

牛年大吉 *niú nián dà jí* Jan. 26, 2009
Wishing you great fortune in the Year of the Ox

Dear Friends,

Today is the first day of the lunar year, and as I do the final edit of this update, I can hear the sound of firecrackers from dozens of spots within a few hundred yards of my apartment. Firecrackers and fireworks have been going off constantly since yesterday, with two lulls: one for the Chinese New Year's Eve variety show on CCTV and one for sleep (from 1 am to 6 am). The variety show is a chance to review the memorable events of the past year. 2008 was been a year of interesting and memorable events, both good (Beijing Olympics) and bad (Sichuan Earthquake).



Let me give a review of my year, not in quite such an interesting form as the variety show, but here goes. In February I had a wonderful time visiting old friends in Taiwan. In May I enjoyed the first visit in my 20 years in Asia by my family (my niece and nephew). It was fun to show them my life here.

In June I went on a team to help with the Sichuan earthquake relief. The magnitude of the disaster and relief effort is hard to imagine; one can only be thankful that the epicenter was in a rural area. Relief and rebuilding efforts continue as millions still live in temporary housing in the midst of winter. The ELCA is working with the Sichuan Protestant Church, and in addition to traditional relief work, any money donated through the ELCA will go toward rebuilding churches, offering church-based counseling and providing support to survivors. Please keep this in your prayers.

Professionally, 2008 has turned out to be one of the best of my life. After years of teaching English, I have been so happy to be part of the community development work of Evergreen, and with the new 'Community Health System' being implemented in Yuci this past year, we are in the right place at the right time to be involved in some exciting new initiatives the government is supporting that can really lead to improved health and services for ordinary people. Because Evergreen was involved early, even before the system started in our city, our staff members are now the experts and are called on to train the government health care workers about community health education and community-based chronic disease management. It is so exciting to finally be doing what I wanted to do when I got my masters degree in public health 20 years ago.

One highlight of the year was the 'Visitation Team' training. Again, years of experience fell into place in a way that allowed us to support the local church in their service to their community. Thanks to everyone who submitted verses for the 'Comfort Verses' resource. The local pastors have edited it and added hymns for each topic. Currently it is about 50 pages long and in the final revision phase before taking it to a printer.

Another professional highlight is the research project into Metabolic Syndrome. Since July, we or our partners have done health checks for over 800 people at 13 of the 16 Community Health Centers and at the Health Check Center of the largest hospital in Yuci. It has been gratifying to realize how broadly we are reaching into the community. A neighbor told one colleague she had done the health check. Biking to church, when another colleague stopped at a red light, the crossing guard told him that she had also just done the health check at the nearby community center and thanked him as she had not been aware she had high blood pressure. This past month, as we presented the yearly reports to the government departments who oversee our work, two leaders told us they had also taken part in the study at the hospital and had noticed that Evergreen's name was on the results form. Another co-worker was told by someone at church that they had taken part in the study. We have found many people who have been unaware of their high blood sugar or high blood pressure, so health education has been an important part of the process.

2008 was also a year of weddings. Our local staff were single when they started to work at Evergreen, and now 6 of 8 are married, and 3 of those married this year. One baby was born in 2008 and another is due in April. Please pray for these new couples and new parents, for strong and happy families.



Most Chinese weddings are held in restaurants, without the exchange of vows we are used to. The reception is usually held on one day for the husband's family and friends, and another reception for the bride's on the next day. Guo Jinbiao's wedding (left) was unusual in that there was a church ceremony before their reception, which was held in a restaurant as is customary. In the photo (above, right), Yan Fang and her husband on the stage at the reception held for her side of the family. A month or so before the wedding, couples have their photos taken. Usually a large framed photo is displayed at the entrance to the reception; this the first time I have seen the photos made into a backdrop for the stage at the reception.

I wonder what 2009 will bring. The ripples of the economic disaster are reaching all over the world and are a constant topic of conversation here in China. I am learning all sorts of new vocabulary related to the economic crisis.

I learned something else new today. Because by the traditional lunar calendar I am 54 (not 52), and because 5 and 4 add up to 9, I should wear something red every day this year. It can be a red sweater, or red underwear, but I need to wear something red since "9" is unlucky. Anyone born in the year of the ox is also supposed to wear red this year. As one friend pointed out, President Obama is an "ox" so he should also wear something red every day this year for good luck.

I will be in the USA from mid-July to late September 2009; I will be working on a schedule soon and will contact you about the possibility of visiting your congregation.

Thank you for your continued support of my work.

Blessings,

Judy Perry

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