

Shanghai Journal 1-29-15

Thinking of all my pals freezing back home and hoping the worst of the storm passed you by. Yesterday in Shanghai the AQI went down dramatically to a “moderate” 76 so we are very happy. We walked to the university (without masks) and while colder, the air was clear and bracing. We’ll take it!

I hit a slump yesterday, after the third day in a row of sparse vegetarian options in the cafeteria. Sometimes it just feels hard when nothing is simple or fast or familiar. We could go outside somewhere to eat but we don’t know anywhere near the U. It is hard in a non-veg restaurant to be sure what is in the food, and of course we don’t know Mandarin yet to figure stuff out. Everything requires careful planning ahead of time. On the walk to the U we passed several street vendors selling wonderful smelling items but still not sure about what we can and can’t eat safely. Most of the time I’m up for the adventure but yesterday was just HARD. I’m sure I’ll feel better today.

It really cheers me up to get notes from many of you – so keep them coming! I talked by Skype to my nephew Seth and we talked to Sumita on her birthday and that cheered me up too. If any of you have Skype names we can talk for free. You can sign up for free also.

One nice thing about the cafeteria is that we are meeting some interesting faculty. We sat at lunch twice with three math guys – a Belgian mathematician from Paris named Thierry, a computer scientist from Paris named Prometeo, and a Chinese mathematician named Yuning who studied in Paris and lives here now. Thierry is a tall, skinny guy with a ponytail. He is quiet but with a mordant humor that sneaks up on you and that I really enjoy. Prometeo (Prometheus) is appropriately big in every way (tall, with a big gut that hangs over his jeans, and talks with grand gestures). He’s also very stylish - gel in his hair, hand tailored suits he tells us the price of, gold jewelry. He is quite full of himself and asserts the most outrageous things. I asked Thierry if they were working on research together and with a horrified look he said, “No! Just French thrown together.” It makes for interesting conversation both before and after lunch!

Today we sat with a couple of NYU faculty – Maria from the history department and her husband Rick from the law school. They seem very nice and they live in our building so maybe we can go out to dinner sometime. I was drooling watching them eat a noodle soup with fresh thrown noodles that I can’t have because the broth is pork. We have asked the cafeteria folks to make a vegetarian soup once in awhile. We’ll see what happens.

Last night I had my first Skype conference call with co-authors on one of the chapters for TDSJ and their voices were crystal clear. So amazing that we can have an hour-long conference across the world for free. The work on the book is moving along well and I’m glad for that focus. No photos to share today!

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