

## Questions

I shuffled forward in the line for security clutching my carry-on bag like it was my anchor to the world. I repeatedly asked myself why I was doing this. Why would I fly halfway across the world to work a job I had no experience doing and live in a culture that is completely opposite to my own? I was leaving behind a close group of friends, a loving family, and a comfortable life; all of which formed a support structure that I had just begun to take for granted and which I would now have to start replacing from scratch. I turned around and waved goodbye to my family one last time—mother and sister failing to hold back tears—and walked through the metal detector. There was no turning back now.



One last picture with my family in the airport before I leave. My smile was a delicate mask barely covering the storm of nerves raging inside of me.



Walking into the classroom was a sensory overload. During my first class, my ears were ringing until halfway through the lesson. My ears are well adjusted now.

My transition to life in China was a lethargic process. While I was living it, time seemed like a solid block of homesickness. I would wake up in the morning missing the smell of waffles, bacon, and coffee and the burrowing wetness of my dog's nose in my ear. The question I started my journey with nagged at the edges of my mind. I would judge time by how many vitamins remained in the bottle every morning: two weeks down, another 280 pills to take until I return home. My saving grace was the opportunities to hang out with my fellow EAs. When I was craving a cheeseburger and instead saw duck blood and rabbit head on the plate in front of me, I at least could take joy in those people that offered me small doses of home. My students also presented a challenge. I had to discover my own way of simultaneously entertaining and educating a room full of 40 ten year old Chinese students who were seeing a foreigner for the first time in their life.

Then one day I woke up and found myself excited to teach; excited to walk into a classroom and be greeted by people who genuinely treat me like I am the highlight of their



day, no matter how small they are or how piercingly shrill their shouting sounds. The children's joy and enthusiasm has proven to be infectious.



Walking down the halls, I am often swarmed by kids hugging my waist and clinging to my feet, hoping for a ride on “the tall wàijào.” It is all I can do to stay standing until a Chinese teacher comes along and saves me. It is a wonder I haven't learned how to say “Help!” in Chinese yet!

Now, when I find myself bored, I begin to devise lessons plans and make up games to supplement them. I began to recognize Chinese words that my colleagues were saying a while ago; granted, I only recognized one or two words per conversation and I have recently improved to only four or five, but I feel proud nonetheless! I go months without entertaining that initial question. When I do, dozens of reasons now push the doubt from my head. My vitamins are just another part of my morning routine.



Huahua asked me to be her boyfriend after our first encounter. Talk about a culture shock!

Halfway through my stay here I met a Chinese girl who made my life in China even better. My language skills improved significantly, my happiness spiked, and my comfort reached memory foam levels. Throwing a girlfriend into the mix made me feel like I once again had a full support system to depend on.

Ironically, my “expertise” of living in China peaked when I discovered not one, but two restaurants that serve delicious Western-style pizza. After a long day of placating rambunctious children, a bowl of noodles, no matter how delicious it may be, just doesn’t cut it for me sometimes. Finding comfort food was the cherry on top of my now solid support structure. For the first time in half a year I finally feel at home.

With only four months left in my adventure in China I am now asking myself a new question: why would I leave? My best answer to that question is, not too surprisingly, another question: why not stay?



My family visited during Spring Break in the States and met my classes. Here, my parents and I are posing with one of my eighth grade classes.