

Love and Dreams

BY DANIKA LEUNG

What I Learned from Teaching in Zhaojue

The second day of camp, my students attended the Career and Personal Planning (CAPP) class where principles and morals were taught. Daniel, the teacher, asked the students two questions. The first one was: "What is your goal in life?" I expected apathetic or superficial answers, such as "I don't know" or "I don't care". But as they wrote out their answer, I saw that these children in the remote town of Zhaojue had BIG dreams. They wanted to break out of poverty and hopelessness. They wanted to be doctors, teachers, artists, computer engineers, scientists, to join the army to protect their country, to attend well-known universities, etc. It broke my heart because I knew they will face many challenges before they get there. At the same time, I was so proud of them for not being afraid to dream.

The second question was: "What are you expecting from this English camp?" To have fun? To meet new friends? Almost every single student answered with they wanted to learn English. They actually WANTED to learn English. Up until that point, I had been drowning in thoughts of inadequacy. I heard God saying: "Danika, maybe you're not good at public speaking, not musically gifted, not good at Mandarin etc...but you know English, right? I want you to teach them English." That day at CAPP, the Lord ignited a desire in me to teach my kids English, with the best I've got. I wanted to help to fulfill their dreams. Maybe what I do in these three weeks won't make any difference but that was not for me to decide. I didn't want to waste any opportunity to help them.

That was the beginning. In Zhaojue, every day I would continue to experience God's grace and glory. I am not normally a loving person, but I found I began to love my students. Zhaojue has a prevalent "culture" of gangs, smoking, drinking, and drugs, and many teenagers end up on this road. I taught English Class 3 (age 9-13). My students were still young, but I knew in the coming year(s), they too would be tempted or pressured to enter the "culture". God put in me a desire to record their dreams on video as a gift to them, to help them remember. They all learned to say their dreams in English.

I want to share with you a few of the dreams of Class 3 (*note: I have changed the children's names to protect their identity):

The meaning of love: "Three crosses on a hill"

Let me begin with Edith's story. In the evenings, we helped the teaching assistants run a program for the orphans who stayed at the Youth Center. The theme of one of the evening programs was "LOVE" and the kids were asked to draw what LOVE means to them on a mural. I remember Edith held her crayon and didn't draw anything, while all the kids were drawing away. After thinking for a long time, she got a knowing look and started drawing. I looked at her drawing with excitement, but I didn't want to believe what I was seeing until I heard her say it. When someone asked her to describe what she drew, she confirmed what I thought by saying: "three crosses on a hill." To Edith this is love. I don't know who told her about Jesus, but she knew. My teaching assistant and I had planned to ask her about it one afternoon, but I decided to wait until that night. Putting off that conversation was my biggest regret in Zhaojue. I found out that Edith had left the camp early and gone back to her village because of a family emergency. I remember the afternoon before she left, she was holding



a piece of paper during class and reading it over and over. I sneaked behind her and saw it was the paper where the students wrote their dreams in that first CAPP class. Edith's dream is to go to one of the well-known universities in China. The day after she left, her friend found a letter left by Edith: "We've only known each other for 8 days at this camp, but I already feel that you are my best friend. We live in different villages but let's study hard so we can both get accepted to this university and be reunited one day."

Madelyn is a precious girl with big beautiful eyes and the happiest smile on her face. Looking at her, you would never know her suffering.

During one of the sports classes, she said she didn't want to run because her leg hurt; and I found out from another team member she had a past accident while gathering firewood that left a huge scar on her leg. The first week of camp, Madelyn suddenly went back to her village. The staff told me that it was because her father passed away. After a week, Madelyn came back to camp. In the middle of the last week of camp, someone walked into my classroom and said Madelyn had to go home again because her grandfather had passed away. So much pain for one little girl to bear, yet Madelyn is still dreaming and smiling courageously. Her dream is to become a doctor.

Night program children with the LOVE Mural

One evening the kids were asked to write their dreams in a jar and buried them. (The idea is to dig them up in 10 years and see if they were fulfilled). Before filling the hole with dirt, the kids were asked to shout their dreams. Aden shouted loudly and proudly "I want to become a doctor!" I considered Aden one of the tough, mischievous boys in my class; once he even brought a lighter into class and put it near another boy's pants. But Aden gave me so much joy. He lived in the dorms in the Youth Center so I saw him a lot. He would smile so big every time I said "Hi" to him. He had so much energy. Once, he put on sunglasses and pretended to rock out on the guitar even though he didn't know how to play. During another evening program, the teachers got to write "I love you because..." on hearts taped to the students' backs. I wrote on Aden's heart. It was in English and he couldn't read it but he looked me in the face very seriously and said "谢谢老师" (Thank you teacher).

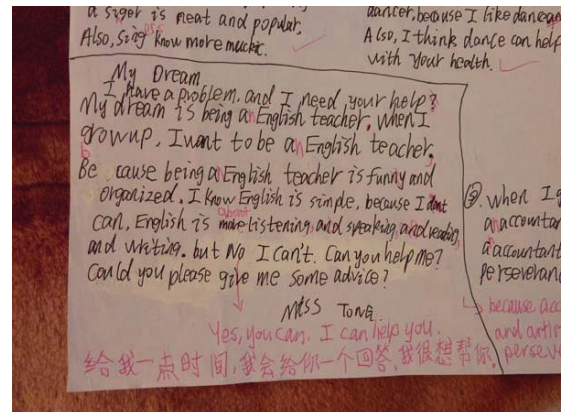


Afterwards, the kids had a choice of taping the paper hearts on the mural or keeping it. Aden shouted "I want to keep it!", folded it up and put it inside his jacket pocket. I wonder how many times he would pull out that heart to read when he goes back home. Aden cried on the last day of camp when he had to go back to his village. In these three weeks, he felt loved. When I remember how carefully Aden treasured his paper heart, I wonder if for some of these kids, this camp is one of the few times they've had someone tell them "I love you."

"My Dream"

Heather's dream is one of my favourites because it encourages me so much. This is Heather's dream: 我想同王老师一样当一名志愿者以后去贫困山区帮助那里的人民 (I want to be like Teacher Wang and serve the people in the poor mountainous region as a volunteer) It is too beautiful to translate. 王老师 is Daphane, one of the MSI's long termers in Zhaojue. I think Heather's dream is an encouragement to all the long termers serving in Zhaojue.

The dream video ended with the children singing R. Kelly's "I believe I can fly." Hearing their innocent voices singing out the words of that song is a memory I treasure deeply. All these children (and the many more that were not mentioned in this sharing) have a hope and a future because there is a God in this world that loves them. Please keep believing in these children living in Zhaojue. Please pray for them.



Teaching in Beichuan, Mianyang

Mei Rideout

In a recent summer, I had the opportunity to teach at a middle school for 9 days at an English camp in Beichuan of the Mianyang municipality in the Sichuan province of China. There were four of us from southern Ontario - Toronto and Hamilton. We got to Mianyang and were joined by nine other international team members - three from Indonesia, three from America, one from Singapore, one from England and one from Hong Kong. We were divided into four groups, each consisting of at least 12 students with one lead teacher and two teaching assistants. Each group also had a Mandarin speaker who helped out with the translation in class as needed. The teacher student ratio was excellent which allowed lots of opportunity for individual attention and interaction between teachers and students. The groups rotated every 45 minutes throughout the morning so that each student was able to meet and learn from all the teachers. Each teacher provided a different focus and teaching materials to help the students build their oral language fluency. In the late afternoon and early evening, we organized games, sports activities, movie nights and talent shows for the students. These fun times were vehicles for getting to know the students in an informal way and provided great opportunities for building friendships. Some of the students commented that these were the happiest moments in their lives.

One of the highlights of the English camp was showing the movie the Chronicles of Narnia with Chinese subtitles where themes of good and evil were explored. Another was the talent show where one group performed a western wedding and read the love theme from I Corinthian 13. All the students had also learned to sing the MSI theme song and sang together at the closing ceremony. That was very moving. On the very last day, about 50 students were able to join some teachers for a luncheon in a restaurant. They were very excited to spend their final moments with their teachers.

Prior to our departure, some of the students wrote us letters expressing their sorrow in having to say good bye. Even after we came back, some students have been keeping in touch.

What have I learned from the summer teaching experience?

First of all, I learned to appreciate and pray for Mary the long term, who works incessantly, whole heartedly and faithfully at Beichuan school. Mary inspired me and modeled true servanthood.

Secondly, I had a glimpse of what real suffering was like when I visited the Beichuan earthquake site. As I walked through the deserted streets and saw slanted, cracked buildings that were once inhabited by real people, my heart got heavier and I felt sad realizing that thousands of souls were lost and buried in the rubble beneath my feet. Do I really care for those who are going to be lost to eternity?

Thirdly, before my departure I was again encouraged and inspired by the sisters in Chengdu's head office, these godly servants of God. Their love and joy in Christ radiate sincere humility that lead to many works of service. May God richly bless these dear sisters and especially their leader Tomoko.



Sichuan Summer

Grace Hsu

In a recent summer I had the wonderful opportunity to serve the Lord in China two full months. I joined MSI Canada for their three-week English Camp program, but felt convicted by the Holy Spirit to go earlier, and obeyed. When I submitted, the Lord paved the way for me to go an extra five weeks.

I stayed in a little town in the mountains of Sichuan about 6000ft in altitude. It was a very small corner of the world, but this region is home to one of China's minority groups: the Nuosu (Yi) people. The Nuosu people, unfortunately, face a number of societal difficulties including illiteracy, alcohol and substance abuse and widespread cases of AIDS/HIV. Many Nuosu people are also slaves to superstition and traditional spirituality. What surprised me most, however, was the attitude these people face when outside of their own community. Some Chinese are prejudiced toward the Nuosu, and so many find it difficult to relocate and find work in other parts of the country. What I witnessed was a lack of hope among the Nuosu people.

Young people did not have ambitions or dreams; many of their lives are dead-ends.

I remember thinking many times about how hard long-term missions work in this town would be, as societal issues are never as simple as they appear. Change in the community takes years (even decades) of dedication. It is easy to lose hope, and easy to see why people burn out from "humanitarian work".

One would need divine strength to carry on.

Despite discouraging statistics, the Lord is definitely moving in China. I was able to participate in a variety of MSI projects: We worked at a farm where staff could train local agricultural farmers, I worked alongside women who've never been to school at a sponsored clothing factory and taught English at the local youth centre. While I was there, the Lord bestowed wisdom upon me by using the MSI long-termers to speak to my life. In retrospect, I'm really glad I went early because 1) God used a lot of people to minister to me during that time, and 2) He was able to use me despite my feeling useless and unprepared. He will accomplish what He will (Isaiah 55:9-11).

One of my favourite things to do was teaching and playing with children who lived on a brick mill right outside of the youth centre.

The Lord used these children (even in their poverty) to touch my life and open my eyes to the beauty in their lives' simplicity. I wanted also to show them God's love in whatever manner I could. The Lord revealed to me how ready and excited people in China were to hear the gospel... People are ready to have their lives transformed by Jesus, and it is so exciting to be a part of the Lord's work there.

God does not necessarily call us to success, but He does call us to obedience. "And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). Our God is mighty to save; if you are willing to obey His call, He will use even you in the expansion of His Kingdom.

All it takes is...Willingness

reported by Cherry Kwok

Simon and Eva joined the MSI vision trip to Yunnan and Zhaojue in March 2011. They have been joining the Toronto prayer meeting for more than a year and seeking to respond to the call of our Lord. Simon is a chef at a hotel and Eva is in accounting. When they first heard the calling of God to serve the people in China, they didn't know what they can do and how they should start the journey. They started coming to the prayer meetings to seek the will of God



During the vision trip, Simon and Eva visited four sites in Yunnan and had great fellowship with the workers there. Finally, they arrived at the Zhaojue Youth Centre that they had been longing to visit. As a chef, Simon was very impressed by the good facilities of the kitchen and great potentials of the Centre. He shared enthusiastically about what he might teach his students with the equipments and utensils there. He even visited the bakery in town and checked out the markets to see what ingredients he could buy there. Eva was excited to find out that they need someone to take care of their accounting which is her expertise. They were touched by the 'dirty but happy' kids running around. They were also saddened by the many youths loitering around without any hope for future.

A few years ago, when Simon started planning for his retirement, he was going to enjoy a comfortable life in Canada. However, God has a greater plan for him and Eva. God had brought to their attention the needs in China. At first they were not sure what they were able to do but through this trip, they are certain that God has something for them. This is the starting point of their journey to bless many people in China.

Next step

Simon and Eva have decided to follow the calling of God to go and they said, "There is no turning back!" They reminded me about what Casey Morgan said in his article "Just Willing":

We never had a special calling to "go." We're not any more spiritual than you or the person sitting next to you in church. We're just willing. That's all.

"Editor's note: Simon and Eva spent six months in Zhaojue this year, passing on their valuable skills and experiences"



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