

Quick Note

March 3, 2009, 9:38 pm

This is just another quick note to let you know that we arrived back home safely (although with more flight changes due to the snow in New ..

We are happy to be home, but disappointed that it was much sooner than expected.

As you might have noticed, we could not be fully open with the information we sent while in China. We know that our computers were searched (as well as microphones and cameras placed in our rooms). For that reason, this blog site can be monitored by Chinese authorities. So I will not be discussing openly any information I have about the activities of the Chinese brethren.

I will be happy to correspond directly with those of you who are interested.

I do not believe that this trip was a waste. I know the ways and thoughts of the One we all serve is so much beyond our ability to comprehend that many good things will come from this that we will never know. It certainly did not turn out as expected, but that is not bad in itself.

Let me close by thanking all of you who prayed fervently for us. Let me ask you to extend those prayers a while longer for those who remain.

I will send a more complete report (but with little information about the Chinese) in a couple of days after I can get over the jet lag and catch up some on my work here.

Eddie

Checking Out

March 1, 2009, 8:50 pm

Just a quick note to let everyone know that we are checking out of our rooms this morning, on our way to the airport. So this will be our last communication until we get stateside. We are fine, but looking forward to seeing home once again.

I am certain we will all have much to talk about when we return.

Eddie

Our Visit from the Police

February 28, 2009, 9:13 am

The first morning I was still suffering from jet lag, although I did sleep about four hours. We all started out for McDonald's and found a new one slightly closer to our hotel. It was nice getting to catch up visiting with Keith and Dakin. As we were finishing our meal, Franc received a call from the hotel. They told him that some officials had asked for us to return to the hotel to talk with them. So we walked back and were invited to meet with the officials in one of the meeting rooms. Six (I believe) officials were there and one showed Franc his credentials from the Religious Bureau. They politely asked us some questions about our beliefs and backgrounds. Then they explained that we would be in violation of Chinese religion law if we practiced what had been done in May, 2008.

They showed Franc the relevant portion of the law and he translated it for us. But, since most laws in all countries are written in language I do not understand I asked them to clarify what this means. I knew that it was illegal in China for a foreigner to conduct or control religious services that include Chinese nationals. Many religious groups from other countries have come into China and attempted to control what happens in church groups they establish. I believe that is wrong. But I can understand from the practice of other groups why these officials would think that is my intention also.

My concept of teaching has always been to show what I believe something means and then allow any student to choose whether they believe my explanation is accurate or flawed. I did not understand before, that also is considered a violation of Chinese law. The officials did explain that we were not being charged with any crimes, and that we welcome to stay and tour Dalian, but that we could not teach or explain the Bible while we are here.

Keith and Dakin decided that we are making the police uncomfortable by remaining, so they were able to make plans to leave the next day. Our plane tickets cannot be changed until Monday, so we are intending to leave at that time. In the meantime, we will do some more sightseeing and shopping over the weekend. I asked the officials if it is acceptable for the four of us to worship together on Sunday and they agreed, but emphasized that no Chinese natives can be involved. We understand and will abide by their wishes.

Eddie

Comment by: Lonnie

February 27, 2009, 6:25 pm

Hi Eddie, Rita and friends,

I just heard the news, and you know you will be in our conversation with our Father.

Our Tour of Beijing

February 26, 2009, 2:10 pm

Beijing is the capital and third largest city of China. Of course, everyone remembers that the last Olympics were held there this past summer. We decided to spend one day in Beijing to see some sights before heading on to Dalian. We contacted a tour guide recommended by some we knew who had traveled here before and she met us at the airport with a driver to take us to our hotel that night. She helped us get checked in and then we made an appointment to

meet her the next morning. I still was suffering the effects of jet lag made worse by the steroid treatment I was taking for the bursitis in my shoulder. So, although my traveling companions were sleeping somewhat normally, I was simply carrying on conversations in my head. We got up early and walked to a McDonald's for breakfast, Rita calls them McMecca.

Our guide was ready with a car the next day to take us first to Tian an Men Square, the largest paved square in the world. It is about .5 mile end to end and more than .25 mile side to side. We arrived early, avoiding the vendors that clog the square later in the day.

Directly across the street is the Forbidden City, which is the largest Imperial Palace in China. It is actually of complex of buildings protected by a series of gated walls where the Chinese emperors lived and worked from the 1400's until the last emperor in 1911. She told us much of the history of this complex, which is far too much information to include in this blog. We exited the complex at the other end where our driver met us to take us to the next destination. I will mention there are 8,700 rooms in the complex. We did not see them all.

We drove north from the center along the path used by the fireworks display during the opening ceremonies to the Olympic complex, seeing the famous Bird's Nest and Water Cubes. From there we continued north out of Beijing about 30 miles to the Great Wall. The Wall is the largest structure ever built by mankind, intended to keep out the Mongol Hordes. It follows ridgelines across the northern portions of China and curves in relatively close to Beijing in several places that can be accessed by road. We ended up going to a less visited place called Muatian Yu. We grabbed a Chinese lunch before climbing the Wall, which was the first experience for the Hall's. Perry was still suffering some effects of a food allergy he had gotten from the airplane and was not very well, but the rest of us seemed to enjoy the meal okay (alright, I admit I liked it better than the others, but I like nearly all food).

We then went to the Great Wall and paid our tickets for entrance and transportation to the top (they are separate tickets, because there are two types of lift cars to take you to the Wall, and the really adventurous can hike (you better be in excellent condition with lots of time for that option). I am acrophobic and I wanted the enclosed cable car, but it was closed for repair, so the only other option was the ski chair lift. Rita told me to close my eyes and hold her hand as she kept turning around to talk to the Hall's in the next car. I told her to sit still and stop shaking the lift! As we climbed higher – and the ground seemed to drop off further underneath us, a gradually change happened. The Hall's called to us to turn around for a picture and I made a weak half turn to wave. Rita told *me* to sit still and stop shaking the lift! By the top, her eyes were tightly closed and my fingers were losing feeling.

We arrived at the base of the Wall in magnificent beauty. Our guide had stayed at the bottom, since she sees the Wall quite often in her work. But she told us that to the west was flatter, but more distance between gates. To the east was steeper, but perhaps only ½ mile to the highest portion of that section of the Wall. We started to the west for some distance, and then we decided to go east after all. Janet Hall waited for us at near the entrance and the remaining three of us started down some very steep snow-covered steps. We saw barracks where soldiers were stationed at the Wall with overlapping gatehouses to watch for the approach of enemies. Then we started climbing the three gatehouses to the highest portion of that section. I knew when we reached the first gatehouse, I would not make it to the next and Rita also felt the same way. In our exhaustion, we lost track of how many gatehouses there were and Perry decided he wanted to reach that next gatehouse up. He did make it but then realized that there was still another higher one and we did not have the time for him to climb that far and return. We rested and started back ahead of him and he caught up with us just as we reached the point where Janet was waiting..

The return back down the mountain was entirely different. Janet took the cable car back down, but the three of us decided to try something new at that section of the Wall. They have built a luge-style run with small sleds to slide back down to the bottom. We got some simple instructions and then started sliding down. It was quite fun, although there were some frightened young girls in front of us that kept us from going the speed we would have liked. I think if we had the time, Perry would have wanted to buy another lift ticket just to ride back down.

Our guide then took us to the airport in time to catch our flight to Dalian that evening. We were all exhausted and I remember almost nothing about the flight except that we took off and touched down. Several friends that we met on previous trips met us at the airport and it was really nice to see them for a short visit before taking a van to our hotel.

I will write about our first day in Dalian with my next report.

Eddie

Somehow we made it!

February 25, 2009, 9:46 pm

Each international flight is different, I have learned, and this was no different. The day actually began for me on the Sunday before we left. Because I waited too late to contact the tour guide who was supposed to help us in Beijing, we were still finalizing plans well into the night Sunday. In fact, I ended up getting to experience something that our older brother did before momentous events in his life, spending the night in communication with our father, instead of sleep. Although it is physically exhausting, I am certain that it helped me be emotionally and spiritually prepared for the next day.

My sister drove us to Cincinnati to catch a Delta commuter flight to Newark, where we switch to Continental for our long leg to Beijing. Since I am not a well experienced flyer, I did not know how to work the kiosk check-in and required assistance, which seemed to be in short supply. Finally someone seemed to notice I was not making progress and came over to help. With her help we made it most of the way through the check-in but then an abort screen popped up which told me to contact a ticketing agent. So we moved from that line down the terminal to another long line. Not being a frequent flyer, we get the longer line with fewer agents. I learned later that Delta has laid off 23 people and that some of them were working their final shift that morning. Speed and efficiency were not going to be in great supply. With barely 45 minutes until our flight was scheduled to leave we finally got to an agent who promptly fussed at us for not arriving sooner. We explained we had been there sooner, but were shifted around. He checked us in, but the boarding pass did not assign a seat for either of us, that would be handled at the gate. You experience flyers probably already know what that means – I do now.

We had to hurriedly say, “Good-bye”, to our kids (sorry about that kids, we do love you) and my sister before entering the security checkpoint. We then got to spend time standing in line with half of the city of Cincinnati to go through security and I am watching the minutes tick down to only about 20 left to go before we finally see the other side. We then began to race through the terminal; of course our flight was leaving from the far side. We get to the gate as they were already loading and there were an unusual number of gate workers – another bad sign. I walked up and showed my boarding pass and asked for a seat assignment and she tells me she does not have any seats for us. It turns out that there was some mechanical problem with the airplane that could not be quickly repaired so they had to substitute a smaller aircraft for this flight. She quickly tried to find another flight for us, but there was nothing

available that would get us to Newark in time for our outbound flight..

We felt terrible because we had invited our good friends, Perry and Janet Hall to make this trip with us and we arranged to fly together from Newark to help them with experience of entering a strange new country for the first time and now we were no longer able to do this. The gate agent continued to work through her computer and thought she could get me on a Northwest flight into Beijing that would arrive six hours later, but we would only have 14 minutes to transfer in Detroit, so that was out. She then found a flight on United out of Chicago that was scheduled to arrive in Beijing only 1½ hours after our original flight. But she told me that we would only have 42 minutes to transfer at O'Hare airport in Chicago, the world's busiest. She said it was not technically legal, but clearly left it up to me to decide, so I told her we would do our best. She spent the next hour (yes, a full hour) trying to make the various networks transfer our tickets.. This included conferences with two other gate agents there and various calls to other airline personnel. It was clearly not the way she wanted to begin her Monday, and I gave her the honor of tearing up our useless gate pass when the process was finished. I don't believe paper can be torn any smaller.

We finally got to have breakfast (for free on Delta) and then caught our commuter plane to Chicago. The airport chaplain had also been very helpful to us during this ordeal and showed me a map of O'Hare. We were arriving at the terminal at the far eastern end of the airport and departing from the terminal at the far western end. So we asked the flight attendant to call ahead and have one of the electric carts take us as much as possible. We raced in to learn from the friendly volunteer that this was not Atlanta or Dallas and they don't have carts in O'Hare. He told us to keep to the left and follow the signs. They do have a tram around the various terminals, but we would have had to leave the secure area and then return through security, which would have taken longer. We started out a slow jog, soon followed by a fast walk, then just walking and puffing, since we are not great athletes. But, finally we saw our concourse and found our gate with people already boarding the plane. I walked up to the ticket agent and showed her my handwritten ticket and she enters the computer and tells me cheerily, "I see your ticket, but your reservation has been cancelled". Now at this point I have been awake for 30 hours, run breathless through two airports, and spent two hours standing at a gate getting this ticket prepared. Remember the preparation I mentioned earlier that I would need? But another conference was called with two other agents and they decided to go ahead and give us seats and bill it to (whichever airline was "on the hook" at this point, I don't know). She even told us that she was giving us better seats, which in fact they were, with an extra few inches of leg room. That makes a difference at my height on a 13 hour flight.

We were the last people to get on the plane, disappointing one man who was hoping to sit in our seats. But, we were not airborne yet. The pilot announces that there is a delay before the FAA would let them leave, then yet later he announces that they had a problem with a special radio they needed for flying over the polar region so they were getting a new route that would not require flying as far north. A few minutes later, he admits that this would add 30 minutes to the flying time, and then later tells us they were waiting for a fuel truck to add more fuel. We finally left more than an hour late, which meant our mad dash through this airport had also been pretty much unnecessary. I remarked at one point to Rita, that had they known our experience this day, they would never have let us near that airplane. Even making up some time flying, we were still more than an hour delayed arriving in Beijing.

The previous portion was written as we approached Beijing. I am now writing a couple of days later. The Chinese portion of our travel went much smoother. We arrive about 5:30 pm and contacted the lost luggage personnel to explain the problem of our luggage arriving on a different flight, from a different airline, at a different terminal. The agent checked and told us that they did not have our luggage at the other terminal but that he had contacted the appropriate agent from the other terminal who was coming to file the necessary report. I asked him if I could go outside the security area to look for our friends who might have been able to gather our luggage for us. To my surprise, he told us that was not a problem and when I checked again with the customs officer I found it was quite simple to walk out and find that the Hall's had indeed been able to gather our luggage with their own. So we were finally able to unite together with our friends and our luggage only about 2½ hours later than expected and begin our visit of this amazing city.

I will close for now and when I get some sleep, I will write about our experiences in Beijing and our travel to Dalian.

Eddie

Ready to Go

February 19, 2009, 2:10 pm

Once again, we have the opportunity to travel to Dalian, China. This will be my third trip and Rita's second to this major seaport on China's northeast coast. There is a small group of believers there who have been meeting together off and on since last year. The leader of the group has been a disciple since the mid-1990's, but all of those from previous generations have either moved to another city, lost their health, or fallen back into the world.

There have been dozens of baptisms in recent years, but up until the past few months, none of these have remained for long. There are a variety of reasons for such turnover. But one of the things we believe that we were able to accomplish our last visit was to show the group how to continue to work and worship together even when there are no foreign teachers present.

Since May, the church has met nearly every Sunday, with 3-5 souls present.

If this trip is anything like the previous two, we will be teaching 8-12 hours a day. We are traveling with Perry and Janet Hall, whom we have been close friends with for more than 20 years. Keith Barclay, who has been working with this group since the early 1990's and Dakin Kinser, a deacon in the church where Keith works, will get there one day before us. Since there will be several teachers available, including two women, we are planning to split the students into smaller classes and have more focused classes for different types of students.

China is still a communist country, where the practice of religion is forbidden (or tightly restricted), except for the state-sponsored church.

This is not really dangerous for us, as the worst that is likely to happen to us is deportation. But it is more dangerous for our students. So my blogs from China will be much less explicit. I will use terms such as "going to the water" for those who submit themselves to the Lord in baptism.

"My/our father" speaks of God. "Discussing" is teaching. "Friends" will apply to those who are already disciples. "Ancient books" is the Bible. It is not too difficult to figure out what I mean.

Also, since we are tourists, we do spend a short amount of time sightseeing and I will make certain to include plenty of tourist like pictures. Rest assured, we will be very busy with the primary purpose of this trip, even if it seems like we are "seeing the sights".

Eddie