

Letter from Kelsey Hamsey
Commonwealth Department of Defence (Army) Scholarship Winner
School Year Program from Australia to China
26th July 2007

Dear Department of Defence, Nin Men Hao!!

Wow I can't believe that I am at the half way mark of my exchange! So much has happened in the few short months I have been in China. I have changed from a new arrival in China, speaking next to no Chinese and having no clue how to use Chinese things and act like a normal Chinese teenager to thankfully being able to speak enough Chinese to hold conversations, competently use everything from chopsticks to navigating the complicated Chinese public transport system and to making wonderful new friends.



I have been so fortunate enough to have already visited the major places in Beijing and surrounds including Tiananmen Square, GuGong (Forbidden City), Changcheng (Great Wall) and TianTan (Temple of Heaven) with Yiheyuan (Summer Palace) the only place left on my list of touristy places to see in Beijing.

The National Flag of China with the Great Wall and the motto to the Beijing 2008 Olympic games in the background.

The change of seasons from Spring to Summer brought the end of my first school semester in China and with that the completion of my intensive language classes. I was so grateful for the opportunity to study Chinese in this environment and it has helped with my settling in wondrous Beijing. I thank all my teachers for their help in getting my language skills to a point where I rarely need someone to translate for me anymore. September brings a new adventure for me as I change into the regular Chinese school. I will then be able to attend classes with the Chinese students and sit in on the 50 people classes to study Maths, science, politics etc in Chinese. It should be a very interesting experience.

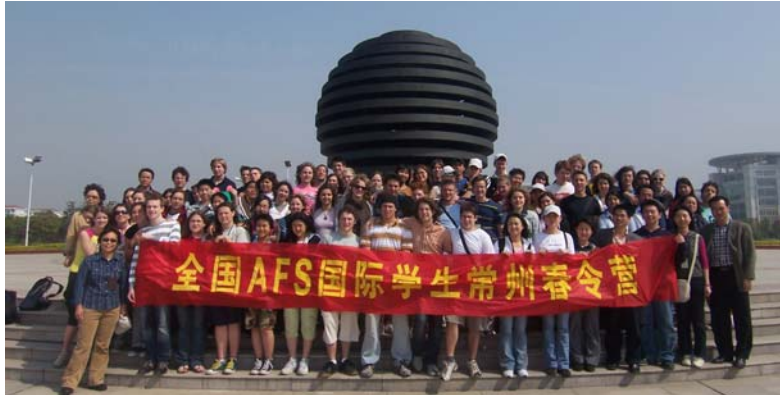
But not all of my language skills can be accounted for by my teachers, a great amount of my improvement must also go to my two host families. Unfortunately 3 months into my exchange I had to change host families. My previous host mother had become too busy at work to look after me and so unwillingly gave me up to a new family. My new family is fantastic! We have 7 people living in the house, which amazingly is a new western styled apartment. Between Yeye (grandfather), Father, Mother, Younger Sister, Younger Brother and a Nursemaid living in an apartment it never feels crowded and is always a happy and laughing place. My younger brother who is 3 years old provides me with much amusement as I try to understand his Chinese. My Grandfather speaks very little PuTongHua (Mandarin) and speaks mostly with the ShanXi accent making it rather hard for me to understand him. But we've communicated well using hand gestures including pointing at the mouth when it's time for dinner.



My host brother Guo Yi Ming (Mi Ming for short)

My new host family just recently took me to Peking University with high hopes that I might return and attend this establishment. They also explained to me that many families take their children from an early age to inspire them to study hard and work hard so that maybe one day they might attend the finest university in China. I must say it did have an impact on me, making me want to work hard to make the most of the few months I have left here in China.

Also with the change of seasons brought a change of AFS students. The normal China Program runs from August to July but I was fortunate enough to go so it wouldn't interrupt two years of schooling just one. So in early July I said goodbye to many friends I had made with the AFS students already here. We went to Changzhou (near Shanghai) and Yunnan (a southern province) together as the AFSers of China. We shared many fantastic memories and I now know I can travel most of the world and have a place to stay or friends to visit. It was amazing to meet over 70 students from 21 different countries. To learn about other cultures, not only my host country's, but all kinds of cultures. But I must not dwell too much on the past and look to the future when the new students arrive in August. And with them, new friends, new experiences and new memories.

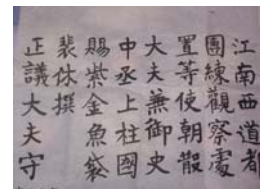


So right now it is summer holidays and man am I busy for them. It all started with the final cultural trip to Yunnan with the other AFS students. Yunnan is so beautiful. So green and just untouched. We saw amazing sights, from natural to man-made and saw a different side of Chinese life. For someone like me who lives in the big city it was so different to see the country side, I'd almost forgotten what green grass looked like! We also had a very interesting experience of spending 38 hours on the train back to Beijing, but we all had a blast, arrived somewhat smelly and grimy but nevertheless laughing our heads off.



Beautiful Yunnan

Once back in Beijing it was a tearful farewell to the students with many promises to visit them in the future. A quick week of rest at the family house then it was off to Tian Jin, a small city about an hour away by train to the south east. I'm spending 15 days here with a temporary host family to just experience life in a different city. Here I've learnt Chinese Calligraphy, Meditation, and watched as my host brother studied Chinese GongFu. My temporary host family owns a restaurant so I've had the chance to go behind the scenes and check out a Chinese kitchen on full scale and sampled many of the north's favourite dishes. And



despite the high temperatures (humidity mainly) we even ventured to the sea. Just say to anyone living on the Australian coast the Chinese sea is just a little different.



Just a little different...

When I go home to Beijing, my host sister and I will return to their 'old home' in ShanXi province and then it's back to Beijing in time to meet the new students as they begin their own experiences in China. It's amazing to think that 5 months ago that was me! And now I'm the

one with the knowledge and hopefully the ability to help the new students with their adventures.

Once school begins again in September it's only 4 short months until I once again return to a different home back on Australian soil. I truly cannot believe I am half way through.

I once again wish to express my thanks to the ADF and AFS for the opportunity to go on this exchange, without them and my ex-classmate Amy Jones, I would never have had the chance to do something this amazing. It truly is a once in a lifetime experience and I thank everyone so much for the chance to experience it.

Having the time of my life

Sincerely

Kelsey Hamsey
AFSer in Beijing, China

