

3rd China letter from Dodie to Lene:

On 25 December 2011 18:19, Dodie <<mailto:dodieinchina@yahoo.com>> wrote:

Dear Lene

Sleigh bells ring...are ya listening? Here, they ring in the hands of the 101 Chinese college girls I took Christmas caroling around campus this week (in batches of 30+/-) giggling and wearing red Santa hats atop their shiny black hair. Sometimes we were joined by the visiting American college students, sometimes by Willi Jean or Martin's class. Martin, our Filipino English teacher, was bold enough to teach them "O, Come All Ye Faithful", the carol about what the government here fears most: a group of people, who strongly believe in something besides economic growth, getting together to affirm a faith and take action.

There is plenty going on here to distract me. Fellow foreign teachers flock together at holiday times; brunches and parties abound. One of my former students, who is now principal of a 100-child all day pre-school, invited us to attend the school Christmas party...cultural fusion for the under-6 set.

Tomorrow, after I teach an EFL class of adults, I'll bake cookies with a Chinese friend and her 10-year old daughter (whose birthday it is and that is her heart's desire). Afterward Carol and I will go into Fuzhou to experience a choral Christmas Eve at one of the old stone churches built by the missionaries in the 1800's. It is a 24 hour shopping night in Fuzhou so the streets will be jam-packed and night market stalls will spring up in alleyways. In the old city, bright pyramids of local oranges fill street vendors' carts. In the Muslim neighborhood, sidewalk tables are stacked high with nuts and raisins from their faraway native lands, as well as lamb skins painted with leopard spots and tiger stripes, made into lumpy hats and vests. The Chinese begin shopping in earnest after work, so these city sidewalks are always busy and busy will turn to teeming on Christmas Eve.

Having a terrible cold, I am not in a chatty mood and will make this short. We have a 3 day holiday coming up over New Year to give people the opportunity to spend as much money as possible. The following week I'll give 101 easy final exam (so everybody passes...if a student fails, you have to make up a similar but different test and give that student a second chance!), grade them, turn in my paper work.

On January 11, Carol and I leave China for Vietnam, then Laos, then Thailand. It has been a packed 4 months with little time to write but a million more memories to write about if I ever settle down and do it. As I rode the jam-packed bus today past construction sites and new malls featuring Starbucks and a cream puff shop named "Beard Papa", I caught a glimpse of a condo complex going up that promised "California CEO circles...Orange County Acres of Forest Resorts" and another in which the builders advised the businessman/buyer "Live the V-Life": victory, virtue and variation. So with that in mind, I'll wish you victory over all your troubles, virtue in all your dealings and enough variation to keep life sparky and interesting.

Merry Christmas! Happy 2012!

Dodie