

January 1, 2003

Dear Friends,

The beginning of a new year is always a time for reflection. As I look back on 2002, I cannot ignore the impact of the war on terrorism on my life overseas. Japan is still the safest place I could be, and I still traveled, but my choice of destinations was somewhat limited by Department of Defense restrictions. China was the highlight – both for Spring Break and the winter holiday.

Beijing was “all about Mao” and the guide’s interpretation of ancient Chinese history (for which I have enormous respect) at the Forbidden City, Ming Tombs, and Summer Palace was definitely influenced by the political climate in which he was raised. Tiananmen Square didn’t impress me as much as it might have because we were fighting a dust storm from the Gobi Desert as well as the surprisingly cold temperature. Beijing is a huge city of 12 million, but doesn’t seem as crowded as Tokyo because it is spread out over more



land. Our guide advised us that there are no traffic regulations in Beijing, only “suggestions.” He also compared the changes in China to those in Russia: whereas Russia changed its political system first, resulting in economic hardship, China has retained its communist government but modernized the economic system to allow international joint ventures and extensive trade. Despite the evidence of modernization, I doubt that Beijing could have been ready to host the Olympics in 2000: at the left is what we labeled a “three star” toilet – because it has tile, toilet paper available outside the stall, and it flushes (but not the toilet paper, which goes in the bucket). Trained in queuing by the polite Japanese, we were astounded when angry Chinese women pushed past us to gain access to the toilets.

Guilin (Gway-leen) was certainly the highlight of the Spring trip for me. You know the Chinese pen and ink drawings? Hills in the mystical distance? Well, they're real! Limestone peaks creatively named "Elephant Trunk Hill," "folded silk hill," etc. etc. We took a four hour boat ride on the Li River through incredibly beautiful country, and visited the art museum where we saw a demonstration of traditional pen and ink drawing and were besieged by children saying "hello, hello," "what's your name?" "glad to meet you" and eager to shake our hands. We also went to a hospital where we received an introduction to traditional Chinese medicine.

In Xi'an (Shee-on), we saw the terra cotta warriors who guarded the tomb of the emperor who first unified China (in the Qin dynasty – c. 300 B.C.) I didn't take any pictures because there was a sign saying "no flash" - but that didn't bother the ugly Americans in our group. The Southern Yue Tomb Museum in Guangdong Province displays intricately

carved jade sacrificial objects, including the emperor Wen's funeral shroud, made entirely of jade. Guangdong is home to the Cantonese (a small rebellious minority who represent 80% of overseas Chinese) as well as the birthplace of Dr. Sun Yat Sen, the "father" of modern China. Our hotel featured an enormous mural made of cut paper:



Guangdong Province is also famous for carved stone, wood and brick as well as "eggshell" porcelain. From its capital Guangzhou (Canton), the Pearl River splits into two branches presided over by Macau (Portuguese colony returned to China in 1999) and Hong Kong (British). There are many more pictures and commentary on my web pages beginning at

<http://www.surflin.ne.jp/janetm/china.html>

The "Black Ship Festival" in Shimoda, Japan, annually celebrates the arrival of Commodore Perry, the opening of Japan to international trade, and subsequent American and Japanese friendship. I made web pages of that trip as well.

As usual, I attended the National Educational Computing Conference (in San Antonio this year) and published a couple of articles. Highlight of the summer was a visit with Karen in Denali National Park, Alaska, where she worked as a "bear technician" and, of course, time with the twins (and their parents) in Portland as well as a week at the beach. I look forward to attending Karen's graduation with a Master's in Environmental Management from Yale in May.

I wish you all a healthy, happy New Year filled with peace.

Love,

Janet

janetm@surflin.ne.jp