Reminiscences of China, by Martin Wesley Johns

Introduction

I am indebted in this account to the notes made by my sister-in-law Sybil Johns, who spent long hours with mother recording her recollections of China on tape. I have used her notes and memories of my own childhood to put together these memories. The account that follows makes no attempt to follow chronological order but instead, attempts to gather together related topics.

The Johnses were part of the large group of missionaries stationed in the cities of Luchow, Chungking, Kiating and Chengtu in the province of Szechuan in the far west of China. They were all involved in the work of the five churches (the American Methodist Episcopal, The American Baptist, the Church of England, the British Society of Friends, and the Methodist Church of Canada) who together operated a complete educational system (from primary school to university) for the 40 million people of Szechuan. They also operated two hospitals, one for men and one for women and children, dental and medical schools and produced for three decades most of the professionals and leaders in public life in West China. After the Communists came to power, the entire effort collapsed. The University has survived as a large medical school and the work of the missionaries in the lives of many leaders in Western China.

a) The Party of 1910

There were five Canadian couples (Fred and Elsie Abrey, Alfred and Myrtle Johns and Mr. & Mrs. Howe, Mr. & Mrs. Outerbridge, Dr. & Mrs. Kilborn*) in the party of 1910. They arrived together in Shanghai and lodged together in the China Inland Mission (CIM) Hostel and shared together the excitement of the new land they had come to serve. Each family was provided with a Chinese teacher and a servant to keep them as they prepared for the long trip to Chengtu, 2500 miles to the west. During the first stage of this adventure, they went up river by steamer, breaking their journey at Nanking and Hankow where again they used the facilities of the CIM hostels. At Hankow, each family was met by a Chinese cook and settled down to house-keeping, China style, each in its houseboat which was to be home for the next ten weeks.

Knowing no Chinese and nothing of Chinese customs, each family was completely dependent on their three “servants” as they attempted to come to terms with the "strange ways" of China.

** The information of the last 3 couples came from a photo taken on the Empress of Japan in November 1910.*

The cook who met my parents had worked with missionaries for years. They considered themselves very fortunate to have him and misted him implicitly. Their new found friend explained to them that, because he knew that it upset westerners, he had abandoned the time-hallowed Chinese practice of "squeeze." * He then went on to point out that he was the only "cook" in the party who had abandoned Chinese ways and asked them if they would please refrain from discussing prices with other missionaries because such comparisons would get him in wrong with all the other cooks who were grossly overcharging their masters. My parents accepted the advice and ate tough roast beef for weeks. The dream collapsed when on a neighbouring houseboat they were served scrumptious and tender beef of the sort they had known in Canada, and my father could not resist asking what it had cost. The answer so infuriated my parents that they went home and fired the cook for charging beef prices for tough old water buffalo. This was their second mistake for the cook that replaced him also squeezed - and couldn't cook.

The interior of China is separated from the coastal area by several chains of mountains which run roughly north and south just west of Hankow. The Yangtse River has cut its way through the mountain ranges to form the Yangtse gorges which provide perhaps the grandest river scenery in the world. Navigation through these gorges is perilous, and because the height of the river between low and high water mark can vary by as much as a hundred and fifty feet, the dangerous stretches of water change from place to place during the seasons. In 1910 no steamboats were able to breast the current above Hankow and the commerce to Western China was carried by thousands of junks which were rowed down the river and either sailed or pulled up the river, depending on the strength of the currents and the winds. A houseboat was simple a junk with its central section designed to form living quarters for the passengers. The back third of the ship was the Captain's home where he lived with his family; while the front third was reserved for the crew of perhaps a dozen who manned the sweeps in the day time and slept on the deck under bamboo awnings at night. When the wind blew upstream, a sail was hoisted and the crew sat on the deck whistling for the wind to blow more strongly. When the wind. died, the crew went ashore, hauling a heavy bamboo hawser after them and proceeded to pull the boat upstream, step by step, while the captain steered the boat and directed the operation. At the foot of each major rapids, there would be a town whose inhabitants earned their livelihood by helping boats up the rapids. A large junk might need as many as 200 trackers, each tied to a massive towing hawser by a band of cotton which went over his shoulder.

** "Squeeze" was the system whereby servants collected part of their wages by buying "cheap" on the market and selling "dear" at home. The missionaries generally paid much higher wages than Chinese employers in the hope that their cooks would deal "honestly " with them. In general, it was a vain hope.*

The path that the trackers followed sometimes followed the river's edge and sometimes climbed hundreds of feet into the air, caned centuries ago out of the face of a sheer rock wall. If a man slipped off the path or fell under the feet of his fellows, his life was forfeit. In the evenly matched battle between the river and the trackers, there was simply no one to spare to lift him back on the path nor place for him to lie under the feet of his fellows. Occasionally a rope would snap, the trackers would flat on their faces and the captain would face the perilous task of guiding a ship down the rapids without steerage way. All he had to keep him was his long iron-tipped bamboo pole which he could use with great skill to deflect the boat from the rocks rushing toward him. Most passengers felt much more comfortable walking on the shore when their boat was being hauled up a dangerous stretch of river. At least, then all one worried about was one's household effects, stored in the hold.

At nightfall, all the houseboats tied up in the harbour of a large town and remained safely till dawn. To tie up alone on a lonely stretch of the river bank was to court robbery or worse. In a busy harbour, there was not enough space for each ship to lay a gangplank to shore and late corners had to be content to attach their boats to those who had already birthed and ask permission to cross their neighbours decks to go ashore. Evening was a time of sociability, with the tempting odours of cooking filling the air and the gossip of the river being shared.

The party of 1910 had no serious misadventures and in due course reached Chungking, an important city west of the gorges and only 300 miles from Chengtu. Rather than following the Yangtze further and then going up its tributary, the Min River to Chengtu, they said goodbye to their captain and crew and set our overland by sedan chair. When they arrived, all five families were settled in one compound, Lao Gwan Miao, where they settled down seriously to learn Chinese. Inevitably, their shared experiences made them very close friends down through the years.

b) Troubled Times

The Republic of China came into being in 1910 under the leadership of Sun Yat Sen with a constitution patterned after that of the United States. Unfortunately, the country was not ready for the exercise of the democratic process and the power soon fell into the hands of the warlords, each of which carved out a section of the country as his own and tried to defend it against all comers. The shifting struggles for power created great distress for civilians who were forced by taxation to support the armies of the warlords and by extortion and pillage to support the armed bands of robbers who challenged the river and land communication routes almost at will.

The first three Christmases my parents spent in China were celebrated on the Yangtse houseboats; the first on their way to the interior, the second on their way down river to escape the civil war in Szechwan and the third on their way up river again. Before the second trip up river, my father was persuaded by a friend to carry a revolver as a protection against marauders. *(Note: There is a comment from MWJ that this might have been in 1917).* He didn't really want

the gun so he packed it when they went on board the houseboat. Early one morning, just after the boatmen had left the shelter of a river port, my parents were wakened by rifle shots and a demand that the boat be brought to shore. As soon as they landed, armed men entered their bedroom, snatched their watches from under their pillows and ordered them to open all their trunks. The search was uneventful until the robbers found a loose cartridge in one of the boxes. They immediately wanted the gun and pressed their bayonets against my father to reinforce their demand. He couldn't remember which trunk he had packed the gun in! Matters were pretty dicey until he found the gun and the remainder of the cartridges which they had missed in their first search. Finally the robbers left and allowed the shaken crew and passenger to resume their trip. Ironically, Mother and Dad had several thousand dollars of Mission funds in cash which they were delivering to Chengtu and all of it was missed by the robbers. Mother had carefully distributed the money in pockets of padded clothing or rolled it into socks or other items of apparel. Dad never carried a gun again!

When they arrived in Chengtu, they reported the robbery to the police. Some months later, the robber band was captured and executed. Mother and Dad's watches were found in the loot. However, on the well established principle, "Finders keepers, losers weepers," the chief of police kept dad's gold watch. He and Dad became quite good friends over the years - and the chief often remarked how well his gold watch kept time.

If things were really rough on the River, "foreigners" could ask the British consul to supply a gunboat as an escort to protect them against robbers. Nationals of all western countries used this service on occasion and travelled securely under the Union Jack. One of dad's best friends was a Quaker who refused to allow his family to be protected in this way. When he discovered that a gunboat had been attached to the flotilla of missionary houseboats proceeding up river, he ordered his captain to wait a day so they would travel alone. In due course, they were robbed and held to ransom. Dr. Stubbs was one of the strongest persons I have ever known, - with a manner which made it impossible to dislike. him. He refused to allow any one to pay ransom on his behalf and eventually persuaded the brigands to turn him and his family free. Dr. Stubbs died many years later (1928?), assassinated as he rode his bicycle across the campus. The seven dagger wounds were delivered on the anniversary of the day that British troops had killed seven university students in a riot in Shanghai. The revolutionaries could not have chosen a worse subject for their demonstration - the respect that Dr. Stubbs had won was such that his death sobered the whole Chinese community and public opinion forced the revolutionaries underground in Chengtu for years to come.

Difficult as it was for the missionaries, the lack of a stable government made matters much worse for the Chinese themselves, who had no recourse at all against the demands of the warlords. During the twelve years I was in China (1913-1925), the government in Chengtu must have changed hands four or five times, as coalitions of warlords gathered enough strength to oust the ruling warlord and then fell apart in the disposition of the spoils. Although very little blood

was shed in this feuding, the country was bled white to support the parasitical hordes of armed men.

I well recall the excitement in our home in one such contest between the challengers and defenders. The challengers had laid siege to the "Arsenal" which was a walled fort a few miles from Chengtu and had captured it after a week of fighting. The challengers then moved up to face the city wall and camped in such a way that the University campus, which was just south of the city, was in no man's land between them. Desultory small arms fire went on for two days and a few stray bullets hit our house. The school was not closed but dad escorted us to school and home again, choosing a path which would keep us sheltered as much as possible behind brick walls. At the end of the second day, the defenders retreated out the north and west gates of the city while the challengers negotiated a peaceful settlement - a million dollars in cash in return for a guarantee that the troops would be restrained from looting. To raise this money, taxes were levied. In Canada, when once we have paid our taxes, they remain paid until another year rolls around. In Chengtu, this was not so and the citizens of that fair city were called on to pay their 1935 taxes in 1923!

When a Chinese army moved, it needed man power to tarry its paraphernalia. This was accomplished by seizing able bodied men to act as carriers. When "lau-fooing" began, every able bodied citizen tried to hide while the military grabbed anyone who came along. The captives were held together by threading a rope through the sleeves of each victim’s jacket on a long chain. The carriers were not abused, and were well-fed since the troops simply ordered restaurants to produce food without payment, but neither were they paid. Thus when the move was over, they were stranded penniless - perhaps a hundred miles from home. One of our servants who was "lau-fooed" was away for a week and finally returned to us half starved and half naked as he had pawned his clothes on the long walk home.

An army in retreat was in too big a hurry to stay on the narrow roads through the country side and destroyed the crops that stood in their way. A farmer whose land lay in the path of the retreat could well have most of the produce he raised on his one acre farm completely destroyed, his water buffalo butchered and his rice taken to feed the troops and he himself 'lau-fooed" to help his captors on their way. One of my most vivid boyhood memories was of such a farm, where only the women and younger children were left - facing starvation - with the father and able-bodied sons all gone.

c) Shopping

Mother and Dad eventually learned to accept "squeeze" as a fact of life and to keep it under control by doing the family marketing from time to time. Every few weeks dad would make a foray to the market and come back laden with meat and vegetables he had bought at prices far below those we had been paying. The cook; nothing daunted, would explain that there had been a great influx of fresh produce from the country that morning and to rub salt into the wound, he

would go off to market himself and bring home produce at 75% of the price dad had paid! The cost of living in the Johns' household would drop dramatically for a few days and then begin a steady climb until the whole exercise had to be repeated.

The idea of a fixed price for goods was quite unknown in China - the asking price depended more on the estimated capacity of the purchaser to pay than anything else. One bargained for everything, with the vendor initially asking twice what he expected to get and the purchaser offering half what he expected to pay. Bad luck if some greenhorn from Canada paid the initial asking price for a cut of meat! The news of his folly would spread like wild fire through the market and no westerner would be able to get the price down within reason for days to come! For the financial security of the whole community, no new missionary was ever allowed to bargain alone. My father hated the whole process of bargaining, but mother enjoyed it so much that she refused to abandon it even when she returned to Canada. After cringing with embarrassment on many occasions while mother argued with a clerk at Eaton's over the flaws in a piece of merchandise she was buying, I finally refused to go shopping with her. I will say this though - she proved that despite the advertisements, there is no fixed price for merchandise in Canada, either -you just have to be less gentlemanly in your arguments than you do in China!

A visit from a pedlar with his pack and the ensuing battle of wits that occurred would make mother's day. The gatemen, having received a tip, would come in and announce that a pedlar who had some lovely embroideries wanted to show Simou (the Lady) his wares. Mother was usually glad to oblige and the pedlar would spread out the contents of his pack on the wide stone railing of the porch that ran almost around our house. When he was ready, Simou would appear and deprecate the lovely things he had to sell - exquisite jewellery, beautifully embroidered satin and silk, jade carvings and all manner of knick-knacks. By the time the examination was over, mother knew which things she wanted but none of the prices were right! She would go off in disgust and the pedlar would pack up his display and amble down the road. In a few minutes, the gateman would return with the news that the pedlar was back and wouldn't Simou like to see the porcelain vase again that she had so much admired. Mother of course would, though she could never learn how the pedlar had guessed that it was that vase that she really wanted. He then undid his pack, again, displaying only those things she had seemed interested in and the vase. The real bargaining now began, each giving a little and eventually the vase and perhaps one or two items would change hands a couple of hours later, after the pedlar had left several times in a huff and mother had gone back several times to her writing or her household chores! The final price would miraculously be what both parties expected on the first encounter. What a nice break to the routine of housework!

d) Our home in Chengtu

In their second year in China, the Bowles and Johns lived in the old Hartwell home. They moved into the house after Martin's birth in the Crutcher home.
(Note from Myrtle Johns picture album).

We lived on the campus of the West China Union University just outside the city of Chengtu. The teaching buildings were in the center of the campus and the "faculty row" and the "Canadian School" enclosed three sides of the area. The architecture was a pleasing combination of Western and Chinese styles;

Our home was a large rambling two-story brick house with an attic, surrounded upstairs and downstairs by large porches which nearly enclosed it. (We actually liked the house next door much better because the porches went right round the house so that children could play tag on the porch on a rainy day). There was no basement but there was a crawl space under the whole house which was divided into rooms in the same way as the first floor. It was an ideal place to play "house" or for "hide and seek." It was also a great hiding place which was badly needed on the occasion when our boson pal Helen Carscallan stole the cookies that her older sister had planned for a formal young ladies "afternoon tea." Although the Johns' boys aided and abetted her and ate most of the cookies, I fear we did not share in her punishment.

On one side of the house there was a grass tennis court and on the other a well flourishing clump of bamboo trees and a rather sad looking banana. The banana tree froze down to its stump each winter and tried manfully to produce fruit the next summer. We saw lots of snail bananas form but none ever ripened before winter again arrived. Behind the house there was a large garden and a stable. One of the many irrigation ditches that crossed the Chengtu plain flowed behind our property and provided us with a place to indulge our passion for making small boats.

Since malaria was endemic, we had to sleep under mosquito nets all year around. Except in very cold weather, we slept outside on the upstairs porch. As a boy with a very fertile imagination, I was always imagining that a tiger would get up on the porch and eat us up and used to examine the 2x2 inch wooden bars that separated our porch from the outside staircase to estimate if it was strong enough to stop a tiger. Actually, the nearest tiger was in the City Zoo and the next nearest was probably 200 miles away in the Himalayas. The closest approach to a tiger was my cat which, after its nocturnal hunting was done, would crawl under the coverlids and purr away under my chin. The only regular disturbance was caused by the snoring our neighbour, Mr. Brace, who slept on the porch next door, separated from us by a tennis court. I don't know how his family got any sleep at all!

The house had a servant's wing, with sleeping quarters on the second floor over the kitchen and storeroom and reached by a set of outside stairs. As I recall, the establishment consisted of a cook and a table boy to help him a house boy, a serving woman who doubled as a nursemaid (Wu Da Niang), a couple of coolies who looked after our three cows, going out to cut grass for

them each day and the gatemen who doubled as dad's Chinese secretary. Some of the servants lived in and others maintained their own homes in the city. The wages paid were high by Chinese standards, ranging from $3.00 to $8.00 a month in Chinese dollars which were then worth about fifty cents Canadian. Since a person could feed himself quite well in those days on about $1.00 per month, and since they had free lodging, they were regarded as well off. It always seemed strange to me that each servant cooked his own rice in the servants' kitchen using his own rice supply which he kept in a locked box under his bed.

e) Housekeeping

Mother and dad were both teaching so that it was necessary to depend on the servants for the housekeeping. Moreover, keeping servants was a way of life in China - even though mother often used to feel that it would have been easier to do the work herself than organize the help.

Immediately after breakfast, mother would consult with the cook on the days' menu and unlock the pantry. He would then measure out what was needed, under her eagle eye, and she would lock the pantry again for another day. In the meantime, dad would go to the stable and unlock the grain bin to allow the cow coolie to measure out the grain for each of our cows. Dad remained until the grain was eaten, Straw, grass and hay were not so carefully controlled,

My mother used to wander into the kitchen periodically. On days when bread was being baked, she would ostentatiously count the loaves that were set to rise. If she found a couple of loaves set aside in the pantry or hidden in the kitchen, she would move them over with the official loaves, knowing that now they would all finally arrive at our table. No one argued about these matters - it was all part of the game that was played between mistress and servants all over China.

We take for granted that the scales in our stores all weigh the same! In China, the commonest scales were steel-yards and every merchant carried his own with him - one set for buying and one for selling! After both buyer and seller had weighed the goods, the argument as to weight and price went on vigorously until a bargain was struck. I recall that one year our winter's supply of coal was being delivered by a dozen men, each of whom carried two sixty pound baskets of coal on the ends of his carrying pole. Unfortunately, most of the men had "accidentally" fallen into an irrigation ditch on the way from the coal yard to our house so that the coal was soaking wet and had gained. appreciably in weight. Dad refused to accept delivery so back they went to get loads of dry coal. The weighing in then began with the merchant and dad each keeping a tally as each basket was weighed and dumped in the coal bin. Occasionally, a bearer would have to be asked to take his foot off a rope dangling from the basket which was being weighed. When the weighing was over, the merchant announced that he had weighed the coal at the yard and that dad's scales were 20 carries light. After a big argument, during which dad told the merchant to take all the coal out of the bin, a compromise figure was arrived at and everyone parted amicably.

Most of the Canadian missionaries did a lot of their own shopping at Eaton's, since in those days Eaton's paid the freight on goods ordered by missionaries in any part of the world. The annual mail order to Eaton's was sent off in March so that the supplies which included Christmas gifts, would arrive by December. There was one tragic year when the Yangtse was blockaded by bandits and our order did not arrive until February! We all got promissory notes under the Christmas tree.

Buying clothes for a growing family with a lead time of nearly a year was not easy! The worst problem was shoes - which seemed hardly ever to fit properly, I well recall a big trunk of new shoes which sat in our attic - shoes for nearly all ages of boys! Woe betide you if your feet were the wrong size - there were no options with less than a nine month delivery date. My brother Harold blames his "hammer toes" on having to wear shoes too small for him - but perhaps they would have grown that way anyway! I still remember the joy of wearing tsao-hai in the summer time. These were sandals made of rice straw which weighed almost nothing and adjusted themselves to your feet immediately. Even though a pair only lasted a few weeks, they were so cheap that they beat leather shoes any day. In looking back, I can't really understand why we didn't wear tsao-hai all year round instead of having to imprison our summer-free feet in western shoes each September.

Clothing was not much of a problem - partly because none of us boys were clothes conscious anyway - and partly because our Chinese serving women made most of our clothes out of the very serviceable cotton goods that were available. Only once were we mortified! Mrs. Albertson returned from furlough in 1924 and told mother what all the boys in Ontario were wearing. Mother got busy and made up dozen of pairs of knee length khaki pants, in assorted sizes. When we got back to Canada in 1925, we discovered that teenagers were all wearing long pants. The Johnses were the only boys in knee pants in the school! It wasn't so bad for the younger ones and I didn't seem to care but Harold suffered agony over this matter. I believe he also got into a lot of fights over his clothing and the nick name "Yellow Belly" that the school kids gave him. Mother finally suggested that if he would pretend to like the nickname, the kids would leave him alone. These tactics worked like a charm - the problem eventually became one of dissuading Harold from using "Yellow Belly" of choice. I know I didn't get out of knee pants for three years - and then only because I was going to college! I never did find out, if all the knee pants were worn out!

The Eaton's order included many things. In addition to clothing, there would also be a carefully planned drug order which always included iodine, castor oil and Epsom salts - the first for every cut and the others for every upset stomach. All remedies in those days seemed to be based on the premise that unless it was unpleasant, it couldn't be good for you. I was always scraping my knees and stubbing my toes and dad was always applying iodine to my wounds. Extreme care was necessary with abrasions because even the slightest wound was likely to fester, in a way that children brought up in Canada cannot appreciate. Because I hated iodine, it took me a long time

and a couple of bouts in bed with blood poisoning before I was ready to put iodine immediately on my wounds.

Because dairy products formed no part of the Chinese diet, the mail order always included large quantities of canned butter, Carnation evaporated milk and sweetened condensed milk, There were also extravagances like raisins, sugar cubes for tea, tins of jam and a selection of goods for emergencies.

There was an abundance of fresh fruit, vegetables, meat and eggs available at all times but it was nice to have special "Canadian" food occasionally. When my parents were on furlough in 1918, Uncle Wesley and Dad made about 50 lbs of maple sugar which, when dissolved in water, made perfectly good maple syrup for special treats for the next seven years.

The best fruits in West China were oranges which were picked "tree-ripened" off the trees in our compound or bought in the market. Early and late varieties were available which ripened from September to March. Another favourite of ours was the persimmon, a pulpy fruit which looks like a tomato but which grows on trees. We picked these green in October, packed them carefully in rice and found that they ripened slowly and lasted till March. A green persimmon is like a tomato-sized choke-cherry in its effect but a ripe one is one of God's best gifts. Melons, cherries and plums were plentiful but there was nothing in the apple line that touched our Northern Spy's.

Pork was plentiful, good and cheap. Beef was not nearly so common and tended to be tough since cattle were used mainly as beasts of burden. The butcher would operate from a store open to the street and in open competition with the flies but the meat was quite safe when well cooked. Ducks and chickens were plentiful and were sold alive. We always had a few chickens fattening up in our chicken run awaiting Sunday dinner or other occasions. Fish was kept alive in tanks in the fish market and the cook picked out the one he wanted and cooked it immediately.

The sugar that was available on the market was only partially refined and had a dirty brown colour. Mother used to refine it by making it up as a syrup and boiling it with eggshells. It came out a nice cream colour.

We ate "western style" cooking all week, except for Saturday noon when the Chinese cook had a free hand and served us scrumptious Chinese food, eaten with chopsticks. Mother learned from him and passed the knack on her daughter and daughter-in-law.

Ice cream was not available, since there was no ice in Chengtu. Occasionally, there would be a cold snap which would leave the ponds covered with a quarter of an inch of clear ice. By raking this together, we would get enough to make a freezer full of ice cream. For more important community occasions, a coolie would be dispatched to the mountains two days walk away, to get a load of ice. He would arrive back with perhaps 75 lbs. of ice and everyone in the missionary community would have a dish of ice cream.

We were very fond of tomatoes, which produced fine ripened fruit for five months of the year in our garden, and which we loved to eat out of hand like apples.

Tomatoes were unknown to the Chinese and were usually no appreciated by untrained palates. Whenever we were on a picnic or travelling, crowds of people would gather around to watch "the foreigners" eat. They always asked to taste the tomatoes and mother would give them a fat juicy one to be passed around. It was fun to watch the children take a bite, grimace and pass it on to the next, to the accompaniment of much laughter and wise cracking.

f) Gardening

Both mother and dad had been brought up on the farm and enjoyed gardening. We had a big garden in which we grew large quantities of carrots, beets, lettuces, radishes, cabbage, cauliflower, tomatoes, cucumbers and pumpkins. The drainage was not good enough for rhubarb so dad built a mound about 8 x4 feet by 2 feet high upon which a patch of rhubarb flourished.

The garden also contained fruit trees - oranges, persimmons, pummalo, pomegranate and pee-bow. The modem grapefruit is a cross between the orange and pummalo and shares characteristics of both. The pummalo fruit looked like a grapefruit 8 inches across but was very sour so that it could only be eaten when dosed heavily with sugar. Pomegranates are beautiful to look at but frustrating to eat since the fruit consists of a closely packed cluster of seeds covered with a thin layer of very juicy and tasty pulp. The juice stains clothing so badly that it has been suggested in all seriousness that the only place to eat a pomegranate in comfort is when in a bath tub. Pee bow is a very tasty fruit with a skin that must be removed. The interior is 10 % edible, the rest being occupied by four very large seeds placed together in a spherical core.

An essential part of the establishment was the bamboo grove, which produced wood for all purposes in an area 200 feet. It served for fishing poles, drainage hose, and for wicker furniture.

Grandmother Johns was always sending seeds to us in China and mother and dad tried them out in Chinese soil. Perhaps the most notable success was the Danish ball-head cabbage which was unknown in Szechwan. We found that these flourished in the Szechwan climate. One day, dad was cutting one for the table when a passing farmer asked what it was. Dad cut off a piece for the visitor to taste and then prepared to cut a big cabbage for him to take home. His visitor stopped him and went off, indicating that he would be back soon. A little later he returned with his teen-age son and a carrying pole. The cabbage was carefully dug out of the ground, the roots protected by a jute bag and carried off suspended from the carrying pole to be used later to produce cabbage seed. Two years later Danish ball head cabbage appeared on the local market and soon became a popular alternative to Chinese cabbage.

Potatoes did not grow well around Chengtu because the water table was too close to the surface. They did very well in the rolling foothill country about 80 miles away and, when introduced by the missionaries, became a popular addition to the diet.

Because we wanted to be able to eat our vegetables raw, there was a firm rule that only cow manure be used as a fertilizer. The servants had their own section of the garden which was nourished with all the "night-soil" from the Johns establishment.

It grew much more luxuriantly than our section of the garden and the servants thought we were crazy to give them the best fertilizer. It was never safe to eat any green stuff bought in a Chinese market, unless it was going to be peeled because the market gardeners paid a good price for the night-soil from the city to enrich their land. One of the unforgettable smells of my childhood was provided by the long line of carriers which filed out of the city of one million each morning, each carrying two large buckets of the "elixir of life" on the end of his carrying pole.

g) The Dairy Herd

To provide fresh milk for a family of five children was no easy task in a country where cattle were regarded as beasts of burden rather than sources of milk for human consumption. To keep us in milk and an occasional treat of freshly made butter needed a herd of three cows since a good Chinese milk cow would give 12 cups at a milking, and not all of the three were likely to be milking well at any one time. Of course, if one insisted one could use the local dairy and buy milk. However, this was not an attractive alternative.

A Chinese dairy (c. 1920) consisted of a man, a cow and a calf proceeding in that order down the road. The housewife who wanted milk would arrive with her pitcher to way lay the procession and place her order for so many cups. The dairyman would stop the cow, allow the calf to nurse for long enough to get her relaxed, and then push the calf aside while he milked her into a measuring cup. The buyer stood by, watching lest the milk be adulterated by the milkman who often had a bag of water in his armpit so arranged that he could squeeze it and add the tickle of liquid that flowed down his am to that which came from the cow. When the required number of cups had been delivered and paid for, the dairy moved to the next customer. The calf was an essential part of the operation, since the cow would not allow anyone to milk her until gentled by her calf If the calf died, the dairyman skinned it and carried the stuffed calf on his shoulders so that the cow could lick the dummy and be relaxed in this way. In 1960,1 saw just such a herd outside the Metropole Hotel in downtown Karachi, to remind me vividly of my early years in China.

Night soil is a euphemism for human excrement collected at night from cesspools, privies, etc, and sometimes used as a fertilizer.
In 2011, Ken and Sharon Johns were in China. As we explored the village of Shiqiao (south of Kaili and near Guiyang), a woman walked by carrying 2 pails with liquid on her carrying pole. It was night soil! It is an unforgettable smell indeed!!

The cattle population of China was scourged by the "Rinder Pest" which decimated the cattle populations from Germany to Japan. It is an extremely contagious disease and when contracted, almost one hundred percent fatal. We lost our little herd at least three times in 10 years, despite all efforts to prevent our stable boy from visiting other stables and bring home the disease on his shoes.

It was a great wickedness to my parents to see the wastage of Chinese babies between the time when they were weaned and the time when they became fully adapted to an adult diet. Whereas breast fed Chinese babies were lovely and fat, and a source of envy to my mother who seemed never to have enough milk for her children, they wasted away when they began to live on rice water so that mother's children were much heavier and stronger by the time they reached the age of three. Fully half of the Chinese children died before attaining that age, their weakened condition making them susceptible to all maimer of diseases.

My father and Mr. Dickensen, who were the only two missionaries in Chengtu with direct farm experience, were able to persuade a group of public-spirited silk merchants in Chengtu to put up funds to bring a herd of Canadian milk cattle to China, with the hope that the new stock would enrich the milking capacity of Chinese cattle. The herd whose purchase my father organized consisted of a Holstein heifer, a Holstein yearling bull, and a Jersey heifer. The two heifers were pregnant when they left Canada and delivered soon after arriving in Chengtu eight months later. The poor animals had had a rough passage up the Yangtze, having survived the sinking of their houseboat on one of the rapids and rather poor care throughout the trip.

My father, with me as a small boy helper, proceeded to educate these cows properly - removing the calves from them at birth and milking them properly, seated on a stool and using both hands. The teats on Chinese cows were so small that one could not use one's hand but had to milk them using the thumb and forefinger. We weighed the milk and kept records and the Holstein, to the amazement of our servants, showed that she could fill a large pail morning and night. When things had settled into a routine, the Governor of Chengtu (the local warlord) and the sponsoring merchants were all invited to a feast at the Dickenson's home. Afterward, all adjourned to the stable where my father milked the Holstein. As dad used to remark - "He has never played before Royalty but he has milked before the Governor!"

The entire herd succumbed to the next epidemic of rinderpest but not before their progeny had been cross bred with Chinese cattle to significantly raise the level of milk production in the Chengtu area.

h) Sundays

The missionaries, as was to be expected, treated Sunday as a very serious occasion. My parents, who had come from devout Christian homes in which Sunday was very much a day set apart, continued that practice throughout my boyhood. As much as possible, Sunday was made a day of rest for everyone - including the servants who were not Christian. This meant planning the menu

on Saturday so that Sunday meals would be little trouble, polishing shoes on Saturday evening, and so on. Church twice on Sundays plus Sunday school was the order of the day.

There was only one worship service a month in English, the rest being in Chinese and the missionaries of all denominations attended together. In fact, I was never aware of denominationalism until I came to Canada. Truly, I have never seen the point of the smallness that keeps us divided - fifty years later. Among the haunting memories of my childhood are the voices of the Chinese girls choir which took part in our evening services - singing "Day is Dying in the West'- in Chinese.

The reading material suitable for Sundays was also carefully scrutinized. Fortunately, my parents believed that the Classics (with a few exceptions) were suitable Sunday reading and all of us delved into the family library - often reading books that were far beyond our capacity to understand. What made Sunday a very special day for us was the fact that Dad was available to us for a large part of the day. Nearly every Sunday afternoon we went for a hike, which enlarged as our legs grew longer until in our last year in China it might take us on a circuit of eight miles. Mother, who was not a good walker, did not go on these jaunts but all five of the children plus an assorted number of neighbour's children were there regularly, with the little ones being carried on the shoulders of the older ones. My twin brother and sister, Ed and Ruth, represented a special responsibility for Harold and I. Dad always walked last and told stories - when we were younger, there were fairy stories and Bible stories, but as we got older he told us the classics. I remember that "Les Miserables" lasted for weeks. It was only later that I realized that dad had been rereading his old favourites at bedtime all week so that the story would be fresh for his Sunday audience, As we got older, we were encouraged to walk last and be the story teller for the day! It was here, I think, that I learned to love teaching.

There was much to see in a small area surrounding the university campus - with good sized villages every few miles in all directions and the roads crowded with people and pack animals. The entire plain was criss-crossed with a network of irrigation ditches and the exploration of these took many weeks of Sunday afternoons.

Sunday evening hymn-sings were also part of the pattern. Mother and dad continued, this practice until long after the family nest was empty. My generation has not continued the practice —except in the form of a special "carol sing" on some Sunday evening early in December.

i) The City

Chengtu was an ancient walled city with a population of close to a million packed in a circular area of diameter about four miles. The walls were higher than a four-story house and perhaps thirty feet wide on the top - with a serrated parapet along the outer rim. The outside wall was built of masonry and the inner watt was a grassy bank. Surrounding the walls was a moat formed by diverting part of the Min River to turn the city into an island. At each of the four gates, an outer wail, masonry on both sides was provided so that attackers who breached the outer gate

would have to attack the inner one while exposed from all sides to the weapons of the defenders. The City gates were closed at sundown, and from then until dawn, anyone who wished to enter or leave had to negotiate passage by means of a basket lowered from the top of the wall. During the day, armed guards controlled the gates and could close them at will.

Although the city had spilled out beyond the walls and the moat, well-to-do citizens elected to live inside the walls since robber bands occasionally raided the suburbs and the wealthy were prime objects for ransom.

The "Forbidden City" was a city within the city which housed the government officials. Originally it had been reserved to the Manchu rulers and forbidden to Chinese but by the 1920's, its parks were open to the public. The City also contained the two hospitals operated by the Five Denominations as well as a Press which printed the text books for their schools and the religious tracts for the evangelists. This complex was about three miles from the University proper which was about a mile from the south gate of the city. The roads between the two sites included the busiest streets of Chengtu and it was always an adventure to walk from one to the other.

A Chinese city assaulted one's nostrils almost as one's eyes. As we walked along, the bake shops and candy stores, the spice sellers and the restaurants, the butcher and fish shops all announced themselves to the nose before the eye could see them in the bustling crowds. You could tell from a block away when you were approaching a public toilet. These were large vats open to the street except for a "modesty panel" perhaps four feet high along the street line. The vats were crossed by large planks upon which you squatted to relieve yourself. The pool beneath was alive with fly larvae and the product contributed by the citizens of the area was sold to farmers as fertilizer.

The narrow streets were jammed with pedestrians, sedan chairs carrying ladies or wealthy merchants and government officials, wheel barrows carrying lesser folk and other barrows loaded with produce - sacks of rice, cabbages, baskets of live chickens, or even two fat pigs loaded on their backs on either side of the wheel protesting every bump in the road with loud squeals.

The confusion was compounded by the fact that nearly every family had a pig which was fed on the family garbage until it grew large enough to grace the table. Piggy was usually tethered to the of his owner's one-story house by a rope which allowed him considerable freedom of motion. If Piggy lived on the south side of the street and wanted to bask in the sun on the north side, the tethering rope provided an obstacle for every passer by. Not all of these were good humoured about it so Piggy would be roundly cursed and driven home to await the next chance to get over in the sun.

The restaurants or "tea houses" were always popular, open to the street with hard-packed earth floors, the square tables started just off the street line and extended back to the kitchen and the private dining rooms. Everyone drank tea - it being common knowledge that cold water (literally raw water) was bad for you. For a few cash (a fraction of a penny in Canadian money) you were

given a bowl with a few leaves in the bottom. The waiter would then keep the bowl full of boiling water for as long as you cared to sip your tea. To do this, he had a kettle with a long fine spout. Standing behind you he would direct a jet of boiling water over your shoulder into your cup. Never saw one miss, though I often saw the jet of hot water used to drive off a dog who had wandered in off the street. The waiter had a neat way of making sure that the water was boiling - they simply poured a bit on the floor. If it landed with a "splat", it was not hot enough; if it landed with a dull thud, it was boiling. Years later I learned the physical reason for this behaviour and have used the example with many generations of students.

There would be a real traffic jam in front of a tea house if the owners had hired a story teller to attract clients. The story teller would be standing or sitting on a dais projecting into the street well above the heads of the passers by and regaling them with tales of the days of chivalry in China. It is interesting that these days were approximately contemporary with those in Europe. The favourite stories were those of the Three Kingdoms* when the dispossessed prince Liu Bei swore a compact of eternal friendship with a butcher, and others in a peach orchard. The butcher turned out to be a military genius and their escapade as Liu Bei won back the Kingdom of Sze Chum make good stories in any language, (Liu Bei's majestic tomb was close to the university campus and as children, the grave mound was our favourite place to play 'King of the Castle". In no sense was this sacrilege, since the tomb was a favourite picnic ground for the Chinese as well and our playmates were often Chinese). Since listening is thirsty work, the tea house would reap a harvest when the story was done.

** The **Oath of the Peach Garden** was a fictional event in Lan Guanzhong's historical novel Romance of the Three Kingdoms. In this event, Liu Bel, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei took an oath of fraternity in a ceremony amid peach blossom trees, and became sworn brothers from then on. Their goal in taking the oath was to protect the Han Dynasty from the Yellow Turban rebels. The oath bound the three men, who would later play important roles in the establishment of the state of An Han during the Three Kingdoms period. It is also often alluded to as a symbol of fraternal loyalty.*

The oath:

"When saying the names Liu Bei, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei, although the surnames are different, yet we have come together as brothers. From this day forward, we shall join forces for a common purpose: to save the troubled and to aid the endangered We shall avenge the nation above, and pacify the citizenry below. We seek not to be born on the same day, in the same month and in the some year. We merely hope to die on the same day, in the same month and in the same year. May the Gods of Heaven and Earth attest to what is in our hearts. If we should ever do anything to betray our friendship, may heaven and the people of the earth both strike us dead."

Most of the stores were completely open to the street with heavy wooden doors that were put up for protection at night fall. Because no one had refrigeration, chickens and fish were always sold alive and the butcher shops were heavy with sides of pork from which the butcher cut the piece you wanted. Flies were everywhere, and ignored because no one understood the connection between flies and sickness. It was our custom to have a few chickens at home at all times so that one could be killed when unexpected company arrived. It also meant that the chickens you had were likely to be fatter than those bought in the market.

Silk manufacture was an important industry in West China: The silkworms were hatched by women folk by keeping the packages containing the eggs warm between their breasts. The worms were fed on mulberry leaves until they reached a length of two or three inches. At this point, they spun themselves a silk cocoon in which they stayed for several weeks before hatching out into moths. As soon as the cocoons were complete, they were dumped in boiling water which killed the worm and loosened the glue that bound the cocoon together. The fine fibres from many cocoons were then unravelled and twisted together to form silk thread, dyed in many colours and used to make the beautiful silk fabrics that have been the mark of China for millennia. The clickety clack of the hand looms could be heard long before they could be seen. The father usually threw the spindle carrying the thread back and forth while a half-grown lad would be sitting above the loom, raising and lowering the threads to produce the pattern desired.

More often than not, the barber was a pedlar who walked up and down the street offering his services. If a customer came along, he pulled out his stool and gave him a shave or haircut on the spot while the traffic bustled by. He had the necessary supply of towel, scissors, and hot water, maintained on a charcoal brazier, at hand in the decorated booth that he carried with him on his carrying pole;

For children on a limited allowance, the candy sellers with their wonderful goodies had a constant appeal. The boys were as much attracted to the pedlars who carried bamboo combs and back scratchers, and a variety of knives of all descriptions. The jack knives available were highly prized possessions, with their multiple cutting blades, screw drivers, cork screws, and probes to remove the wax from your ears.

If one grew tired of noise and bustle, one could escape by going “the long way around" on the City wall. This broad thoroughfare, open to the sunshine and the breeze, was a favourite haunt for mothers exercising their toddlers or grandfathers teaching the noble art of kite flying. Kite flying was a national pastime and kites came in assorted sizes from the small brightly decorated Tea kites which sold for a penny to the enormous dragon kites which were thirty or forty feet long and required a strong man to hold them in a good wind. I favoured "butterfly kites" which were painted to resemble monarch butterflies with a four foot wing span and with brightly coloured windmills for eyes that flashed as the wind drove them around. By jerking on the string, one could make your 'butterfly flap its wings up in the sky. One of the hazards associated with flying your kite on the city wall was the presence of "robber kites" flown from the ground

outside the city. These kites were armed with hooks which could catch the string of your kite. There was then a battle to see which kite could be pulled to the ground first with a crowd cheering the owner of the captured kite on. Almost invariably, the robber would win and there was nothing to be done! There he was perhaps fifty feet away but to get to him you had to walk a mile to the gate and then a mile back to get your kite back.

The wall route was banned to us for some weeks one spring because the beggar who traditionally begged at the foot of the steps leading to the top of the wall died and no one accepted responsibility for burying him. The stench in the alley way off the main street became impossible to face. It was only when the stores on the main street started to lose customers that a collection was taken up to remove the corpse. The fear of becoming involved in other folks' troubles which in recent years made a jungle of some of our large western cities is not exactly a new phenomenon in human affairs.

j) The River Front

Nothing was more exciting to a child than the bustle of the river which flowed between the city and our home. The river was alive with flat bottomed boats of all sizes, from little sampans that serves a man propelled water taxis, to the big junks that carried the produce of Szechuan down to the Yangtse at Suifu. One of our favourite picnic spots was the Thunder God Temple, perhaps five miles downstream from Chengtu. The best way to go was by water taxi and the best way to come home was on foot or by wheel barrow or sedan chair (the rickshaw was still unknown in Szechuan). There was always lots to see - the thousands of boats, each the home of an entire family, moored along the shore and spreading the fragrance of home cooking over the scene the junks being poled up or down stream through the traffic jams carrying their loads of hides, rice or timber the sampans darting across the river - the pleasure boats of the rich with well dressed men and women sipping wine or tea as they savoured the breeze - and the well-tanned boys swimming tin the river and making rude jokes about those sifting in idleness - and further along in the swift water, the cormorant fishers.

These fishermen stood on a boat perhaps 2 feet wide and 20 feet long with a pole in hand, a large waterproof basket with a small neck at their feet and perhaps a dozen cormorants sitting on the bat's edge looking into the water. Occasionally one would see a fish and go after it to return in a few moments with the fish projecting from its mouth. If the fish was very small, it would swallow it whole, but if the fish was of marketable size, the brass ring around its neck made this impossible. The fisherman would then rob the cormorant of his fish and drip it, still alive into his basket. There was no better way to get fresh fish than to hail one of these fishermen and negotiate a purchase on the spot.

(Note: From supplementary hand written notes I believe that this was written in 1977—Ken Johns)