

Tuesday, January 8, 2013

We've finished our courses and finals and have started on other projects! I gave "F's to 8 of my 3<sup>rd</sup> Course students and 4 of my 2<sup>nd</sup> Course students. The University's policy is that those who fail may re-take the final. Woody is giving his "re-take" this afternoon, but I think I'll wait until next term. Everything is done on paper on the day of the final. All grades must be calculated (except for the final) and these are listed on a special list that is requested from the Dean's assistant/Registrar, Tongaa. Tongaa doesn't speak English and doesn't plan to learn it so she always requests one of the multitudes standing outside her door to help me. In addition to Tongaa's form, each student has a special book (think bankbook) that they carry to each instructor for the handwritten grade entry and signature. Somehow these books magically appear at the time of the final. So, once all the calculations are complete, each student (sometimes in groups) can come see their finals and pick up their completed report card book. This book travels with them from year to year with all the records of their University courses. I'm not sure what happens if one disappears. I presume Tongaa has the grades in her filing cabinet and it can all be reconstructed. I'm a bit intimidated by Tongaa so I don't think I'll find out.



This photo is Woody giving his Level 3 exam to 25 students.

After the grading of the final examinations and completion of the report cards, I did have a lot of requests for giving higher grades. One strong English-speaking student who brought a present to us last week and then invited us to her dorm for lunch suggested that I find a way to help her improve her "points." She could understand clearly when I responded with, "I don't negotiate grades." As for one of the 2<sup>nd</sup> course (sophomores) who cheated and had her test marked with a "0," I explained to the Department Chair that I don't want to ruin her life but I'm not really interested in re-testing her and giving her

another chance. She had the best grade in my class before the exam and had been reprimanded earlier in the term for helping one of her classmates on an exam. "I didn't know that helping was considered cheating." She said. "You are a harsh woman, Judy." Since then, she had warmed up to me and had given me yet another (#3) waltzing lesson at one of the many holiday parties we attended. (Two teachers had also given me lessons, as well as one of the University cleaning ladies #4.)

Because I am in a small department and all the students meet with all their instructors after finals, I've been under "the glare" since the incident occurred. At least the entire class hasn't turned on me...yet/again! Luckily for her, she is going to Russia next term and a failing grade would prevent that, so our compromise was something like an incomplete. We'll leave the re-test for later. Hmm, I guess I do negotiate grades. (Reminded me a little of football players who need a certain grade to stay on the team...)

Our meal on 12/31/12 at the dorm was fun and interesting. There are two main dorms where about 500 students situated near our apartment. The one we have visited twice so far has women on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors and men on the 1st. Oyun-Erdene and Nyamsurem invited us for lunch. Their dorm room has three women, thus three beds, and a counter/table for their food preparation. Altho there is a café in each University building where classes are held, there is not one that the dorm students have access to for dinner or evening meals. So, it appears they cook in their rooms. Since microwaves are not common here nor small-sized refrigerators like the dorms in my own sons' former dorm rooms, people have large electric frying pans or steamers that they use for making everything from milk tea to fried bread and steamed



dumplings (buuz). They hang their frozen food/meat? outside their windows in bags. By the time we arrived for lunch, these two women had already rolled the dough, put in the meat, onions, and seasonings, and pinched the dumplings in preparation for steaming. (Woody's notebook on buuz has cooking information [woodypackard.com](http://woodypackard.com))

The women had quite a system set up for their implements and dirty dishes. There was some scrambling that occurred when small bowls for the tea and silverware for eating the salads were needed. Someone left the room and returned to wash the item(s) before presenting it to us. Each room has a sink mounted on the wall as you enter the room and across from that is a small closet for hanging clothes. There are no dressers or desks in the rooms. Small wooden stools are used to sit at the table or off the floor. The limited furniture and electricity (one plug per room) didn't seem to stop the creation of a delicious and substantial meal. Other women wandered in and out who had also contributed to the table and were included in our photo shoot at the end of the visit.



On Thursday of last week we were invited to one of the Russian-English instructor's homes for dinner. Reesa lives about 15 minutes from our apartment in a house that her husband, Baurjan, built. On the same property live her husband Baurjan's stepmother and a daughter, and also Reesa's mother who lives in a ger. They are Kazakh and the tradition is the youngest son cares for his parents. In this case, Baurjan's own parents have died but his father's second wife and children live adjacent

to them. One of the stepsisters came over during our visit to play with Reesa's 20 month old, Erika. She is pictured here with a toy dombre. Her father played the one hanging on the wall for us.



Wednesday, January 9, 2013

Woody and I re-started our Mongolian tutoring last night with Undermaa. We actually constructed some simple sentences with the Mongolian word order, Subject, Object, Verb. I coffee drink. I gulash eat. We are very excited as we've only been accumulating nouns since our arrival. Putting things together seems like a big leap. (Woody negotiates money and food with the vendors much more than I do, so his Mongolian vocabulary is much greater than mine.) We've been trying to practice a few things with each other and hope to meet with Undermaa tonight to record some of the words we've been learning. One of our daily encounters that involves Mongolian-English is the lunch room cafeteria ladies at the University. We often feel that they are tormenting us with their mimicking of our pronunciation and vocabulary. (Just how wrong can a person be when they say shole (сөл) soup?) Little by little we've been teaching and learning words that we use with each other. I've yet to learn their names!



We unexpectedly ate dinner with the President of the University two Fridays ago after we attended an all-University celebration. After waiting for 2 hours for the program to begin (in true Mongolian fashion) and being entertained by students and employees singing, dancing, and receiving awards, we were called to the front to receive a gift from Grandfather Winter aka Santa Claus. Undermaa was with us to explain the different events as they happened. As we three were leaving, the President came rushing by (I think he was going outside for a smoke) and invited us to come to his table in the party room and eat dinner. As it turned out, it was a party for University administrative employees, librarians, secretaries, maintenance people, and the cleaning ladies. (This

explains my fourth with the Provost who from 1900-1924, the Foreign Languages Chemistry they were all able to great time. Photo J.Vanchinkhuu and



waltzing lesson, mentioned above.) We sat is a historian specializing in Mongolian history Dean of the Graduate Studies, the Dean of and Culture (our boss) and the head? of the Department. After a little vodka and dancing, speak English, so needless to say, we had a courtesy Woody Packard! (Judy, President Undermaa)

Next Wednesday Woody and I head in different directions for work and vacation. I will travel to Macao, China for a mid-year conference with other US State Department English Language Fellows from the Eastern Asia Pacific region (China, Mongolia, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, etc.) In fact, I'm responsible for one session of a conference with the Fellows. Then for the weekend (1/19-1/20) the Fellows will join a conference of the University in Macao that will include English teachers from the city and region. I will also be presenting a session at that conference. I will be staying at a lovely resort in Macao and enjoying some warm weather and sunshine. I return to Khovd on 1/23 and have two weeks acclimating before University classes begin again.

Woody will be traveling to Pittsburgh to check in with the Packard family. Hope has been in the hospital for a few weeks and Jan and Kathy have been busy keeping her company. Wood hopes to help them out, spend time with his mom, and buy some more computer hard drives, before returning to Khovd in early February. I am responsible for keeping the garden alive and taking pictures at the square every day. Both of these responsibilities could challenge me beyond my capabilities but Woody knows I'll try hard. (In fact, I have been suggesting that we have a lovely green salad this week and Woody can mix his soil with coffee grounds and plant it anew in February...)



This is day 18 (end of cycle 2) of 9 cycles of 9 days of the Mongolian winter. The first three cycles are usually the most severe. We've been experiencing -20 C and -30 C during the days. The beautiful clear days with blue skies make me forget how cold it really is. And Woody reminds me that it hasn't been above freezing 0 C since November. The frost on the windows at the University doesn't melt any more so our view outside (from the office) during the day is limited. We have some beautiful artwork on our bedroom windows though.

Frost photograph courtesy of Woody Packard.