traveling tips) with me.

It is a delicate process to introduce a spiritual practice such as Pathwork into China. The universities are given much more latitude than the general public, but all publications must still be reviewed by a government agency. On his last tour David was met by a government official who was assigned to review his first presentation; while nothing was said afterwards, this exemplifies how working within China can be extremely complex.

This year, Peking University Press agreed to publish the Chinese translation of Susan Thesenga's *The Undefended Self*. This trip was planned to promote sales of the book by incorporating a talk on Pathwork concepts in David's business presentations. English copies of the book were sent to deans and department heads to gauge the level of interest and secure presentation commitments. Chinese networking was even more effective in generating interest and speaking dates - but more about that in another letter!

A calling forth was made on the Leadership Circle for Helpers who would be able to develop presentations and commit to an October journey. That's how I became involved. Being supported by a team would allow me to see China from the inside, and working with local people is my favorite way of learning about other cultures. Living and working as a Helper in Australia for seven years made me hungry for even more adventures, and I have a talent for translating concepts into every-day examples that helps me communicate with different cultures and life perspectives. I also had the time and resources to donate, as there are no salaries for these presentations and we paid all our own expenses for the 12 days plus international airfares. (Donations collected by the Pathwork Foundation were generously gifted to me to help with expenses. I am deeply grateful for this support).

There is so much to tell that I hardly knew where to begin. Spelling out the context of the journey feels somewhat dull, but perhaps this simulates how the trip unfolded for me - and why the actuality seemed so like a fairy-tale in comparison. Months of preparation and teleconferencing, trying to second-guess how to communicate with the Chinese and determining what concepts might be most relevant for them, followed by all the trip-planning details and itineraries... Even getting my visa was a new adventure, because it had to be applied for in person (by driving to Houston and staying over for a day or two while it was being processed) or arranged through a registered third-party agency. I wondered -- what kind of country wouldn't allow you to mail in your passport for a visa? The answer? The 3rd largest country on the planet, with one fifth of the world's population (1.3 Billion, with estimates as high as 1.6 Billion). China is extremely conservative when it comes to changing established policies and procedures for the sake of a few visitors.

I will write more tomorrow, as the day has been very long (and so is this first letter) and this Magical Mystery Tour deserves my best efforts to share it with you.

Best regards from David and Jan

October 19, 2009

Letter 2: The Magic Begins – Or Tries To

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My trip to China began when I realized that my Qantas Club privileges were, literally and figuratively, over. My first flight to Australia (will not dis the airline) felt uncomfortable and shabby; my second, on Qantas, made me feel like a first class passenger in economy seating. I gifted myself a 4-year membership in 2000 for my first flight on my (temporary) 4-year resident visa. It allowed me to arrive at the airport late, stand in shorter queues, wait in a comfortable lounge where I was served coffee and snacks and could surf the internet (dial-up access was still the norm, so being able to play with a broadband connection was deliciously speedy). Most of all, the membership gave me a sense of belonging somewhere during almost a hundred trans-continental and trans-pacific flights. Qantas was impressed with my activities (and my loyalty) as well, and kept extending my membership at no charge. After taking on only two flights in two years, the 'free ride' membership came to an end after my last trip to Oz in July 2009. Since Australia is my second home now (literally and figuratively, as I have not sold my house in Nambucca), I no longer feel the need to buy a membership.

Flying Air China to Beijing re-introduced me to long checkin queues and noisy waiting areas, providing my own sleep mask and toiletries (Qantas would even provide a pair of socks for the flight!), as well

as central screen movies (no individual seat monitors or controls), and my first experience of what it would be like to not understand anything that was going on, as the movies were in Chinese – with Chinese subtitles.

China is a multi-language country orally, but all Chinese write with the same characters. Chinese characters are read as syllables; full literacy requires knowing only 3-4,000 of the entire 47,000 character library. Yet each character can have 4 different meanings orally, depending upon the tone given to it when spoken. This is how dialects can use the same written language and different oral tones. And it magnifies the meanings of the individual characters, to 12-16,000 meanings for full literacy and 200,000 for all the characters.

There are 12 distinct Chinese dialects. Speakers of Cantonese, Shanghainese, and Huanese cannot understand one another except for basic numbers and some shared root words. Yet they can all read the same text. Mandarin Chinese, the dialect spoken in the political capitol of Beijing and throughout the largest number of provinces, is the official Chinese language. Chinese and foreigners who want to do business with the government, travel between large cities, or international contacts learn Mandarin.

These characters must be used in more and more creative ways to support communication, describe new technologies and philosophies, and especially to phonically enable the Chinese to read Roman character-based proper names and places. German also attempts to use German words to describe new technologies, which can result in longer words and phrases as smaller words are strung together to describe a new process or thought.

By comparison, the English Oxford dictionary lists 500,000 words that can be constructed with our 26 letter roman alphabet, and we tend to invent new words in English rather than hyphenate or string existing words together. English speakers also feel free to incorporate words from other languages rather than create an English-based word, giving us access to other philosophies and ideas without having to invent new words.

The biggest issue for casual travelers is there is almost no correlation between the two languages (and from this point on, I am only referring to one Chinese language, Mandarin). On a spoken level, there are some borrowed words; modern slang, brand names, proper names and technical terminology. Yet when written into Chinese characters, even these fragments of familiarity disappear completely. Unlike many European languages, there are no shared word roots or origins between English and Chinese. That leaves rote memorization, on both a spoken and written level, is the only way to learn the language. And the tones are more complex for some people to learn than, for instance, masculine and feminine noun genders in French or other romance languages. And not only can mispronunciation can create misunderstandings, using the wrong tone completely changes the meaning of the word!

There are some very slight advantages. Chinese does not use past, present or future tenses for verbs; other descriptors provide time frames. They also do not use male and female pronouns, which can create some confusion if you are trying to meet a stranger and attention was not paid to the proper English pronoun required. Yet this assumes that you are already able to read or speak the verbs and names themselves.

Ah, you suggest, but gestures are universal! No, they are not. American Sign Language (ASL) is based upon US customs, attitudes about ideas, and slang. It is as different from British Sign Language as English is from French. Gestures are based upon cultures, and the more different the culture, the more different the gestures.

And there is one more detail that rounds all of this out. Many Chinese have never met or interacted with a foreigner, and are not used to gestures or sign language or even trying to communicate with someone who does not speak their language. While this is less prevalent in Shanghai or Beijing, once you wander a few blocks away from the areas frequented by tourists, it can feel as if you are hundreds of miles into the center of the country.

The result of all of this was that I was cautioned to have the name of my hotel in Chinese characters if I tried to take a taxi from the airport, because it was unlikely that the driver would speak a word of English or understand the hotel name if spelled out in roman alphabet. I was effectively rendered illiterate, deaf and dumb without a translator or the assistance of someone who knows a few words of English.

While traveling in Europe, if I could not speak the language of a country I could fall back upon my passable French, the German I learned as a small child, or the Spanish I picked up while living in Southern California. When faced with Italian, I just changed the accent of my Spanish and guessed what words might be common between the two. Sometimes, I just spoke the language closest to what I was hearing, and there were often enough common words to handle a situation. A passing stranger was often bi-lingual and help out. And at least I could read the street signs and the name of the hotel! None of this works in China.

Is that all? Nope. There's one more wrinkle in communication.

I had brought my Australian mobile phone with me, because it is unlocked and will accept pre-paid SIM cards, plus it works in other countries. Arrangements were made to pick me up at the airport, but he seemed to be running late and I needed to call his mobile phone. So I needed a SIM card or a phone card (their pay phones don't take cash, and require a purchased card). There was a machine next to the newsstand that sold both. I stood in front of it for several minutes, while everything that I have been writing about flooded over me. There was a button for English, but while I could read the words on the screen they made no sense to me.

I had a similar reaction when living in Australia. The Aussies use verbs as nouns, nouns as verbs, and are lively and creative in their slang expressions. You can find lots of these examples on the Internet. But sometimes my brain just came to a screeching halt when someone would speak to me in English and I had no idea what they were talking about.

All my life I had laughed about and made fun of Japanese and Chinese 'attempts' to write instructions and manuals in English. A common comment is, 'can't they afford to hire competent translators?'

In 2002, I stopped over in Singapore for 3 days en route from Melbourne to Rome. The official language in Singapore is English, yet all the official government signs and documents read like toy manuals. That's when I found out that Asian English presumes the same status and rights as American, British and Australian English. Spelling and grammatical rules are adjusted to fit the speech patterns and customs of those who use it. The instructions and manuals that I have laughed at all my life are grammatically correct under the rules of Asian English. And, like the other forms of English, they allow lots of exceptions.

The SIM card machine was telling me things I didn't understand, in my own language.

Miracles do happen. A young woman stepped forward and, without saying a word, motioned for me to give her a bill from my wallet. She inserted the bill, pressed some buttons, and handed me the SIM card package. I installed it in my phone – and the screen lit up. In Chinese characters. She took the phone, navigated through the menus until finding the 'language' option, and Voila! The screen was back to normal! Immediately the phone rang – it was the professor who had been sent to pick me up, calling to find out where I was – but I missed the call by fumbling with the phone. Then he voice message option spoke to me. In Chinese. The young woman held up 2 fingers; I pressed 2, and the voice changed to English. Two minutes later, Dr. Chen walked up to me. A delightful man with a giant smile, he spoke in Asian English with a thick Chinese accent, but they were the first words I had understood since arriving. Now the adventure could really begin.

I may have gone overboard on this topic, but until I experienced the helplessness of not being able to communicate anything more than Yes, No, go away and come here I would not have believed what I have written so far.

Regards, Jan

Tuesday, October 20, 2009

Day 1: Birthdays, dumplings, and history lessons.

(Short note regarding the last letter – the young woman who helped me purchase the SIM card changed the machine back to Chinese characters in order to complete the transaction. She didn't speak a word of English, but was simply familiar with both buying a SIM card and recognizing someone in distress). It was 5:30 am. I'd flown 12 hours from Los Angeles to Beijing, I had a mobile phone that worked, and a lovely professor of Ethics from Beijing University was helping me into his car so that we could drive to my hotel. Life was good. Then it got much better. First impressions imprint themselves and are hard to overcome or erase. Good or bad, our initial feelings about something have a big vote in how we perceive things from that point forward. I turned 60 on September 21st. I prepared for this birthday 6 months in advance, with a sense of enthusiasm and wonder. I gave myself presents, and spent a lot of time considering what I wanted to do with the next (and possibly last) 20 years of my life. I had done research on China and its history in preparation for the trip, and had noticed that China had celebrated its 60th anniversary on October 1st. Those kinds of co-incidences are interesting on a mental level. But when we drove past a very grand landscaped display of topiary, at least 30 feet tall, with a banner that obviously spelled out something akin to 'HAPPY 60TH BIRTHDAY', I suddenly felt contact with China on a heart and gut level. Variations of these gigantic Happy Birthday signs are still present throughout the city, as banners, billboards, and displays. It's almost mind-numbing for me. I cannot help but take such congratulations personally. An entire country – 1/5th of the population of the planet – was celebrating my birthday. I was suddenly able to imagine what it must feel like to be an Empress, or Queen Victoria, or a superstar. The cerebral aspects of my visit were blown away and replaced by a sense of destiny or fate. China had been expecting me. We were going to have an adventure together. Then Dr. Chen said that he wanted to take me to breakfast, and asked what I liked to eat for breakfast. He obviously understood that westerners could have odd ideas about food and wanted to make certain I would be pleased with my meal. But I like to dive in to a country and a culture, so I asked him what he ate for breakfast. His answer was dumplings and soup. I would never have guessed that this was a traditional Chinese breakfast, especially for city people rushing to work, and was glad I hadn't volunteered anything as boring and normal as eggs or pastries had suddenly become. One of my greatest pleasures while traveling is to have my expectations and habits blown away by finding new ways to do things and new things to do them with. He found a tiny, hole-in-the-wall place that was barely 8 feet wide by 20 feet long. All they served was dumplings and soup to people on their way to work. Yet those dumplings are still the most exquisite things I have tasted here, despite my hosts extensive efforts to show us the best cuisine in Beijing. It is a joy to watch food being prepared by someone who does it well; the bits of dough and pork filling seemed to come alive in his hands, becoming sets of intricately twisted balls in bamboo steaming baskets set over a cauldron of boiling water. They were moist and light and chewy with a dark center of spicy sauced pork, as elegant as a piece of ripe fruit. \$2.60 for a basket of 10 dumplings and a bowl of steaming broth with greens and onions. The hotel had a room ready for me, even though it was only 7 am. I'd been in Beijing for only 2 ½ hours, and somehow I knew that the rest of my life was going to be different. I had 3 days on my own before David and his wife arrived and we started our presentations. Jet lag would hit early that afternoon, so I knew I needed some exercise and something to keep me occupied for the rest of the day. The Forbidden City seemed like a good choice, so I hopped into a taxi (with the name of Beijing's foremost tourist center written down in Chinese characters by the hotel concierge). I have no enthusiasm for trying to do a better job describing world-famous attractions than travel books. If you visit Beijing, don't skip the Forbidden City – it's an incredible experience. It feels like going back in time, and perhaps the enormous crowds don't detract as much from the experience as they might at other sites, since the City was usually crowded with soldiers and courtiers on the south / public plazas, empresses and concubines, servants and royal children in the smaller north buildings and courtyards. I enjoyed being on my own instead of part of a tour group, and the audio guide gave me enough information to get a sense of the history and culture. The real

adventure was getting back to the hotel during rush hour in Beijing.

Regards, Jan

Thursday, October 22, 2009

Letter 4: Tianjin, Overwhelm, and Friendship

I completed 8 pages and barely got to 4pm on my first day. So I am skipping ahead in order to come into real time. I may go back and try to fill in some of the earlier experiences later on.

I hit overwhelm yesterday afternoon. David and I were having coffee with the president of Tianjin University of Commerce. We had been told that he was not only an extremely important figure within the academic and university community, but also extremely busy: he would shake hands with us and go on to an appointment. Instead, he sat with us for over 45 minutes, listening to a report from the Dean of the college about our presentations. Then he chatted with us about China, calligraphy, tea, and friendship.

Tianjin is the third largest city in China, but relatively new – it was founded only 600 years ago. It's focus is business and commerce, so tourists do not drive 1 ½ hours south from Beijing to see its magnificent museums and architecture. We had been invited to give two presentations, to the Tianjin University of Commerce and the Tianjin Normal University ('Normal' in this context seems to mean not focused upon or featuring a single discipline). TUC has 15,000 students; TNU has 30,000. Some universities in China have over 100,000 students.

Tianjin is more conservative than Beijing, and our presentation that afternoon was given in a more formal setting than the last 4. There were about 120 students, and David indicated that their questions tended to be well thought out and hard to answer. This was his third invitation to Tianjin since 2001, and while I have gotten used to being met and escorted by deans and full professors (along with a half dozen Ph.D. students as assistants) this time the level of respect, admiration and genuine affection shown towards David by teams of senior staff seemed almost over the top. All it took to send me into overwhelm was 1) for me to make a single, whopping mistake during the presentation and then 2) sit in a high-ranking official's boardroom hearing how 3) a single American may be responsible for major changes in Chinese business philosophy and outlook (and thank heaven that's David this time, not the fool writing this).

David Schwerin is a shy, humble, deeply spiritual man. He has said over and over that he has trouble believing the level of success he has had with the Chinese. I believe that his success in advancing ideas about Socially Responsible Business (SRB) is directly related to his utter lack of ego-based agenda. The Chinese seem to trust and value him precisely because he doesn't ask them to.

This paradox has to do with the delicacy around some of the changes going on in China. It is probable that forcing currents from a foreigner on these topics could stir things up too much, and old-style philosophies and resistances could become re-activated. China is opening up, it is exploring new ideas, and there is a resurgence of interest in spiritual, ethical and moral values. Yet 60 years of government controls has created systems and thought patterns which will not change overnight. Tact and diplomacy are crucial.

Today we presented to students at Tianjin Normal University whose studies were more in line with psychology. It was more my kind of crowd than David's usual business and technology groups have been. I had fun, they had fun, and the faculty was very complementary to both of us.

Almost every day, we are invited for both lunch and dinner by the faculty. This evening we were joined by the school dean, who had surprised everyone by attending the afternoon presentation, and the university president, who came home early from Beijing to meet her old friends David and Zhihe. The meals are served in private rooms of restaurants, ornately decorated and staffed by 2-4 waitresses. There is a glass 4 foot diameter glass lazy in the center of the round table. Dish after dish

is placed upon it, and as soon as one item is consumed another takes its place. I am not referring to 6 or 7 dishes for the evening; that would describe only the appetizers! Then there are 4-6 meat dishes, 3-4 vegetable dishes, 4-5 noodle, rice or steamed dumpling dishes and at least 2 desserts. Two different types of soup are served, and toasts are given all evening long so that everyone at the table is recognized for their contributions, their friendship, or simply their presence within the group. Two hours later, if we are lucky, we are allowed to sneak off to our hotel. But often there is nighttime sightseeing. Last night we took a ferry boat tour on the Mother River of Tianjin. This does give us a chance to talk with other members of the faculty and some of the assistants. And we finish the day exhausted, with instructions on when to be down in the lobby to be picked up and transported to the next location. Tomorrow, we fly to Shanghai (a 1 ½ hour flight to the south) so bags have to be packed and ready to go by 7am. And packing the bags has become an adventure as well! The Chinese love giving gifts to their guests, and the universities uphold their reputations with generous and creative presents regarding Chinese culture. I have more luggage than David, since I will be extending my trip with an additional 10 days in Japan. Yet after only 4 gifts (and no shopping yet!) my luggage is bulging.

I have not said anything yet about the presentations. The PowerPoint files are mounted on my website and after trying out a few approaches we have decided upon a basic introductory presentation on the The Circles of Perception, aka the 50/50 teachings on Spheres of Consciousness. I have some more thinking to do about what may be going on here, and am not quite ready to verbalize. Overall, my sense is that there will not be a Chinese Pathwork Transformation Program anytime soon. Yet I have already been asked if I would consider doing some counseling with groups of students, and such willingness to explore emotional territory not only amazes me, but David and Zhihe as well.

By the way, the first name of the manager of our trip, Zhihe Wang (or in the Chinese style, Wang Zhihe) is pronounced 'Shee Who'. Being a visual person, I keep stumbling over the pronunciation because I spent 3 months emailing him, and I can't get the literal spelling and the pronunciations I assumed out of my head. I have come up with a mnemonic for this feisty ball of energy who seems to know everyone in China and gives us suggestions and pointers every 5 minutes which are inevitable perfect and helpful. In the British TV series Rumpole of the Bailey, Horace Rumpole would refer to his wife as 'She who must be obeyed'. She-Who doesn't yet know that's how I managed to remember to pronounce his name.

Regards, Jan

P.S. So what did I do that was so awful? I pushed a point too far that included the word government. I had been warned not to mention either politics or the government and had been careful. Yet when the topic seemed to be broached by the college dean, I found myself irresistibly drawn into a faux pas response, stating that governments are made up of people (the topic of my part of the presentation had been self-responsibility and the Three Spheres of Consciousness) and that 'we' (meant as a global reference) could change government (meant as governments worldwide). Argh! I don't know what interpretation could have been worse – the boasting of an arrogant American, the rantings of a naïve visitor. It's not the first time I've said something stupidly, knew instantly what had happened, and had to accept the reactions of others as something I deserved. Both David and our tour manager assured me that it was a minor gaff that the Chinese had shrugged it off (their reaction was instant laughter, which perhaps indicates that I was not taken seriously and which only increased my feelings of acute embarrassment). It certainly didn't negate the overwhelmingly positive responses and feedback received for every single presentation so far.

Saturday, October 24, 2009

Letter 5: One week to go; Shanghai

We are more than halfway through the trip now. We spoke to 50 master and Ph.D. students at the College of Humanities at East China University on Friday. The presentations were well received. Questions are usually a good indication as to how well they understood the material; when they challenge our views, both we and the professors are delighted. The primary purpose of such guest

professor programs is to stimulate thought and provoke discussion around new ideas. The Chinese are hungry for new ideas and very much appreciate having greater personal access to foreigners. We have been photographed in next to signs and banners, and were given some of the posters created to honor and promote our visits to take home. I sometimes feel like a rock star.

On Saturday we saw some of the sights in Shanghai with one of the Dean's Ph.D. students. We ate dumplings at a restaurant made (even more famous) by a visit from Bill Clinton. 4 stories tall, it is part of a beautiful 400 year old compound of Ming dynasty buildings. It is now a major tourist attraction, it's ground floors crammed with stalls for souvenirs and food. A line for takeaway dumplings stretched across the center courtyard for 100 yards. I can't imagine how the Secret Service managed security for a presidential lunch there. Then we strolled through the Yu Gardens, an intimate collection of rockeries and ponds, galleries and verandas.

You'll need this piece of trivia to understand my next observation. The largest recent study of Chinese males and females compared to US for height and weight showed that women in both countries average 5'4". Men in China average 5'8" compared to US men at 5'9". The reason this may not be obvious is that there may be more disparity in the US - more very short people balanced out by very tall people - while Chinese are closer to the average overall. So we see lots of tall people in the US, which may distort our sense of what the average is. Yet there is a clear disparity regarding weight: women average 125 lbs in China, 145 lbs in the US; men average 145 lbs in China, 191 lbs in the US. So people in the US may be more imposing in size based upon girth than height. Again, there may be a greater range in the US population, so that very tall or very corpulent people are more common in the US than in China. While humans tend to prefer leaders who are larger than average, there may be less prejudice against being short in China if being particularly tall is unusual. It is possible that in the US, our intuitive preferences may result in managers, professionals and leaders being significantly above average in height because there are simply more tall people to choose from.

A group of Chinese students seemed to be giving their visiting Western professor through the gardens. The girls were probably shorter than average because they were in their early teens; the professor was in his '50s or '60s, over 6 feet tall and about 250+ lbs. With white hair and a ruddy complexion, he looked like Santa Claus surrounded by giggling elves. It was a starkly stereotypical sight, partly because of the childlike quality of the girls' playfulness towards him.

At 5' tall, I have felt very comfortable with the Chinese physically, so I was surprised when I looked up the figures on average height comparisons. It doesn't help that I stopped growing when I was 12. That year, all my classmates went into growth spurts so that I went from being average to being one of the shortest girls in my class. It seemed as if everyone grew up but me, which exaggerates my sense of being height-handicapped. Yet here in China, I feel like an adult and am able to greet people eye-to-eye without cranking my neck backwards.

David's wife has rejoined us, after a 4 day holiday with Zhine's wife in Hunan Province. Sunday the three of us will be driven to Suzhou, 1 1/2 hours south of Shanghai, for three more presentations to various colleges. Suzhou is the silk capitol of China, and it will be my first full-on shopping experience, as I intend to complete my Christmas shopping there! Saturday I came down with a cold, and I was as concerned about losing the Sunday shopping opportunity as I was about it impacting my ability to lecture on Monday! I'd brought a homeopathic emergency kit with me, and by the next morning the fever was broken. Armed with a supply of Hall's throat lozenges from the convenience store across from the hotel I should be over it by the time we arrive in Suzhou.

Starting in Suzhou, I will be making presentations to groups more interested in psychology than enlightened or ethical business practices so will give two lectures on my own there. One will be to a college of comparative religious studies, another to students of special-needs education services. I'm still not able to fully verbalize how I sense Pathwork concepts have been received, perhaps I need to complete the entire series of lectures before I can do my favorite thing (and what I am teaching them to do): take a step back and get a wider perspective.

Regards, Jan

Sunday October 25

Letter 6: First Reflections on Student and Faculty Responses

No email for the last 6 days of the trip was a surprise after having it so often at the start!

One of the reasons I have not gone into detail around the presentations we have given, and the responses from students and faculty, is my perception that people often have an immediate impression, a 'day-after' impression, and then an event finds a more honest place in our lives. Sometimes it sits on a proverbial fireplace mantel in our minds, often for weeks, before being transferred to a place of honor in our internal libraries of ideas, resources and experiences. Sometimes it goes out with the week's rubbish, an interesting but superficial experience. An event can be the highlight of a dull week or month, without becoming a fundamentally life-changing experience. Decades later, a seemingly inconsequential memory re-surfaces and winds up being a crucial element of our understanding. I use the metaphor of jig-saw puzzles to illustrate this phenomenon. We manage to create little islands of understanding, and one day all these individual clusters of information and understanding are ready to fit together. It's a wonderful Aha! experience, to find that you had all the answers but hadn't understood what the question was, or to suddenly see the work of decades (or a lifetime!) come together in an instant of insight. Film and television were critical learning tools for me growing up. They affected me on a visceral level, engaging both my heart and my mind, and flooding me with powerful visual images. Students and faculty have different priorities, perceptions, and timelines. An objective evaluation of any learning experience is like the tip of an iceberg. Knowledge fades, but the ability to solve problems or creatively explore a topic can last a lifetime. Buddhists say, feed a man and you feed him for a day; teach him to fish and you feed him for life. My lectures have brought a few students and teachers close to tears. I interpret this as recognition. They heard their own heart speak. This time, expressed by another, a foreigner. Next time, they may hear it in their own voice. I remember the first few times I heard someone speak my own heart's desire. It was every bit as dramatic as the moment William Gibson recreated in *The Miracle Worker*, when Helen Keller connected the signs spelled into her hands with water. Only sometimes I get to be Teacher, for a few brief moments. And people wonder why this work inspires me! I can't know how many good teachers there are in China. I hear from several students that primary and high school experiences were not pleasant or inspiring, but have no way of knowing if I am just hearing a normal percentage of complaints. It seems obvious that the teachers who are opening up their classes to us support Western influences, while others may not; so we would hear more from the 'liberal' side than the conservatives. Yet over and over we have also been warmly greeted and even hosted by government officials. Our most common departmental contacts are the Business Ethics deans of the School of Marxism in each university. Yet everyone I have spoken to says that in the last decade there has been another revolution, and those who have been privileged to visit every few years see enormous change each time. While there are still tensions and sensitivities regarding personal freedoms, and the government is very sensitive to the cultural shame of losing face, Chinese culture is moving towards a middle way. I have seen enough, heard enough, and have enough personal experience to believe that the Chinese government wants their young people, their educators, and their business leaders to have access to Western ideas about philosophy, ethics, and even spirituality. (Shi Ma? = really?) And how would you know that? Because of the most outrageous day of our entire trip.

To be continued...

October 27, 2009

Letter 7: The Formal Banquet in Suzou

There just aren't words to describe what unfolded on October 26th. We had been driven to Suzou, an hour south of Shanghai, for presentations. Suzou is a 'small' Chinese city – only 6 million, not including suburbs. David and I had participated at the Suzhou Business Network forum (SBN, a giant

industrial park community devoted to Hi Tech) on the topic of Socially Responsible Business. The day before, we'd been told it was cancelled'; that morning, that it had been reinstated at the insistence of a high-ranking official. There may be some internal dissension about how China will grow.

We had honed our act by that point, and this would be the last time we would speak together (since the remaining presentations would be to psychology and religious studies classes, who were less interested in the business and financial aspects, I would be completing the last 3 presentations on my own). As usual, David took the macro view, looking at government and business, global warming and ecology, and social costs and benefits. Then I would present what we decided to title 'Circles of Perception', a psychological explanation of the 50/50 teachings focusing upon how good-hearted individuals can make bad decisions by not being fully conscious of how short-term and ego-centrally focused their thought processes are. Because they are developmentally still only aware of themselves and their personal needs, they project that what is good for them is good for everyone (or simply only understand what is good for them, and let the rest of us fend for ourselves). That is, they operate from within the Individual Circle, known in Pathwork as The Individual Self Sphere.

Every time we present, the Chinese are wild about the idea. I mentioned that students have tears in their eyes when they thank me afterwards. The eyes of party officials, CEOs, and vice-presidents of universities also seem to glisten, and their thank you's feel genuine (the one university president we met had not witnessed the presentation, but congratulated us warmly based upon reports from his subordinates. And promised to send David a box of tea given to him by a government minister, which we were told was akin to princes sharing something a king had given them).

I had become used to the incredibly warm receptions David received, the respect shown to him and Zhihe, and the overall enthusiasm for the concept of Socially Responsible Business (SRB). I have attended many business forums as the CEO of my own manufacturing company, and know the difference between glitzy marketing presentations versus when a corporation is innovative and inspiring. The tone of this forum was similar to those in the US microelectronics industry in the '90s when Quality and Reliability resurfaced as essential business virtues. David is credited by the Chinese as the author of SRB, and they honored him with what approached veneration on this occasion. He shies away from such accolades, but sometimes ideas which are truly modest can ignite new movements and inspire others to greatness.

Both of us had been rather apprehensive about the forum because of the dignitaries and business leaders who would be attending. We knew it was important to present well and honor those who had invited us. It was getting to be a joke that Zhihe wasn't always telling us everything on the schedule, so as not to rattle us or make us nervous. So when he sat David down for a local TV interview minutes before the forum started, all Joan and I could do was laugh and wish David luck – and he did a great job.

We knocked it out of the park that afternoon, impressing everyone. And suddenly the evening's formal banquet was the next thing on our schedule.

This is where words may simply not be enough. We had been invited to both lunch and dinner almost every day with university officials. These were given in private rooms in restaurants, with 8-10 people sitting at a round table with a huge 4' diameter lazy susan in the center. Waiters brought dishes nonstop for at least an hour, and if we didn't serve ourselves then our hosts would kindly place samples of the foods on our plates to make certain that we tasted everything. Many of the restaurants were top of the line, with exquisite china and ornate décor. The food was indescribably good, and our struggle was to not eat any more than a bite of anything because of the sheer number of dishes. When you thought that the meal must be coming to a close, suddenly a huge braised fish would appear (kept alive in giant fish aquariums in the lobbies until chosen for our meals, they were often brought to our host alive for his inspection and approval). And then noodles, another soup, and – if we were fortunate – only one dessert. Usually, there were 3-4 because of the occasion, even though the Chinese don't eat desserts at every meal.

The formal banquet table that evening was 20 feet in diameter. I am not kidding. The floral

arrangements were delicately arranged across a 6' diameter area. We were served formal courses for the first time, probably over 15 different dishes just like the other banquets. But fortunately, the waiters simply whisked away the old ones and replaced them with new so that it wasn't obvious what we had eaten or not eaten.

There were at least 30 people seated around the table, which could easily have held 50. Wines had been provided by one of the businessmen; organic white from Germany, organic red from Italy. The Chinese custom of toasting their guests and each other, draining their glasses and keeping the waiters scurrying to refill (just an inch each time), escalated after the first 5 courses so that for the last half of the evening hardly anyone was in their seats. Instead, it was like the dinner had turned into a cocktail party, with people circling the room in search of friends to toast and chat with while the waiters removed untouched courses and substituted new ones on a schedule of their own.

We'd also become used to receiving gifts from the universities; beautiful framed items, mounted in presentation boxes which would protect them on the way home. We had also received scrolls and tea sets. My biggest rolling bag now held only the boxed gifts, while my clothes would have to be put into China bags for the trip home, and I had given up the idea of doing any shopping, as I didn't have any more room -- it might just be given to me anyway. The gifts this evening were spectacular; pictures embroidered in the thinnest of silk, so that they looked like water colors. I felt fortunate in being the 'subordinate', 'cause mine was small enough (16"x20") to sandwich between the silk quilts I had bought that afternoon. David's was about 24x30", and Joan guessed that it had taken at least 6 months to embroider.

Was that all? Nope. The minister of the entire district was there, and as part of the evening's festivities he performed a piece of Chinese Opera for us, a delicate dance of hand postures accompanied by one of his own compositions -- which he sang for us. And then it was back to the toasting rituals.

Ladies are allowed to toast with juice or yogurt, so at least I wasn't insulting anyone. Men are expected to handle their liquor, a male bonding ritual and test of trust (but several of the university Deans were also on juice, so perhaps this custom is fading a bit). As the honored guest David was trying to keep up with his hosts by only taking a sip each time, instead of following the command of 'gambey!' or bottoms up. While no one seemed to get drunk, the delicate lady seated next to me started to giggle at one point and indicated that her cheeks had gone numb. Then she was off for another round of toasts. Like the meals, it becomes important to pace thirst along with hunger. But when they filled my glass, they filled the juice glass to the brim -- so I was running out of room faster than those who were tossing back only an inch of wine at a time.

When the government minister singled me out for a toast, I complimented his Operaf and shared that my daughter was a theatre director. He immediately invited her to come, saying that he would personally host her visit and arrange speaking engagements with the community theatre groups. (perhaps he had become a bit exhuberant towards the end of the evening, but the Chinese make such promises and they keep them). He said that they needed as much cultural exchange as possible. When I said that she would come the next day, except that she had a 5 month old child to care for, the translator didn't compensate for the fact that Chinese doesn't have a past tense, and suddenly the minister was calling one of his aides over. He thought that my daughter was actually arriving, and was going to arrange for a driver to pick her up! It was a bit tense to clear up the misunderstanding and let him save face. But he reiterated the offer in a way that makes me believe that it is real, and that she has an invitation to come to Suzou as a cultural ambassador, and that this minister would very likely meet with her.

I was pretty close to overflowing, both figuratively and literally, when he then gave another round of toasts. Joan Schwerin (David's wife) was celebrated as the most beautiful of wives, while I was honored as the smartest of women. In front of party officials, university deans, CEOs, and the Japanese director of Panasonic (who had his aide translate the speeches into Japanese while ours translated into English). The whole day was starting to feel like a fairy tale.

This was the fanciest hotel we stayed during the entire trip. My room was practically a suite; the bath was the size of a small bedroom, with tub and a huge separate glass enclosed shower. I had two twin beds on one side of the room and a large semi-circular sofa and coffee table on the other. Exhausted by the dinner, I changed into my pajamas (lovely black woollies from Australia) and was snuggled up in bed when the doorbell to my room rang. A few minutes before, it had been the maid wanting to turn my bed down, so without much thought I flung upon the door to see what might be next. I was greeted by one of the University deans and 4 of his Ph.D. students, who had come to greet me farewell. Since the woolies looked like the black blouse and slacks I had been wearing that evening, they seemed to think that I was still dressed, and so I invited them in to find out what the visit was about. They wanted to take some group pictures! I had to explain that there was no way I was going to have my picture taken with them while I was in pajamas and would have to change. Everyone laughed and nodded, and the men tramped into the bathroom together. I stared at the lady sitting demurely on the couch, and she explained that they were getting out of the way so that I could get dressed! So I did, we called them back and everyone took turns having their photographs taken. Turns out that they had visited David and Joan first, so this was some sort of adorable Chinese custom.

Perhaps this glimpse of formal overwhelm will stand for all the other times and events, because words just won't convey what I felt and experienced. Will try a brief summary later.

Jr

October 30 2009

Letter 8, Goodbyes and Hellos

I knew from the start that this would be the trip of a lifetime, and for me that's saying a lot. I made my first trans-Atlantic flight at 6 years of age. Actually, it was plural – you didn't fly non-stop back in 1956, especially on military transport planes. We stopped in Greenland and again in Shannon, Ireland to get from New Jersey to Frankfurt. We also made those same stops when returning in 1958, when I experienced a day that never seemed to end because the plane was traveling with the sun the entire trip (the planes were slower then).

Times have changed. Back then, all I knew about China was that the children there were starving, and the only way to save them was to finish every bite of my oatmeal. I don't think my mother meant it that way ('Finish your breakfast, children are starving in China!' was probably meant to be a positive statement about how fortunate I was to have a good hot breakfast to eat each morning). Without knowing the reality for those children back in the '50s, my reality during my trip to China was that the Chinese believe in the healing power of food, and they tried very hard to keep me healthy. I have gained 10 pounds, and I can remember most of the reasons. Duck, fish, chicken, beef, lamb (who said the Chinese don't eat a lot of meat?). Dumplings of all kinds; steamed, fried and boiled – for breakfast, lunch and dinner. In Fuzhou, I was greeted with an entire banquet of things that I didn't even know existed, much less that they were caught and eaten.

The only item that I just could not get excited about was duck feet. They taste just like they sound; boiled duck's feet, with sauce. An Asian version of snails (oops – escargot!). The Chinese really do believe that food heals, so why not eat the nutritious duck foot cartilage with sauce, rather than just dry them and grind them up and press them into pills? Yet it's silly to complain about one single dish out of hundreds of delicious, steaming (the Chinese don't eat a lot of cold foods), fragrant delights.

If you think that I am going on too long about the food, it's because at home I eat 1 meal and snack the rest of the time. So having a sit-down banquet 3 times a day left me with the impression that all we did on this trip was eat. Yet these were the best times, because there the table was always full of people. Deans, professors, graduate and undergraduate students (often serving as translators, staff from the universities, and often the limousine driver who drove us around for several hours a day. Faculty members often invited their family, which David explained was a great compliment.

This was David's 5th trip since 2001, and he was my fairy godfather the entire trip. Besides putting out the invitation in the first place and allowing me to participate, he coached me for hours on presentation materials, words and phrasing that the Chinese would understand. Several times a day he would whisper hints about etiquette and manners, and thankfully would take the lead on proper guest behavior so that I could copy him and look really, really cool.

He had learned that the Chinese consider it a great honor to be invited to one's home, even if this is not a practical invitation. He would find just the right moment to invite our host and other prominent guests to come to Philadelphia, and teased in private about what would happen everyone took him up on his offer and he would have a house overflowing with guests! Which would actually be lovely, and once or twice over the years he had entertained some distinguished scholars who were visiting the East Coast. Yet it did feel odd to be inviting people to one's home day after day after day!

From the start, this trip was different for him and Joan as well. I had arrived a few days early, so that I could do some of the sightseeing stuff that they didn't need to do (Great Wall, Forbidden City, etc.). On the day they arrived, we were invited to a banquet by some dear friends who had lived in Philadelphia. This will be a short version, because again words cannot describe the event. We went to what had been the housing compound of a member of the royal family, which had been converted into a restaurant. Each bungalow was now a private banquet room, and waiters and waitresses brought dishes from the main kitchen through a series of intimate formal gardens lit with lanterns and featuring the sounds of fountains and ponds. I've never experienced such a sense of opulence and sheer wealth. David said, 'It won't be like this all the time'. These words became a joke between the three of us, because it kept being that spectacular, that magnificent, and that remarkably different a trip than he and Joan had ever experienced. So 'it won't be like this all the time' will have to be words I remember for the next trip.

This time, it may have felt like David's ship had come in. With the publication of *The Undefended Self* plus his two books (*Conscious Capitalism* and *Conscious Globalism*), his advocacy of Socially Responsible Business as a philosophy which was economically cost-effective and ecologically sound, plus exquisite attention to the names and personal details of his hosts, he had established himself as a friend. The Chinese revere friends, and they are intensely loyal and supportive of them. I was witnessing the bounty of a decade of dedicated effort. It was a privilege to be present and to be able to contribute.

The other contributor to this victory was Dr. Zhihe Wang, who has also put in a decade of effort to create not paths, but expressways to transport Cultural Ambassadors to his country. In his book *Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell uses the word *Maven* to describe a person who is responsible for creating connections between thousands of people, if not hundreds of thousands of people. Zhihe is a *Maven*. Everyone he knows becomes a resource for everyone else he knows, and he is incredibly good at weaving together interests, needs, goals and dreams so that information travels at fiber-optic speeds and connects productively. Another of our jokes was that everyone in China knew Zhihe, or at very least he knew about them!

Zhihe's is a renaissance man: a Ph.D., scholar in Whitehead philosophy (which is huge in China), professor at Claremont University, author of several books and director of the non-profit institute which sponsored our trip through university contacts. (While we paid air fares and a base management fee, the universities covered domestic transport within China plus all meals and lodging – and all the sightseeing we could squeeze in between presentations). His email is claremontwang@yahoo.com, and if you have expertise that the Chinese might find of interest he would love to talk to you about joining one of his Cultural Ambassador tours.

When I was an employee, I worked for my boss. When I was the boss, I worked for my employees. As a factory owner, I also worked for my customers and my suppliers. As a Helper, I work for my clients and the world-wide spiritual community. In China, I focused upon working for David and Zhihe, because their goals were so well integrated into China's spiritual and temporal needs. And China's success will contribute to success for the entire planet.

I've never had better bosses.

On October 30th, I left China. It felt as if I had been there all of my life. Because it was so outrageously new and different from anything I had experienced (and I have lived in multiple locations on 3 different continents) perhaps I just went into freefall, and allowed myself to be completely immersed. Doing partial melt-down to fit into new situations is a way of life for me. I learned to meld into the culture and climate of wherever I went, because as a military family we moved so often. It was less painful if I felt that I belonged and fit in. Yet like all defenses, I didn't realize the downside – that in compensating for never having a permanent home (by making every new place my home), I never developed the ability to define what kind of home I wanted. I eventually lost any sense of who I was, and awoke at 42 to find myself living other people's ideas about what life should be like. It took a few decades to find my own ground. So it was extremely pleasurable to use old, well developed talents from a new place of maturity, to lose myself utterly and yet never feel lost.

I arrived in Japan late that afternoon, and practically went into shock. There was yet another world to explore, another looking glass to go behind, another dimension of humanity that I had never experienced before. I am falling behind in these letters, because I have already completed the 9 days and 3 workshops and a side trip to Kyoto and leave today for home. So I will write again after jet-lag subsides about Japan.

Regards, Jan

Sunday, November 22, 2009

Letter 9: Completions and Beginnings

The short version regarding Japan is that I have been invited to develop plans for a Pathwork Transformation Program in Tokyo which would begin in October 2010. Whether or not that will happen is up to the Japanese. I will return twice in 2010 to promote the course, once in February/March and again in June/July. There could easily be 30 students; I started with 29 in Australia in 2002, with a population base of only 20 million. In Tokyo, we could draw from all over Japan (127 million) as well as Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China.

My tentative plans will be to include an open weekend workshop after each of the Pathwork Transformation Program modules (each will last 4 days, 4 times a year) for those who choose not to join the program, and to generate interest for a following year's class.

So for the past few weeks have been drawing up drafts -- plans and policies, budgets and proposals. I have also put together two new websites: <http://www.janrigsby.com/pathworkinchina/> and www.pathworkchina.org.

These will serve for a while, I hope that there will be so much interest in Pathwork that separate sites will be worthwhile. But for the moment, tying these together allows me to piggyback onto my primary websites for materials and hosting costs.

It's not that there's no fun left. I drink several pots of green tea a day. I bought a rice cooker and make sticky rice and sushi almost every day. China and Japan are on my walls, in my thoughts, and in my heart. To me, this IS the fun part. All the other stuff – the other 22 pages of this blog – were an Over the Rainbow fantasy. Writing all of this down helped keep it real, helped me remember, and helped me to believe in it.

My birthday horoscope in September said: "People need you lately, and you have risen to the occasion to take care of them. So it will be a welcome break to be on the receiving end of lovely attention over the next 10 weeks. An investment pays in October. You'll celebrate happy news in December." I've never before felt that a horoscope made such an accurate prediction. It was truly

unique in my experience to be on the receiving end of lovely attention for such a long period of time. And the investment of time, money and heart that I made in this adventure surely did pay off.

I wonder what the happy news in December will be...

I have also committed to becoming a professional writer, after having written stories since I was 11 years old. I knew this was coming, have felt it for several years, and my friends and family have become more and more aggressive about encouraging me. What pushed me over the edge was realizing that the teleconferences I have been doing for the past 18 months need to be transferred into written format. I hope to start drafting a Pathwork companion book now that the websites are up.

I have enjoyed sharing this adventure. I hope that others follow. Dr. Zhihe Wang's website, www.postmoderntour.com, is one way to start, and I hope that my stories encourage more travel to China. But for now, I'm done with writing and sharing. Going to make another pot of tea.

Blessings upon your own journeys, Jan

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