



二〇〇八年十二月

Dear friends and family:

Things have been quiet around here the first three days of 2009; I've enjoyed the break. Tomorrow it's back to school for me. Yes, I work this Sunday to make up for the extra day off last week – something about it just doesn't seem fair. ☺ At least I know now what to expect anytime I'm given a "holiday." They give...and take away. It's the Holiday here.

Looking back on December nearly makes me dizzy because it went by so quickly. Like many of you, between work and all the shopping for the few Christmas parties and gift exchanges among friends, I stayed pretty busy. But, **this holiday was very special for me** because I got to attend a meeting to celebrate Christmas where people from several nationalities in the city led us in carols and hymns from their homelands.

On the funny side...**Christmas Eve morning, I took a spill off my bike** into what I first thought was mud. I wasn't hurt. However, the smell and green color tipped me off that I had splashed down into sewage. Gross! The rest of the story is hilarious. Thankfully, I'd been tipped off that morning to be careful. I lost a skirt, socks, gloves and some leggings, but I gained gratitude. I was glad it happened in winter and not summer. If it had stunk any more, I'd have lost my dinner from the night before. If it had been summertime, I wouldn't have been bundled up in so many protective layers. I guess, there is a bright side, even when you're sliding through goop.

Belated Christmas miracle! As 2008 came to a close, I made a trek to the city centre to do some walking and talking with our boss. To those of you who are new to this update, please know that I don't normally share this kind of detail, but thought some of you who know me well would appreciate the subtle humor of the situation.

As I sat waiting, I said, "So, what do you want me to talk about with you?"

"What do you mean?" he said.

"Well, I came here to walk and talk with you, but I'm not sure what you want me to focus on."

He paused. "Oh, whatever you want."

I was little confused. "I thought you wanted me to come here today for this?"

"Uh, no, this was your idea, not mine" he said.

By then, I was feeling pretty silly sitting there...waiting.

"Okay, Ang, what do you want me to do?"

"Help these people," I said.

"All of them?"

"Well, sure. The whole city." It sounds a little childish to me now that I think about it.

"Okay, " I heard him say. "You sit here and wait for me."

Just under my breath I said, "Thanks boss!"

Within minutes he started breaking it down for me. First a minority ethnic family walked by and sat down next to me. As I sat smiling at them, my boss said, "People like them?" In that moment, I knew what to focus on and how to proceed. When I finished observing and talking, they left. Next, an old man sat down next to me and started chatting with me in my broken Chinese. I heard a whisper, "People like him?" I had another focus to talk through. After he left, for the next hour, I saw *individuals*, not just people of a city. For me, being able to see with his eyes was my belated Christmas miracle! It's my hope these little miracles will add up over time to change me. Until then, I wish you a Happy New Year! Enjoy the update and know I'm thinking of you... --A

FAMILY – Here they are, my brother's family and my parents. They had a great Thanksgiving together this year. We're all looking forward to everyone getting together next Christmas. I'll be Home For Christmas 2009!



First it was, "I can hardly read this menu..." Now it's, "Man! This print is so tiny." I had to use a flashlight during one of my Chinese lessons to see the book text (but so did my tutor). I'm debating...bifocals or eye surgery...hmmm.

CHRISTMAS...A very interesting Christmas display inside the Ito Yokado department store. The yellow Christmas "cake" is made of rolled up towels. They do a little to decorate for Christmas, but it's nothing compared with what they do for their annual Spring Festival (commonly known to Westerners as the "Chinese New Year").





This Christmas I got four place settings (with chopsticks) from my parents. The teaching staff at one of my schools gave me this gorgeous orchid. In Chinese an orchid is called, "butterfly flower." Now to keep it alive!



There's nothing like the sight of dead chickens right outside my gate to get me in the mood for Christmas. Not really! However, the pork bun in the second photo, makes my mouth water! Yum!!!



One of my former teaching buddies is now a customs official out in Western China. Her English skills helped her get the job. There is nothing like being able to bake cookies on the LIVING ROOM coffee table! Teachers enjoyed the resulting "How To" video. ☺

TESL can be very interesting! One of the things children in advanced classes learn is how to order food from McDonalds and KFC in English. For example, they *might* say, "Please give me two *French fries*, one hamburger, one chicken nuggets, and two colas." By the way, most kids prefer KFC.



CHRISTMAS IN WANKE SCHOOL

My schools alternate celebrating Spring Festival and Christmas. This year the Wanke school celebrated Christmas and it was a hoot! The Friday before Christmas there was hosted a big performance. Each class chose a portion of a popular children's story and enacted it on center stage. After much work and practice-practice-practice, the day arrived. It was a huge success.



A new twist on the traditional Christmas tree!

A pair of hand-painted reindeer for the performance.



Everyone pitches in to make costumes and prepare for the big event.



At the school entrance, piano students tickled ears with their music. I'm sure you can imagine the video cameras, poses, and everything else that went on as proud parents and family basked in the moment.



This class chose "Toy Story" as their performance story. It was so cute!!

Oscar (on the left) is one of the best English students from the 4 year old class.



Too cute for words! This class' choice was "Snow White." Oprah is the English name of the girl who played "Snow White." She got a proper kiss from prince charming! And when she did, the place erupted into laughter. She, on the other hand, barely endured it.



I'm not sure what these two classes were performing, but one had to do with snow...and the other, penguins.



These "robots" were part of a dream sequence for one of the classes. And of course, the cutest ducklings ever! These little 2 and 3 year olds actually had to walk in their webbed feet. None fell down, but we all held our breath.



The Lion king was probably my favorite presentation. The costumes were so cute and the little boy who played Simba did an excellent job!



Finding Nemo was adorable...especially the green headed turtles. This picture was taken during practice...the turtles refused to take their coats off until the last minute before the performance.



The oldest class chose to do "The Emperor's New Robe." Very cute! At the end the king walked around in a pink all-in-one underwear...and was a little chilled after even though he wore it over a thin layer of clothes.



James and Floyd, two little hunks!! Hanging out before show time.

See you next month!