

Friday, October 5, 2012 Photographs courtesy of Woody

Hot water may be on! The city turns the hot water on and off based on the season. When heat is needed (Fall & Winter) then hot water if available. When the heat is off (Spring & Summer) then no hot water is necessary! We've been heating water on the stove in a teapot we purchased at the open market.

Unfortunately with the hot water on it doesn't mean that hot water is continuous or that it is hot...so there are some caveats regarding this celebratory event. In fact there didn't seem to be any hot water in the morning today but it felt hot in the evening.

This was a busy day. I expected to have four classes to teach but ended up with three since I had read the schedule wrong and had missed one class on Wednesday (Level IIA). My teaching began at 9:40 and I had a twenty minute break at 11:10. Then I had two more 1.5 hour classes before I finished at 2:40.

When I returned to the office, Risa, one of the Russian-English teachers told me that there was a celebration party for a woman in the University who recently got her PhD. And that the department would be going. Everyone contributed \$10,000 T. I was thinking we would be walking to the celebration and that it was a tea and cookies sort of thing. (Expect the unexpected!)

About 4:30-4:45 we piled into two cars and drove to a restaurant behind the open market where we went to the upper level to a banquet-type hall. The tables were all marked with department names and we sat in booths with a table on the end. (There were 12 of us.) Oyun and another woman who I recognize but haven't really spoken with came later. Two men (again, that I recognize but don't know) sat in their places initially. When the women arrived, the men asked for additional chairs but ended up going to another table.

As we walked into the banquet hall, I noticed the Chinese-English department was sitting on the opposite side of the room. I waved to Puje and Dawaa. I didn't see Woody and I didn't worry about it until I realized that this was going to be an "all evening affair." Sitting at the table I mentioned to Risa that I didn't have any way to tell Woody where I was. She told the other teachers who somehow conveyed to the Chinese-English department that Woody should be there. They hadn't seen him to tell him that afternoon so he didn't know about the party.



Meanwhile our table was piled with a platter of fruit (apples, grapes, watermelon slices, and mandarin oranges), a platter of thinly sliced beef with the fat edges intact and on the side thinly sliced pickled orange and red peppers and dill pickles, multiple cans of beer,



bottles of water and orange soda, and two tall bottles of Mongolian vodka. Also in the center were glass mugs and small liqueur glasses.

Shortly after we sat down, the waitress arrived with Mongolian tea, a very salty milk-like drink served

warm/hot. I'm unclear if there is tea in it. This was served in smallish clear glass mugs with designs like you might get coffee or juice in the US. Then plates were delivered with cubed potatoes mixed with cubed meat, cucumbers? or pickles? similar to a potato salad.

This course was eaten slowly with lots of chatter between the teachers and greetings to other instructors and University staff as they entered the room or walked toward the restroom that was situated behind us. (Public restrooms seem to be for both genders – male and female. This one had four stalls and familiar-style flush toilets. The toilets at the university are rectangular holes in the floor for squatting, that also flush.) Over the course of an hour approximately 200 people entered the hall including a handful in traditional Mongolian dress. Each group had designated tables.

Around 6 pm, the program began with a Master of Ceremonies who announced a number of performers including 3 young men who played the Mongolian two-stringed instrument, the Morinkhoor, 4 little girls (ages 5-6) who danced to some rock music, a traditionally-dressed Mongolian who did throat singing (a type of whistling at the same time as singing). Once the musical events finished, individuals began to speak about the virtues of the woman and her accomplishments. (I didn't get a blow-by-blow translation but Risa would occasionally lean over and explain the general idea of the compliments.) The woman's parents and in-laws spoke, and each department of the University rose and spoke. The President of the University gave a short speech as did a group of different Department Heads. The eldest instructor in our department gave a short speech (1-5 minutes) also.



Each speaker presented her with a monetary gift. Risa would tell me when they gave a million Tugriks. (That's about \$700-800.) A group of her girlfriends did this as did her brothers and sisters and their spouses. Sometimes she was presented with the traditional blue scarf which Puje told me was a symbol of respect and a framed plaque or in one case, a bouquet of flowers, and a large painting. A large (24" diameter and 18" tall) "cake" made of dried curds was sitting on her table and Woody told me this was a traditional gift.

Her parents, in-laws, brothers and sisters were in traditional Mongolian clothing. The men wore long satin/silk? brightly colored wrap-around robes with wide scarf belts. They also wore large wide brimmed leather hats (Woody calls these, "a combination between a cowboy hat and Dick Tracy's hat.") The women wore either similar robes cut much closer to their bodies with uncovered hair or smaller bolo felt hats. The colors are remarkable. Orange and blue shades are common. One of the throat singers wore a light blue robe and bright orange belt.



Before the main course of dinner was served, music was started and the dance floor cleared for dancing. A few of the Chinese-English department brought Woody over to our table so I could see that he had

arrived. Apparently Puje took a taxi and picked him up. He was as surprised as I was at the elaborate celebration for a PhD. It isn't clear if this is a general societal acknowledgement of the importance of teaching OR just an institutional recognition of someone achieving a high status in their midst. Anyway, the celebration was organized by the candidate herself and her friends. They would pay for dinner for the entire group. The food won't be the largest portion of the bill because the alcohol consumed was in large quantities. We shared the beer on our table but also the bottles of vodka were poured and toasted at regular intervals. At our table the small liqueur glasses were used. At Woody's table, the men were using their glass mugs. We took small sips at our table and they were doing 'bottoms up' at Woody's table.

After many of the speeches, particularly if it involved entire departments or multiple people, the presenters would break into song, department songs and traditional songs. This was quite moving as many people in the audience would also join in. And musical performances continued in between with a rock singer, and another throat singer, as well. Eventually, a woman became the master of ceremonies, and she continued the toasts and the introductions of individual department people.

Dinner was served around 7:45 with large plates of rice, mashed potatoes, beef in gravy, and coleslaw (multiple colored sliced cabbage salad). At most tables, people hunkered down and ate without conversation. Looking at individual tables around the room, it appeared that people were bent down low over their plates. At our table, many of the women put their left arm on the table, leaned over their plates, and began eating. This was a conscious activity that was not to be interrupted.



After some dancing that included the Gandam(sp?) song that was recently made popular by a Korean hiphop dancer, and some other English techno music that Woody and I danced to, I convinced Woody to walk home with me. He was enjoying the vodka and conversation at his table. Most of the women at my table were dancing or speaking Mongolian. A few people had left.

Woody told me that the party would continue until midnight before the police would come to fine anyone who was left. (Bars and public drinking stop



party would come to fine at midnight.)

