

# **SILAGE CHOPPERS AND SNAKE SPIRITS**

**THE LIVES AND STRUGGLES OF  
TWO AMERICANS IN MODERN CHINA**

**THIRD EDITION**

**DAO-YUAN CHOU**



**FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS**

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For the people in the world who have tied their struggle inextricably to the struggle of others...

and...

For Sid and Joan, who insisted that I 'get off my butt and do something for the world,' and gave me many tools with which I could try.

# Acknowledgements

Thanks to my mother, without whom I never would have made it to that small Agricultural Machinery Experiment Station in China, and who has been a personal and political compass throughout my life. She sets a loving if nearly unattainable example and makes me a better person for trying to follow.

Many thanks to the people who were unwavering in their support for this long project: to Sid and Joan who trusted me to tell their story, family and friends, who if they ever doubted that I would finish it never showed it, the Philadelphia Chinatown youth who taught me about practice, IBON staff and board, and all the people who participated in making this book so much better.

Second Edition: Warm thanks to Ann Tomkins for her invaluable assistance in copyediting and clarification. She will be remembered always for her tenacious commitment to struggle for the people of the world.

Third edition: A big thank you to Nancy for her enthusiasm for this book and her enormous contribution towards making this edition a better one, and also to the young Maoists in new organizations popping up all around the world, who, through their earnest and serious study and practice, have given me a new understanding of how this specific history could be useful.

# Contents

Author's Note		v
Note About this Edition		vii
Forward to the First Edition		ix
Chronology of Significant Events		xi
Prologue		xviii
Map of China		xix
<b>Section 1</b>	<b>Formation</b>	1
Chapter 1	Hinton	2
Chapter 2	Bennington	12
Chapter 3	Engst	15
Chapter 4	Cornell Ag	19
Chapter 5	The Gadget	26
Chapter 6	Divergence	38
Chapter 7	The Institute	43
Chapter 8	Relief and Rehabilitation	47
<b>Section 2</b>	<b>Transition</b>	52
Chapter 9	Yanan	53
Chapter 10	Pushing Off	68
Chapter 11	China Welfare	72
Chapter 12	The Underground	77
Chapter 13	Liberation	80
Chapter 14	Tile Cave Town	83
Chapter 15	Transport	85
Chapter 16	Convergence	91
<b>Section 3</b>	<b>Production</b>	94
Chapter 17	The Iron Factory	95
Chapter 18	The Fort	101
Chapter 19	Three Border Farm	117

Chapter 20	Peace	130
Chapter 21	Xian	137
Chapter 22	City Dairy	142
Chapter 23	Grassy Plains	153
<b>Section 4</b>	<b>Contradictions Within</b>	165
Chapter 24	Movement	166
Chapter 25	A Lesson—Part 1	173
Chapter 26	Movement Continued	182
Chapter 27	A Lesson—Part 2	185
Chapter 28	Great Leap	189
Chapter 29	Reconciliation	218
Chapter 30	White Terror	228
<b>Section 5</b>	<b>Paper Revolution</b>	239
Chapter 31	The Superstructure	240
Chapter 32	Snake Spirits	255
Chapter 33	Breakthrough	292
Chapter 34	Turning Over	298
Chapter 35	Unite and Conquer	307
Chapter 36	Red Star	319
<b>Section 6</b>	<b>Dissolution</b>	343
Chapter 37	Wind	344
Epilogue		361
Index		365

# Author's Note

Shortly after IBON published the first edition of this book in 2009, I went to China to see Joan Hinton to present it to her with it. I read nervously to her for a week and felt tremendous relief when Joan, never long on praise, told me that the content was accurate and that she thought I was a “pretty good writer.” She died the following summer.

I feel very fortunate that my life intersected with Joan and Sid's during a time when they were both completely clear-headed, physiologically and politically, and ready to tell their stories. Their clarity, good humor and support enabled me to write this book. It also had a profound effect on my life, making me a deeper and sharper thinker, more principled and self-critical, and most importantly, instilled in me the necessity of becoming an engaged participant in society and the world.

This effect—what I call the Hinton-Engst Effect—was not limited to me, nor the handful of young people from the US who somehow found their way to the Xiao Wang Zhuang Dairy over the years, nor the steady stream of visitors from all over China and the world. The scope of that effect can be measured in part by the reaction to Joan's death. In the US, news of her passing made the mainstream press, primarily because of her work with Enrico Fermi on the Manhattan Project. But the vast majority of remembrances, memorials and tributes came from people who had experienced the “Hinton-Engst Effect,” and had it play a part in their commitment to try to change the world. Their focus was not so much on Joan Hinton the atomic physicist, but Joan Hinton the dairy designer, the internationalist and the revolutionary.

Even if they did often joke about meeting Marx in heaven, and even though Sid always said he would save me an extra heavy shovel for when we were shoveling coal together in hell, both were staunch materialists to the last. They believed in the importance of dedicating your life to making a better world, not the idea of being rewarded after your death. They believed in the inevitability of history, and in the determination and passion people have in the struggle for their own liberation. Sid told me once that his only regret late in life was that he wouldn't live long enough to see China and the world turn from the capitalist road and embark again on the path of socialist revolution. They believed that their generation had done what they could on their historical stage, and that the next great leaps in advancing history were up to the next generation of actors.

I believe as they did that the Chinese revolution and the dogged 30 year fight to build socialism did not depend on heroic individuals in the main—that Joan and Sid's lives and deaths as individual lives did not alter that evolutionary path. But the manner in which they lived, walking away from all the material comforts, professional accolades and opportunities that they and their families had in the first of first worlds, is a testament to the notion that what you believe is more important than what you can acquire, and that what you gain by throwing your lot in with the great majority of the people of the world to raise up all of humanity is more satisfying and precious

than material wealth and ego. The fact that Joan and Sid, with all of their trials and triumphs, persevered to the end in service to that notion shatters the shell of cynicism, grounds and gives legs to idealism and provides the lasting inspiration that people in struggle need for sustenance in deeply contradictory times. This is the Hinton-Engst Effect. Felt in China, in the Philippines, in the US, in the world.

To borrow a line from Bill Hinton: They put their shoulders to the wheel of history and pushed it forward.

The next historical stage has been set. Sid, it seems, was accurate in his assessment of change once again brewing from the Left in China. And the culmination of all of their complex and rich experiences—heroic moments and human failings—has continued to germinate in this generation of actors, some of whom are undoubtedly as principled, human and revolutionary as Joan Hinton and Sid Engst.

Dao-yuan Chou

May 2011



# Note about this Edition

It's been ten years since the first publication of *Silage Choppers and Snake Spirits*. In China, this decade has only seen the intensification of the sharp divide between the rich and the poor, the recognized city residents and the migrants from the countryside living in slums, and the connected party members and everyone else. The re-emergent Left has faced many contradictions not the least of which is trying to link and apply the revolutionary experiences of the past to the extremely different conditions of the present. This critical task to a new revolutionary movement in China depends in part on a thorough examination and understanding of what actually happened in modern Chinese history—especially as that history has been so exactly rewritten and erased, distorted and manipulated to tell a different story, propagating a different ideology.

While the revised edition in 2011 corrected many of the typographical and formatting mistakes, many still remained. In addition, over the last decade, my understanding about what aspects of the rich and complicated lives of Joan Hinton and Sid Engst might be relevant and useful rather than simply interesting has grown clearer. The original intended audience for whom I wrote the book was one unfamiliar with modern Chinese history and exposed only to the history of the Chinese revolution from a Western and generally anti-communist perspective. The book did make its way to some of that audience, but many of those readers found the latter half of the book with all the unfamiliar Chinese names and references to specific historical events confusing. I also learned that many more people who were specifically interested in the China's socialist period, and who had some knowledge of the struggles during that period, were drawn to the book but had trouble getting through the very detailed descriptions of Joan and Sid's early lives in the US.

I'm fortunate that I have the opportunity to address some of these contradictions with another republication. In this edition the first section is pared down, and there are more explanations and fewer names of which to keep track in the second. However, I believe that the issue of disparate audiences still persists. As such, I offer these recommendations:

- For those who have trouble following the extremely complex events in China, I think taking the time to read the expanded footnotes, even though it interrupts the reading, will be helpful.
- For those impatient with the pre-China background, start with the Prologue and go directly to Section 2. Transition. Read Chapter 9, which is about Sid's evacuation of Yanan in the Civil War, and skip over Chapters 10, 11 and 12 to read Chapter 13, which is about Joan's "Liberation" from Guomindang (KMT) held Beijing.

While I believe that reading the entire narrative is helpful to understanding these two subjects, as well as their experiences in China, I don't harbor any hard feelings towards people who don't share that belief! For those who enjoy reading for pleasure

about interesting topics, for those who read mostly to answer questions and for those who do some measure of both—my hope is that this new edition does whatever it is people are looking for more effectively.

### **Chinese Names**

Chinese names are written with the character for the surname first, first name (usually with one or two characters, but written as one word in English) last and no middle name. For instance, Mao Zedong would be written as Zedong Mao in English. Amongst those who have close relationships, Chinese people commonly use the first name. Those who are familiar but not as close, such as co-workers often informally call each other by their last name, preceded by “*Lao*” or old, or “*Xiao*” or small or young. “*Lao*” is usually used when the person is older, or as a sign of respect, and “*Xiao*” when the person is younger. Those with a title are formally addressed by their last name followed by their title, as in Mao Zhuxi, or Chairman Mao, in English.

# Foreword to the First Edition

Having long been an admirer of Joan and Sid's active participation in the class struggle to advance socialism in China, I enthusiastically accepted IBON's offer to edit Dao-yuan Chou's book on their lives and struggles. As soon as I received the digital typescript for editing, what I had intended to be an exploratory quick browse of it glued my attention to the computer monitor for hours on end as I became absorbed chapter after chapter.

I recalled my experience in 1950 as a 12-year-old high school sophomore reading Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*. It was this book that sparked my interest in China in the face of the newly victorious Chinese revolution led by Mao Zedong. The story of O-lan and Wanglung was interesting even as I began to be critical that their individual successes could not have been attainable by most peasants within the corrupt, oppressive and exploitative Chinese feudal order.

What is the point in re-telling my experience? It is that narrative literature (both fiction and nonfiction) about the lives of people is a very simple and effective tool for capturing interest, propagating ideas and directing people to a desired awareness of what ought to be done and that Dao-yuan has this tool which she has skillfully used in telling the story of Sid and Joan. Her craft has made her subject so compellingly interesting to me.

This year, 2009, would have been the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the socialist revolution and construction by the Chinese people had Deng Xiaoping not reversed this revolutionary process more than 30 years ago after the death of Mao Zedong, to put China and the Chinese people on the road to capitalism and the global superhighway of US-led monopoly capitalism. Now China is embroiled in the current deep going global financial and economic crisis as demand for its exports has fallen so drastically and unemployment has risen so rapidly.

This year also marks the 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary of Joan and Sid who have made China their home, participated in and witnessed the Chinese people's great revolutionary undertaking to build socialism during their first 28 years as a couple, while also raising a family and in the succeeding more than 30 years in striving to keep their commitment to socialism amidst its continuing reversal. The story of Joan and Sid is inspiring as so competently and effectively told by Dao-yuan. Their story must be told in China where the prospect is great that their ideas, exemplary deeds and aspirations and those of so many other revolutionary veterans would find resonance among the young people as they seek ways of confronting the grave crisis and overcoming the capitalist plague. This is a challenge to Dao-yuan and like-minded writers of her generation.

The Great Depression of 1929, the first major economic depression of a still growing US monopoly capitalist system did not bring about a successful revolution of the working class in the US. But the social and economic conditions of the time influenced and shaped the progressive and later revolutionary social consciousness of

Sid and Joan. A greater depression of US and global monopoly capitalism has been developing over the last three decades. Will the working class and people in the US succeed in resisting and defeating monopoly finance capitalism? Will the crisis and the resistance bring about the resurgence of socialism? The story of Joan and Sid, as Dao-yuan tells it contributes to the reawakening of the proletariat and people to fight for socialism.

Juliet de Lima-Sison, Editor

May 13, 2009

# Chronology of Significant Events

- 1911** | The Nationalist Party (Guomindang/Kuomintang/KMT), led by Sun Yat-Sen, overthrows the Qing Dynasty and establishes the Republic of China on October 10<sup>th</sup>. This marks the end of more than 2,000 years of feudal, monarchic rule. Imperialist control over most of China remains.
- 1918** | World War I ends.  
Erwin (Sid) Engst is born in Syracuse, New York, US.
- 1919** | The May Fourth Movement, made up mostly of students, breaks out against the Versailles Treaty's article, which transferred Germany's concessions in Shandong Province, China to Japan. Nationwide demonstrations signal the beginning of a modern nationalist movement against imperialism and feudalism and a sweeping movement for the cultural modernization of China.
- 1921** | The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is founded at its First Congress in Shanghai.  
Joan Hinton is born in Chicago, Illinois, US.
- 1924** | First Congress of the Guomindang approves the admission of Communists.
- 1925** | Sun Yat-Sen dies. Russian advisers choose Chiang Kai-shek as a new commander-in-chief.
- 1926** | Nationalist-Communist coalition forces led by Chiang Kai-shek launch a military expedition that takes over most of Southern China through the defeat of regional warlords.
- 1927** | In April, Chiang Kai-shek leads anti-communist coup and slaughters 80% of the Communist membership, driving its remaining 10,000 members underground. In August, Mao leads peasant uprising in Hunan, which is defeated. He flees to Jinggangshan, the mountain stronghold between Jiangxi and Hunan Provinces.
- 1928** | Chiang Kai-shek establishes the Guomindang as a one-party dictatorship. Mao Zedong and Zhu De join forces at Jinggangshan, and found the first Red Army.
- 1930** | Conflict emerges between Mao and Politburo leader, Li Lisan, over strategy—Mao advocates setting up rural bases to “surround the cities,” and Li (under the influence of Moscow) insists on direct urban insurrections. Inter-Party conflict threatens but does not destroy Party unity.  
Mao's wife and sister are executed in Changsha in the Fall.
- 1931** | The CCP Central Committee elects Wang Ming to lead the Party. Japan begins conquest of Manchuria.  
The Great Famine (1929-31) in Northwest China ends—five to ten million are

- | estimated dead.
- 1932** | Japan attacks Shanghai. Chiang Kai-shek signs truce with Japan to focus his attention on wiping out the communists in the Liberated Areas.  
| The CCP declares war on Japan.
- 1934** | Red Army suffers disastrous defeats in attempts to take cities. Remaining forces retreat to Western China with party cadres.
- 1935** | Politburo meets in Guizhou Province and elects Mao Zedong effective leader of the CCP. Mao leads the Red Army and remaining forces on the Long March to escape the encirclement of Chiang Kai-shek's forces and probable annihilation. They march over 6,000 miles in one year and set up a new headquarters in Yanan in Northwest China.  
| Japanese troops move into what was called Manchuria encompassing several far northeast provinces in China (Manzhou) and set up a puppet government with the last emperor Pu Yi. Nationalist and anti-imperialist student rebellions sweep the country in response.
- 1937** | Japan begins major offensives in China. The CCP sees the imperialist threat—posed by Japan to the survival of China as a sovereign state—as greater than winning the Civil War with the Nationalists. Chiang Kai-shek's own generals kidnap their leader and force him to sign an agreement to join forces with the Communists to fight Japan. The Red Army becomes Eighth Route and New Fourth armies under Chiang's nominal command. Chiang effectively stops his offensives against the Communists, but lets them take the full brunt of fighting Japan.
- 1940** | The united front between the Communists and Nationalists begins to break down after Chiang Kai-shek attacks the New Fourth Army. After the US enters WWII, the Nationalists rely on US military aid, and the Communists expand areas under the influence of the guerrilla forces.
- 1943** | Communists gain strength and numbers, claiming 800,000 Party members and 500,000 troops and trained militia in the Liberated Areas. Nationalist troops are plagued by poor morale and lowered fighting capacity and many of them change sides.
- 1944** | Joan arrives in Los Alamos, New Mexico, joins Enrico Fermi's team of scientists on the Manhattan Project.
- 1945** | Trinity (test detonation for the first atom bomb) in July is successful.  
| Sid sells his farm machinery and animals in Gooseville Corners, New York, US.  
| World War II ends after annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan.  
| Mao Zedong goes to Chongqing to negotiate with Chiang Kai-shek in order to form a coalition government.

- 1946** | Negotiations between the Nationalists and Communists fail, reigniting the Civil War. The Eighth Route and New Fourth Route Armies are renamed the People's Liberation Army (PLA).  
 Sid arrives in Shanghai and joins a United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) famine investigation expedition to Hunan Province before traveling to Yanan, capital of the Liberated Areas.
- 1947** | Sid evacuates Yanan with the Bright China Farm to escape the Guomindang's encirclement campaign.
- 1948** | Communists defeat the Nationalists in Manchuria in spite of large amounts of US aid to Chiang Kai-shek's forces.  
 Joan leaves the Institute of Nuclear Studies at the University of Chicago for Shanghai to work with Madame Sun Yat-Sen's relief organization before entering the Communist Underground.
- 1949** | Chiang Kai-shek flees to Taiwan as his forces are routed all over the country.  
 Joan and Sid meet again in Yanan and marry. They work together in the iron factory at Wayaobao before moving north to Inner Mongolia in order to help set up the Three Border Farm.  
 A Peoples Political Consultative Conference is convened, representing workers, peasants, intellectuals and national bourgeoisie. Mao Zedong is elected Chairman of the Chinese People's Government. The People's Republic of China is formally proclaimed in Beijing on October 1.  
 Land Reform is conducted in the newly liberated Chinese countryside.
- 1950** | Stalin gives China a 300 million (USD) loan with no interest. The Korean War breaks out. The USSR supplies North Korea with military machinery and China sends a volunteer army to support the North.
- 1951** | The Three Antis Campaign is launched targeting corruption, waste and bureaucracy.  
 The Five Antis Campaign is launched, targeting bribery, theft of State property, tax evasion, cheating on state contracts and stealing state economic information.
- 1952** | Joan leaves Inner Mongolia for Beijing to have her first child in a hospital and attends the Beijing Peace Conference, where she gives an impromptu speech about her role as a scientist in the annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. She gives birth to Fred (Heping) in October.
- 1953** | USSR under Stalin supplies aid and experts to support 156 large-scale Chinese projects in infrastructure and industry. Moscow dissolves all Soviet-Chinese joint enterprises and withdraws all troops from China.

- Stalin dies in March.
- Sid joins Joan and Fred in Xian, where they are officially transferred to the Yan-zhuang Dairy.
- 1954 Khrushchev first visits Beijing.
- Land Reform is completed as the first step towards collectivization. The State establishes partnerships with remaining the private enterprises and preliminary actions are taken to complete the nationalization of all industries.
- 1955 In January, Joan gives birth to Billy (Jianping). The family moves to Caotan (Grassy Plains) State Farm.
- The Bandung Conference, an historic meeting between twenty-nine African and Asian states (some newly independent), is convened in Indonesia.
- Agriculture is collectivized, beginning with Mutual Aid Teams, then Elementary Cooperatives and Advanced Cooperatives and finally People's Communes.
- 1956 The Party launches the Hundred Flowers Movement. Mao's article "*On the Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*" is published, acknowledging continued contradictions within and between socialist states.
- The transition to a socialist economic base is completed.
- Joan gives birth to Karen (Jiping) in November.
- 1957 USSR successfully launches Sputnik.
- The Anti-Rightist Movement is launched under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping.
- 1958 People's Communes are established. Mao launches the Great Leap Forward to advance China's productive forces and industrialize the countryside.
- Khrushchev demands that Beijing place Chinese forces under Soviet military command. China declines and Sino-Soviet contradictions develop.
- 1959 Khrushchev advocates for "peaceful coexistence" with American imperialism, which the CCP rejects and criticizes. The landed class in Tibet attempts a revolt and fail. The Dalai Lama flees to India.
- Unprecedented floods and drought lead to massive crop failure.
- An enlarged Politburo meeting is held at Lushan (Lu Mountain). Inter-Party contradictions emerge in what is called a "two-line struggle", or struggle between two different ideological lines.
- 1960 Khrushchev recalls all Soviet advisers from China, cancels more than 300 contracts, withdraws technical assistance, and demands immediate repayment of Soviet loans. At the International Party Conference in Moscow, Sino-Soviet contradictions come to the fore.



- | The CCP openly calls Khrushchev a “revisionist”.
- 1961** | At the Twenty Second Soviet Party Congress in Moscow, Khrushchev bans the Albanian Party. Zhou Enlai walks out in protest. Chinese advisers replace Soviets in Albania.
- Following the disruption of the Chinese economy caused by mistakes made during the “Great Leap Forward”, the withdrawal of Soviet aid and natural disasters, the People’s Republic slowly recovers from three years of the “Difficult Times.”
- | Sino-Soviet clashes on both state and party levels foreshadow the widely-felt international ideological fight.
- 1962** | The Cuban Missile Crisis plays out between the USSR and the USA.
- A border dispute at the Chinese-Indian border breaks out into fighting, as Indians encroach into disputed territory. The PLA drives the Indian army back from a 35,000 square mile territory and then withdraws, calling for peaceful negotiation.
- Carmelita Hinton visits China for the first time.
- | The CCP launches the Socialist Education Movement.
- 1963** | Khrushchev signs a nuclear test ban treaty with US and makes “Peaceful Coexistence” cardinal aim of Soviet foreign policy.
- China publishes nine polemics over the course of two years between the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) and the CCP, articulating the ideological struggles between the two parties.
- 1964** | China successfully detonates its first atomic bomb.
- Mao issues a call for the whole country to learn from Dazhai in agriculture and Daqing in industry.
- 1965** | The US sends troops into Vietnam and initiates a massive bombing campaign of North Vietnam.
- Russia sends North Vietnam aircraft, weapon and technical personnel; China supplies small arms and food.
- 1966** | The Hinton-Engst family is transferred to Beijing to work as English language polishers. Mao launches the “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution” (GCPR), writes his first big-character poster urging people to “Bombard the headquarters,” and meets the Red Guards for the first time on Tiananmen Square.
- Joan, Sid, Bertha Sneck, and Ann Tompkins write a big-character poster criticizing the special treatment of foreign comrades. Mao personally approves their document. Foreigners in Beijing form the Bethune-Yanan Rebel Regiment to participate in the Cultural Revolution.

- Red Guards identify Liu Shaoqi as among “those in the Party in authority who are taking the capitalist road.”
- 1967 “January Storm” erupts in Shanghai as workers take over government offices to form a “Paris Commune” type of governance.
- Sporadic armed conflicts break out among some factions, the most serious of which results in a standoff in Wuhan, resolved only with the personal intervention of Premier Zhou Enlai.
- Liu Shaoqi and Wang Guangmei (his wife) are denounced in public.
- 1968 Armed conflict between factions breaks out on the Qinghua University campus. The fighting is put down by thousands of unarmed workers and PLA soldiers. Mao calls for the dissolution of the Red Guards and fighting groups to prevent the outbreak of Civil War.
- Chinese ping pong players initiate what becomes known as “Ping Pong Diplomacy” by issuing an invitation to their US counterparts at a tournament in Japan. The move creates a public front for secret negotiations between the two countries for normalizing their relationship.
- The US lifts its 20-year embargo on the People’s Republic.
- Henry Kissinger, US Secretary of State, makes the US’ first official visit.
- 1971 The PRC enters the United Nations with the seat previously held by Taiwan.
- William Hinton (Joan’s brother) returns to China at the personal invite of Zhou Enlai. He and the Hinton-Engst clan in Beijing are granted five long interviews with the Premier.
- Lin Biao, Minister of Defense and presupposed successor to Mao, dies in a plane crash in Mongolia while fleeing to the Soviet Union after a failed coup attempt.
- Carmelita Hinton brings a US youth delegation to study and work in China.
- 1972 Joan and Sid are transferred back to production as per their request and become advisors at the Red Star Commune just outside Beijing.
- US President Nixon visits China—the first US president to enter the People’s Republic.
- 1973 Zhou calls together all the foreigners living in Beijing and makes a self-criticism and apologizes for the treatment they suffered during the Cultural Revolution.
- 1975 Sid returns to the US for the first time to go on a speaking tour about China, organized by the US-China People’s Friendship Association.
- 1976 Zhou Enlai dies in Beijing. Hua Guofeng is named as his successor.
- Mao names Hua as his successor before he dies in Beijing.

- | Hua, in one of his first official acts, arrests the Gang of Four.
- 1977** | Joan accepts the US-China People's Friendship Association invitation to the US for a speaking tour about China.  
Deng Xiaoping is reinstated as second in command in the Party leadership.
- 1978** | In the Third Plenary of the 11th Party Congress, Deng Xiaoping rises to power and is put in charge of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. Hua is effectively sidelined and officially resigns his post as Chairman in 1980.
- 1979** | Deng makes first visit to the US. Talks with US President Carter result in the transfer of all diplomatic relationships from Taiwan to China. He returns to China proclaiming, "To be rich is glorious," and begins to enact a series of economic reforms to put China on the path to capitalism.
- 1980** | Joan and Sid move to a northern suburb of Beijing to set up an Agricultural Machinery Experiment Station.
- 2003** | Sid dies in a Beijing hospital at the age of 85.
- 2010** | Joan dies in a Beijing hospital at the age of 88.

# Prologue

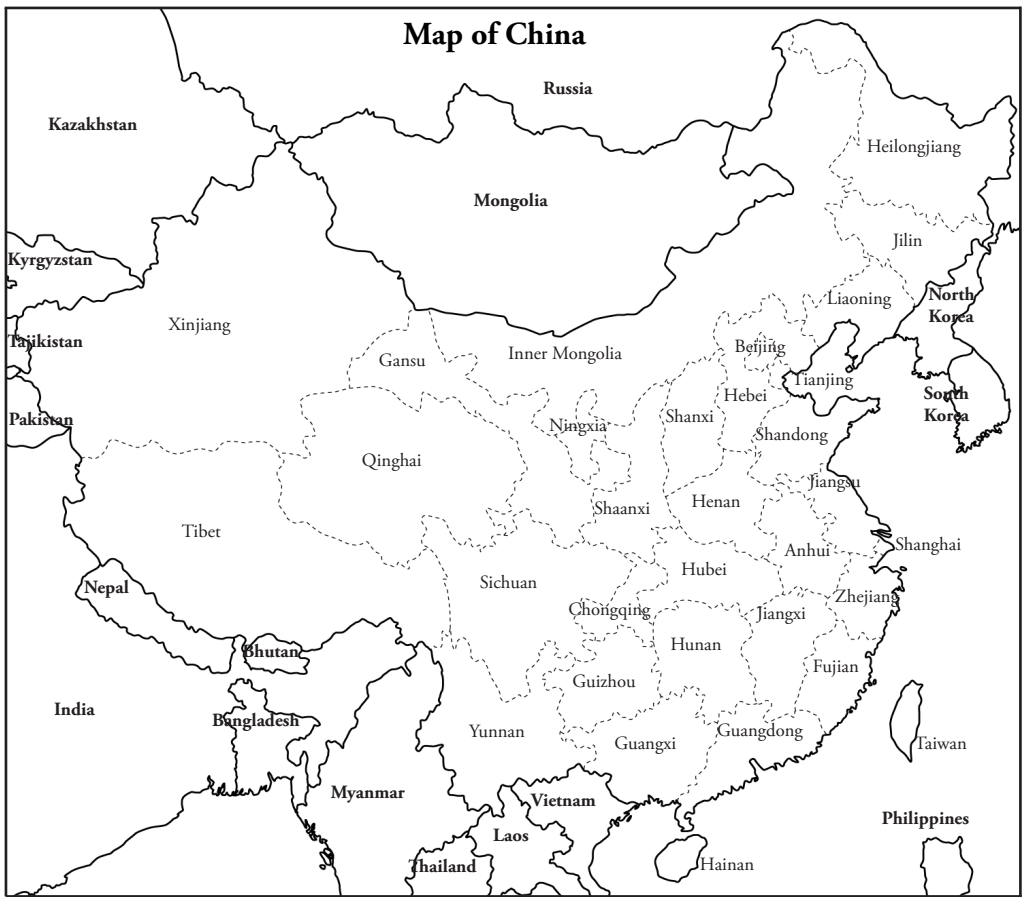
When Joan Hinton left the Institute for Nuclear Studies in Chicago, she was at the top of her field, included in Enrico Fermi's close-knit circle of students, and on the verge of receiving her Ph.D. Instead, she packed up her copy of Einstein's *Theory of Relativity*, a portable typewriter, and her trusty sleeping bag and shipped off to China. She landed in Shanghai in 1948, just after the Civil War resumed between the ruling nationalist government of the Guomindang (KMT) and the Communists and their guerilla army.

Two years passed before Joan made it to the communist-held Liberated Areas, where her fiancé, Sid Engst had been having a hard time waiting. They approached each other for the first time in three years and socked one another on the shoulder. Sid asked again, Joan accepted. They married immediately with red banners flying, the certificate phoned in to the nearest city, and a chop (seal) to make it official. So goes one version of the story.

Another version paints an upstate New York dairy farmer love-struck with an atomic physicist. Knowing Joan would never leave the heady times of the birth and development of a new science to be a farmer's wife (she didn't know how to cook anyway), Sid sold his Brown Swiss cows and farm machinery and made his way to China's Red Area hoping to entice Joan with descriptions of an environment even more exciting than the study group in Fermi's living room.

Always game to harass each other, Joan and Sid claimed one or the other was the true story, depending on who was in the room and who beat the other to the punch. But in fact, most people who were in their company long enough to kid with them know that Joan would no sooner follow a man across the world for love than Sid would sell any one of his cows for a woman's attention. That no matter how compelled they were to each other, the true of impetus of their travel east lay in their shared curiosity about how 20,000 peasants armed only with "millet and rifles," could give a US and Japanese backed 200,000-strong military a run for all its sophisticated weaponry.

So while this *is* a story of how two people pulled up their unconventional roots in the US and married and raised a family across the world, it is first a story of how ordinary Chinese people brought a festering, foreign-controlled government to its knees and built a new society of their own sweat and blood.



*This map represents modern day nation states and the borders between them. For instance, during the time period in which the events in this book take place, what is shown here as the nations of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were all part of the Soviet Union from 1922-1989 and Myanmar was called Burma until 1989.*

**Shanghai:**

1946 • Sid arrived in Shanghai.

**Hunan Province:**

1946 • after arriving to China, Sid worked for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) on a famine investigation expedition in the rural areas around Changsha.

**Shaanxi Province:**

1947 • Sid quit his UNRAA job and arrived in Yanan, which he later evacuated with the communists. He spent almost a year in North Shaanxi Province on the run.

**Beijing:**

1948 • Joan joined the communist underground.

**Shanghai:**

1948 • Joan arrived in Shanghai to work with the China Welfare Fund.

**Shaanxi Province:**

1948 • Joan arrived in Yanan to join Sid and together they moved to the iron factory at Wayaobao.

**Inner Mongolia:**

1949 • Joan and Sid joined a group sent to Inner Mongolia to establish a farm and develop agriculture there.

**Shaanxi Province:**

1953 • Joan and Sid and their first child transferred to a state farm on the outskirts of Xian.

**Beijing:**

1966 • Joan and Sid and their three children transferred to Beijing to work in the superstructure before returning to production.

**Section 1**  
**Formation**

## Chapter 1

# Hinton

*“If you want to know about me, you have to know about my mother.” Joan Hinton*

Joan laughed so much when she was an infant that her father asked her mother, “Do you think something’s wrong with her?” To which Carmelita replied, “No, she’s just happy!”

Joan was the third and last child of Carmelita and Ted Hinton, arriving in 1921; the three came by age increments of two with Jean leading off and Bill in the middle. They were all born in Chicago with pedigrees that stretched in extraordinary directions on both sides.

### Carmelita

Two phrases that stuck in the mind of Carmelita Hinton from the time she grew up in Omaha, Nebraska in the 1900s through her founding of the country’s first progressive co-ed boarding school were:

“Learn by doing,” and “If you think of something, do it.”

The first, a phrase borrowed from current day philosopher John Dewey, guided her through her life in her foremost role as an educator. The latter, William James’ idea, gave stubborn shape to how she faced challenges and ambitions all her life.

Carmelita’s father, Clement Chase was the editor for the main newspaper and several business newspapers in Omaha, Nebraska. Carmelita remembered all sorts of people in and out of their house, from artists and actors, to newspapermen for parties and meetings—all events that her mother hosted. But Carmelita, influenced mainly by her father, grew up having different ambitions. Chasing stories around the country by train, he often asked if she wanted to go with him and open her eyes to the world. She always jumped at the opportunity and saw much of the US through the windows of rail cars. Placing a high value on education, Clement had no hesitation about sending sons and daughters alike to college, even if his wife Lula Belle would have preferred more education for Carmelita in housekeeping and hostessing.

Carmelita packed off to prestigious Bryn Mawr college in Pennsylvania when she was of age to get a teaching degree and fell headlong into the burgeoning movement for women’s rights, which was beginning to create an opening for independent thinking women of a certain economic class to burst into their own.

Bryn Mawr women often threw parties with neighboring boys or co-ed schools on the weekends, and it was at one of these parties playing some game of hide and seek, that Carmelita found herself hiding under the same bed in the dark as Sebastian Hinton—nicknamed Ted. Taken with his cohort immediately, Ted asked Carmelita what kind of people she liked. She replied that she liked people who liked to read and who liked the outdoors. From that time on, every time they saw each other, he had an armful of books with him on prominent display.

## Ted

Ted's mother, Mary Everest Boole, was one of five daughters of a British high school math teacher named George Boole. He was quite ordinary and poor but liked to play around with mathematics in his spare time. He derived an entirely new form of mathematics that was obscure at the time and later became the foundation for computational logic. He was never credited for it during his lifetime, but today it is called Boolean Algebra and forms the foundation of modern computer arithmetic. Ted's grandmother, Mary Everest, was also a mathematician at a time when women weren't supposed to be. She taught herself calculus and invented string geometry. Her uncle, Sir George Everest, was the English Surveyor of India, from whom the English name for the mountain was given.

The five girls grew up in England, which was ahead of the US in women's liberation (of a certain class) by about a generation. Their father apparently believed in raising tough children, physically and mentally. Later in life, they all complained that he was much too strict, chasing them outside to run around even in the dead of winter. But also later in life, most grew into independent-minded women with a laundry list of intellectual accomplishments.

One daughter, Lucy, a chemist, became the first (among many other things) woman professor at the Royal Free Hospital. Alice married and kept house and in between cooking and cleaning, she found time to build three-dimensional models of the fourth dimension. Maggie also kept house but studied botany in her spare time.

Ethyl knew snakes. But she also knew how to write and was neck deep in the European revolutionary movements. Joan, who grew up with the Aunt Ethyl who got excited when she saw copperheads in the Catskills, had no inkling that she was the author of an internationally influential little book called *The Gadfly*, until she reached China many years later. The story about the illegitimate son of a priest who led an armed Italian rebellion was popular in Europe and the US and sold millions in Russia (later the Soviet Union) and China.<sup>1</sup> Aunt Ethyl, though, was the black sheep, and family members politely skirted mention of her work in favor of her passion for reptiles.

Mary, Ted's mother, was also a mathematician and writer. Her husband, Charles Hinton, wrote several books as well, about multi-dimensional worlds, which later inspired the story Flatland. (Flatland was a place in the second dimension written about the lives of people there to give readers a concept of space.) When Ted was two, his family immigrated to the US, where he eventually ended up attending parties at Bryn Mawr. His love for reading aside, his keen interest for the outdoors, for nature and for children, probably influenced Carmelita's decision to marry him. But the story is that she sat on both of her hands when he proposed, so she could be completely

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<sup>1</sup> The Soviet Union, or the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was founded by the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party on December 30, 1922, after the world's first successful communist revolution in 1917 (known as the October Revolution).



objective in her decision-making.

After Carmelita graduated from college, she and Ted made their way to Chicago, where she rolled up her sleeves with Jane Addams and went to work at Hull House. Hull House was what was called a settlement house (originated in England to settle university students in urban slums to work), and operated to provide services and different activities for poor people in Chicago. Addams pioneered evening adult classes there, which paved the way for present day continuing education. Carmelita eventually became Jane Addams' secretary.

Carmelita, much to her mother's disappointment, was one of the few women of her time who did not know how to cook or do housework when she married; she found an endless supply of other activities that were infinitely more interesting—her first passion being children and education. In Winnetka where they put down roots, she left her work with Jane Addams to start her own family while organizing the first kindergarten in the United States. She held the kindergarten in the backyard of their house and became so involved that when she was close to giving birth to Joan, she had labor induced on a Friday so she wouldn't have to take too much time off.

Ted made his living as a patent attorney. An avid inventor himself, he tried to help inventors get something for their creative work. He observed his kids and what they liked to do and built all sorts of toys for them in their backyard. One was a wooden structure that kids could climb on and swing across and also physically learn about three-dimensional space through play. His design was based on the x, y, and z axes and he called it a Jungle Gym.

Carmelita and Ted brought up their kids in constant contact with nature and the outdoors, taking the kids tromping around the outskirts of Winnetka. One of Joan's earliest memories was of hiking by a river and her brother Bill falling in on one side of a bridge and being fished out by their mother on the other. Jean remembered that their father would always come home with some small animal or another tucked under his arm for the kids to play with, learn about, and care for.

When Joan, Bill, and Jean were two, four, and six, their father died. Carmelita told them that he died from a combination of the mumps and the chicken pox. Not until years after her own death in her nineties, did the three siblings learn that Carmelita, who was strictly and morally opposed to lying, had told her children a huge one. She explained his death in terms of illnesses that children could understand in order to protect them from the terrible knowledge that their father hung himself in a mental institution. Because Carmelita confided in so few people about his mental condition and the real cause of his death, no one really knew what drove him to it. Regardless, his three children's memories of their father even at such young ages were happy ones, full of toys to climb, and rabbits, and snakes, and mice.

Carmelita raised her three children remembering Dewey's philosophy of learning by doing. While extremely strict—she didn't tolerate any whining or spoiling—she let them run around and learn from their own mistakes.

Carmelita took a job teaching in an elementary school but soon decided she

should move the family out of Illinois because of what she saw as its growing suburban sprawl. When she heard of a school on the East Coast with a reputation for progressive education, she inquired and was hired without a face-to-face interview. She sold her house and moved the family to Cambridge, MA, where she took the teaching position at the Shady Hill School, a grade school that mostly served the children of Harvard professors. There, Carmelita found herself surrounded by people who were similarly influenced by Dewey and James. The Shady Hill School took “learning by doing” to heart, and Carmelita found she could formalize her educational philosophies in the classroom.

They lived in a big enough house with a porch where the whole family slept. Carmelita had one room, where Bill and Joan were quarantined once with the measles. During their recovery, Bill tied a string from his bed to Joan’s so they could entertain themselves by passing messages back and forth. On one note Bill drew a picture of a Chinese man in a tub in the ocean. The message was that he was going to China. Joan wrote back and said that she was going too.

As the family of a teacher who had summers off, the Hintons traveled frequently. But every other summer, they would roost in the Catskill Mountains, where Ted—who was a carpenter as well as inventor and lawyer—had built a small cottage. When the family outgrew it, Carmelita bought a larger house up the hill and called their haven in the mountains Camelot.

Carmelita packed those Camelot summers with exciting projects and self-made adventures. The Hinton Three, along with the two or three extra kids that they usually took in as borders in Cambridge, used their boundless energy constructively, on par with Carmelita’s philosophy. All the summers were play, and their play opened their eyes to the natural world around them and taught them how to live unafraid in it. One summer Carmelita found it impossible to concentrate on her task for the summer: writing her curriculum for the coming year. Her solution was to get the kids up each morning, put packs on their backs with food and water, and instruct them to hike in any direction they chose. When it got to be the end of the day, she told them to hike down to some place with a phone and call her with a location so she could come with her car to pick them up.

Always looking for ways to teach her kids responsibility through play and connection to nature, one summer Carmelita bought ponies at an auction for the four of them, and using a geological survey map, led them by horseback from Cambridge to Camelot with their collie Fluffy trotting behind. At night, they asked farmers if they could put their ponies in their pastures, set up their tent, bought milk and eggs and cooked their dinner. That summer the kids learned to ride bareback because their inattentive grooming led to saddle sores. By the time the sores had healed, they preferred to ride without saddles, just in time for a long pony ride north to Maine to visit an old Bryn Mawr classmate. They came back through New York City with Joan in a dress for the occasion.

In the alternating summers, the young family struck out looking for adventure:

in the US to Glacier National Park, to England and sailing around Scotland, and scaling the tall peaks of Norway. The trails of Glacier National Park they took by foot, hiking from hut to hut, and the glaciers of Norway by reindeer, which lept over crevasses with the Hintons snug in sleds sailing behind them.

At Shady Hill Joan made close friends with two girls in her second grade class—Joy Clark and Sally Madison, whose mother was an old Bryn Mawr classmate of Carmelita's. They became were the terrors of the grade school, slugging it out with any challengers in the playground, and on their birthdays they brought monkey wrenches to school to fend off any classmate unwitting enough to try a spank. Joan in particular was known as a fierce wrestler who enjoyed throwing the boys down in the dirt in the schoolyard. Shady Hill alumni, Mac Osborne reminisced:

The first day I spent at Shady Hill... Taylor Gates was my class sponsor... He showed me my desk, my locker, my mat (for resting, not wrestling), and the toilet. At recess he led me forth into a sizeable ring of more or less contemporary humans.

"What's this?" said I. "Oh," he said, "you're to fight Joan Hinton." "What?" said I. "Yes," he explained mildly, "everyone has to."

Before I could begin training, or get any measure of my opponent, the ring parted to admit a Valkyrie, known to mortals as Joan Hinton. Thick yellow... pigtails akimbo, she declared rather than inquired, "Wanna fight?"

"No," I replied sensibly.

"On," she returned and fell on me with a hammerlock or something. Despite a spirited resistance, she soon had me flat, from which position (with a gentle nod from Taylor) I gasped out uncle and was promptly released.

The circle opened to allow her departure, then promptly picked me up and dusted me off with kind words... I had joined a community which accepted me in one way and the Valkyrie in another.

For second grade Joan had her mother as her teacher. Following in the footsteps of her sister and brother, both quite brilliant in academics, Joan was dismayed to find she was a "slow reader." Always just about at the point where she needed "special help," reading was consistently her biggest challenge, so much so that when her mother assigned them to read the children's book *Redfeather*, Joan grilled her pal Sally about the story when she couldn't keep up. She lied her way through her mother's questions. Carmelita of course saw through her thin answers and called her into the conference room for a talk. Joan's lie was a testament to how difficult it must have been to be slow in a family of bright students, as her mother's strictness for honesty ran deep in all her children.

Going to school at Shady Hill meant that you were always learning actively. Mrs.

Hinton set her second grade class to building an entire children's sized village from the ground up. Each student was in charge of making a different kind of building: the general store, post office, houses and barns. Joan's project was a little barn house. While they had the help of carpenters and architects, the children designed their buildings, measured and sawed planks, and nailed everything together. Then they learned how to weave the rugs and shape the dishes from clay, making all the inside furnishings, including the furniture.

The final exam for the second grade simply required the children to spend the night in the village they built.

By 1929 the economy was already in the doldrums, and it tanked in October with the onset of the Great Depression.<sup>2</sup> Ted, however, had left them a sizeable chunk of money that was put away in the Harvard Trust, which happened to be one of the few banks that didn't go bust. So while most people were hitting hard times, trying to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table, Carmelita started looking for a place to settle with enough acreage to raise all her children and their animals. She found seven acres with a barn and a house that had burned to the ground and spent an exorbitant \$30,000 to build her house on the original foundation around what was left of the three fireplaces.

Joan ploughed her way through Shady Hill, soaking up her lessons (except maybe reading) with enthusiasm. When she was eleven, her mother with a group of educators took part in a project called the "Experiment in International Living." The idealistic vision behind the project was to take young people from different countries to live and play together, to foster understanding and prevent wars between nations. Because Carmelita led the first trip in 1933 with Donald Watt, the brain behind the project, she was able to take all three of her kids, including Joan, who was otherwise too young—to Nazi Germany.

Back at Shady Hill, the 8<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum included Latin. Carmelita and the mother of another classmate were absolutely set against teaching dead languages, so Joan and Liba Coolidge had science class instead. As Latin class included all the grammar lessons too, Joan and Liba never learned very much grammar; instead they opened their eyes to the fascinating complexities of chemistry, geology, and astronomy. They explored the properties of a flame, plotted the course of glaciers, and made models of the earth, sun, and moon. These first lessons in the natural sciences were much more compelling to Joan than trying to slog her way through children's literature.

The next summer in 1934, another group went with the Experiment again to Europe, with Carmelita in the lead and children in tow. The American kids took folding kayaks down the Mosel River to Koblenz, paddling innocently into the time in history when Hitler was consolidating his power in the Saar Valley, and they arrived in

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<sup>2</sup> The Great Depression started in the US with the stock market crash on October 29, 1929. It was a worldwide economic downturn caused by, at that time, the biggest crisis of capitalism, reflecting the contradiction of overcapacity (the production of more goods than the majority of workers can afford). Capitalism in the US was saved by the onset of the war economy of World War II.

Koblenz in time to hear him working a crowd of hundreds of thousands with an impassioned speech on the religious (Christian) sanctity of the Nazi Party. Joan, on the tailcoats of one of her bigger classmates, climbed through the grassy field and up the hill until suddenly they were at the foot of the platform, staring Adolph Hitler in the face.

The crowd fervently chanted “Unsere Führer! Unsere Führer!” (Our leader, our leader!) with tears streaming down their faces as Hitler spoke. Joan was so close she imagined they could hear Hitler’s own unamplified voice. But although the group, including Carmelita, knew the logistics of the political scene in Nazi Germany, they had not become aware of the profound implications. Joan and her friends brought home Nazi knives emblazoned with “Blood and Honor,” and Nazi flags as souvenirs.

In 1934, while Carmelita and her kids were in Germany listening to the Führer, Roosevelt came to power in the US, and his federal projects and the war economy began to bring the Great Depression into its death throes. Jean was on her way to college, with Bill soon to follow. Carmelita began to think about higher education.

Progressive education was OK for grade school. Liberal-minded people most often were open to experimenting with how to teach the little ones. But once their children entered high school, college boards were on the horizon, and the time came to start cramming to score well enough to end up in the Ivy League. Girls aimed to go to Bryn Mawr and boys to Harvard.

While Jean and Bill attended a fairly progressive high school, Carmelita had her own idea: to start a coeducational progressive boarding school—the first in the country. And since she’d had the inspiration, she felt determined to carry it out.

Carmelita traveled around the country recruiting teachers and students, mostly around Boston, where she knew many educators and taught many of their children, but also as far as Chicago and New York City. She asked Joan to keep her company on the New York trip, but Joan, in spite of feeling sorry for her mother, declined to go to the big city where she had to wear a dress, and stayed home to ride her horse instead. The economy was just beginning to stir, but masses of people were still unemployed. Consequently, Carmelita had her pick of creative and similarly dedicated teachers who were eager to get to work.

Soon what many people saw as a harebrained idea of starting such a monumental project in the midst of the Great Depression got off the ground, and the hunt began for a suitable site. The search ended in Vermont, when Carmelita stood on top of a hill in a small town called Putney. Carmelita and the owners of the failed dance school that once occupied the buildings there negotiated a very reasonable price with a lenient payment schedule; the two old women liked Carmelita’s ideas and wanted to see the place put to use.

Carmelita personally interviewed each student before their admission to the school on top of the hill that she named simply the Putney School. The students she chose showed interest in unusual subjects and hobbies. Perfect test scores and stellar report cards didn’t matter nearly as much as if you liked winter camping. But Putney was a private boarding school, and the tuition quite high for a typical family at the

Depression's tail end. So while the students that finally enrolled in that first year were varied in their interests and adventurous in spirit, they were all white with money.

The summer before the first semester the school held a camp where the students and teachers put hands to tools and built the boys' dorm and the school farm. The dance school had too few buildings, but soon the students and faculty raised more structures for classrooms and a mess hall.

Jean, who had already finished high school, started college that fall at Bennington across the state. She would have missed the Putney experience altogether had she not returned at the end of her college year to take part in equally packed summer sessions. Bill entered Putney as a senior, but when it came time to graduate his entire class decided to stay another year because they liked the school so much. Joan was in the first class and so got to start and finish high school at her mother's new school.

Putney gave Carmelita the opportunity to put all of her experience and philosophies around education into practice; Putney was her school, and she made no bones about making all the important decisions and dictating the direction and vision of the institution and its curriculum. Carmelita believed that people who had the privilege of education had the obligation to change society and her goal was to train her students to be capable, creative and honest people who would shoulder the responsibility of making the world a better place. While she never formalized her educational methods, Joan summed up the maxims that served as the school's foundation:

1. Learn by doing
2. Don't be afraid of hardships
3. Honesty and truth above all else
4. The world is made by your head and your hands
5. Having education does not make you better than working people

And so, Putney students worked—and their work was their play. Teachers restricted classroom learning to the classroom; they gave no work that couldn't be finished during the day. Work jobs and chores filled the afternoons. Adults with more skills and experience gave direction and guidance, but Joan and her classmates logged the forests, milked the cows, and mowed the fields. Winter saw students driving the sled to gather sap from buckets hanging from maple trees. Just as Joan, Bill, and Jean were always responsible for cleaning their rooms and tending to their ponies, Putney students were responsible for the whole campus, barn, kitchen and all. One skill absent from the curriculum was any kind of cooking. When asked why the young women at Putney didn't learn how to cook, Carmelita's sharp reply was, "They'll learn when they get married. That's soon enough."

The time Putney students did spend in the classrooms was packed full of familiar topics made exhilarating with a new vision of how to engage students in learning. Joan's chemistry teacher—who doubled as the geometry teacher—left a deep impression on her. In his classroom she discovered a Wilson cloud chamber and was entranced by

its display of atom tracks. She followed the silent trails and imagined the miniscule atoms that made them, like tracing vapor trails in the sky to the jet you can't see but know is there. Of all her teachers, the chemistry teacher was the only one who heaped any praise on her; he told Carmelita that Joan had "the kind of brain that worked well for science—not literature." Joan, the little one who followed blithely behind her two larger-than-life siblings, had finally found a sphere in which she excelled. She drank it up and dreamed of becoming a scientist.

Carmelita reserved the weekends for trips, mostly camping, climbing, and hiking. In the winter, skiing dominated all else. Always early in the field of physical activities, Carmelita started skiing with her three while they were still in Massachusetts. Once at Putney, schools began to form ski teams, of which Putney was one. Carmelita disliked team sports like football, and she always warned against sports' competitive nature. But the Putney ski team was extremely competitive, always ranking well against the other school teams, and Joan became a force to be reckoned with on the slopes.

Mount Washington's Tuckerman's Ravine, a big basin of delicious and tricky downhill runs, was around the corner in New Hampshire. On weekends, the team piled into the school's big red truck bed, sleeping bags and all. Ski lifts were yet to be invented (and it wasn't the way Putney students related to mountains anyway), so the group slung their skis over their shoulders or strapped on seal skins over their skis and climbed to the top. They cooked their own meals on a fire and slept in a lean to, packed close for warmth.

The slalom was Joan's event. At a big race at Tuckerman's Ravine, the ski coach told her that Gracy Carter, a member of the Olympic ski team, was competing there, and to see if she could beat her. She did.

In 1939 the 1940 Olympic pre-trials were held in Vermont on Mount Mansfield, while Joan was still at Putney. Two students in the area, Joan and a girl named Marilyn Shaw, qualified to go to the Sun Valley Invitation Meet and then onto Mount Hood for the Olympic tryouts. Joan didn't have any money of her own, but the Putney School provided some funds and her mother pitched in, and she went with Marilyn to the tryouts. Joan had never skied such a big mountain and the downhill scared the day-lights out of her. But the slalom unfolded beautifully before her, and she whisked softly through it like water pulled by gravity. She placed in the top ten and would have gone to the Olympics in Norway the next year if World War II hadn't broken out.

Instead of going to Norway, Joan went to Lake Placid with the American team to compete against Canada. After a smart reconnaissance of the slalom course, she stopped dead at the first flag, and then aimed straight through, barely having to turn through the flags. She placed second in both the downhill and slalom.

During one of the summer breaks at Putney, Carmelita sent Joan to a Colorado Springs dance camp to "become graceful." In almost all other matters, she did not separate girls from boys in activities or education. But observing her daughter in work and play, she got a little worried that she'd maybe raised her daughter just a little too far outside the mainstream. Carmelita's sister, however, lived in Colorado Springs and

had a horse for Joan to ride. So instead of learning how to tap dance, Joan spent a much-preferred summer in the Rocky Mountains taming her Aunt Helena's wild horse.

Putney, with all of its educational experiments and progressive philosophy, faced enormous pressure to turn out graduates prepared to attend the nation's most elite universities. After all, these were the children of some of the US' wealthier families, who in many ways were taking a chance by sending their offspring to Putney. Carmelita had set out to prove that teaching children to think was more fruitful than having them cram for exam questions. Parents were relieved when she was proved right. With no homework, no exams, and certainly no college board prep courses, Putney graduates were admitted in droves to the Ivy League. After Bill's second senior year and his own admission into Harvard, his mother suggested that he defer for a year and see the world. Bill's ability to strike out on his own, with ten dollars in his pocket and an ambition to go around the world, was Joan's first glimmer of the difference of opportunity that society afforded the different sexes.

Hitchhiking across the US, Bill sailed three times across the Pacific before he earned his way to Japan. The freighters whose decks he scrubbed and mopped carried scrap metal from the US for the weapons that the Japanese were using in their attempt to conquer China. What he saw as his part in Japan's war effort was a stain on his personal history that he would later write about in an apologetic poem to the Chinese people. Sitting in a classroom at Putney, Joan looked out the window one day and saw her brother return to the school more weathered and wiser from his travels, walking in from the direction opposite the one he left to prove he had gone exactly around the world, and with just about ten dollars in his pocket.



## Chapter 2

# Bennington

*“Why the hell should physics be secret?” Joan Hinton*

When Joan followed Jean to Bennington College in 1939, the school was still a fairly new institution. Tuition was high, and Joan relied on her mother and a few scholarships to pay it. She took up waiting tables (one of the few jobs allowed to women) for spending money and spent the first \$25 she ever made on a pair of binoculars for tracking birds.

Not yet co-ed, Bennington was progressive education for girls, mostly focused on the arts. The entire science department fit into an old H style barn, along with the library and shop. But Joan, who knew she had a head for science, majored in physics and minored in the violin. The head of her department was a biology professor, and while she found biology interesting, physics had already tainted Joan’s blood. She’d seen a Wilson cloud chamber and wanted more.

In line with the principles of progressive education, Bennington required students to work on yearlong projects. Her freshman year, Joan remembered only as working at an eye clinic in Dartmouth where she spent most of her time skiing. But her sophomore year, with that cloud chamber still on her brain, she decided she had to make one herself. Each step in the process required her to learn new skills. While she learned theory in the classroom, she went to an old craftsman in the city to learn how to turn a lathe and to a foundry to cast brass. She special-ordered its glass casing from Corning Glass and got a feel for electricity by working with solenoids, wire coils that moved metal bars to start off a chain of events to expand the air in the chamber.

At a certain point in her project, Joan found she was stuck and needed more information, so she contacted the Cornell University physics department, which had a functioning cloud chamber. During the winter months at Bennington, the school had what it called winter field periods, when it sent its students out to live and work with people in the fields they studied. Joan told the Cornell department of her project and asked permission to spend her sophomore winter there to see how the chamber actually worked. Cornell further caught Joan’s interest, because by that time, her brother had decided that Harvard and the social sciences did not interest him as much as agriculture—and had transferred to the Cornell Agriculture school. There he shared a rented room above the Student Union with an upstate New York farm boy named Erwin Engst, whom everyone called Sid.

During the winter of 1940, Joan spent two months sleeping in the Cornell dorms and glued at all other times to the work going on in the basement of the physics building. Unfortunately for the guy working on the cloud chamber there, across the hall from his room was a crew of people taking apart a cyclotron—a device that added energy to charged particles in order to split atoms. Aside from burning out one of his solenoids, Joan didn’t do much for his cloud chamber before she jumped ship to the

fascinating goings on next door.

Marshall Holloway and Robert Bacher were physics professors and Clancy was one of their graduate students—and the trouble they were having was that they couldn't get the vacuum that made the cyclotron go to stop leaking. They welcomed Joan into their ranks and taught her the tools of the trade, the most useful of which was soldering. The others could and did try day and night to make it work, but Joan, who sponged up every drop of knowledge, had to make it back to the dorms by midnight. She timed it so that if she left the physics building at a run by 11:50, she could beat the clock and avoid being marked late for curfew. Every night as she sprinted past Cornell co-eds making out at the dorm entrance, the dorm head greet her happily with: "Having you here is like a breath of fresh air!" One thing that did not fascinate Joan was making out—unless it was alpha particles kissing electrons off atoms.

Joan returned to Bennington in the spring to work on her cloud chamber, but it took another year and another winter field period at Cornell to get it done.

In her third year Joan ploughed deeper and deeper into the study of the just-emerging field of nuclear physics. In the scientific journals, hot debates were raging between Einstein and other brilliant theoreticians about the nature of particles and waves. But just about the time Joan was finishing her cloud chamber ("it didn't work all that well, but the workmanship was pretty good"), the journals seemed to run dry of reports about new research and theoretical developments. Thinking it strange that scientists previously so prolific and passionate about the field fell suddenly silent, Joan asked her professor why. His answer surprised and perplexed her. "Maybe," he said, "it's becoming secret."<sup>3</sup>

After that year, the Bennington science department told Joan that they had taught her as much as they knew about nuclear physics, and that she'd do better to graduate and go to grad school to continue her studies. Carmelita came to the graduation ceremony bearing unwanted gifts: blue and white high-heeled shoes. Perhaps in the same mindset as when she sent Joan to get graceful in Colorado, this time she succeeded in getting Joan to put them on and hobble through the ceremony. After the ceremony an infuriated Joan took off for the workshop where a horrified Carmelita watched as her daughter took off one shoe and flung it down the length of the hallway. Joan ignored her mother's distressed noises ("Joan! Joan!"), and took the other one by the heel and hurled it too, until it joined its pair with a satisfying thump at the end of the hallway. She turned to her mother: "That's what I think about wearing high heels. I'm never going to wear them again." She never did.

The summer after graduation, Joan returned home to Putney and volunteered to be the driver on the summer session work trip. Putney students were set to travel the

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<sup>3</sup> Fission was discovered in 1938, and in 1939 Einstein co-authored a letter to US president Franklin Delano Roosevelt with Leo Szilárd urging him to support the development of nuclear weapons. Roosevelt did not act until Fall 1941, Joan's third year at Bennington, just before the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. The bombing launched the US full throttle into nuclear weaponry development, and the research went underground free from public scrutiny.

US, learning about the lives of migrant workers by working in the fields with them. They stopped at any farm that would have them, sleeping in haylofts and joining whatever work there was to be done. Whether the farmers actually won out in the learning to production ratio was iffy, but the Putney kids had enough enthusiasm and hands that most farmers were willing to have them. One such farm belonged to Sid Engst, Bill's Cornell College roommate, who Joan met briefly on her winter field periods in between racing to her dorm and soldering pipes. Previously known to him only as Bill's little sister Joanie, Sid took notice of the unconventional horseback riding skiing wrestling truck driving hay stacking winter camping always laughing student of nuclear physics. Joan, raised to throw boys to the ground and make them yell uncle, found Sid to have a wry sense of humor, his feet firmly planted on the earth of his Brown Swiss dairy farm, head in politics and philosophy, and game for any adventure she dreamed up. The two became fast friends.

## Chapter 3

# Engst

*“Sid, with my brain and your brawn, we can do anything.” Mother Engst*

By the time Sid Engst rented his apartment above the Cornell College student union on College Avenue, he’d already quit med school and decided to go back to what held meaning in his life: dairy farming. So when a “tall lanky New Englander” named Bill Hinton arrived at the door to share the rent, he was not all that impressed with his Harvard credentials. As the tough farmers around his home base of upstate New York said, “You can tell a Harvard man but you can’t tell him much.”

The ninth of ten living children (the first died in infancy), seven of them older sisters, Erwin had to grow up with thick skin to survive the kind of teasing meted out by his siblings. Irene, Verda, Lorna, Olive, Una, Bernice, and Hazel (older brother Orville, or Bud as everyone called him, came after Una and before Bernice, and Wesley was the last) all took pretty good care of him but couldn’t resist giving their little brother a hard time. Their nickname for him was “Sissy,” but since their mother heard about it, probably from Erwin, and forbade it, they called him the closest thing to it: Siddy. Sid, the later evolution, stuck with him so closely and so long that for most friends and acquaintances to look at Sid and say “Erwin” felt awkward on the tongue.

Although his father, Fred Engst, died before he was ten, Sid had distinct impressions of the kind of person he was, with some gaps filled in by sisters old enough to have known him as young adults. Immigrants from Germany to New York City in the late 1800s, his parents gave Fred up at an orphanage when he was two. At that time, the orphanages “farmed” out their charges when they were very young; they sent them to families with no or few children of their own to work until they were 18 in what amounted to indentured servitude. Fred was sent off to Moline, Illinois and lived with a couple that worked him hard and refused to send him to school. He stayed only until he was old enough to run. When he ran, he ran to the coalmines, where he worked in the hole but at least got paid for it. There, he became a charter member of the United Mine Workers.

After Fred met Edna and they married, the young couple moved to a farm outside Syracuse, New York reminded them of the rich earth in Illinois, and they put down what cash they had and got to work. It wasn’t long, though, before they found they’d been suckered into buying land that drained poorly. At that time too, preempting the big stock market crash of ‘29, the depression already started in on farmers trying to make their living on the land. Sid’s first memories were of being forced off the farm, because the family couldn’t make the mortgage payments.

The Engsts moved to Minoa, NY, another small rural town near Syracuse to rent the Cochran Farm and try to make their living. By that time the family was already eleven strong—Wesley, the youngest, arrived unexpectedly at a much later date—and as renters, they made very little money. Yet when hobos jumped off the train at the

Minoa station and lined their bellies with the Engst's corn roasted over a quick campfire, Sid's father Fred let them be. He told his family that, "The only reason why those people are eating that corn is because they're hungry. The least we can do is let them go ahead and eat it."

A union member from the mines and a socialist early on, Fred was politically different from most of the other farmers in the area but still very well liked. He had a sense of humor and always lent a hand to folks who needed help and neighbors in Minoa Village respected and befriended him.

The Engst daughters, much older than Sid, mostly worked in the barn milking the cows and running the milk route. Up before dawn, one stayed in the house to make breakfast and the others worked the udders, cooled the milk by aeration, bottled it and drove the route in a one-horse buggy. After they got back, they had to wash up, eat breakfast and catch the streetcar into Syracuse where one by one, they went off to college. The Engst girls came up the ranks that way until they left home though marriage or college. All but one of the girls graduated college; Lorna dropped out and went to work in a factory.

Sid, too, learned early that there was precious little time to play. His first job was to carry the lantern twice a day during chores: both the morning and evening milkings and feedings had to be done in the dark. When he got older he graduated to carrying wood to heat the house and then finally to milking and feeding. In between chores and sleep, Sid had barely enough time to attend a one-room schoolhouse, which housed six grades. Corporal punishment was out of favor by that time, but the environment provided for learning was rigid and strict.

After a few years, the Cochran Farm's owner lost most of his fortune and came back to farm his own land. The original agreement was that the Engsts and the owner would split the heifers born while the Engsts were renting. The owner, however, thought better of it when the time came to divide up. But Sid's mother Edna, fierce in any kind of righteous fight, prevailed, and they lined the cows up by equal pairs and flipped a coin to see who would choose first. When they left that farm and moved to the next, they had a small herd of their own.

Fred and Edna had to move their family to quite a few farms in the next few years, paying rent and trying to eke out a living. One such farm was in a little village called Rottenaur Bridge, at a time when the price of milk hit an all-time low. The dairy farmers shipped their milk to the milk plant, which often cheated them on the weights. It got so bad that the local farmers called a milk strike, and Sid's parents were right in front agitating for people to come together. They opened their house for meetings at night and Sid and his siblings lay awake straining to hear what was worrying their parents.

Almost all of the farmers organized to join the strike. The biggest farm owner, though, also owned the truck that took everyone's milk to the plant, and he refused to stop his deliveries. The first day the milk truck tried to deliver to the plant, the striking farmers stood in the road, blocked its passage and dumped the 100 pounds of milk it

carried. The second day, the truck skirted the line by going earlier than usual. So the third day the farmers felled a tree across the road and when the truck came to a halt, they punched the tank full of holes with their pitchforks and watched as the white milk spewed gurgling to the ground. Once the farmers gained a small increment of change, however, the once-radical organization rapidly filled with dissent, fell into disarray and soon disbanded altogether.

The Engst family finally settled in Highbridge, yet another of the small farming villages that dotted the New York countryside around Syracuse. Four wealthy businessmen owned the property, and while they prepared to build their summer homes on a lake on the land, they needed a caretaker for the farm. The family lived rent-free while they tended to the place.

When they first moved there, they still used kerosene for light; it was a big event when electricity came into the house. Telephones too were just becoming popularized. When the family sent Sid down the road to make his first call to the blacksmith, he got so nervous that when the operator asked what number he wanted, all he could say was he didn't know. But the new invention that most perplexed Sid was the radio. They had to buy gas for the car and pay a fee to the phone company. Why weren't they charged for listening to the radio?

Not too long after they finally settled, though, Fred's health, which had been slowly failing for years, turned progressively worse. The smallest tasks exhausted him to the point of having to lie down in the middle of trying to work. With a huge family and no strength to support it, he began to lose his temper with his health. Still, he did not physically discipline his kids—it was Edna who had the spare-the-rod philosophy of child rearing.

Fred died and the stock market crashed, both in 1929. Sid was almost eleven.

Widowed, with the Great Depression breathing down her neck and a whole passel of children to provide for, Edna faced her situation by rolling up her sleeves.

The farm was theirs to work rent free, but they still had to find a way to plant and harvest it. Bud, Sid's older brother, was just about old enough to work the fields during his summer vacations from school and it wasn't too long before Sid came up in the ranks and got enough strength and experience to take up his share.

In the meantime, Edna began raising small livestock as a means to support the family. In addition to their small herd of milk cows and a couple of workhorses, she started in with pigs, chicken and ducks. The few they couldn't eat she sold for cash. Her garden was always laden with vegetables and fruit grew natively on the land—all of which she canned relentlessly. Even the cows and pigs they slaughtered in the wintertime appeared on their table in the summer from glass Mason jars. So while at the height of the Great Depression, the household pulled down perhaps a dollar or two in cash a month, the Engsts always ate very well.

As one of the last to leave home, Sid was trained by Edna to do almost all the work outside the house. He learned how to slaughter all the animals, stunning cattle with blows to the head and taking pigs at the throat. While he didn't think too much

about it, he never liked the killing work. Still it was his job, as was skinning and gutting them. The farmhouse had an adjacent corncrib where most of the meat froze solid in the biting upstate New York winter, safe from scavenging animals. The ham and shoulders went to the smokehouse where select maple boughs preserved the meat into choice morsels, which Sid's mother then sold. Sid pretty much just did what his mother told him, not paying too much attention to retaining the knowledge. He had his sights already set on leaving farm life and studying medicine. ("At least," he said later in his life, "I don't think I ever aspired to be a lawyer!")

Because his mother was so well organized, had a lot of hands to pitch in, and was an exceptional cook, she gradually began to build up a trade of regular customers who came to the house for anything from plucked ducks to smoked hams and a wide variety of baked goods. After she had built up a sizeable and loyal group of customers, she started taking her goods to the public market in Syracuse on Saturdays. One of Sid's sisters had a secondhand Model A Ford that they loaded up with over a dozen pies, marrow fat beans packed by the pound, Columbia berries good all the way through the bag (not like others who sold bags with beautiful berries on top fronting for a rotten bunch below), and every dairy product a person could produce. Fridays Mother Engst and Sid worked frantically, Sid slaughtering ducks and chickens for his mother to pick and dress. Edna's customers came to the market before work, so she had to go before dawn began to crack to beat them there and get their business. She sat for years in the market through Syracuse's bitter winters and the very worst of the Great Depression.

What Sid was learning in school interested him, and he was a good student. He did have a reputation to live up to; eight Engsts preceded Sid—about one every year—and the word around was that the Engsts were good students. He had a particular interest in mathematics, but when he was fifteen, he began innocently reading books about the Russian Revolution. He liked to go to the library and ended up borrowing most of the books authored by people who were propagandizing against the socialist experiment. The anti-Soviet pitch peaked in the US in the '30s, right when Sid was making his weekly rounds to the stacks. British Prime Minister Churchill came out with his famous "strangle them in the cradle" speech and radio programs fanned up the fervor with sensational news about the dangerous "Bolsheviki." Sid and the other kids he ran with played games of spies and assassins to see who would get caught by the Reds.

But what Sid gleaned from all the reports piqued his interest, especially concerning the upper level cadres who were not allowed special privileges or high salaries: "To a person who was brought up in a poor farm community like I was, that was a very impressive fact."

Most people did not agree with his ideas politically, so he did not share them, but by the time he graduated high school in 1936, he had become one of the very few people around with Leftist leanings, sympathetic to the Soviet revolutionaries.

## Chapter 4

# Cornell Ag

*“Once you get shit on your shoes, you can’t get it off.” Sid Engst*

By the time Sid graduated from high school, his brother Bud had already graduated from Cornell Ag School and was making his living as a teacher. The worst part of the Great Depression was over, and US farmers were on the rebound. But because Sid’s aspiration to go to medical school required a great deal of money, he took two years off to work at Solvay Process. His mother gave him his room and board, and he continued to do some of the chores around the farm and take her to the market on the weekends. But for forty hours a week, he went to work at Solvay Process making forty cents an hour—a fortune to Sid in those days.

The workers at Solvay Process were a diverse collection of first or second generation European immigrants. Unskilled in the lab and just out of high school, Sid was the lowest in the hierarchy. He mostly swept the floors and fetched lunch for the others, and when there was no other work, sometimes helped the two repairmen. The work was not terribly interesting, but the camaraderie among the men was warm—and contagious; Sid soon lost the interest he had in the Russian Revolution and thought mostly about his path to medical school, where he would become famous and prosperous. He wanted to *be* someone. So when a salesman came calling, selling home study courses on business management, Sid bought one and took it home to work on at night. Working forty hours a week with ten hours on the road to and from the plant, and farm chores to boot made him pretty sleepy at night, though. So to stay awake in order to learn how to manage businesses, he started smoking the pipe and tobacco he won betting in the football pool at work. He never did finish the correspondence course but smoked a pipe until he was forty.

Two years later, with enough money in his pocket to pay tuition, buy books and put gas in his car, Sid enrolled in the University of Illinois. It was the nearest state liberal arts college with a pre-med program which New York didn’t have, and since he was from out of state, he paid \$100 instead of the usual \$10 for in-state students. A high school classmate enrolled at the same time, and the two drove out to the Midwest in Sid’s Model A.

There, they rented rooms with three other students, including a Southerner with a long drawl and the son of a Bulgarian perfume importer. None were very well off, with Sid at the bottom of the barrel, so they did work-study at the university and lived off of day-old goods from the bakery down the street and giant jugs of milk.

It didn’t take very long for classes at Illinois to prick a hole in Sid’s medical school bubble and drain it of all its romantic illusions. Never having had to study much in high school to do well, he found himself neck deep in homework and exams. When he decided to become a doctor he hadn’t figured on the years and years of studying he would have to do before he ever got into practice. He missed his life on the farm



miserably and found out that the place he had wanted to beat a path out of was where he actually belonged. He decided to tough out the year at the University of Illinois, but that he would transfer at the end of it to Cornell's agriculture school.

That winter before Christmas, brother Bud, who had become the Director of a private high school in New York, and his wife Helen made a down payment on a farm. 1939 was still the tail end of the Depression, but they saved some money and bought a hundred and twenty acres in Gooseville Corners, a village of three or four families not big enough to merit a dot on most maps. Bud and Helen lived and taught at the school, so on his Christmas vacation, Sid and drove too fast over ice and sleet back home to move his mother and all their belongings to the new place.

The barn on the Gooseville Corners farm was a little ragged around the edges, but the old farmhouse that sat by it was a treasure. Built when farmhouses were meant to house big families, it included all the common rooms, a wood shed, office, six bedrooms and a short storage area.

By May, Sid readily packed up his belongings and headed home and got a job driving one of the lumber trucks for his brother-in-law's timber business for the summer. At the end of the summer he transferred and enrolled in Cornell's College of Agriculture for the fall semester.

Cornell's "Ag School", as it was called, was completely different from the rest of the school, and no love was lost between the two. The Ivy Leaguers treated farmers like the livestock they raised and farmers made fun of how stupid the educated snobs were. The local favorite was:

"A farmer and a college professor are sitting next to each other on a train. They're getting bored, and it's a long train ride, so the professor says, 'Why don't we tell riddles? Whoever can't answer the riddle has to pay the other person a dollar.' The farmer thinks awhile and says, 'Well you know I'm happy to play, but after all, you're a professor and I'm just a farmer, so you can't expect me to be at your level. How about if you can't answer it, you pay me a dollar but if I can't answer it I pay you 50 cents?' The professor thinks, 'Well you know I should know more than he does,' so he says 'OK, you start.' The farmer thinks a minute and says, 'What walks on three legs in the morning, four legs at noon, and brays like a donkey?' The professor thinks and thinks and back and forth and pretty soon he says, "You know, I give up," so he pulls out his wallet hands the farmer a dollar. And he says 'OK now what is it?' The farmer reaches in his pocket and pulls out a 50-cent piece and says, 'You know I don't know either.'"

Cornell's Ag and Veterinary Medicine Schools were Land Grant colleges<sup>4</sup>, which

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<sup>4</sup> Land Grant colleges were funded by provisions in the Morrill Act in the late 1800s. The Land Grant gave federally owned land to states for educational institutions focusing on agriculture, military, mechanics, and home economics, as a mechanism for working-class people to take part in higher education and gain practical training to become skilled workers.

meant that Sid could go to school there without paying any tuition. But among the strings the government pulled with that assistance was to require all male students to join the ROTC for two years with any further affiliation optional. So Sid joined up with the rest of his classmates and learned how to march and shoot military style.

The room Sid rented could house two, so when Harvard transfer student William Hinton from New England walked in asking, he took him in as a roommate—in spite of what upstate New York dairy farmers thought about the Ivy League. The two got off to a little bit of a rocky start, but this soon evened out and they became good friends. Not that there weren't a few skirmishes over listening to the news on the radio at night—Bill was much more scholarly than Sid and the two fought over the knob when he was trying to hit the books. And they got into hot debates over politics—but those fights never ended badly. When Sid knew he lost the point in the end, his last words were, “You may be right, but goddamnit *I'm* not wrong!”

Often Sid took Bill along when he drove the thirty miles home every weekend to begin building his herd of dairy cows. Those drives home during the winter on sleet-covered roads could be pretty harrowing; Sid drove a Ford V-8 with mechanical brakes which had two characteristics: “One, they were never correctly aligned, and two, they never worked very good.”

Sid's little brother Wesley, nine years younger, was just getting old enough to help out. At eleven or twelve he was already a better judge of cows than Sid and took first place in judging contests with experienced adults over twice his age. With his help at home, Sid began to build up a small herd of Brown Swiss cows, different from their black and white Holstein cousins in their higher fat and protein content. So every time he had some money in his pocket he went home and put it into a brown cow. Then he loaded up his car with as many jars of his mother's vegetables, meats, and fruit as he could eat in a week and went back to the classroom.

Sid took what classes interested him or he thought useful and happily ignored the rest; he already knew he was going to be a farmer and other courses were a waste of time.

In addition to cheerfully goading Bill, Sid was intent on listening to the radio news because of the hopping political climate at that time. The growing power of Red Russia and the communist revolutionaries in China had the capitalist and imperialist countries on edge. The nation states of the world were realigning allegiances in intensifying power struggles.

Sunday drew all relatives within a reasonable radius to Mother Engst's dinner table for heated political arguments in addition to the chicken, beans, and apple pie. Sid, Una and Lorna usually lined up on the Left with Verda and Olive in the middle and the rest on the Right. After particularly hot and heavy fights about the New Deal or fascism, Edna would admonish her children as they left and declare “no more politics next week.”<sup>5</sup> The following Sunday might start out peacefully but it wasn't long

<sup>5</sup> The New Deal was the set of US President Franklin D. Roosevelt's public service and infrastructure programs during the Great Depression designed to employ workers to aid in the recovery of the economy.

before the battles started, often times with mother in the lead.

After graduating from Bennington College, Bill Hinton's sister Jean went to work in Washington DC for the FSA, the Farm Security Administration, which the government set up to address the desperate situation of small American farmers. Jean became increasingly influenced by the progressive forces in the project and traveled often to talk to her brother about what was happening in the world as she saw it. She was concerned because Bill had become a pacifist; recognizing the increasingly oppressive climates in Germany and Italy, he still believed that war should be avoided at all cost. Jean set out to convince him, and his roommate if he would listen, that the fight against fascism was a just one.<sup>6</sup> Sid listened.

Jean was 100% interested in what was going on in the world. ...She was a real propagandist, anti-fascist, anti-reactionary, trying to expose what was going on in some of the dark corners of Washington.

Bill... did have a lot of influence on me. But the person who really had the most influence on me—clearing up a lot of questions about politics in the US and the world—was Jean. She was a very good teacher—very patient, but like her sister Joan, she had the knack of being like a bulldog—grabbing by the butt and not letting go. I put her as my first teacher.

And so Sid got to know Jean. He briefly met the other sister, Joan too, when she spent a couple months in the winters of 1940 and 1941 working with Cornell professors and students on high-energy physics. But Jean blew through on a regular basis, bringing the latest word from Washington and an armload of books for them to read, one of which was *Red Star Over China*.<sup>7</sup>

The two Hinton's and an Engst spent a lot of time together, trying to get a rise out of each other and arguing about what was going on in the world. When one got the best of the other in an argument, Sid would jokingly call Jean a Red Dog and she would call him a Fascist Pig.

Through Jean, Bill, and Sid, and Joan to a lesser extent (her head was mostly in the cloud chamber), got to know some of the more influential people on the Left in the US. They became friends with Bob Coe, a New York City progressive who put out a little pamphlet called *Facts for Farmers*, about the situation in agriculture and how farmers were being undercut. They also got to know Archie Wright, an IWW (International Workers of the World) member, and head of Dairy Farmer's Union in New York. Later, Bill went to work for the union and stayed with Sid for a spell, trying to organize

<sup>6</sup> Fascism is an extreme reactionary political ideology and form of capitalist government that arises usually as capitalism experiences crisis. It fans the flames of bourgeois nationalism and xenophobia in order for the bourgeoisie to obtain compliance from the proletariat in consolidating its power and interests.

<sup>7</sup> *Red Star Over China* was written by Edgar Snow (published in 1938), an American journalist who, upon the invitation by the Chinese Communists for an honest reporter from the West to cross into Liberated Areas and write about what he saw, spent many years doing just that. In addition to interviewing Mao and other Central Committee members, he was given access to ask questions and write freely about what he saw. No communist himself, his honest description of the Chinese revolution moved a lot of progressive and Left-leaning Americans.

the farmers in his area. He stayed almost a year and the only one he ever signed on was Sid. In other areas of the state, however, the union had a stronger membership.

The US Left had a growing interest in China, and in addition to Edgar Snow and *Red Star*, people started to travel there and write about what they saw themselves. And Sid, along with a lot of other people who were paying attention to the news, found it pretty interesting that the Red Army was beating back the Japanese, while the US backed Guomindang (KMT) was forced into retreat after retreat.<sup>8</sup>

The world was becoming increasingly embroiled in WWII during Sid's second year at Cornell, but the US had yet to send any troops. Bill moved to the Warren Farm on campus, where he was able to put into practice what he learned in class and make some money to boot. Sid still kept his apartment but spent most of his time at home, where his small herd was growing and needed constant attention. He drove back to school only once in a while if there was a class on something he wanted to learn. In May 1941 Bill graduated and Sid dropped out without getting his degree. The Pearl Harbor attack hadn't happened yet, but it looked more and more like the US was going to enter the stage—and the US army didn't draft farmers. Besides, his Brown Swiss herd was just ripe to start full time milking. It was time to get going.

Sid loved life on the family dairy farm. He loved working with the cows and cultivating the fields and found he wasn't too bad at it. The war jump-started the farming industry along with the rest of the economy and prices were higher than they had been in a long time. Edna ran the house and the garden, Sid took care of the farm work, and Wesley pitched in when he wasn't busy at high school.

Because he was just starting out, Sid decided to milk three times a day to make more money. Almost all small dairy farmers then milked twice a day; the relentless nature of the work combined with plowing, planting and haying in the summer made the third milking too grueling.

Sid's friendship with the Hintons continued through Bill's stay organizing farmers and Jean's continued efforts to kick start his politics. Once in a while he took a rare Sunday off and went to Putney, but mostly they stopped in to see him on the weekend. One summer, Joan drove into his yard with a red truck full of Putney students, and the two got to know each other. Suddenly Bill's little sister took shape as her own person in his field of vision, and they became friends. He found her interesting because her head was in serious ideas and was curious about "how the world was put together"; if there was one thing you could say about Joan, it was that she was not like other girls. But he was so busy, he didn't have time to develop a deeper friendship with her. His mind was on udders and hay, and increasingly, on politics.

The crisis of war deepened with the US entering on the side of the Allies. On a

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<sup>8</sup> The Guomindang, or the Kuomintang by the older spelling system, was the Chinese Nationalist Party. Originally founded by Dr. Sun Yat-sen in 1912 after overthrowing the last dynasty, the KMT as it was known in the West, worked together with progressive forces in China for a Democratic Nationalist revolution. After Sun died in 1925, General Chiang Kai-shek took power. Two years later, he purged the Communists from the KMT, killing most of them, and forcing the rest underground.

much smaller scale, several issues in Sid's life also reached a climax. A major influence on his day-to-day existence arrived with his brother Bud who bought another farm nearby and moved back with his family to farm it. While he had never been very close to his older brother, Sid got along with him fine when he lived several hours away. But now that he was back, right next door, and Sid was making his living on a farm that Bud owned, the situation got prickly. By then, Wesley was big enough to do a big share of farm work, and Bud wanted him to help out in his fields. Wesley had different ideas, however, which his mother and Sid supported, and the mounting tension forced Sid to think about his future in Gooseville Corners.

Another issue gnawing at Sid was the growing realization that dairy farmers can do nothing but milk cows 365 days a year. Any news he heard from China piqued his curiosity—but he had no time to explore it. The politically charged times swirled around him but were always a little out of reach, and the work he loved became somewhat of a fetter, restricting his participation in the larger than life social struggles of the time.

During this time, a voice in his head (that sounded remarkably like Jean Hinton's) was telling him that progressive people had to join the fight against fascism. In spite of Jean's attempts to convince her brother Bill, after Pearl Harbor, he went off to a conscientious objectors' camp in New Hampshire. That same voice in Bill's head finally pierced his pacifist ideas, and he enlisted in the army shortly thereafter. In the army's physical examination, though, they found Bill only had one eardrum and rated him 4F, unfit for regular service. So instead of suiting up for duty on the front, he joined the Office of War Information and shipped off to China where, according to his own description, he showed Chinese peasants Mickey Mouse movies.

The combination of these factors called for a drastic reevaluation of what Sid wanted to do with his life. He was torn. He had grown up with shit on his shoes, and it wasn't easy to think about giving that up, especially with his own, carefully picked and cared for Brown Swiss herd. In the end, a little heavy hearted, but also interested in what lay ahead, Sid decided to opt out and prepared to hold an auction. All of Edna's children had been giving her a little money every month while she was living with Sid and Wes to support her in her old age. When Sid decided to sell out, she had enough money to buy a house in nearby Cazenovia and prepared to move when her son did. Sid had no specific plans except to sell off his assets and join the army for a while. So in June of 1945 he put together a catalog that listed every cow and her pedigree, as well as all the farm machinery he had accumulated. He planned the dispersal sale for August 25, 1945.

All proceeded as planned except that the Japanese surrendered a few days before the auction. Not about to join a peacetime army, Sid decided to see a little of the country before he figured out what to do. China called, with the Communists poised to resume the Civil War after Japan's defeat, but the amount of money he made in the auction wouldn't go too far traveling the world. So he got the address of a physicist friend from her mother and wrote to tell her he was going out to see her. Joan Hinton

had disappeared after graduate school to work on a secret war project. The incineration of Nagasaki and Hiroshima had blown her cover, and she surfaced in Los Alamos, New Mexico. Word was she could have visitors and was allowed to leave the compound.

## Chapter 5

# The Gadget

*“After Germany was defeated... [t]here was this whole feeling... that we weren’t even gonna use this thing... But the army wanted to test it, so they didn’t want Japan to surrender.”*  
Joan Hinton

After her blue and white high-heeled shoes slid satisfyingly into the wall of the science building at graduation, Joan, hungry for more, immediately applied for graduate school. The logical choice was Cornell University; her old cyclotron friends Holloway, Bacher and Clancy were eager to have her in their department and were doing just the kind of work that interested her. It was a great shock to her when they wrote saying that the Great White Fathers of the physics department did not want her because she was a woman. That rejection was the first time in her life she’d experienced what most females learned early on—that society did not treat the sexes equally. True, she had to struggle into a dress now and again, and her brother traveled around the world in a way she couldn’t have, but Carmelita’s youngest had avoided learning that hard lesson, really, until she was 21 years old.

Her mood considerably less buoyant, but still eager to learn, Joan applied to other schools and eventually went to the University of Wisconsin mostly because they let her in. She decided to attend summer school there, because although she had done some of the most advanced work in high-energy physics, she had very little foundation in terms of academics. With one biology, one chemistry and one physics teacher, the Bennington science department had not been able to give her much background. She’d built a Wilson Cloud Chamber and worked on a cyclotron without ever having taken a course in calculus.

So in the summer of 1942 Joan found herself quite alone in an alien landscape taking two courses: calculus and kinetic theory of gases, a course that required elementary calculus. The professor, however, was a crusty old traditionalist who had written his own textbook about a decade before, and followed it methodically, page by page, example by example. Although the class was a long way from her progressive education background, Joan found she liked it; as long as she memorized the book exactly, she pulled down A’s regularly.

Compared to the Putney and Bennington’s active campuses, environments where Joan flourished, the University of Wisconsin was cold and isolating. During the fall she found an old woman to rent a room from and every day walked to the physics building and back again. The most depressing aspect of the social life there was that the graduate students formed a club that excluded women. The fact that the rule was aimed at the school librarian, not Joan, didn’t make her feel any more welcome when she occasionally did venture in. She and the librarian were the only two women in the entire department.

Even the folks she did try to talk to seemed content in their lives with their stud-

ies and their play. For Joan, it wasn't enough; she was used to being around intellectuals interested in the deeper issues in life and in the world.

As part of her scholarship, Joan had to teach a couple of labs for the department. She was always one chapter ahead of the students in her classes and enjoyed learning the experiments that she set up for them. But most of her time was spent in the physics building's basement, designing an experiment that would eventually earn her a master's degree. Down in the damp, desolate cellar, apart from the other scientists in their private club, she sat amidst the cobwebs trying to figure out what she was supposed to do. She knew she was supposed to build a vacuum system out of glass but was not sure how to go about it or even what it was for! Most of the time she spent practicing how to blow glass.

Gradually though, Joan got to know some of the other students. Dave Frisch and Al Hanson who were on the crew of the Van De Graaff Generator (a device for accelerating atomic particles) were friendlier, but they were a few years older and already married. One fellow physics grad interested her because he was deep into religious philosophy and spent a lot of time debating with her. Joan was pretty sure she didn't believe god created nature, but she struggled with her own ideas about how animals and plants came to be so perfect. The accepted answer was random mutation and natural selection, but she saw no evidence of living things in the process of mutating and selecting. So she argued with the devout Catholic but could not put her finger on why she thought him wrong. Only years later in hot scientific and philosophical debates in China would she come to flesh out her ideas on natural selection.

Joan shared an office with another graduate student named Schalter, and because he was politically more progressive, she became friendly with him. He was quickly interested in her as more than a friend, the extent of which Joan discovered when he took her to New York to meet his family. Either through complete naiveté or with willed ignorance, Joan did not have any clue about the significance of a boy taking a girl home to meet his Orthodox Jewish family. And while her complete disinterest in romantic pursuits had little to do with it, she found the Jewish culture in his family very different from her own WASPish background and difficult to understand.

During that first year, Schalter transferred to the University of Chicago, and Joan maintained contact with him; on her way home to Putney after her first year, she stopped in to see him. He excitedly told her of possible plans to go on a cosmic ray expedition to Colorado and introduced her to the professor who headed the trip. Part of the expedition's experiments relied on cloud chambers, and because they had no one on their team who had any direct experience with them, the professor asked Joan if she would go. The Rocky Mountains *and* cloud chambers? She didn't need to think twice, and as a result inadvertently bumped Schalter off the expedition. After a quick trip back to the Vermont hilltop school to see her mother and pack a few things, she hooked a ride with fellow expedition members without many regrets about friends left behind.

At Mount Evans, the scientists began setting up the cloud chambers at base camp



near tree level to measure a cosmic ray splash. In the meantime, they sent Joan up to the summit to stay with a student conducting a different experiment named Tabin, living alone in a cabin there. Perfectly fitting with her upbringing and far away from societal norms, she lived alone there with a man she'd never met, and no one thought anything of it. They were young scientists interested in understanding the smallest particles they could conceive of—not relations between the sexes. Joan fit right in.

Joan helped Tabin with his various tasks, but mostly got to hike around with her brother's silver flute in search of scenic spots where no one could hear her play. Soon though, the scientist working on the cloud chamber interrupted her dreamy summer vacation with word that he couldn't get the thing going and needed her help.

In her excitement to get to the top of Mount Evans, Joan had never even looked at the expedition's cloud chambers. She went to work with only a couple years of experience at Bennington under her belt and found their setup different and difficult to adjust. Try as she might, she couldn't get the things to run. Feeling a bit sheepish about her "contribution" to the expedition, she nevertheless spent an enthusiastic and happy summer among like-minded students on what seemed like the top of the world and had to drag herself back to the cobwebby Wisconsin cellar and vacuum system that awaited.

Soon after Joan settled back into the routine of her dreary Midwestern existence, her colleagues in the physics department began disappearing one by one. Dave Frisch, Al Hanson, and pretty soon all the grad students in the private social club that excluded women vacated the campus. No one knew, or no one said they knew what was going on, and the impression was one of great secrecy. Joan found it baffling and her environment even more desolate and depressing as the only people she had come to know in Wisconsin vanished. One morning, she followed the stairs to her basement room and found a cleaner space on the floor where the Van De Graaff Generator had been, and a slightly bigger hole in the wall right next to it that led outside. Soon, it seemed only the Catholic physicist, the librarian and Joan remained.

Doggedly plugging away at her classes, teaching labs and blowing glass to avoid building her vacuum system, Joan received a letter one happy day from her old Cornell cyclotron pals, Holloway and Bacher. They were working on a war project, and would she like to join them? Her smile that day lit all the dusty corners of the entire musty basement. Not only would she be joining the fight against fascism, she had a path out of the cobwebs. Holloway and Bacher thought she was all right, and it was such a relief to be recognized and wanted. She filled out the enclosed form and waited.

She didn't have to wait long before a notice came and directed her to be in New Mexico in February 1944.

Prepared to leave school regardless, Joan took that notice to the university administrators to see how they would handle her academic career. College requirements took on a different meaning during war times. With a top-secret war project in the Southwest gleaning the best students in science from the universities across the country, Wisconsin administrators were eager to send their own—to help win the war and have

their names attached to what would probably be a prestigious project. So with a hastily arranged oral examination (Professor Stanislaw Ulam who gave Joan her exams remembered later that she strode into the room and sat on the floor to answer her questions) and a picture of the Wilson cloud chamber she made as an undergraduate, the University of Wisconsin awarded her a Master's Degree in Physics: "It was a real joke getting my degree off of my sophomore project at Bennington... I knew very little physics... I just dumped myself into cyclotron work with elementary physics courses. But working with the cyclotron crew got me to New Mexico."

Before she left Wisconsin, Joan paid a visit to the local library to check out a book on New Mexico to learn a little about what would be her new home. When the librarian flipped to the back and asked her to write her name on the card, there she saw listed the name of every Wisconsin physicist who had disappeared from her building. Top-secret or not, anyone with a local library card could find a complete list of scientists on the project as well as the approximate time of their departure. Ulam would be next on the list—both in departure and on the library sign out.

Joan had enough time to go back East to pack up her things and say goodbye to her family. At Putney she spent some time with her mother and then went to Washington DC to see her sister Jean. Her brother Bill was still at a conscientious objector's camp in New Hampshire where the government arranged for pacifists to work in production to avoid having to kill against their beliefs.

Jean by then was working in the Farm Security Administration and married to Bill Green. They lived in a big house that was always filled with people in politics coming and going. Jean showed her sister around—took her to labor union meetings and introduced her to the progressive people in her circle. Joan too, had been a target of Jean's political education for years, and while she was studying accelerators and making vacuum systems had diligently read the books Jean had sent, one after another: *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Red Star Over China*... She found Jean's work exciting and interesting but was still glad that her contribution to changing society could be through her love of physics.

Most everyone involved with the war project traveled to the site by train. But Joan, through her brother-in-law, who was in aeronautics, flew out to Albuquerque on a war priority. There, a WAC (Women's Army Corps member) picked her up at the airport and gave her a verbal thrashing for traveling decadently in a time of war. The army had to foot the bill for Joan's plane trip, while the top dogs like Enrico Fermi and Robert Oppenheimer were riding the rails.

The WAC drove north through Santa Fe and then finally to Los Alamos. There, Joan presented multiple forms of identification and her letter of hire before they took prints—not just of her fingers, but of both her hands. Once she entered the compound, there was no leaving; only the very top-level scientists and military men were allowed to leave the site on project business. Fermi, considered by the police to be an enemy alien because he had fled fascist Italy often had to travel to the University of Chicago's Metallurgical Laboratory (or Met Lab—later changed to Argonne), where

the experiments sometimes required his urgent attention. Every time he left the area, though, he had to report to the police who were always quite suspicious of his sudden travel plans. Once on the move, the scientists would also have to assume different identities as they traveled. A story told about Edward Teller, another top scientist with whom Joan later studied, was that once on a train the conductor came by and asked his name. His response was, “What time is it?” knowing that by midnight he’d be in a different region and have a different identity.

So Joan knew that with that level of secrecy, she wouldn’t be coming out until the thing was over—and had no idea just how long it would be. Once inside, Joan was quickly met by Holloway and Bacher, the guys responsible for her liberation from the dusty Wisconsin cellars. They led her into a quiet, secure room and filled her in:

[They] told me that the job there was to see if we could make an atom bomb out of uranium and plutonium. They said, “We don’t call it a bomb, we call it ‘the Gadget.’” That was the only time the whole time I was there that I ever heard the word ‘bomb.’

The code name for uranium 235 was 25—uranium was the 92<sup>nd</sup> element, so they took the 2 from 92 and the 5 from 235. Plutonium, which was one of the human-made elements, the 94<sup>th</sup>, they referred to as 49.

The second day, after the personnel there assigned her a place in the barracks and showed her where to eat military style in the mess hall, they gave her a white badge which read: H44. Only two different colored badges hung from the necks of all personnel—white and blue. Anyone with a white badge was a scientist, and if you were a scientist there were no secret documents that you couldn’t read. The blue-badged personnel were GI’s, military people who had a lower level of security clearance.

Robert Oppenheimer, the one commissioned with finding the site and setting up the compound, insisted that in order to get the most out of the country’s sharpest group of scientists, they had to create a collective environment where secrets were not kept among them. Thus, Joan, one of only four original graduate students (the others were Ph.D. candidates or out of school in research), had the same access level as the other grad students, Ed Hammel, Bob Carter, and Harry Daghlion, the Ph.D.’s, Marshall Holloway, Robert Bacher, Percy King, and Raemer Schreiber, and the man they worked under, Don Kerst, the inventor of the betatron (an electron accelerator). Fermi sat at the very top of the pyramid of Joan’s group and wore a white badge like everyone else. Skeets, Starner and the mechanic that rounded out their group wore blue badges.

The site along the top of a long mesa was about a mile across and divided into several large sections, which held different areas of work. The technical area housed mammoth machine shops with rows of lathes and milling machines waiting for able hands to guide them. Another section was dedicated to explosives research, because when the Gadget finally came together, just the right kind and right amount of dynamite would be needed to blow it apart. The section of experimental nuclear physics set out to answer critical questions barely posited, like how many neutrons would come

out of a split atom to start the next reaction?

Joan's group was tasked to build the first enriched uranium reactor<sup>9</sup>. They worked in the canyon below because the experiments were so dangerous—if anything went seriously wrong, the rest of the personnel would be shielded from an accidental explosion.

Altogether, in the beginning, the canyon scientists numbered about eleven. When Fermi's group in Chicago arrived from the Met Lab, they spent some of their time in the canyon, but also with the cyclotron up on the mesa. Sometimes Joan had to go up to the cyclotron to fetch something and so became acquainted with Herbert Anderson and Darragh Nagle, two scientists who had come from the Met Lab, and the others. The cyclotron crew included a group of brilliant scientists with a sense of humor and fun. When they tired of walking to the barbershop on site, they put in an order for a barber's chair with their other requests for parts. The military, unqualified to deny their request—they could've really needed it for the cyclotron work—dutifully shipped it to them with the rest of their equipment. So everyone went to the cyclotron group to get a haircut.

Down in the canyon, the crew had already built a five foot-thick cement wall to separate the shops and the laboratory from the experiment area. The experimental group worked on one side and the theoretical group on the other. The theoreticians tried to calculate when the reactor would “go critical,” or split one atom that set off a steady chain of other reactions to split other atoms, and Joan's crew tried to test out the theories.

Building the reactor meant building a water boiler, which they constructed out of stainless steel. Around the steel sphere they stacked beryllium oxide bricks with their bare hands, oblivious to the harmful effects the beryllium might produce.<sup>10</sup> The only uranium in the country came from Oak Ridge, where scientists labored over separating the lighter 235 out from the ordinary uranium 238. Bit by bit, the 235 trickled in and the scientists in the canyon gradually added it into the stainless steel sphere along with a neutron source, trying to make it go critical.

Fermi assigned Joan the job of being in charge of the Geiger counters, devices used to measure radiation levels, but the job made her grumpy because of its low-skill tediousness. She didn't want to be stuck in the counter room while everyone else was out doing exciting work, and thought counting rather beneath her abilities. As a result, she didn't do a very good job and came out with some unusual results. She came down into the canyon one day to find Fermi looking for what he was ready to name the “Hinton Effect.” They never found the pattern in the radiation levels and chalked it up to an error in record keeping.

Fermi was quite forgiving and quick to laugh with the young scientists. Always challenging them to think and giving them opportunities to learn, he had no snobbish-

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<sup>9</sup> The enriched uranium came from Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and the team used it to feed the reactor where the nuclear chain reactions could start or begin fission.

<sup>10</sup> Beryllium oxide is a white crystalline oxide that is now known to be extremely carcinogenic.

ness or sense of stature about him:

Fermi was amazing. He once called me up to his office in the technical area, and he said we had to write a paper. So he said “OK, the first line will be like this.” And I said, “OK” and wrote it down. Then he said, “The next sentence we’ll write this. Now you go and write the paper.”

I didn’t understand it, of course, so I couldn’t write it, but I came back with what he told me to write, and he was so nice. He went through the whole paper and said, “Let’s do this sentence this way and then let’s do this sentence this way.” It got turned in, and it had my name on it: my name first and his name second... And I had no idea what it was about. So somewhere buried at Los Alamos there’s this paper by Hinton and Fermi. When I told this story in Chicago a couple years ago [in the early 1990s] at a reunion [of Los Alamos scientists], they laughed and said it probably hasn’t been declassified yet!

Since no one really knew when the big moment when the thing went critical would come—no matter how accurate the calculations, this was a completely new, unseen, untried situation—the group drew a graph of the reactions that were taking place and each scientist took a guess and scribbled his or her name at the point where they guessed it would go. Joan put down her name early and felt quite proud of it. Even though she was on the other side of the chart as Fermi and ended up being way off, she felt good about not being like others who waited until the thing became more apparent to make themselves look better.

In the midst of all the hard work and startling new discoveries, the community of scientists found time and creative ways to play. All of the world’s resources were pretty much open to them; before they went skiing, they would go down to the shop, requisition long strips of stainless steel and edge their skis with them. Fermi often led trips up behind the mesa to the volcano and the crater that cupped water into a lake. Exploring the caves within, they found indigenous paintings of another time. They also got to know some of the Native Americans in the nearby pueblos—some of whom worked on the site—and were invited to some of their ceremonies and celebrations.

Recognizing that most of the people in the compound were eager to continue with their studies, and that continuing education would help push their work forward, the scientists set up an informal school: anyone who wanted to could offer a class, and anyone who was interested could take it. They worked away at chalkboards and took notes copiously—what they were studying would fill the next generation of textbooks.

By 1945, Joan was already considered an old timer, having come into the project fairly early. The status allowed her better housing in what they called “Bathtub Row,” a row of neat white houses facing a swimming pool that previously housed the faculty for a boys’ boarding school. Every two rooms shared a bathroom on the second floor and a living room and dining room on the first. The dresser provided wasn’t nearly big

enough to hold all her junk, so the first thing Joan did was go down to the shop and requisition some hardwood and went to work in her spare time making some cabinet doors. The cabinet itself she just dug out of the wall behind the dresser. Unfortunately, before she had the thing finished and put together, the cleaning woman moved the dresser, discovered the gaping hole, and reported her to army security. Summoned immediately for interrogation on why she was destroying army property, she tried to explain her ideas about cabinet doors and her beautification plans. Army security wasn't interested and abruptly ground her extracurricular activities to a halt.

Spring of 1945 saw the death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. When she got the news, Joan sat crying quietly until Fermi happened upon her and asked why she was so sad. She replied that she thought Roosevelt had some sense, but who knew what Truman might do?

Roosevelt didn't live to see Germany surrender and the US stand down a peg or two. Japan was on the defensive and a more relaxed air filtered its way into the compound; they weren't going to use the bomb, so the sense of urgency dissipated. Complete secrecy was no longer the status, and the scientists who had read censored letters and had no outside contact for over a year, welcomed the change. A direct result for Joan was that her mother, sister, and Bertha Sneck, the Putney School nurse and Bill's future wife, spent that summer in New Mexico. Oppenheimer had a cabin he didn't use and lent it to them. Joan rented them a car and saw them on her days off.

Around that time, the uranium finally went critical, or began reacting, and the canyon group immediately split into two: two graduate students, Hammel and Daghlian, went to make the fast reactor, and Joan went with Bob Carter to work on the high power reactor, or what they called the highpo. Schreiber, Kerst and King designed the highpo, a great big cement block, and Joan and Carter helped put it together. Their work was challenging but not dangerous like the other team's fast reactor.

The fast reactor used plutonium, which came to the site in an excited whisper. Joan went to look at it; it was about the size of a baseball and people said it was warm to the touch. This was the actual stuff that made up the bomb, and the group began experimenting with it immediately. This first accident happened when Hammel, who had the plutonium in some water, started letting the water out and the plutonium turned purple, indicating that it was beginning to react. He quickly put it down and started shouting for people to evacuate. Hammel ended up in the hospital for a while, but he survived, having lost only some of his hair and a few nerves.

When the highpo was up and running, Carter and Joan were put in charge of releasing the poisonous gases from it. They ran plastic tubing along trees until they guessed it was far enough away from the building and released the gas into the air. In those days there were few protective measures because the effects of radiation on human beings were still relatively unknown. During a physical, Los Alamos doctors did find that Joan had low white and red blood cell counts that they attributed to over-exposure to radiation, but they weren't sure.

As the date for Trinity, the first test, approached, the fast reactor group contin-

ued experimenting with the plutonium, specifically with paraffin. Made up of mostly hydrogen atoms, paraffin reflected neutrons back to their source. So they used blocks of paraffin around the plutonium to see how it reacted and called it “tickling the tiger’s tail.”

One morning, Joan drove down to the canyon site especially early and met Starner, the GI, running out of the building: “Harry’s had an accident.”

He brought Daghlian to the car and Joan drove him to the hospital. While tickling the tiger’s tail, he had accidentally dropped a piece of paraffin on the plutonium and it turned blue. His hand then brushed the top of the plutonium, and the entire ride up to the mesa he kept rubbing his hand trying to feel through the numbness. The doctors gave Joan all the coins in Harry’s pockets because she was still in charge of the counters; they wanted to get a reading on how much radiation he’d been exposed to. She took them back down the canyon and they jammed the counters. She spent a long somber stretch of time in that room until she could get the counters to finally read each coin separately.

It took Harry Daghlian a month to die. The radiation burned straight through his body, and the doctors’ efforts proved useless. Even putting him on ice didn’t affect the burning. He was the first casualty of radiation in the world.

Trinity was set for July 16, 1945, and some members of the canyon group were tasked with handling the plutonium while a group from the mesa handled the explosives. Because Joan and Carter focused mainly on the highpo, they weren’t required to be at the Alamogordo test site. Missing the test of their collective work, though, wasn’t going to happen. King, Kerst, and others drew Joan and her crew a detailed map of how to get to a little dirt mound about 25 miles from the detonation site, where they could observe from a safe distance. The weekend before Trinity, Joan paid a visit to her mother and sister, who were still vacationing up at Oppenheimer’s cabin. She was too loyal to her work to do anything more than casually mention to Jean that on the 16<sup>th</sup> she should get up very very early in the morning and that maybe she would see something.

Carter had a motorcycle and put Joan on the back, and Skeets the GI had a two-seater roadster that Hammel rode in that July afternoon, and they caravanned to the Alamogordo desert. They drove through Santa Fe and arrived at the last small town before the military base to wait until dusk. Military jeeps patrolled the perimeter, and they waited with their lights off until one passed them going in the opposite direction. They quietly went through, ditching their vehicles in the sparse scrub bushes when happened upon by other patrols.

When they got to the pile of rocks on the map, they hid the bike and the car under brush and tiptoed their way to get a good view of the south. D-time was midnight. With the whole desert before them and a long way from anyone who could hear them, Joan and her friends still spoke in whispers, their voices blending with the warm desert air. Midnight came and went. The south was inky black. Now and again they felt a few splatterings of light rain and then nothing.

The desert sky eventually cracked at its eastern horizon—the early warning signs of dawn. Then, without warning, as Joan recounted:

It was just complete light; there was no direction to it. I felt like I was at the bottom of an ocean of light. There was just light everywhere, everywhere you looked. And then gradually it was like there was a magnet sucking this light and it went “Whooo” and concentrated into this purple mass. It was like burning oil—sort of black outside and purple inside: a terrible color of poisonous purple. This mass went up and up and up, and there must’ve been heat on the top, because it evaporated the clouds and made a perfect circle of blue sky. The thing went right up until it got to bright daylight where the sun came through. The top of the column was just like cumulus clouds, with the colors of the sunrise, red and blue, and then down at the bottom it was still night with this bubbling purple stuff at the very bottom.

We were watching this, absolutely silent, and then all of a sudden, “WHAM!!” The sound of the shock wave was incredibly sharp. It came from 25 miles away, and how fast does sound go? Five miles a second? Anyway it took quite a long time before the sound got to us. The whole place shook and then it echoed back and forth. There were mountains on both sides of the valley, and it went on and on, rumbling, rumbling...

Before the sound came, we were still secret. It was still two years of secrecy, then once that sound came, boy you knew you were finished as far as secrecy was concerned!

Joan and her friends began to talk excitedly daring to raise their voices for the first time in two years. And were surprised to find that they weren’t the only inhabitants of that rocky mound. There were about a dozen other people concealed there in the night, from other groups on the mesa, each little group with its own detailed map of how to get there: “We were all so quiet, and it wasn’t even a very big mound!”

When they got back, they learned from their friend Harold Agnew why D-time had been delayed so long. Harold was in the aircraft that was supposed to fly over the site to simulate the bomb being dropped. He had a set of instruments to measure the possible effects on the plane and its pilot and passengers. But the pilot wouldn’t go anywhere near Alamogordo. He circled over Colorado at a safe distance, and when the military ordered him in, he claimed the weather was just too poor. Books written later about the Trinity test would say it was bad weather that prevented the research plane from joining the simulation, but the brief shower on the rocky mound and Harold Agnew in Colorado told a different story at the time.

The scientists knew they had created something quite terrible. But still no one had died. Harry was sick but still in the hospital. And since Japan was clearly on a path to surrender, the possibility of its use seemed small. The military, however, had a different perspective. Their fear was that they would not be able to use and see the results



of their newest weapon on human populations before the war was over. Three cities in Japan had been protected from traditional warfare just for the purpose of seeing the complete effects of the atom bomb: Hiroshima, Kokura and Nagasaki. The only reason they didn't hit Kokura was that the US army bombed so much outside the city that the smoke obscured their target. As Joan said, "the people of Hiroshima had no bombing, no saturation, no B-49's strafing them or anything; they had a normal life throughout the war and then all of a sudden they had an atom bomb dropped on them."

August 6, Joan was out with the group on a trip when Carter picked up a newspaper and found that their "Gadget" had vaporized Hiroshima. Nagasaki was three days later.

After Trinity and before they dropped the bombs, the military and top-level scientists engaged in a mighty struggle which the scientists predictably lost. Post bombing, the mesa at Los Alamos nearly exploded itself. This time, though, the scientists teetering on its long flat surface were not united in a community of common purpose. Groups were no longer divided between canyon work, explosives and theoretical nuclear physics. Instead, there were those who wanted to wrest the monster they created from the hands of the military, those who wished to see the bomb used to conquer the growing "Red Menace," and those who sidestepped the political issues at stake to continue with their study of science.

On August 23, 1945, the first notice was posted and a memo sent to all staff:

All staff members who would be interested in forming a society whose object is described below are invited to attend a meeting for this purpose on Thursday August 30th, 1945 at 7:45 PM in Theater #2:

Many people have expressed a desire to form an organization of progressive scientists which has as its primary object to see that the scientific and technological advancements for which they are responsible are used in the best interests of humanity. Most scientists on this project feel strongly their responsibility for the proper use of scientific knowledge. At present, recommendations for the future of this project and of atomic power are being made. It would be the immediate purpose of this society to examine our own views on these questions and to take suitable action. However, the future will hold more problems that scientists will feel the need of a more general organization to express their views.

We submit the above statement for your consideration. Will anyone who would like to contribute to the discussion please get in touch with one of those listed below?

R. Christy, W. Higginbottom, S. Ulam, M. Pearlman, L. Slotin, R. Sutton,  
R. Wilson, V. Viecekoff, W. Woodward.

Joan attended the meeting along with many other colleagues and that night they

formed the Association of Los Alamos Scientists to fight for civilian control of atomic energy. Of the canyon group, she was the only one who joined. Most who did not, like Fermi, steered clear of the sticky politics of it. Others were advocating the annihilation of the Soviet Union.

The newly formed association met regularly to debate the issues at hand and formulate a plan of action. To begin with, Nagle and Anderson took up the task of traveling to the Trinity site. There they mounted a snowmobile and gathered samples of the sand fused from the blast and took it back to the mesa. The name they gave it was Trinitite, and they gave Joan the job of pressing it into clear plastic molds. She made over a hundred molds in the chemistry building now turned into a site for political activity, and they mailed a keepsake to the mayor of every major US city with a note attached: “Do you want your city to look like this? Fight for civilian control of atomic energy.”

In the meantime, since the war was over, the Los Alamos community began to break up; some went back to school to study or teach and some went into research. Joan and Carter both applied to the Ph.D. program in Urbana, Illinois, hoping to follow Kerst who already taught there. The university accepted Carter and rejected Joan, probably on the basis of gender. Being left with no school and no place to go because she was a woman was an unwelcome shock—back to the reality of society off the mesa. But Sam Allison, who had headed the Met Lab and arrived in Los Alamos a few months before Trinity, was busy setting up the Institute of Nuclear Studies at the University of Chicago with Fermi. Fermi asked, “Why don’t you come with us?” Allison gave her a job and just like that she was plugged right in at the top of the field again.

In the middle of this flurry of planning her move to Chicago and political activity, Joan received a note out of the blue from a friend she hadn’t heard from in almost two years. Sid Engst gave her the news of his auction and plans to hitchhike across the country to stop in to see her. He would arrive in Los Alamos around Thanksgiving and wanted to know if it was all right. She didn’t see any reason to say no.

## Chapter 6

# Divergence

*“I wanted to go to China, and I wanted her to go—I didn’t put too much pressure on her, just a little.” Sid Engst*

*“I liked Sid a lot... but I was a physicist at the height of my field after all. I wasn’t about to go off with a farmer and be a... wife. It wasn’t my priority.” Joan Hinton*

Sid spent some time helping his mother fix up her new place in Cazenovia before he struck out across the country. With bus fare money reserved for emergencies only, he depended on hitching rides with strangers going in his general direction. Most nights he spent sleeping in railroad stations—and made it out to the Southwest in pretty good time.

Joan took a weekend off from her increasingly political work in the compound to climb nearby Truchas Peak (a 13,000 plus foot mountain in the nearby Sangre de Cristo mountain range) with him. They hitchhiked to the base of the mountain and then carried their sleeping bags, food, and packs up to the summit to spend the night. Joan, who learned early from her mother to be prepared for any and all situations, refused to let Sid make or eat any of the food they brought. What happened if they couldn’t catch a ride down through the foothills? Hungry but still game, Sid carried his share of the food back down again on Sunday afternoon until they got a lift from a passing car.

Joan went back to work while Sid poked around the area waiting for Thanksgiving the following week. The plan was to go to the Grand Canyon over the break, and Joan gathered a crew of willing participants, including Bob Carter and Skeets and his wife, to make the trip. Together they hiked down the canyon and spent the night by the Colorado River.

By the time Sid headed back East, the two had gotten to know each other. Everyone at Los Alamos had Joan pegged as a couple with Bob Carter; they worked in the same area and spent most weekends together climbing mountains or skiing down them. When Sid came calling, though, Joan found in him a person thinking about and analyzing the world the same way she had been brought up to be in her family. He interested her. But as a physicist at the top of her field, studying groundbreaking ideas with the likes of Fermi and Kerst, becoming a farmer’s wife was hard to imagine. But then, becoming anybody’s wife did not really fit into the image she had of herself at the time. She didn’t doubt that some day she would get married and raise a family—but surrounded in almost every aspect of her life by male colleagues with whom she seemed to be popular, she wasn’t worried about lack of candidates, and she had too many other and in her opinion, more interesting things to think about. The way she summarized Sid’s visit in her head, was that she had a very nice time with him, they became closer friends, said goodbye, after which she went back to work.

On his way back, Sid decided to have a look around the Deep South. He'd been once to Virginia to visit one of his sisters, but that was the extent of his exposure. By the time he ended up on the east coast ready to head north to Washington DC, the South had left two distinct impressions. The first was the intensity of the segregation that still saturated the southern states—the discrimination that Black southerners faced and the poverty in which they lived was unlike anything he'd ever witnessed. New York's rural farming communities held small-scale ignorance in comparison.

The second was the depth of the religious roots. His rides drove past billboards that read ominously: "Prepare for the Judgment" and "What will you say to God?" Sid, told to write Methodist Episcopalian in the blank next to "religion" on school forms, did not grow up in a religious environment. One of his sisters became a believer early on, but when she went looking for her siblings to take to church on Sundays, they invariably disappeared into the woods, leaving her shouting, "You're going to burn in hell!" on the doorstep. Mother Engst's strongest persuasion was: "Well Sid, you'll never learn anything bad in church."

In DC, he looked up Jean Hinton and stayed with her and her husband Bill Green. China was still on Sid's mind, and when Jean found out he was thinking of trying to find a way to go, she told him there were job openings with UNRRA—the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. UNRRA was the US government agency set up after WWII to "rehabilitate" the countries the US devastated in war. Through her connections Jean found that they were looking for dairy specialists to send with the Holsteins they planned to ship to China and Eastern Europe. To Sid, the job seemed like a dream. Not only would he be pulling down a good salary working with dairy cows, but he could also ride their black and white backs to China. When the job ended, he would have money in his pocket and be in a good position to try to finally satisfy his curiosity about the communist-held "Liberated Areas." He applied without hesitation, his application accompanied by recommendation letters from some bigger farmers he knew. He went home to his mother's to wait for word.

The day after Christmas that December at the end of 1945, Sid invited himself to the Hinton's place in Vermont, hitching a ride up to the school on the hill. Joan was on vacation leave from Los Alamos and eager to take Sid riding.

While I was there, Joan said, "We gotta go horseback riding." She had a nice horse... He was fat as a pig and his sides went up nice and round. Bill's horse was Clyde, and he went up like a razorback. So Joan said, "Oh let's ride bareback. I don't like saddles." And I said, "Oh, hmmm, oh yeah I love bareback too." Well, we went out and Clyde would neither gallop nor walk. He just trotted along, bung, bung, bung, and I thought, "Jesus, my legs are going to be three inches longer when I get through with this trip!" My butt was getting sorer and sorer and she'd say, "Isn't this fun?" And I'd say, "Yep, yep, this sure is fun!"

The two stayed up late talking, but the most Sid ever did was put his arm around her—

even that he didn't do in public.

When Sid made it back to Cazenovia, he received notice that he got the UNRRA job. The job in China, however, did not come through as planned; originally the agency was hot to get him there, but after he was hired, the situation changed and his position stalled. So instead of south China, they sent him to wait in the Baltimore stockyards, where the livestock was concentrated before they shipped it to various corners of the world. He spent an impatient month there waiting for word among the cows and veterinarians. When the waiting became intolerable, Sid went down to DC to pester the UNRRA bureaucrats and have a nice visit with Jean.

One weekend while Sid was in town, Joan showed up. She was in DC as part of the Association of Los Alamos Scientists' direct lobby for civilian control of atomic energy. When she returned from Christmas vacation in January 1946, she found that the scientists were realizing that they could not affect change in Washington:

Oppenheimer was not doing what we had hoped he would do. He supported the report that the Commission of Atomic Energy had written that allotted civilian control. But General Groves was on the commission and the report included the military. Oppenheimer was a tremendous leader; he got all the scientists together at Los Alamos to work together in solving these problems of science, and we all sort of assumed that he was going to lead us in the moral part of it too. He did care about it, but he was under too much pressure from the US government, and he was too afraid of his future. The result was he allowed the bomb to be dropped and in the end they hounded him to death anyway.

The commission infuriated the scientists, and soon they descended en masse on Washington to turn up the pressure. Included were members from different sites all over the country: New Mexico, Tennessee, Illinois, Washington... Even the head of the Chicago lab, Leo Szilárd, the physicist who co-authored Einstein's letter to Roosevelt urging him to develop atomic weaponry, joined the group in DC. He had foreseen the direction of the situation even before the US bombed Japan, and he and his group were among the most vehement and outspoken in opposition.

So Joan stayed with her sister and fought alongside her colleagues. The struggle was humbling at times; once when she tried to get past a secretary to see a congressman, the woman behind the desk asked sweetly, "Oh, are you here on a school project?"

She also did her best to pull Fermi into the fray, writing him a letter trying to goad him into action. His response came in a short note:

Dear Joan,

Thank you for your letter and your attempt to keep my political conscience on the job. There are several points in your letter in which I am not in agreement. In fact there are so many that I think I had better wait until you come to Chicago before making an attempt to answer them. Hope to see you soon.

Yours, Enrico Fermi

She stayed in Washington until Congress passed the Atomic Energy Act of 1946, (also known as the McMahon Act), which the scientists saw as a great and final victory. The act excluded the military from any control of atomic energy, and the US government soon declassified much of the work done during the war. According to Joan: “It looked like we were going to have a big nice happy new world.” A new spirit of internationalism seemed to bud; the US, which had come close to inviting the Soviets to Trinity was ready to ask them to participate in the new International Control of Atomic Energy. Just that March, though, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill arrived in Fulton, Missouri to accept an honorary degree at Westminster College. With his speech about the Iron Curtain he initiated the Cold War, cleaving the world—and the nation of Korea—into two camps, with the US and England pitted against the “communist menace” of the USSR and the newly emerging threat of the People’s Republic of China. The Iron Curtain clanged shut, and so began the rise of Senator Joe McCarthy’s career.<sup>11</sup>

When Sid met up with Joan in DC, he proposed the idea that she go along with him to China to see for herself what they only heard second hand or through distorted news reports. While she was anxious to know just how it was that the red guerilla army was defeating US backed troops, she had a position waiting for her in Chicago alongside Allison, Anderson and Fermi. Although shaken by the way her interest in a field of science had helped vaporize hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians, the apparent victory against more atom bombs restored her confidence. Her family too, encouraged her to go on to get her doctorate—China could wait.

By that time, there was another kind of proposal linked with a little talk of marriage, to which they were both amenable. They shook hands on an informal agreement to wait a couple years. But Joan’s understanding as she left for Chicago was that they would “wait three years and see.” Sid’s as he headed back to dreary Baltimore was “wait three years and get married.”

The last time Sid took off for DC to give UNRRA another nudge, they told him that the China job was still uncertain, but would he like to go to Yugoslavia instead? Yugoslavia didn’t have nearly as much appeal as China and the Liberated Areas but was infinitely more attractive than the Baltimore stockyards. He asked for some time to consider it, and they gave him two days. Sid didn’t have long to think; the next morning he got a call from DC directing his immediate return to Washington. The China job came through and it was his for the taking. Two weeks of basic Chinese language class and various government briefings later, he boarded an army propeller plane and

<sup>11</sup> Joseph McCarthy was an elected US senator between 1946-1955, coming to prominence by fear mongering about the communist threat in the US. His opportunistic attacks against individuals led to a witch-hunt of progressives and Leftists as well as gays and lesbians in the US, propagating a widespread climate of fear and terror. Many who were accused of being communists or sympathizers were put on blacklists, unable to get employment, and some who were accused of being traitors, faced sedition trials, which culminated in the 1953 execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, accused of being Soviet spies. The term McCarthyism came to refer to this climate in general terms, not just the actions of Joe McCarthy.

shipped out for Shanghai.

## Chapter 7

# The Institute

*“I was just a baby physicist, but I learned to listen to concepts... Fermi didn’t want anything but concepts and understanding... His idea was that the world is real and it’s out there for us to understand.” Joan Hinton*

Right after Joan arrived back in Chicago, the phone rang—it was Los Alamos calling to ask if she remembered what the radiation count on Harry Daghlian’s coins had been. There had been another accident, this time with Louis Slotin. Slotin, part of the fast reactor group in the canyon, stayed on after the war to do research. He too was “tickling the tiger’s tail,” demonstrating the plutonium’s reactions to a group of onlookers, when the screwdriver he held to control the tamper slipped. The tamper hit the plutonium, the thing went purple, and Slotin grabbed it with his bare hand to save the other people in the room. He died in a week. His was the second canyon casualty but ranked in the hundreds of thousands after Daghlian and most of the civilian populations in the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The job Allison gave Joan at the Institute of Nuclear Studies was as his assistant on the Cockroft Walton accelerator, a huge machine like “those kinds of machines that you see in the movies that are all great big balls and then connecting things, two stories high.” She had her picture taken on the ground in front of the machine and later sent it to Sid, but it disappeared somewhere between Chicago and Shanghai.

Allison, who knew that doctoral candidates wanted most to have time to study, took it easy on Joan. So she dove headfirst into her classes, trying furiously to catch up on the many basic math and science courses she lacked. She studied hard, and what she lacked in creativity in tackling concepts or theory, she made up for in dogged memorization of equations and pursuit of formulas.

That first year, while Joan took her elementary courses, Fermi held a small evening discussion group as a sort of extension of the Los Alamos community they’d been a part of. Joan, who had the same two-speed German bike that she brought back from one of her Experiment in International Living trips, rode to the university on those evenings. Fermi’s house was on the way, so she always pedaled first to his house where she waited on the porch for him to open the door, too shy to ring the bell. In those sessions, young “baby physicists” as Fermi called them, like Joan sat in front of the same chalkboard as giants like Owen Chamberlain, and Edward Teller. Leona Marshall (one of the two main physicists in charge of making the plutonium in Washington) and Frank Yang also attended regularly.

In the evening study groups, they discussed anything in physics of interest to any of them; as a result, Joan began to grasp some advanced concepts. Fermi, a consummate teacher, brought practical understanding to the most complex ideas. He ruthlessly cut out a lot of the complicated details that weren’t necessary and made physics real. In those days, most scientists used slide rules to measure and calculate. Fermi



loved the slide rule because it showed the figures only as accurate as the margin of error allowed—all the other decimal places got cut off. Through being around Fermi, and scientists like Chamberlain and Yang, Joan learned that “only people who really know what they’re talking about can say things simply enough so that laymen can understand.”

Oftentimes, Fermi took his little group out into the Chicago marshes on weekend walks and camp-outs. They observed and analyzed the natural world around them, much in the style of Carmelita Hinton. (Once they found a nest of eggs and took them to the Institute. Joan kept them by the giant Cockroft Walton machine where they hatched into happy salamanders until one escaped, causing all scientists in the area to scurry around on hands and knees hunting for it.) One day, crossing railroad tracks, Fermi spun around at Joan and shot out, “What’s the coefficient of the expansion of iron?” While Joan stammered, calculating furiously in her head, Fermi went on: “You just have to estimate it. You see the tracks there, and you can see how much gap they leave for the iron to expand when it gets hot...” He came up with a figure and told her that if she went home and checked the books (she did) it would be pretty close (it was).

On one overnight trip, Fermi told Joan about how his brother, close in age and in heart, died when he was young. Facing spiraling depression, he turned to books and read his way into theoretical physics. When he was twelve, he figured out the equation of a spinning top just by thinking about why a spinning top doesn’t fall. Through his life experience he came to believe that people could solve problems and understand concepts just by thinking about them.

Frank Yang (Yang Zhenning in Chinese), a Chinese national newly immigrated, chose to settle in Chicago specifically to study with Fermi. He first appeared to Joan in her quantum mechanics class. Quiet and unobtrusive, the class nonetheless recognized immediately that his theoretical understanding shot way ahead of theirs. But one of the reasons why Yang admired Fermi was that Fermi used his head and his hands. He sat atop both the theoretical and experimental fields of nuclear physics. While Yang could nearly go toe to toe with Fermi in theory, his background was that of elite intellectuals in China, where the separation between any kind of mental and manual labor spanned several socio-economic classes. So he set his sights on experimental physics. The result was that Yang joined Joan and Allison on the Cockroft Walton machine to learn how to use his hands. The first time he met him, Allison called Frank Yang the “Yellow Devil,” and it stuck—until the whole scientific community at the Institute called him the Yellow Devil.

The Cockroft Walton machine, like the cyclotron, accelerated atoms for the purpose of bombardment. Instead of going around in a circle, though, the machine produced a 4000 volt spark inside a dome at the top to set the protons zipping to the bottom and sent the atoms to the other end. Joan stood one day on the tiny wooden platform erected near the top of the machine, her hand resting on the round cover while Yang finished his work with an electrical problem. Quite unexpectedly, his tweaking sent all 4000 volts flying up to the cover where it burned a hole and sent a

mighty shock through Joan's body. People often get electrocuted because the electricity coursing through the body causes the muscles to contract, increasing the grip on the thing that's killing them. So Joan threw herself backwards onto the little wooden rail on the platform to break the contact. She survived with a scar that lasted a lifetime on the back of her third finger, and the shakes, which lasted the rest of the day. Nearly three decades later, when Joan met up with Yang in China and showed him her scar, he had no memory of even one of the 4000 volts he sent through her at the top of the Cockroft Walton machine.

Yang never did become much of an experimentalist. His theoretical understanding so leapfrogged others that after reading a paper he'd written, Teller told him if he formalized it he would give him his Ph.D.

The next semester, Joan took her second quantum mechanics class, this time from Teller. Teller, the father of the hydrogen bomb, was later a main target of progressive scientists opposed to the expansion of nuclear weaponry. He became known for his vehement advocacy for their use on the Soviet Union before it could develop its own technology in defense. With the creeping saturation of McCarthyism in the 1950s, he became more extreme. For the time being, for Joan, at least, he was a tough teacher who did not care much for how much his students memorized. He wanted to see that they knew how to use their brains, and in that, Joan did not feel very confident.

In that class, another Chinese student named Lee Tsungdao arrived on the scene. Younger than Frank Yang and his opposite—he was an experimental physicist—he came to the US already burrowed deeply into most advanced physics. He had, however, taken no general college courses and had to suffer through his other academic requirements while taking quantum mechanics.

One day, Teller chalked a problem on the board and began explaining it to the class. Lee Tsungdao raised his hand midway through and politely disagreed with Teller's explanation. Teller took a long minute to consider and decided Lee was right. The class went on, but Joan's head stuck to the problem. She went back to her micro-office carved out around the guts and organs of the giant Cockroft Walton machine to try to visualize it the way Lee described but found she just couldn't. Finally, she drew the conclusion that Teller had been right after all and made a trip to his office to show him. The next class, Teller corrected the problem again.

Because Allison gave her a job for her first year at the Institute, Joan's status was an assistantship which meant her work took care of her tuition. But with her second year looming around the corner, she applied for a fellowship position, a status given only to ten out of over a hundred applicants. To get a shot at the position, she had to get A's in all her classes. When finals rolled around and she sat down in her quantum mechanics class to tackle Teller's questions, her heart sank. Of the three complex problems, she could only answer one.

Thinking her chances at the fellowship and her run at the Institute were finished, she retreated to her cubicle teary eyed. Fermi who ducked his head in, noticed her tears and asked her about it: "I could only answer one out of the three questions on the

exam and I'm going to flunk out of school." But Teller ended up giving her an A in the course, and Joan liked to think the A reflected her work on the problem Lee Tsungdao got mixed up on, rather than the unlikely chance that Fermi put in a kind word or two about her to Teller.

Her A's intact, the Institute awarded her a fellowship the next fall, 1947.

In the meantime, the Japanese surrender in World War II and Japan's failure to conquer China kicked the wobbly legs from under the pact between the Chinese Communists and Nationalists; with the threat of imperialist conquest gone, the internal fight for control of the country inevitably resumed.<sup>12</sup> Civil war broke out in June 1946—with the Communists relying on the peasantry and the Guomindang relying on coerced troops wielding US arms. Sid, according to well-traveled letters from the front, was running for his life in North Shaanxi, China.

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<sup>12</sup> The Communists and the Nationalists signed a pact to fight the Japanese and not each other in 1937, after two of Chiang Kai-shek's top generals forced him into the agreement in the famous Xian Incident during which they kidnapped and held their general captive. As patriots and nationalists, Generals Zhang and Yang saw that if Chiang continued to fight the Communists at the expense of defending China against the mounting Japanese invasion, China would be lost. So in December 1936, they kidnapped Chiang and forced him to meet and negotiate a united front with Zhou Enlai, the communist representative.

## Chapter 8

# Relief and Rehabilitation

*‘I’d seen poverty in the US, but poverty in the US and poverty in China are two completely different things.’ Sid Engst*

After a brief stopover to refuel on American territories in the Pacific, Sid’s plane landed in Shanghai in March 1946. A whole other world unfolded before him as he got off the plane: poverty and destitution such as he’d never imagined. In those first few days in Shanghai, Sid got early indications that perhaps he knew less than he assumed. Witness to women selling their children to delay starvation, pimps on the street peddling young virgins, and dead bodies beginning to rot in the gutters, Sid stood sheepishly at the scene holding a bag of cheap clothes he brought with him from home to “help the poor.”

Newly arrived UNRRA personnel stayed at the Great Eastern Hotel in Shanghai—two to a room. Sid’s first roommate was a Brit who wished him “goodnight old chap” every night before bed. The upstate New York dairy farmer was a long way from Gooseville Corners. He became friends with an electrical engineer straight out of the US army from Japan, and the two of them took regular walks down to the docks at night to watch the “coolies” work<sup>13</sup>. Two Chinese men, small in stature, gaunt to the ribs, and dressed in rags swung three bags of grain between them from dock to boat. Sid and his friend, two brawny, well-fed Americans accustomed to manual labor, jumped down to the dock once to see how heavy their load was and barely managed to pick it up off the ground. Sid, who could not imagine why when toiling under such grueling labor the coolies sang among themselves and only came to realize much later that their song kept them in sync with each other, coordinating each step to prevent accidents and wasted energy.

Sid was ready to get to work, but there was no sign of any cows. Awaiting their arrival, he spent time contacting some of the Lefties working in the area including Gerry Tannenbaum, Madame Sun Yat-sen’s American born secretary. Gerry knew Bill Hinton from when they worked in the Office of War Information together. So when Sid left for China, he carried with him in his pocket a letter of introduction to Gerry from Bill. When Mao Zedong arrived in Chongqing for peace talks, Gerry and Bill had managed to schedule an interview with him. Bill, eager to question the communist leader about the situation in China and in the Liberated Areas (geographical areas liberated and governed by the Communists), found himself instead struggling to answer Mao’s endless questions about the situation in the US.

Gerry worked with Madame Sun (Song Qingling in Chinese), in the China Welfare Fund, an organization that, among other things, tried to get medical supplies into the Liberated Areas. Song Qingling came from a wealthy family whose patriarch,

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<sup>13</sup> The English word “coolie” comes from the Chinese words “*kuli*,” or bitter strength.

Song Yaoju, a Methodist minister and businessman, was sympathetic to the nationalist movement. Of his three daughters, Song Ailing married a wealthy Shanxi banker, Song Meiling married Chiang Kai-shek, the man who seized power of the nationalist government in a coup that resulted in the murder of hundreds of communists, and Song Qingling married Sun Yat-sen, the father of modern China (or father of the nation), as he came to be called. The saying in China goes that of the three Song sisters, one loved money, one loved power and one loved China. But Song Qingling did not need her husband, who died early in 1925, to know that the Guomindang government he founded and Chiang Kai-shek took over was corrupt to the core. She threw her weight and prestige as the Madame, as many called her, to aid the efforts of the Communists, who she believed were struggling for the principles that she had shared with her husband.

Very few progressive forces existed within UNRRA itself, which was staffed mainly by people with what could be chalked up to as charitable feelings for the Chinese people. One exception was a New Zealander, an open Marxist named Paulie, who came regularly to talk politics with Sid. They sat on the roof of the fancy hotel where he stayed, and Paulie described the progressive struggle in New Zealand. But mostly Sid kept his political ideas and his desire to go to the Liberated Area under wraps.

UNRRA's mission was mainly sending relief supplies into war-stricken areas. While they had their share of technical and medical experts to aid in the rehabilitation part of their purported purpose, most of their resources went to the relief side, trying to save some of the thousands of Chinese starving to death as a result of massive drought and systemic government corruption. A bad year for crops did not bring humanitarian aid from the nationalist government, though. Instead, government officials made a killing on the grain scarcity by extorting it for the black market. Chiang Kai-shek knew too that the peasantry was feeding his communist enemies, and so encouraged his underlings to take from the poor to line their own coffers.

Still no cows. Aside from touring the few existing dairies in Shanghai, the only black and white Sid saw was the stark difference between the destitute and the filthy rich. So when UNRRA began organizing what he called the “nth” famine investigation group to go to Changsha in Hunan Province, Sid asked for an assignment on it. After a little wrangling, he secured the agricultural representative position and prepared to “investigate” the situation in the countryside and the UNRRA relief camps set up for starving peasants.

The group of about eight UNRRA personnel launched off the Yangtze River (Changjiang) on naval ships called LST's (Land Ship Tank), the bow of which opened up to admit jeeps and trucks into its cavernous belly. When they reached Wuhan, they drove the jeeps off of the carrier and onto a small coal driven steamer bound for Changsha.

It was hot as hell in southern China at that time, especially on a boat that burned coal as its fuel. So one evening, after the boat dropped anchor for the night, Sid slid into his trunks and splashed satisfyingly into the cool water. Pretty pleased with him-

self, he stretched out on his back with his hands behind his head and floated lazily about. When he thought it about time to head back for the night, he opened his eyes—what he saw scared the summer heat clear out of him. The boat was not where it was supposed to be—it was a distant blob way upstream from where he was.

Sid panicked. He swam as fast as he could, but for all his thrashing about, he could just barely keep up with the current. His frantic efforts, though, caught the attention of a fisherman in his small craft, who paddled over to him and gave him a hand up. Sid didn't know too much Chinese, but the main reason why he didn't say anything to the fisherman was his red face. And the fact that he didn't even look back at him or give a wave of thanks as he climbed back aboard the steamer ate at him for the next four decades.

The UNRRA group hit land with their jeeps, sleeping bags, tents and generous food stores and started inland from the river. The group split into two jeeps and two different cliques. Those in Sid's jeep: a Canadian they called Emperor McConkey, a British doctor Fisher, and an American doctor, Heisinger, became friends pitted against the crew in the other jeep. The leader of the investigation group was quite a terror wielding her authority, insisting on driving at a ferocious pace. Sid's group refused to follow but caught her verbal wrath every time they met up again, which was resolved only when Sid refused to fix any more blown out tires.

Driving through villages meant driving through the swarms of beggars that they housed:

It was terrible because you couldn't give them anything. If you did, you'd just get swamped. A whole lot of them would come right at you at the road crossing and all we could do was drive right through. Some places starving kids would concentrate around the ferries where we went across the rivers. And what could you do? These kids were obviously starving, but you just had to block off your hearts and just drive right through.

When they finally arrived at the UNRRA relief camps, what they found was far more horrifying. There, under great balloons of white tents that UNRRA erected, masses of people lay dying. Peasants desperate enough to leave their land staggered half dead into the camps, hands outstretched. What the UNRRA workers put in them was a little bowl half-full of raw flour and no means to cook it. When they died among the swarming flies in the suffocating southern heat, they often did so still futilely clutching that bowl of flour. Sid's group estimated that over 200 dead bodies were hauled out every day.

Demanding answers from the local magistrates elicited one of two responses: "I told those people what was going on and they're so inefficient, they can't do anything!" and "I'm so glad you told me about the situation. I had no idea, and now I'll get someone on it right away."

Sid found that for all his experience and academic learning, he knew as pitifully little about the situation in the Chinese countryside as he did about how to get the

local government to do something about the famine all around them:

You could see the corruption, you could see the inefficiency—what had to be done was very obvious. But aside from that, what did we know? We didn't know anything and there had been about three teams before us. I remember... when we were out walking along on a field trip looking at the crops there were what looked like morning glories growing on the ground. They asked what it was, and someone said sweet potatoes. I said, "Oh no they're not sweet potatoes." Of course they were, and here I was the agricultural representative on the trip.

I knew nothing about the crops that they were using in that part of China at the time, but I still had to write the report about it. Of course... I didn't necessarily think that I was that incapable of writing that report either. I was 27 when I came and... coming from the great West, having been to college, a fairly successful dairy farmer, white Anglo Saxon origin, and male and young—though I wouldn't put it in those words, I sort of thought that I was doing China a favor by coming. Thinking back on the thing, Jesus, I didn't know very much about it at all. There were a few things you could tell though: there was a drought, and by talking with the local people, you could tell already it was going to be a bad crop year again.

The group stayed in Hunan for about a month before heading back to write up their reports—which got put on the pile on top of the last set of reports that said about the same things: the famine was very serious in Changsha, the government officials extremely corrupt, and the camp administrators blindly inept. People were dying by the truckload, not because there wasn't enough grain, but because supplies were siphoned off and stockpiled for profit.

Not too long after he handed in his work, Sid got hit with amoebic dysentery and spent twenty days in the hospital getting his insides cleaned out. He shed a few pounds, but left the hospital well and was told by his Liberated Area contact that he'd better think about leaving soon. That June civil war had broken out, and while "peace talks" were still going on, it looked more likely that peace would break out only when one side defeated the other.<sup>14</sup>

Sid resigned his post at UNRRA. Because the cows never showed, he wasn't obligated under his contract, and they released him without too much hassle. While he made arrangements with his contacts to go to Beijing and from there Yanan, the

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<sup>14</sup> The rumor around the talks was that Zhou Enlai always got the best of his American and Guomintang counterparts. One story concerned General George Marshall (for the US), Song Ziwen (for the Guomintang and Madame Sun's brother) and Zhou Enlai; they spent a day negotiating, after which Marshall held a news conference with the western press. The next morning, the first issue Zhou Enlai raised was that Marshall distorted to the media what they'd agreed on the day before. They argued and soon Marshall protested, "Oh, Zhou, you're a pretty smart guy, but at least you have to admit that my English is better than yours." To which Zhou shot back, "Yes, your English is a lot better than mine, and if I can tell that you distorted it, then you can see it too."

capital of the communist-held territories, he put in some time at CLARA, the China Liberated Areas Relief Administration. CLARA was trying to ensure that the Liberated Areas got a share of whatever international relief supplies arrived in China. Unless they put up a struggle to divert a portion, the supplies flowed in an easy current to the Guomindang controlled areas. Since Sid knew a little about UNRRA's internal workings and had a vague idea of what kind of supplies they actually possessed, he passed along what information he could.

As soon as he got word from his contact, Sid flew to Beijing to await the next leg of his trip. There, he stayed with Bob Burton, a progressive American doctor, who battled the Guomindang to get medical supplies into the Liberated Areas. While he waited, he scribbled a letter to Joan telling her of his plans and the possible lag between this and his next letter. And of course he urged her to get herself to China as soon as she could get on the next boat, both because he missed her like crazy and also because civil war was going to make entry into the Red Areas increasingly difficult.

As the peace talks broke down, the US began to call back its truce teams, set up under the pretense of neutral negotiation whenever skirmishes broke out. At that time, three US military men were still in Yanan, and when the US sent the plane in to get them, they carried an extra passenger with them. Huang Hua, who would later become the foreign minister of the People's Republic arranged for Sid's seat on that flight. The peaceful two-hour flight in the army plane took him southwest to North Shaanxi Province, where the landscape changed to parched yellow-brown earth, clumped together to form little hills with flat tops that looked to Sid like rows and rows of haystacks. The valleys below were the paths of rain-dropped rivers carved out of mud, crusty edges torn into angular planes.

So, in October 1946, less than eight months since he arrived as a United Nations dairy specialist in Shanghai, Sid stepped off the plane into liberated Yanan. Finally, he would have a chance to see for himself whether the Chinese Communists were as glowing as their reputations.



**Section 2**  
**Transition**

## Chapter 9

# Yanan

*“There were poor, but it was poor with dignity and no extremes... The soldiers and the cadres and the people were just all there together.” Sid Engst*

The difference knocked him over. Sid could see how poor the Yanan area was—yet there was no poverty per se. Children did not run the streets begging, no pimps sold women into prostitution. And while everyone’s clothes showed threads and were faded to a distant relative of blue, every person was cleanly and neatly dressed. Gone were the outstretched hands of desperate starvation and gone were the trashy government officials in their luxury sedans tearing a path through them. In their place: men, women, children—dressed and on appearance fed and treated with respect regardless of gender, age, or rank. Such were Sid’s first impressions of Yanan when he stepped off the plane.

In addition to the two US army colonels and their much-abused lackey, a few other foreign faces could be seen around Yanan. Sid stayed at the foreign guesthouse where he slept and ate his meals with the US military men and Anna Louise Strong, an American reporter.<sup>15</sup> Another American, and another Sid, Rittenberg, was also in town at the time. After dinner his first day, Sid set out on a walk to take in his new surroundings:

There literally wasn’t a whole brick in the whole place. The Japanese had bombed it because the communist headquarters was there. So they set up their new little shops in the gullies on the side of the road, although it wasn’t much of a road.

An interpreter caught up with him and helped him take a look around the rebuilt market area.

The second day, when the interpreter intercepted him on another stroll, the young man said politely, “If you go out you should call us, because there’s a certain amount of danger. Also, do you have a letter of introduction with you?” Cheeks flushed, Sid realized he hadn’t made his intentions or background clear; while his hosts knew he showed up on arrangement through friendly contacts, they had no idea who he was or what exactly he was doing there. He stumbled over himself to assure the interpreter that he had two letters vouching for him, and that he would try not to venture out on his own again.

A couple days later, Yang Shangkun (future president of the People’s Republic) appeared in his room. In charge of keeping track of and figuring out what to do with

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<sup>15</sup> Anna Louise Strong was an American author and journalist, who was engaged in the labor movement in the US before traveling to the Soviet Union and China. As a journalist, she became involved in the events around the Everett massacre in Everett Washington 1916, when the Everett Mill owners hired thugs to keep the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) out of town. In her life she wrote many books about the USSR and the Chinese revolution. During her stay in Yanan, she conducted an interview with Mao Zedong when he famously described US imperialism as a “paper tiger.”

all the foreigners in Yanan, he examined Sid's letters and asked what he'd like to do and what kind of skills he had. As the agricultural representative on UNRRA's famine investigation, Sid found out that in spite of his Cornell Ag education, he didn't know all that much about agriculture in China. But still, it was what he knew most, and he could at least hold his own if there were any dairy cows around. He asked to stay and do whatever work he could, so Yang assigned him to the Guanghua Nongchang (Bright China Farm) in the city outskirts.

The total of Bright China's land made up about ten acres, with a little flat land planted in crops and plenty of hillside land that was not. Thirty head of cattle tried to squeeze out a little milk every day, and Sid, for the first time since he sold off his herd in the US, happily got his hands back on teats and feet back in shit. There too, he met and made a friend in Liu Deying, a young kid just out of junior high and newly assigned to the state farm with five others.<sup>16</sup> Precocious with a wicked sense of humor, Liu Deying's job was keeping track of Sid. He knew only a couple of English words, and Sid's Chinese vocabulary could get him through hellos, goodbyes and to the bathroom, but not much further. But in spite of their age difference and being fluent in radically different languages, somehow they managed to communicate and got to be close friends.

Liu Deying, in addition to being completely fearless in making jokes and friends with his charge, turned out to be a mechanical genius.<sup>17</sup> When Sid's watch stopped working, Liu Deying, fresh from the back hills of North Shaanxi, who had never seen a watch before, took the whole thing apart, figured out the mechanics of how it worked and put it back together again so it ran.

That December, the Bright China Farm got word that the government in the Liberated Areas decided to set up a livestock farm to improve the local livestock in the province's very northern region. The farm leadership wanted four of them to travel north through Shaanxi Province to find a suitable site near the Inner Mongolian border. Sid, an English-speaking college graduate from the Northwest Agricultural University named Kang Di, and two others got the assignment.

Just as they were getting ready to head out, an alarm sounded of Guomintang general Hu Zongnan's possible attack of the area.<sup>18</sup> Because the Bright China Farm was the main research site in the region, they had to evacuate all the equipment it housed. The equipment wasn't much, but it was all they had at the time. They found a hiding place for it and sent the very young, the very old, a pregnant woman, and Sid with Liu Deying out to the remote countryside for safety. With not much else to do with their

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<sup>16</sup> A lot of youth, especially from the countryside, inspired by the Red Army and the just war they waged with the corrupt Guomintang and the Japanese invaders, left home to join their ranks. They came to be called "xiaoqi" or little devils, and they ran around looking after the finer details of daily existence, like lighting cooking fires and delivering messages.

<sup>17</sup> Feudal society with its rigid hierarchical structures made joking with or even speaking first to elders taboo. In the Liberated Areas, and later after winning the revolution, the communists sought to break down those oppressive customs that were meant to moralize and justify the social order.

<sup>18</sup> Hu Zongnan was a top Guomintang general, a graduate of the Whampoa Military Academy, where he was one of Chiang Kai-shek's favorite students.

time, Sid taught Liu Deying some English and went on long walks with him. Near that time, a revolutionary by the name of Yang Zao died a martyr in the cause, and Liu Deying suggested Sid take it as his Chinese name, in remembrance of a fallen hero. In less than a month the leadership decided the alarm was false and called them back.

Plans to leave for the survey trip north resumed and soon the four set off on a weeklong walk, accompanied by a donkey cart hauling a few supplies. After walking all day, they looked for small inns to spend the night. Inns were actually peasant homes with an extra *kang*—a long sleeping platform built out of mud and warmed by a fire that smoldered below.<sup>19</sup> The first night, Sid climbed happily atop the toasty bed, and slept soundly. In the morning he woke with the massive bellyache that people unaccustomed to the slow bake effect of the *kang* often came down with. He was “running at both ends,” but the donkey cart and its driver wouldn’t wait, and he spent the next day taking some side trips off the beaten path.

The countryside they walked through was “liberated,” meaning the Communists controlled the area militarily and set up its own system of government based on the principle of land to the tillers. Rural areas liberated from exploitative landlords through land reform proved to be the backbone, legs, and soul of the Red Army. Long oppressed by rich landowners, paying exorbitant taxes while trying to eke out a meager existence, peasants believed with their hearts what they saw with their eyes; the Communists were giving their lives in a fight for their interests—the interests of the poorest and most oppressed. Support grew exponentially in the form of new enlistees and whatever food and supplies they could spare.

On the way up, Sid’s group spent one night at a local activist’s house. While he supported the Communists in actions and the new ideology they promoted outside the home, inside, each night, he was ruthless in tightening the bindings on his daughter’s feet.<sup>20</sup> Kang Di took him aside to try to dissuade him, explaining that though the Communists had no law against it, they discouraged the feudal practice that had evolved to keep women subservient. In the end the peasant could only say, “I agree that they shouldn’t be bound, but in our area, if they aren’t bound she’ll never get a husband.” Liberation then, spoke only to the beginning of class liberation. Other forms would have to wait until the victory of the Civil War, which would ensure that his daughter’s would be the last generation to totter painfully on rotting stumps of folded flesh and bone.

When they arrived in the border area, they found a “working group” already in place trying to improve the agricultural conditions. Overall, the ethnic makeup of China was some 90% Han, with over 50 other ethnicities making up the other 10%. But because of its close proximity to the Inner Mongolian Border, Han and Mongolian

<sup>19</sup> A *kang* is a traditional sleeping platform used in colder climates in China, where the cooking fire is built underneath to heat the platform above.

<sup>20</sup> Foot-binding in China was a feudal custom the practice of which involved wrapping young girls’ feet with bandages tighter and tighter until the bones folded under and the flesh often began to rot. The smaller the foot, the more beautiful. The practice confined women to the home, too crippled to escape abuse or the feudal hierarchy.

ethnicities mixed about half and half in that area. They welcomed the group from the Bright China Farm enthusiastically, eager to progress in their work to ease the lives of the people in the area who relied on their livestock for their livelihood.

Sid and his group spent two weeks there surveying the land and assessing the local conditions before retracing their steps south again to Yanan. A week's travel up, two weeks there, and a week back meant February greeted them at the Bright China Farm, along with hard, reliable news of Hu Zongnan's imminent attack on Yanan. It signaled the beginning of Chiang Kai-shek's Northwest Campaign against the Communists.<sup>21</sup> Sid fell with his friends to the urgent task of preparing for the evacuation of the entire city, including the small herd of Holstein cows at the Bright China Farm.

On March 19, 1947, when Hu Zongnan and his forces arrived, they found the slopy loess hills of Yanan emptied of any semblance of a communist presence.<sup>22</sup> The Central Committee had abandoned its former stronghold without reservation; its guerrilla tactics were not to engage in long drawn out battles over specific cities it held. Outnumbered and outgunned, they used the countryside where they had overwhelming support to "surround" the cities. The Guomindang could not possibly occupy every city in addition to hunting for them in the mountains and valleys of China's vast countryside. If Hu Zongnan wanted Yanan, he could have it. If they stayed their course, the Red Army would have it back soon enough.

The Central Committee divided into two sections. Liu Shaoqi and Zhu De headed up one group, and they went east across the Yellow River to Hebei Province to continue with agricultural reform and engage in production. Mao, Zhou, and Ren Bishi headed up the main group and stayed in North Shaanxi where Mao directed the war over the whole of China.

By then, only four Americans remained in Yanan: Sid, Anna Louise Strong, Sid Rittenberg and George Haitem, an American doctor. All four requested permission to evacuate with the units in which they worked, and Zhou Enlai (future Premier of the People's Republic) sat down with them to discuss the situation. He gave permission to three, but asked Anna Louise to return to the "white" areas, the areas held by the Guomindang, in order to use her skills as a journalist to carry accurate news from the front to countries overseas. Anna Louise bucked. She desperately wanted to evacuate with her organization and certainly wasn't happy about returning to the corruption and brutality of the Guomindang cities. But in the end she came around and got past her own desires, knowing how much the Communists needed a progressive journalist to combat the rabid anti-communist propaganda blowing hot in the West. She left Yanan that night.

Yanan's young and old melted back into their own villages. As for Sid's unit, the

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<sup>21</sup> The Civil War was characterized by a series of military campaigns by the Guomindang, all designed to try to extinguish the communists, led usually by different commanders who convinced Chiang Kai-shek of the efficacy of their strategies.

<sup>22</sup> Loess soil is silt-like in texture with fine particles that carry in the wind like dust and has the characteristic of standing in steep vertical slopes.

Bright China Farm, three or four of the most able slipped out to join the guerilla ranks. The rest, less than twenty in total, were charged with keeping the thirty head of milk cows and one big work bull (who was also named Yang Zao, more out of brute strength than out of temperament) out of the way of the advancing enemy. One couple, whose home was too far off in far southern China to return, stayed too, and their young child traveled perched on the bull's back, strapped high atop the food and supplies, swaying delicately with each step.

At about two in the morning a few days later, Sid's group quietly left Yanan, muffled footsteps and hoof beats breaking the night's stillness. They traveled up Gaochao Valley past a small village called Date Garden and spent the following day in a little gully. From there they watched Guomintang planes begin the obliteration of Yanan.

The next night, the farm moved to a small village of a handful of families called Miao Dianzi. There, they found an empty building into which they drove the cows with a few empty rooms where they slept. During daylight hours, Sid took walks up around the hills to survey the land and see what he could see. On one such excursion, accompanied by Zhang Genye, another college grad from the Northwest Agricultural University, a Guomintang plane looped over the horizon, gunning for the small nail factory not too far from their little hilltop. The bombs they let fly with extraordinary inaccuracy "sewed stitches" across the valley. Zhang Genye watched in disbelief as Sid climbed a tree to get a better look, yelling, "This is a hell of a place to be!" over his shoulder as he ran for cover.

A few nights into their stay in the village, an alarm sounded: the Guomintang were on their way, and they had to be quick if they hoped to escape capture. Mass chaos erupted as they beat a hasty retreat into the mountains, only to find out it was a false alarm. Back at Miao Dianzi, the group engaged earnestly in two days of meetings about how they handled the evacuation. With equipment and supplies left behind, the sloppy departure rattled everyone in their group. After figuring out what happened and why, they organized the ranks to prepare for the next alarm and assigned specific tasks to each individual. Loss of property, so precious to the cause, ranked a close second to the loss of life. Next time they would do better.

Soon, Bright China Farm members located a spot in the mountains with a pasture for the cows and some virgin land to plant grain located about 50 *li* away.<sup>23</sup> Sid explained:

The fundamental problem of resistance is food—grain, even more fundamental than rifles. Rifles you can get from the enemy, and you can only get food from the people. If you're a People's Army, you can't take it from the people, so you have to have your own grain. So the idea was to get our stalwarts up there and *kai huang*, as they call it, open up virgin land...

Since tending to the cows did not require all of their hands, in April, Sid and three others decided to experiment with strip cropping for soil conservation on the

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<sup>23</sup> A Chinese *li* is approximately half a kilometer or a third of a mile.

hilly terrain. That part of North Shaanxi had very little flatland, and the peasants had a hard time scratching out a living. The land on the hills was arable, but intense erosion thwarted any real planting. So the four drew up a proposal and sent it off to the Department of Reconstruction, about 200 *li* away. Distance and time was different then; 200 *li* “only” amounted to a few days’ walk there and back.

The department approved of their plan and they got to work, thinking they would “peacefully wait out the war” that way. Yang Zao, the bull, ploughed the soil, and they used their two donkeys to haul manure by the basket from a flock of sheep owned by a peasant nearby. The crops they chose to plant in strips—alfalfa grass, green feed, and millet—were perennial crops known to hold soil.

Not too far along in their work, Sid got hit with bloody dysentery. Everything he ate or drank took the express lane through him, and when he tried to get up and walk, he blacked out for an entire day. He regained consciousness but spent two weeks seriously ill. The beginning of his recovery was met with word that they should move out and rejoin the rest of their Bright China friends who were still in the mountains with the cows and then evacuate the area; the Guomintang army was on the move and headed in their direction.

Abandoning their strip cropping experiment, the four made it back to the group where Sid hung out and took it easy, trying to gain back some of the strength the dysentery chased out of him. Lying around sunning himself on the hillside occupied a couple days until one day a friend came tearing up, yelling about the Guomintang being ten *li* away. Stopping briefly to gather up the grain they’d hidden, they took off in the opposite direction at a run—and ran for about six months:

[T]hose six months were filled with more activity than I had in twenty-some years of my life before then. In the summer of 1947 Jiang Jieshi [Chiang Kai-shek] started two big campaigns against the Red Areas—against the communist armies. One was in Shandong. And the other was in Shaanxi, Yanan, because the Central Committee was there, and they wanted to wipe them out.

While Sid and his comrades’ main task was keeping the cows and themselves out of the enemy’s way—not directing the Revolutionary War—they were in the same area that the Central Committee was reported to be. And the Guomintang probably wouldn’t let them go if they were captured, just because they weren’t the Central Committee. No one kept very well track of the date, but Sid figured in the entire month of June the group stayed in one place for two nights only twice.

Life on the run meant constant preparedness for flight, very little to eat and fitful, restless sleep. After that first chaotic false alarm, packing up and heading out turned into a well-organized coordination of movement; each person had their own clearly defined task. The cows had to leave first: “The cows weren’t afraid of the Guomintang” and so slowed down the pace of the retreat. Those in charge of them had only to roll up their bedding and get them moving. Sid and Zhang Genye got the job of picking up

the odds and ends left behind at the very end and packing them on donkeys.

After a stretch of harrowing nights of constantly being on the move, the farm camped out early one morning in a courtyard of an evacuated village. Trying to catch a rest proved futile. Soon the clattering hooves of their mounted scout set off the alarm: “Quickly, quickly! The Guomintang are coming—they’re only ten li down the valley!” They all leaped to action, and when they were nearly packed, Sid ran out to the front to see a line of soldiers marching relentlessly up the valley. Sid returned to his tasks with a rush of adrenaline. By that time, only the odds and ends crew, the two donkeys and the Farm Director—who climbed the village wall to check the enemy’s progress—were left.

The others had already made it down the hill, across the river and out of sight. But when Sid and the others got behind the two donkeys laden with supplies, they stubbornly ignored frantic efforts to make them run. Then, just as one donkey hit the water, it suddenly felt the whip and started running wildly upstream, dumping its packs into the river. Zhang Genye grabbed the donkey while Sid dove for the packs and the two managed to throw them over its back and get it across.

It turned out that particular file of soldiers was actually their own guerillas, but the Farm Director came back with the news that the Guomintang had in fact crossed the Luo River about ten *li* away.<sup>24</sup> Aside from being a very close call, the donkey in the river incident was something that people remembered about him for the rest of Sid’s life. Although he had been with the Bright China Farm for a few months during some hard times, Sid was still really an unknown entity; he just showed up in Yanan with two letters of introduction and no real reason for being there except to see and work in the Liberated Areas for a while. A US citizen with many roads out of difficult situations that others couldn’t access, his persistence in trying to save the equipment and supplies rather than just his own skin made a lasting impression on his comrades. He passed a test that morning without knowing it.

Which was not to say that he didn’t still have a lot to learn. When two members in the group began arguing about who should be assigned a task, each had his own reasons why it was not his job, and time passed quickly while they continued to debate. The Farm Director was not there to decide that day, and finally Sid cut in and suggested they flip a coin: “Oh boy did I ever get criticized for that! ‘You don’t decide what’s correct and what’s incorrect by tossing a coin!’”

By June the Guomintang’s strategy became clear; they thought the Central Committee was somewhere in the Luo River Valley, and they set out to encircle the area and extinguish them and the fires they lit throughout rural China. The farm found itself in that same Luo River Valley in June and spent 30 days trying to break through the Guomintang encirclement, moving at least once sometimes twice a day and grabbing a bite whenever they could.

Always in a hurry, one day they had to send the herd over a high bridge, and one of the cows slipped off the side and dropped to her death. They butchered her on the spot and had just set up a cauldron to boil the big chunks of meat when their

<sup>24</sup> The Luo River is a tributary of the Yellow River dividing Shaanxi and Henan Provinces.



scouts returned saying they should hustle out of there. The meat was only half boiled, but there was no time to do anything but pack it up and take it with them. The fruits of the short time in pasture that the herd enjoyed had been made into butter, which the group carried with them in pails. So as they ran from the Guomindang, they took fistfuls of rare beef and dipped it in butter for their meals. Sid, the old farmer from Gooseville Corners, found that particular menu delicious—but some of his friends were not so pleased—especially the vegetarian in the group.<sup>25</sup> With no time to stop and boil their usual pot of millet, the unfortunate guy doubled his distance traveled with all the running he did off the side of the road.

Caught in the same Guomindang encirclement were several other small groups that ran into each other once in a while. Among them was the Yanan University group. The head of the university, who Sid met in Yanan before the evacuation, was old and sick, riding a mule. A former teacher from Xian, the Guomindang seized and shot him for openly criticizing the nationalist government. Left for dead but found by his students and patched up by a sympathetic doctor, they smuggled him through the countryside traveling by night until they reached Yanan. The farm merged with the Yanan University group until they decided they would be harder to spot in smaller bands.

With the routes to the northeast and southwest cut off at either end of the Luo River Valley by the Guomindang, and with Ma Hunkui's (a Muslim military commander who recruited soldiers through mutual hatred of Han Chinese) army blocking the way west, Sid and his group's best shot was to try to break out of the encirclement by crossing the river to the east. Yan Xishan, a savvy old warlord, did occupy the east, but after being manipulated and played by the Guomindang, he was not aggressively pursuing the Communists. Lying low by day, the Bright China group drove the weary cows north, up the mountains and down the gullies that ran into the Luo River by night, scouting for a place unoccupied by enemy soldiers at the riverbank to cross. When they hit the bottom of a gully, their scouts rode silently to the mouth to see if the Guomindang soldiers were in the valley. For several nights they found there were, and headed up the next mountain and down to the next gully, until finally, the news seemed good; the peasants down by the river said they were clear. They didn't know, though, how far away the nearest soldiers were, so the group had to move quickly.

The Luo River was only about two feet deep—the spring floods were long past and the current calm enough to walk across. At 3:00 in the morning, a file of dark figures, some on four legs, with those upright trying to keep splashing to a minimum made their way across the water. They kept walking a day east before they dared relax. They broke through the Guomindang encirclement, and as near as Sid could figure, they did it on the fourth of July.

As soon as they stopped looking behind them, the farm group sent someone to the Border Region Government in the village of Suide for instructions.<sup>26</sup> He came

<sup>25</sup> A usual Chinese diet was high in grain content, and most people (excluding the wealthy) did not eat meat regularly. The meat they did eat was usually pork (except in some ethnic minority areas) and well cooked.

<sup>26</sup> The border region encompassed the area where three different provinces—Shaanxi, Gansu and Ningxia—met

back with instructions for Sid, Zhang Genye, and another Bright China comrade, Bai Renshen, to report to the government, and the three set off immediately on the four-day walk eastward.

Sid and his friends had to travel to Suide following a specific course through the mountains. With Guomindang and guerilla forces scattered throughout, their path had to be plotted carefully. Their instructions were always that they should be at a certain place at a certain time, and only after they got there would they get instructions for the next leg:

The first day we walked all day until it was dark, probably about eight or nine at night. We were going along on a path on the top of a mountain and all of a sudden we broke over a little ridge where we could see down into a valley. There was a peasant village in that valley that was lit up; we saw all these lights shining out of the paper windows on the caves... The lights the peasants used were very little things and usually they didn't use them because the oil was too costly. So we knew there was an organization of some kind or another there.

We went along... and then all of a sudden from the side a voice came: "Se ma ren?!" [Who's there?!] Really sharp. We saw the soldier and brought out our pass. The soldier took us into a little house where we registered and got new passes to go on. They made arrangements for us to stay the night and gave us millet, and the next morning we went on.

At the time, anybody of any importance was using false names... so we didn't know what organization it was that was staying there. You didn't ask questions in that kind of situation, but we guessed it was a section of the Central Committee. ...Here it was right in the middle of the war, with all these Guomindang troops dashing around trying to find an organization of the Central Committee or the government. And here it was in this little valley, this peasant village.

No wonder the peasants didn't believe the Guomindang's rumors that Mao had fled to the Soviet Union or died on the battlefield.

After a day's rest at the Border Region Government, Sid, Zhang and Bai got their new assignment from the Department of Reconstruction. Their instructions were to proceed to a village about a day's walk from Suide to a farm where the Bright China Farm had done some work. That farm was about two days' walk from Yulin, one of the bigger cities in North Shaanxi held by the Guomindang. Reports were that the Red Army was preparing to do battle for the city, and if they took it, the Guomindang would retreat to the air and "bomb the hell out of it." Sid, Zhang and Bai were being sent to the area to evacuate the agricultural supplies and equipment out of the city if that was the case.

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along the Inner Mongolian border, and a provisional government was set up to govern the Liberated Areas.

The People's Liberation Army did try to take Yulin, but didn't succeed.<sup>27</sup> The communist general, Peng Dehuai led the attack in what some said was a disaster and others a clever feint, designed to draw the Guomindang's northeast armies to Yulin while the Communists took some big battles further south in the province.

While they were waiting near Yulin, still in the dark about whether the attack was on or not, Sid and his friends got an urgent message to go east across the Yellow River into Shanxi Province. Apparently the Border Region Government had already packed up and left Suide, so the three of them hurried. They spent the night in a village by the river; it was high—a thrashing current made brown by the fine silt the water tore up along the way. Early in the morning, they made the crossing on a raft, tied at one end, poled across and then pulled back from a long way down shore. They penetrated a little deeper into Shanxi Province before stopping for a rest and awaited new orders.

They didn't know why they had to hustle at the time, but the Guomindang was chasing the People's Liberation Army (PLA) through the area west of the Yellow River. What the Guomindang didn't know was that the army they were chasing was not beating a hasty retreat, trying to escape with their bedraggled forces across the Yellow River. The older machinery and livestock that they left behind, the half-cooked food and supplies haphazardly strewn about strategically whet the Guomindang's appetite. Finally, they would have a major victory over the elusive guerilla soldiers. They pursued the PLA straight to the riverbank and found out belatedly that they ran right into a trap, were easily surrounded, and completely decimated. Their reinforcements that charged in to help them were swallowed in the same way, and within a matter of days, the PLA wiped out both the Guomindang and Hu Zongnan's main forces.

Safely across the Yellow River with most of the other communist organizations, Sid and his two friends were out of work. The cows were elsewhere, and the areas where they were trying to do agricultural work were in the enemy encirclement. So Sid took some time off in September to visit George Haitem, the American doctor who had also evacuated Yanan, who was working at a nearby hospital.

George was an American citizen who was originally from and studied medicine in Syria. Then, before settling into his medical career, he decided to go see the world and ended up in Shanghai in 1935. He linked up with some of the more progressive forces there, including Madame Sun and her China Welfare Fund. Through the institute, communist leaders in the Liberated Areas requested that they send two people from the West: an honest reporter and a doctor. The reporter they chose was Edgar Snow and the doctor George Haitem. While Snow's book has—at Haitem's request—no mention of the doctor, he shared Snow's entire journey into the Liberated Areas and was present at the interviews Snow had with Mao. After Snow gathered all his material

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<sup>27</sup> The People's Liberation Army was the new name for the communist-led forces after the return to civil war after the Japanese defeat. During the period of the united front with the Nationalists, the Red Army was renamed the New Fourth Route Army and the Eighth Route Army. Both wings were technically under the military command of the Guomindang as was negotiated in the united front, but in reality they were under the direction of the communist military general, Zhu De.

for *Red Star Over China*, he left the Liberated Areas and China. Haitem stayed on. One of his first jobs in the autumn of 1935 was to ensure the grain for the Red Army made it along the Long March route.<sup>28</sup>

When Sid went to see him, Haitem was practicing medicine and so checked Sid over. He found him to be generally in good shape, but ravenous. Haitem had a much higher quality diet than Sid had during those six months on the run (he was also still trying to make up for the bloody dysentery at the beginning of the evacuation) and for the three or four days he was there, it was hand to food to mouth. George laughed dishing out additional servings: “Jesus Engst, now I know why your mother brought you up on a farm!”

After he returned to the Department of Reconstruction, Sid met up Kang Di, the English-speaking college graduate who studied plant pathology. Tired of sitting on his hands, he proposed that they take a trip to all the areas the department had done agricultural work. They could assess the work and pick up on some techniques that people were using. That way when they finally got reassigned, they could build on what was already out there. The government approved their plan to go north through the countryside, making a wide berth around the Guomintang held cities.

Carrying their food and supplies on a couple of donkeys, they set off on foot (“You could ride them but they were about as big as we were—but tough as hell.”). Their route took them to the northern tip of Shanxi province to the Great Wall and across into northern Hebei Province. There, they stopped in a small village where the Central Committee’s second leading group of Liu Shaoqi and Zhu De were holed up having a big meeting. A couple hundred guerilla soldiers stood guard—all pretty nervous about Sid’s presence. Kang Di, though, was high enough in the ranks that he could get some of the information from the meeting, so they stayed in the village for about a week.

The second leading group was in charge of directing land reform in the Liberated Areas, and Sid later guessed that at that meeting, they were determining the “line” or theoretical direction of practical work that cadres were to carry out. And as Kang Di and Sid walked through Hebei, they saw some of the line in action, described later as an “ultra-Left deviation” that was in opposition to Mao’s line of rehabilitation and making landlords work for their own livelihood:<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> In 1934 the Communists suffered major defeats in efforts advocated by the USSR to try to take Guomintang-held cities—and were on the brink of being wiped out. At the end of the year, they initiated a wholesale retreat to Jiangxi Province in the west, losing half of the 87,000 soldiers they began with. At the beginning of 1935, the forces that remained linked up with Mao, who had opposed the policy to take cities in traditional warfare, and made him the effective leader of the CCP. To escape complete extermination by the Guomintang, who had almost completely encircled the beleaguered communists, Mao initiated the Long March, leading them on unpredictable routes through snowy mountains and treacherous marshes to Shaanxi, where they established their new base in Yanan. By the time they escaped the encirclement and reached Yanan, a little over a year had passed and only 10,000 people remained to join with the other communist forces in the area.

<sup>29</sup> In a Marxist context an ultra-Left or ultra-Leftism refers to an ideological line, strategy, tactic or action that is either divorced from the reality of, or opportunistically exploits, the reactionary aspects of ordinary people’s consciousness. It is often described as “Left in form, Right in essence.”

Liu [Shaoqi] and Deng [Xiaoping] and their section had an ultra-Left line of attacking the middle peasants and giving no land to the rich peasants.<sup>30</sup> When we came through Hebei, we ran into places where they were carrying out land reform, and... they were quite often beating up the landlords and taking all their land away and so on. ...[W]hen the landlords wouldn't tell where their wealth was, they were roped around the legs and pulled down the hill for a little while: "This is to help you remember where it is."

Policy... was that... if a landlord... had blood on his hands, and if it was demanded by the people, then he could be shot. But there was no physical punishment. But a lot of the local cadres, did use physical punishment, especially with landlords who had exploited them for quite a while.

Among the ordinary people, there was a terrific feeling of elation and liberation and support for the new government, but there also tended to be that ultra-Left line among them... It's understandable, but... a lot of people who would've been shot if left up to the ordinary people, were not shot, and later on, quite a few of them did some pretty good work.

While they stayed in the village, Sid and Kang Di heard that several foreigners were working in a Liberated Area further south in the province. Sid, who through erratic correspondence from the US knew that Bill Hinton was in China again, guessed it might be him. The two foreigners he found with Bill were Isabel and David Crook, and the three of them were working on posting English language news bulletins from the Liberated Areas.<sup>31</sup>

Both eager to get back to work in agriculture, Bill and Sid asked the local government for permission to work on agricultural tool improvement at the Northwest Agricultural University. The two old friends had a lot of fun together, inventing new tools and arguing over design, much as they'd argued over politics in their Ithaca apartment. They produced several tools including a seeder, all of which though not perfect would save time and labor. The unanticipated problem, though, was that the Chinese peasants had a lot of hands and were shy of land. With Land Reform in the Liberated Areas, each family received a plot according to how many mouths there were to feed, and the ratio was very high; a family of five would have maybe a little less than one acre. Collective farming, where several families pooled their land together into a larger plot that could use machinery was still further down along the road. For the most part, Chinese peasants would still be out in the fields with their hoes for several years to

<sup>30</sup> Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping were communist leaders during the Civil and Liberation Wars. After Liberation, they became the main party leaders proponents of developing China through capitalism rather than socialism.

<sup>31</sup> David Crook was a British internationalist who had fought in the Spanish Civil War as part of the International Brigades to fight fascism. Later recruited to spy for the Soviet Union, he was sent to China to keep watch and inform on Trotskyites. Isabel was a daughter of Canadian missionaries and cultural anthropologist. After they married, they went to China in 1945 and eventually into the Liberated Areas. Both became teachers and stayed on in China, raised three children and participated in building a new society.

come, and the two American farmers who came from opposite conditions (plentiful land and not enough labor) in the US didn't make much that actually got used.

After a few weeks, Sid rejoined Kang Di and backtracked to the Yellow River. This time, though, they followed the relief grain route. In some areas of Shaanxi, because of first the Japanese onslaught and preferred method of slash and burn, and then the Guomindang's crop destruction to starve out the Communists, peasants were going hungry. The Communists set up a route from Hebei Province to transport grain, station to station into the hardest pressed areas. Each station was set apart as far as a person carrying a 100 *jīn* sack of grain could carry. By the time it reached Shaanxi, of the 100 *jīn* of grain, only 60 would remain—the other forty had to be eaten to get it there.<sup>32</sup>

For Sid, who had seen the Guomindang's famine "relief" in Hunan Province, witnessing the level of relentless organization and efficacy in staving off famine of the grain route left a deep impression. Hundreds of people died a day in Changsha while bags of flour sat in warehouses, and here peasants carried grain on their backs across two provinces and prevented almost all starvation.

Sid and Kang Di re-crossed the Yellow River and headed to a village near Suide where the Border Region Government set up shop again. They were met by Lin Beiqu, an old cadre who was the head of the government, who had been a friend and collaborator of Sun Yat-Sen's.<sup>33</sup> Apparently they all had their doubts about whether Sid would come back and were pleased to see him.

Reunited with his old friends Liu Deying and Zhang Genye, they were all assigned to work in an iron factory about a couple days' walk away in Wayaobao (Tile Cave Town). Their task was to improve local farm tools. The peasants who lived there made up only three or four families, but twenty or so cadres sent from the Border Region Government worked there producing iron by melting down scrap in a giant blast furnace. The entire factory consisted of the furnace and a small row of caves. A small coal mine nearby provided the little bit of fuel the factory needed to subsist.

Living conditions were rough. With grain being carried in on people's backs, everyone except Sid was on grain rations; they were afraid that physically he would not

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<sup>32</sup> A *jīn* is a "Chinese pound" or "catty." Before China switched to the metric system in the 1980s, a *jīn* was approximately 600 grams or one English pound.

<sup>33</sup> In the Chinese context, a cadre, which is the closest English translation for *ganbu*, was a revolutionary who devoted his/her life to the revolution and later to building socialism; someone who strove to provide leadership, not only in the logistical sense, but also in terms of setting an example of putting public interests before self. William Hinton, in his book *Fanshen*, explained the word in these terms:

"The Chinese word for cadre is *ganbu*, which means 'backbone personnel.' It has no satisfactory English equivalent, even though it is commonly translated by the French word 'cadre.' Since 'cadre,' as ordinarily used in English, means a group of trained persons, it is not exactly suitable for referring to the individual members of such a group. Yet the Chinese word is used both for the group and for the individual.

In this book the word 'cadre' is used to designate any person who plays a full or part-time leading role in any area of political activity whether it be the government, the Communist Party, or the Peasants' Association. It is also used to describe technical personnel in industry, agriculture, education, etc., who are employed by the government."

be able to handle the scant portions.

Sid had just settled in for a week or two when the iron factory got word that the Guomintang army in Yulin was going to try to make a break for it to Yanan. One possible route they might take was right through Wayaobao, so the group got ready to evacuate. The Guomintang took a more westerly route, however, and met their demise on the road to Yanan. The army in Yanan, the only Guomintang army left in North Shaanxi, tried unsuccessfully to bolt south. After their defeat, North Shaanxi stood as an entire province—liberated. One year, one month and one week after its inception, the Communists knifed Chiang Kai-shek's Northwest Campaign and Hu Zongnan's occupation of North Shaanxi in the throat and bled the Yellow River and the region west of it red.

The evacuation of Yanan and the wholesale defeat of the US-backed, mechanized Guomintang army by millet eating, rifle bearing guerilla soldiers was the beginning of a long and thorough education for Sid. US born, Cornell College attendee, if not graduate, and successful dairy farmer, it taught him what he had suspected for some time: that he didn't know nearly as much as he thought he did. And that the people he'd been with, from illiterate peasants to adolescent revolutionaries and seasoned cadres, knew "a hell of a lot more" than he did. Those six months of dodging the Guomintang gave him increasing clarity about why the Communists enjoyed such overwhelming support among the people and even among enemy soldiers. Captured soldiers were not treated as enemies—they were fed, given medical treatment and presented with a choice: accept a train fare home or a place in the Red Army. Most in the Guomintang ranks were from the countryside or urban poor and had been forced into service by tyrannical officials. Most chose to stay.

It had been a year since we'd evacuated Yanan. And I would say that the main changing in my thinking in this year was that I became much more humble... I was brought up in the US, the most modern country in the world and... there's a little Western or at least American chauvinism that goes with that, especially when in going to a third world country. I had that, plus I went right to the very backward place that I went. I did realize that, as far as fighting the Japanese was concerned, these people were super. But I still thought that just by thinking about it, I could give most of the answers to the questions that anybody wanted to ask. And in this year that I went through the Liberation War, I spent about six months of that year, from March to September, just running around in the hills and keeping out of the way of the Guomintang... trying to keep those cows alive... But in the process of going through this, and seeing what these people, who had nothing but millet and rifles, were able to accomplish, made me much more humble... And I realized that it wasn't just a question of respecting these people, but really really learning from them.

What you learn in a situation like that is that it's not just education that

makes people intelligent. Obviously you gotta learn and study, but as Mao said, “All knowledge, directly or indirectly comes through practice.” I had this chance to go through the Liberation War in the Northwest and a chance to see firsthand, for six months, what it meant to have people’s war; what it meant to have the people on your side... Though I could have answered those questions correctly on a quiz beforehand, this is when it really got into my bones. The reason that Marxists, true Marxists are invulnerable when they have correct leadership, is precisely that: relying on the ordinary people. As I say that was a terrific lesson.

Sid wrote passionate letters to Joan, though the opportunities to send them out were few and far between, pouring out the details of what he learned and experienced. He urged her with growing conviction to leave her atom bomb littered studies to come and see for herself the new society that the Communists were building on the very ground that the decaying Guomintang government lay rotting. In addition to missing her, he was sure that just as he had, she would find what she saw in the Liberated Areas, interesting and inspiring.

Joan similarly wrote to Sid about the current passion in her life: black holes, supernovas, and all the wonders of modern science that opened up to her. Sid was pleased as always to hear from her and extra happy to get a letter several sheets of paper long while on the run from the Guomintang. Joan, was dismayed to hear of the fate of one carefully penned correspondence about black holes: “You took that beautiful letter and wiped your ass with it!” Wiping with dirt clods in North Shaanxi took some getting used to, and those highly theoretical letters proved to also have some practical applications.



## Chapter 10

# Pushing Off

*“The whole field of nuclear physics just looked like it was going down a bottomless black pit.” Joan Hinton*

Because Joan had a fellowship her second year in Chicago, she vaulted out of the Cockroft Walton machine cubicle into a regular office on the third floor. The office she shared was with Harold Agnew—the same Harold Agnew who was in the plane registering and recording the decimation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Because she spent her first year doggedly finishing her coursework, her second year Joan dedicated to preparing for her preliminary exams, which she and her third-floor colleagues scheduled to take for their doctorates the following fall of 1948.

While Joan was still fascinated with her studies and riding the crest of the most innovative aspects of the field, she couldn't help but feel the political atmosphere bearing down on her:

I could see that the field... was getting tighter and tighter and more and more secret. Even the first year, we couldn't get any deuterium, heavy water, for our Cockroft Walton experiments. Allison wanted to get just a little bit to use as the “bullets” in the machine and couldn't get any. But the next year when I was in an office with Agnew, right across the hall was a room stacked full of boxes full of heavy water. It was all going to the Argonne.<sup>34</sup> It was right in the same building and we couldn't get one drop for ordinary experiments. So this made me think, “Well boy, it's not like we thought it was gonna be.”

I [began to see] that what happened at Los Alamos was very specific to a certain period of history, and it was disappearing very fast. At Los Alamos, all these top scientists were working together in what they thought was pure scientific discovery to fight against fascism. And then after the war ended... everybody was jealous of everybody else and everybody had to write papers and have their name on it... [A]ll around me I could see this thing escalating. [W]ith nuclear physics, it wasn't like you were doing botany and could climb a mountain and find a new plant or something. In physics the machines get bigger and bigger, and you're caught into this thing... You couldn't possibly decide what experiment you were going to do, because you were part of this whole machine that depended on funding.

I was still at the top of the field, but I could see the ship sinking. You had

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<sup>34</sup> Argonne (named after the surrounding forest) was established as the first national laboratory for nuclear physics in 1946, and although atomic energy at that time was supposed to be under civilian control, it was known as the government's nuclear physics lab for military experiments.

to get money from somewhere and the people who gave the money, gave it for a purpose. Certainly nobody gives money for research unless there's a purpose. I remember coming back from lunch one day with [Robert] Christy, and he told me my fellowship money actually came from the Navy. I said, "What the hell's the Navy got to do with me?" I had never thought of that at all.

The illusion of civilian control that Joan and her colleagues worked so hard for came crashing down around her. Simultaneously, her sister Jean continued to fill her in on what was going on in the world, and her family spent their time together discussing happenings in the Soviet Union and China. She took her ideas about politics to Chicago and found herself constantly embroiled in arguments with Fermi and Anderson. Fermi, so intolerant of any disconnect between scientific theory and the reality of the physical world, argued that politicians would do best running the world if completely isolated on a mountaintop. Anderson informed her that it was quite reasonable to have progressive or Leftist ideas in college when she was young, but that she would grow out of it.

One innocent conversation with another student who was an open communist earned Joan a warning from Agnew that she'd better not be seen in public with him. Joan was at once furious and surprised:

I said, "What the hell? What are we afraid of anyway? Ideas? People can't have ideas?" Not if you have a fellowship from the Navy. It was getting so... you had to be ready to do what the Army and Navy wanted you to do—even though there was supposedly civilian control.

Letters from Sid helped foment Joan's growing disenchantment. The stories he told from the Liberated Areas added color and texture to what she heard from her sister and her brother who eventually left for revolutionary China too. Her desire to see what was going on in China for herself, coupled with her growing clarity about the direction of nuclear studies, finally pushed her to a critical decision. The increased pitch of civil war was beginning to close the window of opportunity to travel to China. Certain that she wasn't going to spend the rest of her life "building bigger and better bombs for the US government," she finally made her decision: she would go to China while she was still able to get in, and leave the door open to return to her studies if she didn't like what she saw.

On the advice of her brother, she wrote Gerry Tannenbaum, Madame Sun's secretary. He happened to pass through Chicago soon after, and Joan sent a letter with him to the Madame, whose reply from the China Welfare Fund was to wait; the Civil War was intensifying and the situation was too precarious for her to come. Undaunted, Joan began to write various Chinese universities to apply for a position as a physics teacher. The China Welfare Fund, seeing her determination, relented and sent her a letter of hire.

With that letter in hand, Joan immediately applied for a passport as a student

of the University of Chicago with a letter of hire in Shanghai. When she came to the blank that asked “purpose of visit,” however, she faced a difficult dilemma. She knew she certainly could not write “to go see what the Chinese revolution is all about,” and she also knew what would be the most believable rationale: love and marriage. So, pride in check and gritting her teeth, Joan grudgingly filled in that she was going to reunite with her fiancé and tie the knot. While in those days predating computer records, and the passport agency in Washington had no record of her classified work for the military in the Los Alamos, Joan almost made a crucial mistake. When she went to Washington to apply, she gave her papers to her mother’s old Bryn Mawr classmate who worked in the office. If she knew about Joan’s work history and the potential “security risk” her trip to China might pose, she never let on, and Joan got her passport.

After making a speedy reservation on the General Gordon, a boat docked in San Francisco bound for Shanghai, she called Bill’s girlfriend Bertha in a hurry. Bertha, who was also planning her trip to meet up with Bill, told her that she would make it if she could but to go on ahead if she didn’t show up.

One of the first people in Illinois that she told about her decision was Frank Yang, who taught her the first phrase she ever learned of Chinese: “This is a pen.” She cried a little when she told him she was going, because although she was already making the arrangements to leave, she still felt torn. Her doctoral exams and the Ph.D. she’d worked so hard for awaited her in that fall, but by then China would surely be closed to her. So she stuck with her decision and rode her bike to Urbana, where Bob Carter was studying at the University of Illinois, to say goodbye.

Fermi, Allison, and even the fanatically anti-communist Teller who wanted to preemptively nuke the Soviet Union, all knew where Joan was headed. But they never breathed a word to anyone:

...[W]ith just one word they could have stopped me. But there was this idea that people should be free to think what they want, even if they didn’t agree with it... Allison actually had the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] come to his house about me... and he said, “It’s none of your goddamn business.”

Instead, they got together the small community of physicists to throw her a farewell party and presented her with a camera to document her travels.

Joan had the 500 dollars she figured she needed to go to China but owed her dentist about that much for the mouthful of gold inlays he put in her. Thinking that she might eventually come back to the US and need that 500 dollars, she put her 500 in the bank, told her dentist she’d pay him when she got back and borrowed another 500 from Sid through his mother. March arrived with Joan in San Francisco where she spent the night at another friend of her mother’s. Her last night in the US she spent at a Los Alamos physicist’s house, the Italian Emilio Segré, who showed her around his lab where he ran his own cyclotron, the machine that had so captured her imagination and launched her into her physics career.

The next morning Joan boarded the General Gordon, a huge passenger steamer, and stood at the rail searching for Bertha among the streams of passengers making their way up to the ship. Finally the ship blew its last horn and pushed off from the bar with no sign of her. Joan was on her own.

## Chapter 11

# China Welfare

*“I told her no. I said I’d never worn lipstick and my mother never wore lipstick and I was against it [so] I wasn’t going to start then.” Joan Hinton*

Passage was 18 days, with a brief stopover in Hawaii and a longer one in Japan. Joan, who knew about three phrases of Chinese from Frank Yang, tried to socialize with the Chinese passengers. She asked the servers in the dining hall not to seat her with the other Americans who spoke English among themselves, and they paired her up with a middle-aged Chinese man. While she did learn how to ask for cold boiled water, she found him quite dull and was not too disappointed when he got seasick and left her on her own. Also on board were three Chinese students returning home after studying abroad. One was a physics student who Joan bowled over by deriving Fermi’s statistics from an equation. He was so impressed he told his university about her once he got home, which prompted an invitation for her to teach there.

The rest of the time Joan spent alone usually at the rail, watching the sea in all its hues and shapes change from day-to-day. She also took up the task of learning Chinese characters on her own—ten a day meant that by the end of her journey she would know 180 by the time the boat arrived in Shanghai.

When the steamer docked in Yokohama, Japan, the passengers disembarked and were bused to Tokyo for the night. Yokohama was Joan’s first exposure to Asia, and the conditions shocked her. The dockworkers who unloaded the boat there stood in sharp contrast to their counterparts, the unionized Longshoremen, who were at the pinnacle of their united strength in San Francisco. What the Longshoremen lifted with machines, the Japanese workers carried on their backs often covered in rags if anything at all. The countryside on the road from Yokohama to Tokyo was completely flattened to rubble. Bombed out Tokyo unfolded in front of Joan’s eyes, in a blur of US military police motorcycles. After a tour of the emperor’s palace and a night slept in a fancy hotel, the group re-embarked and pushed off for China.

As for the men who unloaded the boat in Shanghai, “...if they could’ve been any worse off than those in Japan then they certainly were.” Terribly thin workers hefted the ship’s contents onto their bony shoulders while scavengers ran the docks in search of wisps of cotton or cloth to use or sell.

Anna Wang of the China Welfare Fund met Joan after she got through customs and took her in a pedicab (a three-wheeled cycle with a carriage in the back for passengers) to her home. Anna lived in a two-story house in front of which beggars slept with their children often out in the rain. People who could afford it sometimes rented out the two foot space created by a false ceiling at the top of many second story ceilings in the area for the night, just to get out of the weather.

Once settled, Joan took Chinese lessons from a young student who came to the house once or twice a week. In a short while, Madame Sun sent for Joan from

the office, which was located in the center of Shanghai. It was a two-story, two-room space crammed with about a dozen busy people, and in a tiny corner on the second floor Madame Sun worked in a space just big enough for a desk and chair walled off with boards: her office. She suggested that Joan looked too conspicuous in her pants and practical shoes and encouraged her to keep a lower profile by wearing dresses and lipstick. The Madame's status as Sun Yat-sen's widow and Chiang Kai-shek's sister-in-law had gone a long way in blocking any repercussions of her work aiding the Communists, but no one knew when her good favor would run out. So Joan conceded to dresses—she had packed a couple just in case—but bucked on the lipstick. She said no to Madame Sun while she stood in her cramped office and meant it. She just couldn't bring herself to do it, even for Madame Sun. She did, however, allow a hairdresser to wave her hair.

At that time, the China Welfare Fund, in addition to working on getting relief funds into the communist areas, ran a few local programs in the city. One was the Yucai (Develop Talent) School, which concentrated mostly on training poor and talented children in the arts. They also employed volunteers to teach children in the street how to read and write. Their method was to teach ten children how to write one character, at a time. Each of those ten would then teach it to ten more of their own and the character pyramid quickly spread through the city. They distributed basic medicines in the slums by teaching one group of kids to teach others how to diagnose the most prevalent diseases. The school sent out young “medics” with basic kits to cure worms and other simple illnesses their limited medicines could tackle.

The China Welfare Fund assigned Joan to teach English at the Yucai School while she waited for them to find her a way into the Liberated Areas. After about a month, Bertha, Bill's girlfriend, finally arrived. The China Welfare Fund planned to send them both out through a Friend's (Quaker) Service hospital in Zhongmu, a small city in Henan Province. Because the Friends worked both sides of the line, they had contacts there that might help them get across. And because Bertha was a nurse, they assigned her to the hospital there right away and told Joan to wait for word.

While she waited, a Hangzhou university invited the Yucai School's drama group to give a performance, and they asked Joan along to give her a chance to see another city. They took an overnight train to Zhejiang Province and the university put them up in the second floor of the theater building. Joan brought along her trusty sleeping bag and slept alongside the others on mats.

One of the performances was a short pantomime play satirizing the ballooning inflation of the Guomindang economy and how the workers' wages could never keep up. One actor played Inflation and the worker actors ran along behind trying to catch it. Not surprisingly, the Guomindang officials in Hangzhou were none too pleased, and during the second night's performance, the police burst into the theater and shut them down. The drama group ran backstage and shouted for Joan to “Quick, get out,” before gathering up their props and instruments and beating it back to Shanghai.

The school's little skit hit a raw nerve with the Guomindang for a reason:

The inflation then was so bad that the money was measured by the pound. It was out of this world. If you went to a bank, the money was piled up on both sides around the clerks' heads, and they would peer out through these piles of money. I decided to buy a jackknife for Sid... and I had to take US dollars... to exchange into Guomintang money. The place you went was this long hall... filled with the noise of people jingling coins... For my five US dollars, they gave me a whole bag of Guomintang cash. I went on a streetcar to the store... and dumped it out on the counter. There was no way they could count all that money, so they just weighed it.

Joan was plotting a logarithmic curve of the rate of inflation just for fun, when the Guomintang suddenly issued what they called the "gold yuan," to replace the original paper money. Along with the new money, they also mandated that everyone had to exchange any foreign currency or gold or silver goods that they had for the "gold yuan." Armed police went door to door collecting and shot anyone who resisted—their pictures posted the following day as a warning. The Guomintang had a pretty good idea that they were probably going to lose the Civil War at that time, and in order to prepare to take what wealth they could when they fled, they had to convert their useless currency to gold and silver.

Joan's logarithmic curve leveled off after the issuance of the new money for about a month. Then the money collapsed and inflation went right up to the place on the graph where it would have been if they hadn't done anything. The result was the Guomintang had a lot more gold and silver in their coffers when they finally fled to Taiwan, and the people melted the "gold yuan" to sell the copper in the coins.

Soon, the China Welfare Fund sent Joan up to Zhongmu on a cargo plane loaded with medical supplies. While she waited there with Bertha to leave for the Liberated Areas, she found her way inevitably to the hospital complex's shop, where an American there taught her how to weld. She spent her days designing and welding together a baby crib with a safety rail that slid up and down.

When nearby Kaifeng fell to the bombing that came with civil war, Joan followed the medical unit to a compound there run by an Austrian doctor named Lippa, where they operated on bombing casualties. As the group prepared to return to Zhongmu, though, Joan found herself feverish with malaria. The hospital was equipped with medication to treat malaria, so after a few harrowing days, gradually Joan's spiraling fever came under control. But at the tail end of her battle with malaria, she contracted sprue, or Celiac disease, brought on by a sudden deficiency in vitamins, which made it difficult to digest food. Dr. Lippa certified that she was not healthy enough to go to the Liberated Areas, and Joan found herself sent back to Shanghai.

The China Welfare Fund wanted to send Joan back to the States because of her condition, but Joan remained predictably stubborn in her intentions to stay on and reach the Liberated Areas. Sprue was a disease that many westerners contracted, unaccustomed to the southern Chinese diet of mostly rice. She remembered that her brother

Bill, who also came down with sprue in China, took folic acid, which eventually cured him. So Joan wrote Carmelita who sent her a bottle and slowly her health improved.

In the meantime, Joan got word that Bertha had walked out of Zhongmu and into the Liberated Areas. By the time Bertha got to the tractor school where Bill taught, blisters covered her feet—but she got in, which meant to Joan that she should be able to get in too.

Joan continued to wait in Shanghai for her chance. She did some work for the China Welfare Fund and got to know some of the other foreigners in the area, including Rewi Alley's industrial cooperative group and Silvia and Bill Powell, who together with Julian Shulman, put out a magazine called *China Review*. She also met Sid Shapiro and Fengzi, an American lawyer and Chinese actress and literary critic, who married in China.

The end of 1948 found Joan still in Shanghai, not much closer to the Liberated Areas than when she first arrived. She was growing impatient, but then just around the new year Gerry Tannenbaum called her to his apartment in one of the city's towering high-rises. Madame Sun arrived at his heels, and together they told her of a new opportunity for her to go to the Liberated Areas. Apparently, Sid Shapiro and Fengzi were preparing to go into the communist underground through Fengzi's connections and agreed to take Joan along.

Joan was so ecstatic she did a somersault on the bed in front of them. She also felt a rush of gratitude; going into the underground was risky enough without taking along a trousers-wearing, unmade-up platinum blond in low-heeled practical shoes. Her instructions were to buy a one-way plane ticket to Beijing to arrive at a certain date and time and immediately check into the Beijing (Peking) Hotel. She was to wait there for her contact.

That was just at the time the Huaihai Battle, one of the largest battles in history involving over one million soldiers, was raging in the north.<sup>35</sup> So when Joan approached the airline ticket counter to buy a one-way ride to north Beijing, the woman seemed quite skeptical about her intentions. Flights were packed coming out of Beijing in anticipation of the battle moving towards the ancient city. But she got her ticket, packed up her belongings, and said goodbye to her friends at the China Welfare Fund. From the Beijing airport, Joan took a bus into the city and went directly to the Beijing Hotel where she registered as instructed. And waited.

A few days came and went without contact, so Joan ventured out into the city during the day. At Wangfujing, the city's main shopping district, Joan suddenly became aware of a man's face appearing and reappearing in the crowd. He was following her. She picked up her pace and began to wind back and forth, around and around. Fear crept up into her; she was alone in Beijing, and no one would even know to miss her if she disappeared. Finally, having looped around the building enough times so she

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<sup>35</sup> The Huaihai Battle or Campaign was one of the few conventional battles that the People's Liberation Army fought. They were able to surround the Guomindang troops at Xuzhou and wipe them out, which turned the tide of the Civil War in northern China.



thought she'd lost him, she shot out the door and made a beeline for her hotel.

Soon after, holed up in her hotel, Joan heard a knock on her door. She opened it up to see Fengzi, Shapiro and a stranger who said, "Come with us." Joan gathered up her things and followed them into the underground.

## Chapter 12

# The Underground

*"[Shi Lan] was always keeping track of us, making sure nothing was going to happen to us. He did so much for us; he risked so much for us."* Joan Hinton

Every time Joan saw Shi Lan, the man who picked her up with Fengzi and Shapiro from the Beijing Hotel, he had on a different hat and a different coat. Only much later did she come to find out that this man who was in charge of getting the three of them to the Liberated Areas, was actually in charge of the entire Beijing underground.

He led them from the Beijing Hotel to the eastern part of the city, the second *hutong* north of Dongdan, to be precise, to a small house at the end of the street.<sup>36</sup> There, they lived with a family who was also trying to get into the Liberated Areas. The people involved in the Beijing Underground proved to be mostly intellectuals—artists, writers, and actors. They presented Joan with a false pass that identified her as a professor of a Beijing university, and took her with Fengzi and Shapiro to different residences to take part in their discussions about politics and the current situation. Several times for entertainment, Shi Lan “took them” ice skating by telling them where and when to go. When they saw him skating in the same rink with a different coat and a different hat keeping an eye out for them, they had to pretend that they didn’t know him.

Much later, a day or two before the Communists liberated Beijing, the Guomindang arrested Shi Lan. And then they let him go. It was the worst thing they could have done to him, which is probably why they did it. The Guomindang was known for letting prisoners go who had given up names of comrades to arrest. So Shi Lan, who dedicated his life to the revolution and risked everything for the underground and Joan, Fengzi and Shapiro, spent almost thirty years under a cloud of suspicion, politically untouchable. He was finally cleared before he died on the basis that the enemy had never taken anyone because of information that he might have had.

After a few weeks with the family, the three of them moved to another house in Beihai (literally, Northern Sea) in central Beijing into a former missionary school compound. They moved into Daihao’s house—a fancy building in a walled yard on the Beihai Lake. Daihao was in film—an actor and a director. He was also a Guomindang official. Very early, he had gone to Yanan, filled like many progressive intellectuals with a romantic idea of what life in the Liberated Areas would be like. While he fit in politically, he found the living conditions a little too tough and eventually returned to the city to do work for the underground. Taking a position with the Guomindang provided excellent cover. By the time Joan moved in, his house had become the exit and entry point for the people in the underground going to and from the Liberated Areas.

The people who passed through that house slipped like water from one form and shape to another. Movie stars, writers, and literary critics clicked in the front door on

<sup>36</sup> Old Beijing was made up of alleyways that led into mazes of small walled off courtyards. These alleyways, called *hutong*, led to entrances to courtyards. Dongdan is a major north south street on the east side of the city.

high heels wearing lipstick and emerged through the kitchen out the back door as ordinary peasants carrying carefully forged Guomintang passes. Some of them came back across the lines with work to do in Beijing and stories to tell from the front. Joan, who was taught never to lie and couldn't bring herself to put on lipstick, even for Madame Sun, was fascinated.

There, Joan met Yang Gang, a famous writer and sister to the revolutionary Yang Zao for whom Sid was named, when she arrived from Shanghai in a fur coat and made for the closet off of the dining room where people changed into their peasant clothes. Daihao and his friends sat at the table and laid out the false passes and photos while she got dressed. Before she came out, though, a child of the people that Daihao rented the house from came by. They had someone on watch and so had just enough time to take out a stack of family photos big enough to cover all the documents and began having a very innocent conversation about their relatives. Yang Gang was close enough to hear what was going on and froze silently in the closet. The boy, who was a member of the Guomintang youth group and a rather fat and waddly teenager, got bored quickly and made his exit. Yang Gang picked up her forged pass and disappeared out the kitchen door.

Once when Daihao heard that the Guomintang was onto him, he invited a bunch of buddies over to play *majiang*.<sup>37</sup> Joan, Fengzi and Shapiro retreated to their bedroom in the back and waited. When the Guomintang police burst in, they ignored them, concentrating on their boisterous competition. As soon as the police began their harassment, though, Daihao picked up the phone to call his Guomintang boss and shouted for him to get them off his back and out of his house. It wasn't clear whether he actually had anyone on the phone or not, but the act was enough to scare the police who turned tail.

The underground finally formalized a plan to get their three guests out of Beijing and into the Liberated Areas; they were going to bike out past the western hills and Guomintang lines. That was just fine with Joan, except that even with leaving most of her junk and her footlocker behind, she still had quite a lot to take with her on the back of a bike.

Shi Lan arrived at Daihao's place and told them to prepare to leave the next morning. Joan and her two friends readied the bicycles, pumped up the tires and tried to find a way to fasten her bundle of clothes, sleeping bag, typewriter and trusty slide rule onto the back of the bike. If the Beijing Underground found working with the foreigners exasperating (Sid Shapiro had a typewriter too), they made no comment and rather patiently tried to help them get ready.

By the next morning, though, Shi Lan changed his mind and decided the plan was too risky. The Communists' northeast army under Lin Biao was beating a fast track south, squeezing the Guomintang armies in a tightening circle around Beijing. The gaps between the Guomintang soldiers closed in and attempting passage posed increasing danger.

<sup>37</sup> *Majiang*, or *mahjong* is a popular game (usually with gambling) played by four players with tiles.

The next plan was to send them through by bus from Tianjin, a smaller city to the southwest of Beijing. Daihao drove them in his car to the railroad station where they said goodbye and boarded the train. The man who picked them up on the other end led them to a residential section of the city and up to the top floor of a five-story apartment building. The man they stayed with didn't have a bathroom in his place, so Shapiro and Joan had to cover their blond and brown heads to walk across a railed platform to the next apartment over to relieve themselves.

A few days in hiding passed before their contact instructed them to go to the local market and board the bus. The bus turned out to be an old open bed truck on which the passengers sat to travel to the countryside. Joan and Shapiro's cover was that they were a married missionary couple. Fengzhi, Shapiro's actual wife, dressed like a peasant and got on with the man who was leading them, and everyone had to pretend that they didn't know each other. Just as the truck rumbled out of the city limits, they stopped at the first barricade. The officials there spotted Joan and Shapiro immediately and ordered them off of the truck. Fengzi, an actress by training, sounding cool and irritated, called out, "Why are you holding us all up?" And Shapiro became belligerent, naming the official who was in charge of American missionaries in China as their boss and threatening unpleasant repercussion for the Guomintang officers. Joan kept quiet, trying not to look as scared as she felt, wondering to herself what would happen if they called Shapiro's bluff and actually called up the official to see if they were legitimate missionaries.

Shapiro thought that Joan's bagful of sprue medicine made them suspicious. Joan believed it was the two typewriters, which might have looked like telegraph machines to the unfamiliar. Whatever reason, the two were left standing at the barricade while Sid's wife and their Tianjin contact in the underground drove away on the back of the bus. Thinking on his feet, Sid suggested they register in the most expensive hotel in town, where he left Joan to go look for their "people." A few nervous hours of waiting passed before dark until Sid reappeared with a different man who led them back to their fifth story apartment.

Not too long afterwards, Fengzi turned up with their original contact and a story to tell. After leaving Sid and Joan at the side of the road, she could only watch their guide and do as he did, without letting on that they were together. A few stops later, he got off the truck and purchased a train ticket back into the city. Fengzi could only trail furtively behind and discreetly pantomime his movements. She followed him that way back to that same apartment for a relieved reunion.

Their friends in the underground were at a loss. They had no other ideas about how to get them out to the Liberated Areas and so sent orders to have them sent back to Beijing. There, Daihao apologized and told them there wasn't anything more they could do. The Communists were coming fast down from the north and the Guomintang were more and more tightly encircled around the city. The three of them took one of the last trains out of Tianjin before the battle for it began. There was nothing left to do but tell them to surface.

## Chapter 13

# Liberation

*“The Guomindang Army there was in rags; ...their shoes were all sort of falling apart [and]... they had their pants sort of hanging on them and their hats askew.” Joan Hinton*

The new year of 1949 saw the People’s Liberation Army bearing down on Beijing and preparing to take the ancient capital city.

The city’s liberation was a long time in coming. Mao and his supporters on the Central Committee leadership had spent years struggling to hold the Party to the strategy of “surrounding the cities from the countryside.” Back in 1934, under Mao’s vehement protest, the Party leadership had followed the Soviet Union’s direction and waged conventional warfare on the Guomindang and their strongholds in the cities. Mao was isolated and set aside, while what was then the Red Army suffered defeat after defeat in the battles for the cities. Barely able to gather their remaining forces, the Communists retreated to the southwest. Smelling blood, the Guomindang forces began a campaign to encircle them and finally wipe them out.

Reeling and devastated, most of the Party leadership turned to Mao for a way out. His solution was simple but grueling; to escape total defeat, they would have to walk out of the tightening encirclement. So began the 6000-mile Long March, on which many died, but many made it to Shaanxi Province to set up the new communist headquarters.

From Yanan, they resumed the strategy of depending on the great masses of the oppressed peasantry in the countryside. From the peasants, the Red Army rebuilt their forces in the areas they liberated by enacting land reform, mobilizing the peasants to organize against landlords for rent reduction and eventually to take the land they tilled. At the end of World War II, after the tenuous united front between the Communists and Guomindang finally fractured, Mao estimated that it would take five to ten years before the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) finally marched into the cities in the final stage of their struggle, having strangled the Guomindang forces from without. But by February 1949, as Joan and her friends tried to surface and the Communists prepared to take the ancient capital, only three years had passed.

As the communist troops swept down from the Northeast at a lightning pace, the Guomindang proceeded to dynamite a no-man’s-land around Beijing’s city walls, destroying anything tall enough for their enemies to hide behind. Joan heard the shelling going on night and day, along with the buzz of the last aircraft leaving from the soon disabled airport. Trying to pass time and wait out the storm, she wrote a letter to her old mentor, Enrico Fermi, describing the demolition.

Anxious to find a place for them to last out the battle, Sid Shapiro approached the missionaries in the school near Daihao’s place, who were all beating it out of the city as fast as they could pack up their essentials. He arranged with one family to look after their house while they were “away,” and he, his wife Fengzi, and Joan moved in.

Joan bought a bike from the child for thirty dollars, even though she knew they weren't going to take it with them.

The first thing Joan wanted to do was fill the pantry with canned foods, in anticipation of the rough times ahead. Who knew how long the liberation of Beijing would take? What if they were there for months and the food supply ran out? Disregarding Shapiro's protests, she packed the cupboards, and not unlike the trip she took with Sid Engst up a New Mexico mountain previously, they ended up with all kinds of untouched canned supplies by the time they left Beijing. Aside from the fact that the food situation never got too bad in the city, a major reason why they never touched the cans was because the missionaries left behind their cook, who seemed to want to stick around and cook for the house's new inhabitants. So during the day the trio went out to have a look around and went back at meal times for Western style menus of tender steak and gravy.

On their daily forays, they saw that the city was getting completely cut off; planes dropped mail and supplies periodically, but the Guomintang troops inside the city looked more and more demoralized and worse for the wear. Bedraggled, thin and dispirited, it seemed unlikely to Joan that they would be able to put up much of a fight.

Joan was leading a pretty comfortable life, and it was an exciting time to be in Beijing—clearly another turning point historically in the Civil War. But Joan was still stuck with the same problem of how she was going to get herself to the Liberated Areas. At that time, Yanjing University (which later merged with Beijing University), had already been liberated as it lay just outside the city center. The students who ended up locked inside the city negotiated passage back to their school, and when Joan heard a rumor that the Guomintang was going to open one of the city gates to let them through, she jumped at the possibility. She just happened to have in her possession a letter of introduction from Gerry Tannenbaum to a professor at Yanjing University, which was to be passed to one of the top leaders in the communist areas.

The day that they planned to let the students out, Joan packed her things—sleeping bag, typewriter, and slide rule—onto her bicycle again, clutching her letter of introduction, and said goodbye to Shapiro and Fengzhi, who decided to wait out Beijing's liberation at the abandoned missionaries' house.

Joan pushed her bike to the city's western edge and got in the line of students and teachers who waited at the big wooden gate, Xizimen (the Straight Western Gate). Her heart beat a little faster when they opened it, but she passed through without incident:

I went out with the students and that was really exciting. We had to go across the Guomintang area from where you could see where they had demolished all the buildings around the place... I pushed my bike and we... came out of the city up a road... We got on and there were trees along that road. And then we saw the PLA [People's Liberation Army]. Oh was I excited! They were coming single file through the trees, and they had these huge fur hats, because they had come from the Northeast. Oh boy was that

exciting, having just come out of the Guomindang area with the soldiers all forlorn. Those PLA had just come so fast down, and they were going south in a single file as we were going north.

Just like that, Joan “liberated” herself.

Yanjing University was run mostly by missionaries. After Joan showed her letter to the PLA soldiers who had come into the school, they took her to see a woman called Miss Gert, one of the missionaries on the campus. In a strange coincidence, it turned out that Miss Gert knew Joan’s relatives in England and consequently took her in as one of her own. When she got sick with a high fever, Miss Gert stayed with her and nursed her back to health.

Joan found her “liberated” life at Yanjing University refreshing. The PLA soldiers filled the campus with different activities, including lively skits on the playing field about serving the people and propaganda on the different things that the PLA was doing around the country, like Land Reform. Unlike Beijing where the Guomindang soldiers dragged themselves around looking bedraggled and pessimistic, the campus was alight with cheerful, well-organized events and full of energy and enthusiasm. Unsure when her contact might come through, Joan settled in and enjoyed Liberation.

## Chapter 14

# Tile Cave Town

*“Some people say I fell in love with the Chinese people. To a certain extent it’s true, but the main thing that I fell in love with was the Chinese revolution.” Sid Engst*

Sid had a decision to make. Since his arrival in Yanan and the Liberated Areas, he had, for the most part, been in the company of people who spoke English and who were assigned to look after him. But in the latter half of 1948, soon after he, Liu Deying and Zhang Genye resettled at the iron factory, the Communists went on the offensive and were preparing to liberate the major city of Xian. They swept south, liberating one area after another, and were in short supply of cadres who could stay behind to organize the people and the work after the People’s Liberation Army went on. They needed Zhang Genye, and they asked Sid if it would be all right. He had a few days to think it over.

Although he never made the decision to spend the rest of his life in China, at that point, Sid was pretty sure he was going to stay awhile. And while he knew how to say things like, “How are you?” and “Time to eat,” he really had not learned much of the language. So when faced with the decision, he finally made up his mind that if he really was going to stay on, he’d better get going with learning Chinese. In his mind he knew that: “Well if I’m gonna learn Chinese, being the lazy pig that I am, the only way that I’m gonna learn it is to get into a position where I’m forced to learn it.” Zhang Genye left, and Sid spent two very rough months, some of the roughest time he spent in China, even more so than the evacuation of Yanan, struggling to communicate with the rest of the community in Wayaobao.

I have the greatest respect for Chinese workers, but they’re not good teachers of foreign language... We’d be all together and someone would say something to me and of course they would laugh. Then someone else would repeat it again as something else and some other guy would think that the reason I didn’t get it was because it wasn’t shouted loud enough into my ear. So they’d come up close and shout it at me and then everyone else would laugh again. Then about three guys at the same time would start explaining it by roundabout ways and after about an hour, my brain was like it was just ground into meat sausage.

But the result of it was after about a month, I began to pick it up more or less, and then after two months, I wouldn’t say that I was talking Chinese, but I was talking something that they could understand... And since I learned Chinese there, I’ve always had that North Shaanxi accent.

Unable to communicate well with those around him, and missing home and everything familiar to him, Sid spent his days off (they would get one every couple of weeks or so) wandering the loess hills feeling homesick. He developed a real love for



the land on those walks in those rolling hills with rich soil and flat tops, and where the weather was mostly dry and sunny.

The purpose of the iron factory was to improve the local peasants' farming tools, which were quite simple at the time. Also, because of the destruction from the Anti-Japanese War and then the Civil War, many people in the area lacked basic necessities, like cooking pots or woks. Most of the iron they used was melted scrap—a lot of it actually came from unexploded bombs. If they came across one, they would very gingerly take it down to the creek and leave it soaking in the water for some time before taking a sledgehammer to it and breaking it open, hoping that they weren't going to blow themselves up. (Liu Deying used the powder inside for his rifle to shoot birds and rabbits.) In addition to melting whatever scarce scrap metal they could find, they also used the huge blast furnace, which needed the muscles of four people to pump the bellows, to try to extract iron ore, although they were never very successful with it.

As Sid began to work together with those old ironworkers, he realized what Marx had realized a long time ago: the tremendous latent ability of the ordinary people. Peasants, who had never learned how to read or write, perfected the process of pouring molten iron into wafer thin woks by building precise molds. For Sid, the challenge was to try to understand how to start from scratch using scrap materials to make functional products. One such task was to build a sluice gate, a heavy iron gate that could be lowered and raised to block off water in irrigation ditches. When he first learned of the project, he thought it impossible—he just didn't believe that they had the capacity to make such a complicated device. But because the irrigation project nearby needed it, they cheerfully told him that regardless of their capacity, they had to make it.

With scrap metal in such short supply, the iron factory workers took to buying up old railway ties from the locals who had participated in tearing up the old Shaanxi warlord, Yan Xishan's railway. Some of those old ties got melted down and made into a heavy square for the gate. Some got hammered into a long ratchet. And to make the gear that would lift and lower the gate, an old fitting worker wielded a chisel and cut every tooth out on a solid iron disk. It worked, although the irrigation project never got going very well. Eventually the sluice gate sat idle in the ditch where it stayed even into the 1970s when Sid returned to visit his old haunts.

Earlier, in the spring of '48, Sid had heard that Joan had landed in China and was making various attempts to enter the Liberated Areas. He even got an occasional letter from her, and the leadership informed him when the Underground made formal contact. But it wasn't until late March of 1949 that he happily received word from the Border Region Government, requesting his urgent return to Yanan: Joan had arrived.

## Chapter 15

# Transport

*“What impressed me about Yanan was the spirit of the place. Nobody could possibly be there without being affected by it.” Joan Hinton*

After the People’s Liberation Army completely surrounded the city of Beijing, and it was clear that the Guomindang had no viable way out of the situation, they entered negotiations about how to resolve the situation. Fu Zuoyi, the KMT general in charge had his back to the wall, but still, it took some convincing by his progressive young daughter to get him to negotiate a peaceful surrender.

As a result, Beijing was spared from complete destruction, but to Joan, it never really had the feel of a “liberated” city. One big reason was that because of the peaceful liberation, all of the city’s KMT officials were allowed to keep their posts.

By the time the surrender had been negotiated, Joan had been at Yanjing University outside of Beijing with her old family friend Miss Gert for over a month. Her chance to go to the Liberated Areas in Shaanxi never materialized, because the whole situation around Beijing was so complicated; apparently they also couldn’t figure out how to extract one foreigner living among so many others on the campus. So when Beijing opened its big gates to let the PLA in, she packed up her sleeping bag, slide rule, and typewriter on her bike again and went with them.

I was right in with the PLA as they were coming into the city at Xizimen. The whole city was just so excited. The gates were open and the army was going in, and here I was going right along with the army. They were throwing confetti all over the army, and everybody was clapping and yelling and here I was being welcomed into the city of Beijing from the Liberated Areas...!

Sid Shapiro and Fengzhi were still living with their personal cook in the missionaries’ compound, and together they went to a meeting with a leader of the cultural group that they were all connected with. At that meeting, he took Joan aside and told her quietly that arrangements had been made for her to go to Yanan on a truck that was going the same way to deliver some heavy machinery.

Joan had her footlocker packed and ready to go when an army car came to pick her up. She said goodbye to her friends and got to show off some of her driving skills when the soldiers found out she knew how. They took her to a big empty building where the People’s Liberation Army was setting up, and she spent the night before they loaded her onto the truck with all the other cargo. The two PLA drivers took her over as their responsibility, and they set off on the long slow drive south. The truck was an old Dodge, and Joan happily stood in the truck bed with a vista in front of her and the equipment wrapped in tarps behind her. Her Putney School days had enamored her with bumpy rides on big trucks, the wind in her face, and the freedom to sing at the

top of her lungs whatever songs came to her knowing no one would hear.

The first stop was Shijiazhuang, a small city southwest of Beijing and the capital of Hebei Province. They had a two-week wait there while the drivers took care of some business. While they were waiting, a cadre sought her out and asked if she would like to go by train to visit a small town nearby called Wenshui, where a couple of foreigners were stationed, one of whom was teaching at a tractor school: her brother Bill.

Joan found Bill well, thoroughly engaged in teaching the ins and outs of tractor mechanics to the first class of earnest students, in the very beginnings of the push for agricultural mechanization. The siblings were happy to see each other, and Bill grilled Joan to glean any knowledge she might have about mechanics, as they took apart machines and figured out what made them work. Joan also had a chance to catch up with Bertha, who never made it to the freighter that Joan took across the ocean, but made it into the Liberated Areas long before her. Trained as a nurse in the US, Bertha was working in that capacity wherever needed.

When it was time for Joan to go back to the truck in Shijiazhuang, Joan assured the local cadres that she would be able to make it back by herself on the train, that no one needed to be bothered with sending her; everyone was busy at work, and the ride back was straightforward. They agreed.

It was interesting, because everybody said when you were a foreigner in the Liberated Areas, you weren't allowed to go anywhere by yourself for fear you would see something that weren't supposed to see. They always talk about how controlled everything was. The whole Western press said that... But at the time ...[i]t was so simple... It was so natural and simple and easy. Nobody worried about this foreigner; they didn't think of it that way. They just took it for granted that you were one of them, and that was all there was to it.

When the crew headed out of Shijiazhuang, they found the roads increasingly difficult to pass, the drivers battling mud and the devastation caused by the Guomindang bombing. With most of the bridges and roads destroyed, their progress was very slow, stopping often to pull the old Dodge out of the muck with men straining on ropes when it got stuck. Joan and the two PLA drivers stopped every night in small villages, where the drivers, ever protective of their cargo, slept on either side of Joan, just in case. As they entered the Taihang Mountains, they crossed through areas where the local peasants had never seen anyone who was not ethnically Chinese, and wherever they stopped, word spread to such an extent that throngs of crowds would surround them. Hundreds of people pushed and strained to catch a glimpse of the yellow-haired stranger, and Joan's PLA caretakers had to find creative ways to get her food without being crushed in a restaurant.

Finally, after days of rough going, they made it to a railroad town, where the drivers entrusted Joan to the local organization, so that they could go run their errands. Not knowing quite what to do with their guest, the local cadres gave her a room and

asked if she wanted to eat *yuanxiao* (sweet, sticky dumplings made out of glutinous rice); they had heard that foreigners liked to eat sweets. When they found that she did like *yuanxiao*, they began serving them to her three meals a day, until Joan convinced them to feed her whatever they ate.

Feeling a little alone as she waited for the PLA drivers to come back to claim her, Joan asked if she could participate in their daily political study, where they read the paper out loud and then discussed what they read. Although her Chinese was not very good and she did not understand big chunks of what they discussed, she found it comforting to be part of a larger group, rather than isolated in her own room eating sweets all day.

One of the errands the PLA drivers was running was unloading the heavy equipment from the truck and reloading it onto a train car. So when they picked Joan up again, it was to ride the old warlord, Yan Xishan's narrow gauge railway. There were still parts of it that hadn't been torn up, and they boarded on an old coal steam engine driven train. Joan sat with the rest of the passengers at the open door of the boxcar, her feet dangling over side, listening intently as her traveling companions told vivid stories of the guerilla history in the area. As the boxcar clattered along, they pointed out where battles were fought against the Guomindang and Yan Xishan.

At their stop, they found another truck awaiting them to drive down to the Yellow River. The current was so strong that in order to cross, they had to drag the raft or boat upstream a few hundred feet before loading it up and trying to send it across. They drove the whole truck onto a small boat, and although Joan was a decent swimmer, she did not like the way the current and rapids took hold of the little boat and churned it about. Safely on the other side, Joan looked up to see the famous old city of Suide, built on top of a hill with steps leading to the top. They left their truck down below and climbed up on foot to eat and spend the night.

The entire city, though, seemed to hear about the foreigner in their midst and coalesced at the village inn to have a look. A huge crowd gathered, with people in the back pushing to get closer. The two PLA drivers did their best to reason with the crowd, but they could only get to the people in front; those in the back who couldn't hear kept pushing until it seemed like the whole building was trembling and its thin walls would collapse. Alarmed, the drivers made a swift decision to beat a hasty retreat and swept Joan out the back door, down all the steps, and back into the truck.

A few days later, sometime in the middle of April 1949, their truck rumbled into Yanan—or at least what little remained after the Japanese had bombed every building, bridge and road to smithereens. The truck drove up the only little road in the whole place, a rarity on which still stood a couple of wooden buildings on both sides of the dirt path. Yanan lay nestled in the folds and creases of three main valleys, carved out by two large rivers—the Yangtze and the Yellow Rivers—that converged near the center of town. The loess hills that rose up from the valleys were riddled with caves, cubbyholes dug out of the fine soil that had the ability to stand up to gravity given the benefit of the delicate curve of an arch. With no buildings left standing, every organization

worked out of caves, from the hospital to the schools to the news agency.

The drivers drove straight to the offices of the Border Region Government, which consisted of a row of small caves for work and another row in back for living quarters. A young guy who spoke English named Kang Di greeted Joan with other officials. (At that time, all the cadres that were supposed to go to Xian to work after the PLA liberated it were waiting in Yanan). Joan said a warm goodbye to her two caretakers, and they to their unorthodox charge, and just like that, Joan found herself taken readily into another organization.

The only thing that took a little getting used to, though, was that up until that point, for over a year, she had been on her own, and to a certain extent, on her own merits. One of the very first conversations Joan had with Kang Di was about the events of 1947, and specifically about Sid and how he passed an important test in the evacuation of Yanan. He described how Sid and Zhang Genye stayed to rescue the equipment that fell into the river when they thought the enemy was marching up the hill behind them. Kang Di presented Joan with her first task in her new organization: learn from Sid. Joan had, to say the least, mixed feelings about her task. She was an individual, an atomic physicist who had written an article with Fermi, a daring skier who could've gone to the Olympics, and an intimidating wrestler who could throw any opponent to the ground. Here, she suddenly found that she was thought of mainly as Yang Zao's (Sid's) fiancé, and told to study and emulate him in her thinking and actions.

Joan really tried to be OK with it. After all, it would've been much more difficult to walk into the situation if Sid hadn't passed that test. With much effort, she consciously swallowed her prideful feelings, because she had already made her choice to try to get into the Liberated Areas. And there was not much chance that she would have been able to get in as a scholar from the Institute of Nuclear Studies, a world-class skier or a formidable wrestler.

Kang Di informed her that Sid was working in an iron factory two days' walk away and that they had sent word that she had arrived. He would get there in less than a week. In the meantime, Kang Di showed her to a cave where she would be staying, and Joan moved in.

I got my footlocker into the cave... and I just had my typewriter, my slide rule, and my sleeping bag and a few clothes. And I thought that it wasn't very much stuff. But when I got in there, and they saw that footlocker, they thought that was an awful lot of stuff. So I got more and more embarrassed by all the stuff I had. It seemed to get bigger and bigger as people came in and remarked about how much stuff I had. As Sid described in the evacuation of Yanan, those people could put everything they owned on their backs and just walk off.

It was Joan's first experience living in a cave, and she liked its practicality. The thick loess walls acted as insulation, cooling the place in the hot summer and holding the warmth in the winter. One drawback was the lack of light. The front door was the

only window, covered with rice paper; the locals long ago began the folk art form of papercutting, so that they could paste intricate designs on the windows and see the shadow images from inside.

At night the whole city of Yanan had one small generator that produced one, small, meek and flickering electrical light. The rest of the city used small oil wick lamps that made the palm of a person's hand look big and cast a dim light about two feet in diameter. The consequence was, when the sun went down, people went to bed.

During the day, Joan became infected by the spirit of life in the heart of the Liberated Areas. The level of organization and sense of purpose exuded like sweat out of people's pores. Joan integrated quickly, getting herself measured for clothes, which were on ration—each person received one cotton padded set for winter and two sturdy lightweight sets for summer—and eating her meals at the cafeteria. Because she was a foreigner, they put her, like Sid when he first arrived, on a higher quality diet, along with the elderly and those in poor health. Wanting to be part of a livelier crowd instead of the “old fogies,” she managed to convince the people looking after her to move her into the medium grade cafeteria pretty quickly.

And of course, everyone studied every day. In fact, it wasn't just that everyone set aside some time during their busy days to study: studying, thinking about the political and social issues around them and in the world, permeated the entire society. Living conditions were tough for cadres coming from the big cities, much less foreigners from imperialist countries. But Joan had grown up sleeping in haystacks and roughing it in the mountains. And besides, the sense of being part of something bigger than herself, dwarfed the experiences she'd had at Los Alamos. Here, they were talking about rebuilding an entirely new society and the liberation of an entire country, and working for a whole new world.

Everybody was working for the same thing, and I suddenly had the feeling of being part of something very very big. It gave me a tremendous feeling of being part of the people of the whole world in a common cause, and it was just a very comfortable feeling; it just felt wonderful.

People always say, “Oh you had such hardship, oh the living was so hard,” but you know I don't remember the hardship at all, or rather, I don't remember it as being hardship. I never was much on clothes anyway, and to me being able to put on the same clothes every day was a relief...

Right at the beginning, I remember feeling something on the back of my neck. I pulled it out, and they said that it was just a louse and hadn't I seen a louse before? They showed me how to squash it between my fingernails, and from then on for about a year, I got well acquainted with lice. The place was full of lice. Around the belt is warm, and that's where the lice like to be, we'd have a meeting and talk and everybody would be feeling around our belts. Somebody would be talking about something important going on in the Border Region Government, about... what the policies were, and

at the same time everyone's pulling up their pants and going katunk! and squashing the lice. It's such a nice satisfying feeling when you go katunk! and you can hear a little pop and a little bit of red blood comes out.

[T]o be working with all those people who were thinking so far ahead, I realized that I was part of something very very big, very very new, and something that the whole people of the world should know about but didn't. And I also realized that although I'd had a lot of experiences, this was something I'd never had. I felt like I'd really come home. Suddenly I was in this family, part of the family of the human race... All the people around me weren't thinking about themselves. They weren't thinking about Yanan, or about Wayabao. They were thinking about the whole world... It was an international feeling; they were thinking about how to change not just China but the whole world into a place where everybody could live.

When I got into that situation, it was extremely exhilarating and liberating. I just felt like, "Oh boy, this is it." They didn't treat me like a foreigner; they didn't isolate me, they treated me like a comrade because they considered foreigners part of the revolution. They took me in as part of the world.

This initiation into liberated China, and the enthusiasm and spirit of the people around her tempered Joan's feelings about her relationship to the Chinese Revolution through her connection to Sid. It would and did sustain her, although she would struggle with her role as Sid's other half for the rest of her life.

## Chapter 16

# Convergence

*“Everyone thinks I came here to chase the man and get married, that I would’ve gone to Kalamazoo just to get that one man.” Joan Hinton*

*“Well wasn’t that what it was?” Sid Engst*

Sid really enjoyed the walk from Wayaobao to Yanan; he made it a lot, because the Border Region Government called him back a number of times in the year and a half he worked at the iron factory. By far, the best thing about it was about a third of the way through, a bright cold mountain spring flowed off of a rock overhang near the path. For Sid, sleeping with lice and eating millet twice day was not really that big a deal. What he found most difficult, what he actually considered hardship was adapting to drinking hot water, boiled in the previous meal’s oils and juices. Fuel being very precious in North Shaanxi, peasants kept two cooking pots or woks on the stove, a small one in the front over the fire for food, and a big one in back for water. The back wok, warmed by its proximity to the cooking fire, was filled with water. When someone needed a drink, they simply scooped a dipperful of warm water and let it come to a boil in the front wok. The long time Chinese custom of drinking boiled water, while very good for controlling disease and parasites, was a hard adjustment for the US dairy farmer accustomed to tall glasses of pure cold water, especially in the hot summer.

So Sid always picked up his pace when he neared the spring and stood underneath catching the stream in his mouth directly until he forced himself away. He filled a few canteens for the road, but always had images of turning back for more, like the times he and Bill Hinton used to turn back for more ice cream riding home from Cornell.

Sid’s arrival in Yanan in April was with great anticipation, not just his and Joan’s, but the whole organization’s, which looked forward to witnessing the great reunion of the two foreign comrades. When they finally saw each other again, each was a little put off by their pasty white faces and long angular noses. Joan thought Sid looked sort of unhealthy. Happy to see each other nonetheless, Joan strode up to Sid and, to everyone else’s surprise, gave him a big punch in the arm. Sid punched her back.

Since they were in the Liberated Areas, women’s feudal position as property had been abolished, and when talk of marriage was in the air, both parties had to be asked for consent and be in agreement.

So they asked me if I wanted to marry Joan and I said, “Yes.” And they asked Joan if she wanted to marry me and she said, “Well, you know, I came here, I ...well, I ...you know, I ...guess.”

Joan felt put on the spot. While it was true that she had come all the way into the Liberated Areas as Sid’s fiancé, she had been hoping that they would have some time



to get reacquainted with one another and see how they got along; they were friends in the US, but they actually didn't know each other that well. In addition, the perception that immediate marriage would seal was that she had come to China to follow a man, not to be a part of the Chinese Revolution. It irked her. She had strong reservations. She wished all those people weren't standing around waiting for an answer. In the brief seconds that elapsed from the time they asked the question, Joan made her peace. The wedding was on.

Joan got into the spirit of things quickly; the event was a big deal to the local people. Their Chinese comrades were excited and eager to make their wedding a festive celebration. The first order of business was the official registration, which proved to be challenging with a telephone that you had to yell through, and English names that sounded impossible to spell. Sid spelled Engst out for him, but when the registrar yelled it over the phone, his "E" came out like "ANG!" and they never knew what ended up being put down on the official document.

The head of the Border Region Government was the old revolutionary Lin Bei-qu, and he had the only passenger car in Yanan—an old beat up Chevy. Although they could have walked from their cave to the hall where they were to have the ceremony in about 20 seconds, Joan and Sid were hustled into the Chevy and driven there in style. Over the entrance hung a sign that read in English, "MUCH HEPPINESS," and they entered under a shower of confetti. Inside, benches sat in rows filled with well-wishers who listened as the official read several simple documents. That was the extent of the ceremony, and although they both knew how to do a mean square dance, they sat out and watched, as others paired off into ballroom dancing.

Back at their cave, their friends put up long scrolls in celebration of their marriage. Kang Di wrote a *dui lian*, or a scroll with pairs of sayings on either side and top and bottom. In it, he changed their names to go with each other. Sid's name, Yang Zao, after the martyred revolutionary, originally had the surname Yang paired with the character for date (the fruit). Joan's was Han Chun, a conversion of sound based on Hinton Joan. Kang Di wound both up in a clever poem, exchanging the characters with others that had the same sound, pairing Yang Zao, Morning Sun, with Han Chun, Cold Spring. No one had ever heard of the surnames "Morning" and "Cold"—but it suited them; not many had ever met the likes of Sid and Joan anyway.

The two stayed in Yanan for a few days before heading to Wayaobao, but not before a major marital incident. Immediately after their wedding, some of the local women took Joan out for a walk to make friends and tease her about being newly married. Sid decided to hang out in their cave to relax.

This guy who'd been working outside of the country had just come back up through the [Guomindang held] White Areas. It was very dangerous, and he had with him this one cigar, a nice Havana cigar, probably cost something like a dollar or something, you know, really expensive. And he saw these foreign comrades getting married here in Yanan. What more could

you do with that cigar than just give it to this foreign comrade who was here in Yanan? ... We had this deck chair, it was a nice modern relaxation chair that I was in, and thought, "What the hell, it's one cigar, and no matter how long you keep it it's still one cigar. I may just as well smoke it." So I sat back in this nice deck chair and lit my cigar and was enjoying that cigar very much. And the door opens and... in bounds Joan. She took a couple whiffs of the air... and then she turned around and looked at me and her eyes glared just like a tiger looking at whatever tigers look at when their eyes glare. She stomped over to me and grabbed the cigar in my mouth, pulled it out and stamped on it! She looked up and said, "Now you know what I think about smoking cigars!"

Joan wasn't one for subtlety. She recalled, laughing:

That was his new bride. But I must say he never smoked one again. He was an avid smoker, though, and I hated it. His fingers and teeth were all brown with smoke from smoking a pipe. Those were the first frictions of marriage.

By the time Joan and Sid were working out their first marital issues in the cave in Yanan, it was clear to everyone on both sides of the line that the tide had turned in the Civil War, and it was only a matter of when, not if, the Guomintang would be completely decimated. Once Beijing fell and was peacefully liberated, Chiang Kai-shek and his few remaining loyal generals, got ready to blow out of the country—with as much of the wealth they had accumulated as they could.

Local governments were able to turn most of their attention to the task of rebuilding infrastructure and building a new society. Less one Cuban cigar, Joan and Sid set off with another cadre for the iron factory as eager participants in that process.

**Section 3**  
**Production**

## Chapter 17

# The Iron Factory

*“Both Joan and I like to work. But the main thing is our thinking; work for us is always subservient to the idea of who you’re working for and the purpose of your work.” Sid Engst*

Raised by Carmelita, mostly in the outdoors, in the mountains and valleys of North America, Europe and Mexico, Joan saw landscape in North Shaanxi that she had never imagined. Her fresh eyes saw them differently than Sid, who had spent the greater part of two years running for his life around those hills.

Those hills are so different from any hills anywhere else in the world... loess cliffs where the people dig out their homes, and the top is so round that they plant their fields on the tops of these things. There’s no flatland, except a very little bit by the river. So we climbed up past people’s homes and we’d look down and the chimney would be right by our feet; they all lived in the hill.

It was... just donkey and footpaths up. We... came down into Matigou: Horse Hoof Gully [and] spent the night down there in that little gully on a *kang* in an inn... The next day we went up and over, and came down into Shiping, the little group of caves around the factory. After a day walking like that, we came to a little stream, and across that were just two rows of stone caves, and that was the factory.

Joan liked the old guy who took the trip with them—he was easygoing and completely down to earth. She had to do a double take when, upon reaching the factory, she realized that he was the head of the factory. Her conceptions about power, authority, and hierarchy were turned on their head, in a society where everyone was issued the same clothing and saw their roles as individuals in the context of being part of a mutual and collective effort to change the world.

One of the first people Joan became acquainted with was Liu Deying, the young guy who had been assigned to look after Sid way back when they worked in the Bright China Farm together. Joan found in him too, a complete absence of pretense, and more importantly, any kind of feudal ideology about the differences between men and women. Their friendship formed quickly and lasted a lifetime.

Unlike in Yanan, where Joan and Sid occupied a cave by themselves, in Wayao-bao, caves were in shorter supply—so they shared. Another adjustment that Joan had to make was with the Western notion of “privacy.” In the Chinese language, there wasn’t even such a word or a succinct way to describe the concept. So there was nothing strange or awkward about the local women pushing back the curtain that separated Joan and Sid’s space from the others without warning or apology. They came to check her out and thought nothing about lifting up her shirt, commenting on the size of her breasts, and wondering out loud about the function of her bra—most Chinese women

wrapped towels around their chests.

Joan joined right away into the work. But only a few days into it, after the evening meal, she, Sid, and Liu Deying decided to go out for a walk. Not too far from the factory, Liu Deying spotted a nice tree to climb and scrambled immediately to the top, calling for Sid and Joan to follow. Sid, always the sensible dairy farmer, opted to stay with his feet firmly on the ground. Joan, on the other hand, having grown up climbing trees, was happy for the chance to impress on her new friend that she was just as adept as he was.

The last time Joan had really tested out her tree legs had been with her brother Bill on the way from Bennington College back to Putney years before. They spotted a grove of birch trees and decided to stop to engage in a New England ritual called “swinging birches.” The idea of swinging a birch was that you climbed up to the top, swung your legs out, and got the tree to bend very gently and let you down to the ground—preferably a ground covered with a deep blanket of snow. The brother and sister pair swung bigger and bigger trees until Bill called out to Joan from the top of a tree so tall that he couldn’t get it to bend and let him down. Joan scrambled up after him, and the two swung out their legs in unison—which they thought was a good strategy until the branch gave a horrible crack and broke in two. Both went crashing down to the ground unceremoniously and landed hard on their left ankles, which were never quite right after that.

This time, Joan felt quite confident propelling herself up to where Liu Deying perched, laughing at her like she couldn’t follow. Sid watched from below, telling her to take it easy until suddenly Joan dropped from out of the tree to the ground with a big thud in front of him.

...I was sitting down below and all of a sudden I see SWIEEEE bung! on the ground. Jesus, just been married a week or two weeks, there’s my wife and all. Before I could even think, she jumps up and turns around and looks at me and eyes glaring: “Don’t think you can keep me from climbing trees just because I fell out of this one!”

A little taken aback, but very concerned, they asked her several times if she was hurt. She reassured them that she was fine, but when they started out on their walk again, she told them that she had decided to go back first. Chalking it up to embarrassment or fatigue, the two went on. Joan waited until they were out of sight before dropping to the ground. Unable to put any weight whatsoever on her left foot, she began to crawl very slowly on all threes, down the trail, across the creek, and back to the factory.

Sid came back to the cave to find Joan completely immobilized, unable to even touch her ankle. Slightly stunned by the comprehensiveness of her stubbornness, he nonetheless had to take care of her every need for several weeks. There was no chance of Joan hobbling outside to go to the bathroom (much less squat over a hole, like the rest of the population), so Sid had to improvise by borrowing a big frying pan from the kitchen and making it into a bedpan. There just wasn’t anything else—and besides, a

solid scrubbing with sand and boiling water would make it OK to bring it back for its original purpose.

When Joan first arrived and while she was bedridden, Sid was in the middle of working on an irrigation pump. Although he didn't really know what he was doing, people looked to him as the main technician. What saved him was a little red book that he had borrowed from the Yanan library and never returned, with all kinds of practical information for people working on technical problems. The irrigation pump was powered by a donkey walking around in a circle, which moved a wheel that held a series of buckets. The buckets scooped water and dumped into a trough, which then sent the water out to where it was needed.

Everything had to be made from scratch. If they needed a pair of pliers to tighten a nut, they had to make the pliers first as well as the nut. They used whatever materials they could find, from the poor quality wood to make molds, to a downed Guomin-dang airplane for its aluminum. And when every time they cast a wheel and at least one spoke broke because the outside of the wheel would cool faster than the inside, farmer Sid came through by remembering the way the spokes were always crooked back home in New York. It suddenly dawned on him that if the spokes were crooked, they would have enough give to twist when the thing cooled, preventing the spokes from breaking.

Another project that Sid headed up was making a series of different kinds of donkey carts. A donkey could safely carry about 100 kilograms on its back. But by designing a little two-wheeled cart, that same donkey could haul about 200 kilograms. A bigger cart with big wooden spoked wheels and a good mule pulled half a ton.

Joan's first project was to design and make a trip cart for the local coalmine. Instead of a cart that got loaded up and had to be dumped and shoveled out, she made a little cart that had a trip action, automatically opening up the back and tipping the load out.

Joan and Sid both knew that their time at Wayaobao would be short, altogether maybe five months after their wedding in Yanan. The plan was always for the small group of cadres from the Border Region Government to head north to the border of Inner Mongolia, where Sid had gone before to scope out the territory and conditions before evacuating Yanan. The iron factory was fast on its way to becoming obsolete; everything they were working on was going to be leapfrogged very shortly. China as a country was going to be moving ahead fast, and soon the need to pound out nails out of unexploded bombs would be over. As soon as the PLA liberated Xian, they would have at their disposal entire factories and more modern mechanisms to produce the things the people needed. Sid's skills would be better put to use in working in livestock improvement, to raise the standard of living for the herdsmen in the very northern region of Shaanxi Province. Joan, of course, would be assigned with her husband, but also because of her technical skills.

Knowing that they would soon be setting up shop in the windswept grasslands, Joan proposed that she design and build a windmill to bring along. She soon found her fundamental knowledge of science put to the test. As a nuclear physicist who matured

as a scientist in Los Alamos, she had never had to think about the physics behind cutting the teeth out of a gear; she just signed her name at the shop and got to pick from an endless assortment of different-sized gears made of a wide variety of materials. She remembered signing out a long strip of stainless steel to put new edges on her skis. Now working in the remote loess hills of North Shaanxi, where the local peasants rarely, if ever, ventured past the next gully, she found herself thinking about the world she left in a different light. The people she worked with knew nothing about Fermi and Los Alamos and therefore had no way to assign any kind of importance or status to it. They wanted to know if she had sound ideas about how to improve the tools and machinery that would raise the efficiency and living standards of the Chinese people.

But their world was not closed; they were thinking about the future of all mankind that had nothing to do with doctors' degrees. They had a vision and an understanding of the relations between people and how society worked, which nobody at Los Alamos had any idea about.

So Joan set about trying to figure out everything with calculus—how big the fans needed to be, the angle of the gears, the position of the tail. Because resources were so scarce, there wasn't a lot of room for error. What she came out with looked like it might work, and they set it aside to take with them when it was time to go north.

The technical work at the little factory was only part of their life there. The other main part was studying. Only a few people had any formal schooling and many were illiterate. So once a day, they would gather to study Chinese. Liu Deying, who had graduated from middle school before he joined the revolution, spent that time learning English from Joan and Sid. After one study session, he approached Joan to ask, "Can all women be called mistakes?" Joan didn't quite know how to respond until she realized that he meant "Miss.," and laughed for a long time before she could answer.

During those five months, the Border Region Government also called them back to Yanan several times for meetings. They made the two-day walk, drinking from the spring, spending the night in Horse Hoof Gully, and arriving to attend intensive meetings about the current political situation.

We had meetings there... with guys who have squatted all their lives. They didn't know how to sit on chairs, so they squatted up on the chair hunting for lice. We talked about how to develop North Shaanxi and animal husbandry, how to take over Xian and how to build this new China... They were really right out of the loess hills, but they were so far advanced in their thinking. They would study every morning. It was tremendous what they knew about society and history and everything, and it was such a primitive setup; it was just mind-blowing.

The last time they were called back to Yanan, it was to move to the north. Sid proudly hitched up two mules to the four-wheeled cart. Joan loaded up her windmill in the back, alongside her footlocker, sleeping bag, typewriter, and slide rule, and they

set off. The only thing about making the trip on their four-wheeled cart, though, was that they had to search far and wide for a road big enough to ride on. What was left of the bigger road had seen better days—partly out of neglect, and partly to cut the legs out from under a motorized Guomintang army. What was a two-day trip by foot ended up taking about a week on the cart, with lots of time spent stopping to ask for directions to the *malu*, which meant literally, the horse road.

China in August 1949 was still very much in the midst of civil war. While the liberation of the entire country was imminent, the further out you got from the more populated areas, the more sketchy the status of the liberating forces. As Sid said, “Any two-bit landlord with enough power and money could get together 20 people and have his own little local militia...<sup>38</sup> If the Guomintang’s power extended to that area very well, why then those armies were brought under the central Guomintang command. But if the central Guomintang command was not strong there, the army would be more or less—to be polite you might call it ‘independent,’ but actually, they were just bandits, local tyrants.”

The policy was that any army that wanted to defect to the Communists could do so, and retain their own internal organizational structure. The one requirement was that a People’s Liberation Army officer, who had equal power with the original top officer, would serve as part of the unit. The two would discuss any moves before they made them, come to a consensus, and then act. It was very good in theory, but in those far-flung areas, there was always a danger that in the case of strong disagreement, the one PLA officer might meet an untimely death and the rest of the unit would become bandits again.

Those conditions accurately described the situation of Sid and Joan’s destination. In Yanan for a week before they started on their journey, they had the chance to get an earful from Yu Manqing, one of the college graduates in animal husbandry stationed at the temporary farm site up north, who ran yelling back to Yanan about the local leadership there. Intellectual cadres sent out to the more remote regions oftentimes found their theoretical ideas about what the revolution would look like in practice at odds with how the local leadership saw it.

The college graduate intellectuals had the idealistic idea that in new China all the Communists were perfect, and there would be no self-interest of any kind. Then when they got there, they found that the local cadres were not as perfect as they had imagined. In fact, sometimes they were squeezing money or goods from the people and still had all those habits from the old society, even though some of them had joined the Party and the revolution. Most of the intellectuals just couldn’t take it; they didn’t see it as development, as a gradual process of change. They had the idea that everyone

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<sup>38</sup> Militias during that time in Chinese history amounted to hired or coerced guns that did the bidding of a landlord or warlord to enforce their will on the peasantry or against other landlords and warlords—or communists. Under the CCP, militias were People’s Militias, organized to arm the people themselves for self-defense.



should be perfect, and they thought they were perfect too.

In this case, the conflicts seemed serious enough to send up an old cadre from Yanan to try to solve them. So together with Liu Deying, Sid and Joan, Lao Huang (Old Huang), a *kejiang* (a regional level official) got ready to make the trip too.

When a country goes through a revolution, and a new government and political system are taking over, one of the many logistical issues at hand is how to deal with currency. The general population had lost confidence in the hay bales of Guomindang currency long ago, and so many were dealing in silver. The Communists were trying to slowly take the silver out of circulation and replace it with their paper currency, but the locals where they were going didn't have much confidence in, nor experience with the new government or its paper money. What they did place value in, though, was cloth. So along with their own personal effects (Sid and Joan had an enormous amount of luggage at one footlocker each), they also loaded up the string of six or seven donkeys with bolts and bolts of cloth for barter.

The trip took about a week, walking about 30 kilometers (about 20 miles) a day. Both Joan and Sid would remember that trip for the rest of their lives. They were in the prime of their lives and newly married; the long walk behind the trail of donkeys was like play and took them through different kinds of landscape that wowed two people enamored with the natural world. Light feet and lighter hearts: China, after generations of bitter struggle and suffering, was on the cusp of Liberation, and the prevailing feeling in the air was excitement. Joan and Sid, like the rest of their traveling companions, were eager to take part in building a new country.

## Chapter 18

# The Fort

*“The sand dunes came in stretches like long, curling dragons.” Sid Engst*

The way to the Mongolian plains was up through the loess hills, down into gorges, and then up and up and up again until the earth was no longer eroded and simply formed a wide expanse of flatland. Sid had seen it on his previous trip, but having Joan along to talk about it with made it more real.

[I]t was so beautiful; the water was so clear in the streams, and up in the hills the air was so pure. For most of the week, the terrain was deep gullies, where we climbed to plateaus and then down into the gorges. Some of those places, the road got narrower and narrower until it was steep down on both sides. There was one place with cliffs and the river down below. And in those cliffs were holes dug up during the Muslim invasion... probably more than 100 years ago... [T]he Hans made those caves in the cliffs... [and] a little hole in the rock and one person could hold off an army coming up. If someone climbed up, they just clubbed them.

As we got further north, the erosion got less and less, and finally we found ourselves up high where the gullies were just little gullies. Then pretty soon we were up on the Mongolian plains where it wasn't eroded at all, and when we got up higher, we saw further and further until we saw a little thin thing that turned out to be the Great Wall of China.

Around Yanan, caves dug into loess hills provided the peasants shelter. But once they got to the plains, there weren't hills to dig into. So instead, they dug down into the ground, leaving enough on top so that the cave wouldn't collapse. They had the odd experience of walking on flatland that extended to the horizon and then coming across a chimney at their feet. A few more feet forward and they would come across whole villages dug into the ground.

The whole way was well worn with donkey paths, because it was on a salt route. Up in the northern regions were great big salt lakes that either dried up or were pumped out. Salt in central and southern China was hard to come by, so donkey drivers made the trip back and forth, bringing bags of salt south, and loads of consumer goods like cloth north.

During the summer time, the way locals traveled was to get up early in the morning and walk until the sun came up at around 9:00. The donkey drivers then released their animals to pasture to graze and dug a hole in the ground themselves to build a fire and make some food and rest. Then, when the sun started on its sunset path around 3:00, they hitched the animals back up again and walked for another 15 kilometers until it got dark. If the weather was good, which it was most of the time, the group

slept outside. Otherwise, they spent the night in a little inn.

Joan was a little taken aback when she saw how the cook at the inn threw dried cowpies into the fire as fuel and then turn to knead the dough for the noodles. Psychologically she knew that everything was going to be boiled anyway, but it still took some getting used to. After all, this was the woman who Sid joked once that practically made him “boil his penis” before they had sex for the first time!

The time in the middle of the day while the donkeys and drivers rested was left for play and adventures. Joan couldn't understand why Liu Deying loved to shoot the wild birds and animals they came across. Once he shot a big eagle, with a wingspan wider than he was tall. And when they came across a wild rabbit, Liu Deying gave Joan his rifle and told her to take a shot. She refused, horrified; she did not see any reason to shoot an animal that hadn't done anything to her.

As the donkey caravan neared their destination, the Mongolian plains unfolded before them alternating between three to five mile stripes of caramel sand and tough grass. The first time they crossed a stretch of sand made Joan a little nervous; there was no frame of reference anywhere. But as long as you walked in a relatively straight line, you were bound to come across the next strip of grassland. Joan, Sid, and Liu Deying entertained themselves by building a sand sculpture of Chiang Kai-shek and then beating it to the ground.

In that area, grassland was grassland and desert was desert, and they ran parallel like canals from the northwest to the southeast. One theory that Sid heard was that all of the loess soil in Shaanxi (and other parts of southeast China) and all of the sand in the Mongolian plains originated from Central Asia. In Xinjiang Province, in the far northwest, the desert consists of only stones the size of marbles. Millennia of endless winds from the northwest had blown anything smaller away. The wind swept up the finer particles of loess, depositing them further south. But the sand, bigger and heavier, could only tumble over and over itself, piling into sand dunes that crested and fell, sometimes burying whole cities in their wake. In the area where Joan and Sid were to spend the next three years, the sand moved 10 to 20 meters a year. Ningtiaoliang, a village near what would be their station, struggled futilely to move the path of the sand as it crept up against its western walls, before eventually giving up and moving out.

The county seat, or administrative center, was a little place the caravan passed through before arriving finally at Shuaba Haizi, a low-lying village and temporary site for the farm. Sid met up with some familiar faces: long, black and white ones. The cows he and his comrades had driven up all the hills and gullies of North Shaanxi were there chewing their cud in Shuaba Haizi.

The place where they really wanted to set up the farm was called Chunchuan, further along into the strip of grassland, but ever since the main PLA forces had left the area, the bandits and militias had been wreaking some havoc in the region. Things seemed to have settled some, so Sid went with Lao Huang, and the Farm Director, Yang Chunhai—the co-director and the guy who had made the intellectuals so mad—to survey the area. Joan stayed behind and met for the first time, the crew of youth that

had come to work on the farm: Yu Wa, Ma Xuankuan, Li Guideng, Bai Wa, Zhang Lanchun and Er Gadan. Young kids at the time, they would grow up with Joan and Sid, eventually moving as they did to a state farm outside of the ancient capital of Xian working with each other for almost two decades.

Sid and the two co-directors were optimistic in their assessment of the situation, and so the farm, named Sanbian Muchang (Three Border Pasture Farm), because of its location on the borders of Inner Mongolia, Shaanxi and Ningxia, began the process of moving into the walled fort of Chunchuan, in the last few days of September 1949. Left over from the Boxer Rebellion, Chunchuan was an old adobe walled fort, with walls stretching over twelve feet high.<sup>39</sup> When Joan arrived to take a look, she mapped it out in typical scientific fashion.

At the south end where the main gate was there was an extra wall in the shape of an L so that anybody coming in the front gate could be seen from both sides. Inside was a Catholic church in the northeast corner and school, and some fairly decent buildings. There were also a lot of broken down structures. At some point in time, the local people built their houses inside the fort, but as the situation got more stable, they left the fort and took the wood from their houses with them. The mud walls and foundations were still there without the roofs, so it looked like a bombed town, sort of forlorn.

In the southern end of the fort was the local government, a Mongolian government with a Han Representative. They had a few houses there [and] in the northwest corner we had our farm... At the very northern end of the fort, there were two very little grain storage houses, one of which they gave to Sid and me. Next to where we lived, there was another sort of better house that we used for our experimental lab and all the equipment. There was another row of buildings in front of that, and then there was a paddock for our animals.

Northeast of the Chunchuan, not too far by foot, was a place everyone called Jiu Chun, or Old City. In reality, it was more like a big mound of earth, the remains of an ancient city wall. And although it would've as Sid put it, "driven an antique collector mad," because it was littered with old pottery and relics, they didn't pay it too much mind beyond using it as a landmark. Two older women lived in caves dug out of the old wall, and with another woman who lived north of there, they came to be known as the "San Guafu" or the Three Widows (even though two were not really widows).

The Mongolians in that area were not nomadic like the Outer Mongolian people

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<sup>39</sup> The Boxer Rebellion was an uprising in the 1899 at the end of the Qing Dynasty led by the Chinese Society of Right and Harmonious Fists. Called "boxers" because of their use of martial arts, they rose up against foreign imperialist interests that were exploiting China. In 1900 the boxers assaulted Beijing's foreign section, killing over 200 foreigners, which prompted foreign powers to send in troops to crush the rebellion. As a consequence, China had to indemnify the foreign powers—forts like the Chunchuan were part of that indemnity.

to the north. They stayed in one place year round and therefore had no need for the portable ger or yurt.<sup>40</sup> Aside from the houses inside the Old City, all of the houses around there were built with rammed earth walls; the local people staked out a place with poles, filled it with dirt and then hammered it down until it was solid. When they removed the poles, a new wall stood on its own. On top of the adobe walls, the locals built rafters made of wood, and beams to hold up the roof. In China, rooms were measured by how much one beam could hold up. Most of the locals there had huts that were one or two rooms in size.

Almost all of the local people near Chunchuan were ethnically Mongolian. The new policies of the new government dictated that if ethnic Han man married a woman who was an ethnic minority like Mongolians, they and their offspring took on the identity of the ethnic minority. This policy was to ensure that ethnic minorities were not eventually assimilated through marriage by their shrinking population and the overwhelming majority of Han people. But because most people were ethnically mixed there, and most identified as Mongolian, it seemed like the local practices were actually ahead of the national policies.

Unlike most traditional Han practices, where women were kept tottering on bound feet inside the home, Mongolian women did almost all of the farm work, including milking and feeding the animals, making all of the dairy products that were the staple in their diet, and shearing the sheep. Milking the cows was quite a process, not only because it was by hand, but also because the cows there would not let their milk down without their own calf suckling first. So as each one came in from pasture needing to be milked, they let her calf start out suckling, and then separated it and tied it near the mother's head. After the cow was milked out, they let the calf spend the night with its mother, so that the milk during the day went to the humans and the milk at night went to the calves.

Mongolian men handled the business, and as the property owners, they held the power in the family structure. Their work was limited mainly to selling and buying livestock, checking up on the horses and sometimes bringing one in—and also lying around in the grass all day watching the sheep. With the exception of one Mongolian they knew, who was a doctor married to a Han woman, all of the mixed marriages were with Han men and Mongolian women. Matches the other way around would have dire consequences on a family's ability to survive, because no one would know how to do all the work with the livestock.

Just north of Chunchuan, the closest Mongolian resident to them was Deharjee, a man whose wife had died. Because he didn't have any women in the house to take care of the animals, he hired a tough, capable woman named Gala to help out. The Three Widows, Deharjee and Gala, perhaps because of the proximity, were more friendly than others in the beginning to the cadres who came to set up the farm.

Joan and Sid hauled in their footlockers and settled quickly into their two small

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<sup>40</sup> A ger or yurt is a circular structure built with collapsible wooden beams and thick wool felt wrapped around with a hole at the top for a stovepipe.

rooms. Their bed was the traditional *kang*, heated by burning fuel underneath the clay platform. Their rooms, though, happened to be attached to a bigger building, which was the place where the farm stored grain. As a result, the place swarmed with rats, especially at night, when they could feel them running across their bodies, sometimes stopping to bite their noses.

Feeling quite differently about the rats than the innocent bunny that Liu Deying had tried to get her to shoot, Joan decided that the rats had to go. She and Sid came up with an ingenious plan to plant one of their footlockers over the rats' entrance and exit hole, propped up by a stick. They then leaned anything heavy that they could find up against the walls, tied a string to the stick, and turned out the lights. They sat quietly for a few minutes until they heard the familiar scratching of tiny claws over the earth floor and pulled the stick out from under the footlocker. Wham! They turned on the lights and went all around the room, smashing the boards and things they had propped up. That first attempt landed them about seven rats, including two that met their untimely end squashed flat under the heavy footlocker as they tried to make their escape. Using this method, they managed to cut down on the rat population significantly.

As part of the moving in process, the farm set up the windmill that Joan had so laboriously designed and crafted in the very northwest corner of the fort, the corner where the winds were especially strong, sometimes gusting and whipping dust and dirt around furiously. The project seemed like a blazing success until one day the winds kicked up, and the windmill got going, spinning faster and faster until KABAAM! The whole thing exploded and blew up into the air. That's when Joan found out that a very important fixture on windmills is the brake. Resources were so scarce, she never got a chance to try again.

Chunchuan, a week's walk from Yanan, was more remote than any other area Joan or Sid had been. Thus, on October 1st, 1949, when the whole world (different countries for different reasons) took notice of a little event like the founding of the People's Republic of China, no one at the Three Border Farm had the slightest idea. A donkey cart arrived 20 days after the fact with a newspaper bearing the exhilarating news that China had, after generations of groveling on its knees to different colonial and imperial masters—"stood up." The cadres at the farm knew that the victory had been near—but they also knew firsthand, the enormous price that had come with the revolution's success. They shed some tears, ran up a red flag in the fort, and celebrated.

For the rest of 1949, and through the first winter, they did not manage to do much work. Their only objective was to do whatever they could to help the Mongolians with whatever was needed to raise their standard of living. But several obstacles stood in the way. First was that they were all, as Sid put it, "not a little green, but very green," and didn't really know what they were doing themselves in terms of how to live in that region. Second was that decades of exploitative trading practices of the Han Chinese resulted in an intensely distrustful Mongolian population. For generations, Han Chinese merchants who traveled to the area to trade would trick and cheat the local people in their business, like demanding a head of sheep for goods the Mongo-

lians had no other way of getting, like a sewing needle. The acrimonious relationship was not made any better by the continued presence of a Belgian priest, Father Ma, who did everything he could to foster the distrust between the local people and the farm.

And the third was the diet was pretty poor, it was cold as hell and they had a hard enough time just surviving, much less doing much work with the local people. Farm life at the Three Border Farm proved very different from farm life in Gooseville Corners, especially because the people making decisions about whether they should be issued fuel for heat were 20 days south by donkey cart.

For a while after we were transferred up there, we were on the 2<sup>nd</sup> class kitchen again with the Farm Director who was not that healthy. But it was only a little while before we went on the 3<sup>rd</sup> class kitchen... With the 3<sup>rd</sup> kitchen you had plenty to eat; you could eat as much as you want... but it was just millet.

In the very northern part of the province where we were, *huangmi* [(yellow grain)] was the main grain that was grown. When it's growing in the fields, it looks a bit like rice, it's an open panicle. There was also foxtail millet, *xiaomi* [(small grain)]. When it's growing, the top opens up into what looks like a foxtail. The *xifan*, grain boiled into a soft consistency, was made out of *xiaomi*, but the *huangmi* made better ganfan, boiled or steamed dry like rice... If it was morning, you'd have some *xifan*, and... in the evening it was all *huangmi*.

But once a week we had a meal of flour, usually it was *mantou*, steamed rolls. Oh they made wonderful *mantous*! There were only two meals a day, and I think it was on Wednesday that we had it—by Tuesday night we were already thinking about it. We only had rice about once a year... on Spring Festival [Chinese or Lunar New Year] we'd have one or two meals of rice.

[I]n that area there were a lot of animals, and we had more meat than you would have other places—they had a lot of sheep and cows... It was just a little bit [but] everybody had a little bit quite often. The mutton was pretty good, but the beef was all ready to knock on the door of hell. Fresh vegetables were quite scarce. In the winter it was all just *baicai*, Chinese cabbage and *kuqicai*, which was like a dandelion. It was *kuqicai* until you didn't even want to look at it anymore... They cut it and washed it and put in one of those big earthenware crocks with salt and water...

[T]hat first winter was pretty difficult. We'd get up in the morning and usually have an hour and a half. There was a *dong! dong! dong! dong!* That meant get up. So we'd get up in the morning and quickly put our clothes on. We had *mianau*, cotton padded pants and cotton padded jackets. Then you grabbed your basin, your towel and your cup and dashed to the kitchen where they'd heated up a big cauldron full of warm water. You took half

a basin full of warm water and filled up your *chagang*, tin cup, with half hot water and half cold water to brush your teeth with, and dashed back to your room and put your towel in there—it was frozen stiff as a board. You had to put it in gradually cause it had to melt as it went in, and then you washed. When you were through washing, you brushed your teeth and dumped this water in the basin. And then you threw the whole thing out, hung your towel up, and quickly did all you had to do with your towel then because in about five minutes the towel was all frozen stiff as a board again. After washing, the bell for study would ring and off and we'd go for an hour or an hour and a half of study.

Joan and Sid had a *kang* to sleep on, so theoretically they should've been warm at night even though it averaged ten below Celsius (14 degrees Fahrenheit). But because the wall where their *kang* was built was right up against the earth wall of the fort, they had the unfortunate problem of the smoke not drawing from the room. Every time they lit a couple of sheep manure pies under the bed, the air turbulence would force the smoke down the chimney instead of up. Finally, they struck upon the idea to dig a hole on the outside of the wall to burn the manure, and vent the heat inside. Feeling rather pleased with themselves for solving the problem, they fired it up and tested it out. Or, rather, Joan tested it out; Sid went away that night on business.

An important fact about kangas that folks who did not use them regularly usually didn't know, is that you have to keep a *kang* active if you want to sleep on it. A *kang* that hasn't been used for a while gradually accumulates moisture, so when you fire it up, all of the dampness gets driven into the covers—and into anyone who happens to be lying on top. Peasants knew to build strong fires under a previously dormant *kang* for about a week, driving the moisture into a pile of straw on top before sleeping on it. But Joan had no idea and woke up the next morning completely steamed to the bone.

She couldn't move at all, and when her friend, Wang Fuping, came by her window to see why she wasn't at breakfast, she could only manage an "Eeerrrrgh" sound that her friend couldn't really hear or understand. Hours crept by before Wang Fuping returned and Joan managed to communicate to her that all her bones had turned to jelly. She helped her to the bathroom and moved her to the kitchen *kang* where she gradually recovered. The second time it happened, Joan decided that she would rather be cold at night and they left the *kang* alone.

The second winter, the leadership in Xian decided to issue everyone some smokeless coal, which didn't throw very much heat beyond a small circumference, but it would warm your hands if you put them directly over it and at least kept everyone's room above freezing.

Each winter everyone was also issued some raw wool to make their own socks. Sid spun the wool by sticking a chopstick in a potato and twisting and wrapping the yarn around it. Joan took up knitting; she still had an artistic bent and found different colors and made stripes and patterns in the socks.



Living conditions were tough. But people didn't complain, because their spiritual life was a different story. The cold nights and monotonous meals didn't make a dent in people's eagerness and excitement about building a new China, and they took their study and discussions as an essential part of that task.

Our study was wonderful. All the study material, pamphlets and so forth, was all sent up from the provincial government Party. Study was carried out always through the Party committees at various levels. Our Chinese on the whole by that time was enough to keep up with what was going on... the people we were with... didn't have a very high level of literacy either.

But the things they studied proved to be complex, advanced, and based in the work that they were doing. They started with the very fundamental ideas of how human society developed historically from a communal structure to a feudal one, in order to understand concretely the forces that existed in China, and how to move it forward. A major and continuing study subject was the new government policy on the Minority Nationalities, which they were able to put in practice on a daily basis because of their relationship with the Mongolians.

The national policy on the Minority Nationalities basically stated that the Han Chinese had to take the initiative in building positive relationships with the minorities in helping to preserve and protect their traditions, culture, and language. All of the schools in National Minority areas had to be taught in the local language. Later, in middle school, Mandarin Chinese could be introduced as a second language, but not in primary school. Also, the policy discouraged the intermarriage between Han Chinese and other nationalities in order to try to prevent the gradual assimilation of ethnicities who were in the overwhelming minority.<sup>41</sup>

As far as the new marriage law went, prohibiting the buying and selling of women in marriage, the policy was not to interfere if it was part of their custom. The cadres on the farm put on some short plays about the new policies in China, and the work that they were doing (Joan played a sheep in one of them). Joan drew a picture for one of them of a woman sweeping, and on the other end of her broom, being swept out the door were many of the old customs that oppressed women. But when a young local woman who had come to work with them on the farm told Joan and Wang Fuping

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<sup>41</sup> Even in places like Tibet, where a semi-slave, semi-serf society existed, the original agreement between the communists and the Tibetan rulers at the time that China was founded, was that the Tibetans would maintain their own system. The slave masters were allowed to keep those they enslaved, but the PLA was there to give the people other options, so to speak, if they chose. They sent Han cadres in to set up schools, and many of the enslaved children ran away from their masters to the schools.

As the ideology of the enslaved people changed, pressure mounted on the slave owners, which fomented the eventual rebellion in 1959 that ended up with the Dalai Lama retreating to India. At the time, relations between the USSR and China had deteriorated, and Khrushchev bought off India's Prime Minister Nehru in order to try to surround China. So when the lamas and slave owners, the Tibetan ruling class, tried and failed to get rid of the PLA and the communist cadres, most of them were able to beat a hasty retreat to India where Nehru gave them a place to hide out.

that she was being sold off in marriage against her will, there was nothing they could do except offer her a place on the farm. Her family was Han, and she was only about fourteen years old, but the customs in the area ran deep. They told her she could just stay and join the farm, but in the end the pressure was too much and she was sold to another family.

The only real limitation that the policy placed on Minority Nationalities was that there was no tolerance for any physical abuse, and specifically not between married people. After explaining that policy, they held what they called an “accusation meeting,” like the meetings that peasants had against the landlords during Land Reform. In this meeting, though, instead of peasants standing up to make public all of the landlord’s horrible crimes, women had the chance to “out” their husbands as abusers. For the rest of her life, Joan carried with her vivid images of a Mongolian woman standing tall in her robes, angrily talking about how her husband beat her.

Fortunately the policy was clear and their study of it diligent—because when reality hit and people responded emotionally, they needed their studies to fall back on to sort out what to do. In one instance, a Mongolian neighbor’s dog ran into the farm’s herd of sheep. One of the men guarding the sheep against wolves shot and crippled the dog with his rifle. What followed was about a weeklong study about Minority Nationality policy and educating themselves about the importance of dogs to the Mongolian livelihood. In the end, they offered a sincere apology to their neighbor who accepted.

Later in 1951, Sid went down to Xian for a northwest regional meeting (made up of five northwestern provinces) on animal husbandry.

There was a guy from a sheep ranch in Sanjiao Chun, Three Cornered Village, in Gansu. He was making a report about their technical work there and he said, “Of course because we’re the only sort of branch of the government around there, we also do work with the Minority Nationalities... They have a very loose style of life, and their sexual relationships are very very bad. One of the jobs we do is to correct them and help them get rid of these things.”

The guy who was the head of the Northwest Animal Husbandry Bureau interrupted him right there and said, “You know if that’s what you’re doing, that’s completely opposed to policy. That’s not your job. The Minority Nationalities’ customs and habits are their business.” He gave him hell right there in the meeting, saying there were all kinds of customs and habits all over the world... [and] that their customs and habits were up to them. They could change them if they wanted and they could maintain them if they wanted, and it wasn’t our business to tell them what to do.

The point was well taken and had practical applications for the Three Border Farm, as Mongolian customs about marriage and monogamy were also very different from the Han—and from upstate New York and New England to boot. Although Joan and Sid were not Han Chinese, because they arrived with the farm, they were treated

as such and referred to as “Big-nosed Han.”

In addition to just trying to acclimatize to daily life and engaging in rigorous study, people were also assigned some work tasks. Sid, because of his background in dairying, was made vice head of the farm and did some technical work with the animals as well as pushing papers and dealing with governance issues that the leadership had to address. The cows, of course, had to be milked, but there was not much of a market for fresh milk—so the question was what to do with the product. After the windmill incident, Joan was given the title of technician and put in charge of the cheese and yogurt department. Wang Fuping worked with her, and together they attempted to do what all of the Mongolians seemed to do effortlessly; make dairy products that didn’t spoil.

Joan got hold of some US government pamphlets detailing step by step how to make cheese—but their main hurdle was that they didn’t have any rennet to make the cheese curdle.<sup>42</sup> Upon someone’s suggestion, they substituted the ingredient that people used to make soymilk congealed into tofu. Even though it worked to a certain extent, the taste of the cheese was horrible enough to Joan, much less to the Han Chinese who were completely unaccustomed to eating cheese anyway.

Joan made the butter the way they did in the US, by letting the cream rise to the top of the milk, skimming it off and churning it into butter. But it failed too, because it wouldn’t keep; it went rancid before they had a chance to sell or eat it.

The work was interesting to Joan, who, in her usual way, kept incredibly detailed records of each experiment that they tried. But in the end they wasted a lot of milk and didn’t have anything to show for it. So Joan decided that the best course of action would be to go out to spend some time with their Mongolian neighbors and learn how they made their cheese and butter.

Because Gala, the young woman who worked for Deharjee, was the closest—and also she made her living processing the milk—Joan approached her first and asked if she would be willing to teach her. Gala agreed—of course there was no better way than to learn by doing, so she promised to call her when she was going to make butter. When she did, Joan went with her through the entire process, beginning with cow wrestling.

They had to wrestle with the calves, one at a time. Oh boy, it was a real vigorous thing tying the calves up to their mother’s leg and then grabbing them away and milking the milk; it was an incredible process. You had to be really strong to do it.

After stripping the little bit of milk that the cows gave, they poured it into a big ceramic pot that stood on top of the warm *kang* so that it would sour more quickly. Joan found out later when she went to the Three Widows, that some people would churn the whole milk once the crock was full, until butter particles floated to the top and got skimmed off. But Gala did it the more difficult way, by skimming the cream from the whole milk until the cream itself filled an entire crock before churning it. The

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<sup>42</sup> Rennet is an enzyme extracted from the lining of calf stomachs for the purpose of making cheese.

churning stick was a long pole with leather disks fixed to the end. In the US, farmers made butter the same way, but the crock was a lot smaller and the churner a lot more efficient. Gala sat on the *kang* and counted while Joan took a turn churning.

I thought, “Boy, I’m pretty tough.” I was pretty strong, as strong as any woman I knew around there. So I took it and she started counting. I think the count was to a hundred or something, but boy, I got to about twenty, and I was already just worn out... [S]he asked, “Are you getting tired?” I said no, because I wasn’t going to admit that I was tired. But all my muscles were turning into acid down my arms and boy was I sweating.

Finally she said, “OK, let’s have a rest outdoors.” I thought that was just nice, but we just got out the door and she jumped out and said, “How about wrestling?” I said, “Well gee, OK,” and we got into a wrestling match. Here I was, just about finished from beating the butter, but I went at her and she went at me to see who could knock who down on the ground. Finally we both got rolling on the ground; I was just about equal with her... Then she said, “OK, now we’ve finished wrestling, let’s go in and do the butter some more!” Oh god!

As much as her arms burned, Joan loved the experience; she’d finally met a woman who was her equal physically, and competitive too in the same good-natured way. The two spent a lot of their time together laughing. Gala became her first Mongolian friend, and in her life, one of her closest.

In addition to finding a friend, Joan found how the Mongolians kept their butter from spoiling. After churning the butter, Gala put it in a big wok along with some millet. As the butter melted and began to boil, the protein collected on the millet at the bottom of the wok, leaving pure butter oil to be poured, while still very hot, into a sheep’s stomach sewn into a pouch. She tied off the top and hung it up, where it would keep indefinitely because the heat had killed the bacteria, and the protein was still in the wok on the millet.

After the two became friends, Gala’s year of work for Deharjee was up and she had built a new house on the other side of the prairie near the edge of the sand and had to move her things there. Naturally she hunted Joan down and asked if she wanted to help. Joan readily agreed and met her in the morning to find that her payment for a year’s work was four big sheepskin pouches of butterfat oil. These she rigged up onto two carrying poles and handed one to Joan to help carry to her new place.

The way Gala walked was in big strides; she was so different from the Han women... She was just so strong striding across the prairie with her Mongolian boots and robe... I was striding along with her, but after awhile I began to wonder how far it was. She just kept saying, “Over there, just over there.” She was also singing away these Mongolian songs that were so nice, swinging her bags of butter, but I wasn’t used to a carrying pole all that

much, and it started out light, but got heavier and heavier. Course I wasn't gonna be beat by her, but I began to sweat and wonder how far away just over there was.

In Mongolia, where most people travel by horseback, distances were measured differently than in Han territories, where most people walked or went by donkey. "Just over there" turned out to be so far away that they arrived at Gala's small adobe house hours later. Joan, exhausted but pretending not to be, met Gala's seven or eight-year-old daughter, and found out that her father was not Gala's husband. In Mongolian customs, there was nothing unusual about a woman having multiple lovers, because their husbands were away much of the time on business or with the sheep. Gala also explained to Joan the difference between Mongolian and Han women in terms of the price that a new wife would fetch: 600 *yuan* versus 200-300.<sup>43</sup> Mongolian women were known as more capable—and they were proud of it.

On another visit, Gala took Joan to visit a friend nearby. Again, "Just over there" turned out to be a long trek that lasted up and over sand dunes, all day until the sun went down. Just at dusk, they arrived at two small adobe huts guarded by vicious dogs that were only called off after their owners knew who was coming.

The family consisted of a widow with five or six children and her father who lived next door. The group had a blast, sitting and singing together far into the night. Joan followed along with her recorder and copied down the music for some of the tunes she liked. When it came time for bed, everyone got under big sheepskins on the *kang* heated by sheep manure and slept soundly. For Joan, that trip and time spent with Gala's friends was an important signifier that she had become close to the local people and gained a deeper understanding of their lives and culture. She was shocked to find out, when she returned to the farm, that everyone was in an uproar about the fact that she had spent the night without her husband away from home.

Joan was just as shocked by their reaction as they were about her behavior. The next morning at study, when the cadres there took her to task, she pointed out that men spent countless nights out without a peep from the leadership. And besides, the whole purpose of her trip was to become closer to their Mongolian neighbors and improve relations. In the end, both sides let it go. Sid was unconcerned, Joan ignored the criticism, and there didn't seem to be anything else anyone could do about it.

It wasn't the first nor the last time Joan shocked those around her into silence. In January of that first winter, 1950, the Xian Agricultural Department invited Joan and Sid down to speak at one of their meetings about their work at the Three Border Farm. Because Carmelita had been so strict about her children cursing, Joan had no idea when or in front of which kinds of company it was appropriate. And since she had learned most of her Chinese from peasants in North Shaanxi, she opened up her speech to the bureaucrats by calling them all "motherfuckers" and launched into a talk about

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<sup>43</sup> A Chinese *yuan* is the name of the People's Republic of China's currency. It is also called *renminbi*, or the people's currency.

her experiences, peppered with a rich assortment of swear words. As Sid described, “First their faces turned white—then they turned green. They didn’t know whether to laugh or to cry.”

By the time Spring 1950 rolled around, the farm cadres were more than ready to get to work on their plans for livestock improvement and disease prevention. But as it turned out, the most pressing issue at hand was not cows, sheep, and horses—but bandits. The bandit group that had made the place unstable before the farm decided to move in was sighted in the area, and since northern China had been liberated first, the main People’s Liberation Army forces were in the south. After having shot their PLA representative and gone back to banditry, these thugs roamed around Inner Mongolia and North Shaanxi, making their living by looting and killing.

As the bandits drew near, Sid and the other farm leaders met with the local Mongolian government, made up of four cadres, to see what they wanted to do. They decided together to stay put, post sentries to keep watch, and try to fend them off if the bandits really decided to attack the fort. The farm called a meeting and divided everyone up into guard duty groups to stand watch on the wall at all hours of the day and night. Sid described:

On top [of the wall] there was about a two meter wide little path with a mud rammed earth wall on the outside so that you could walk along on this path. And if you were up about even with the top of this wall, you could see out over the grasslands, and you could see who was coming.

At the meeting, the leadership handed out the few rifles and bullets that they had. Joan lined up to get one, but Liu Deying put an abrupt stop to it, saying, “You wouldn’t even shoot a rabbit on the way up here and you want a gun?” Chagrined, Joan was issued a baseball bat instead.

Joan’s guard buddy was one of the youth named Er Gadan, a nice young guy who was not very big physically. Their job was to haul bricks up the wall every night that they were on duty and pile them at a giant fissure in the fort’s wall. They would each walk in opposite directions looking out over the dark plains with their feet scuffing the adobe wall making the only sounds in the night—until they met at the crack, turned around and went the other way. Should bandits try to climb up the crack in the wall, their job was to beat them off; Er Gadan would throw the bricks, and Joan would pop them on the head with her baseball bat as they came up. Waiting for the bandits on those quiet nights, Joan had a sudden epiphany about the use of violence.

Up until then, I was sort of a pacifist; ...I couldn’t imagine shooting people. I knew that if you had to have a war you had to, but myself I couldn’t really think of it. But waiting up there for the bandits to come, that thinking disappeared so fast... Of course you could say it was because they were bandits and bad people, and they were coming to destroy the people’s property. But I knew my feeling at that point was self-preservation too. If they were going to come kill me, I was ready to kill them too.

The bandits didn't show up the first night on watch, or the second. In fact, they didn't show up at all, and the farm got word that they had moved away from that area. The leadership called the sentries off the wall until news of the bandits moving towards Chunchuan again came barreling down to them on horseback by way of scouts. This time, the Mongolian government and the farm consulted and sent a couple riders to Anbian, a small village twenty miles west, where a small PLA company was stationed. They came back with a box of hand grenades and climbed back on the wall.

Again, the bandits did not show. Just as everyone started to relax, Joan got sick. What started out as mild symptoms and a slight fever gradually worsened every day. In the morning, her temperature was a little lower than the night before, but then climbed one or two degrees higher than the previous morning. Sid, who took her temperature every few hours as it worsened, described it as a saw blade, zigzagging higher and higher, until she couldn't get out of bed anymore.

Right when Joan was bedridden, the bandit army was sighted again, making a beeline for the fort. This third time, an attack seemed imminent. The local Mongolian government decided that they were too close and the fort was too poorly armed, so they made preparations to evacuate to the relative safety of Anbian. The farm followed their lead and immediately got to work getting the animals, equipment and people on the road. The mood was tense and urgent.

Joan lay in bed, unable to move much; the only medication they had on hand was a sulfur-based drug that they used to cure infections, and it didn't touch her fever.

I told Sid to just go, that they couldn't hold up the whole thing just because of me. It's strange, I really thought, "Well, ...that's the way it is. I chose to join the revolution and here I am, and if I'm gonna die, then I'll just die that's all." I don't know whether that counts as being tested... but I think back on it and what could I do? I was sick, and all the farm was moving away and the bandits were coming.

The farm was not about to leave one of their own behind, but they evacuated everything else—the animals, equipment, and people and all of their belongings—before sending five of their strongest people back with a stretcher that Liu Deying made. Nearly unconscious by then, Joan's trip was full of stars swinging dizzily overhead with every lurch of the stretcher. Sid, on one corner of the stretcher, was completely exhausted from a whole night and days' evacuation work, and worry about Joan. The walled fort of Chunchuan was on the edge of the grasslands, and going to Anbian meant sloggng across about three miles of sand. Even with four people on the stretcher, and one person rotating out for a rest, the trip was slow going; with every one step forward, they slid half a step back.

Sid still had with him the standard army issue (aside from the weapon) that he and all of the other UNRRA staff had been given upon arriving in China. In it were what they called "fatigue pills" (probably amphetamines), which were supposed to give the completely depleted soldier energy to keep fighting. He never had any use for

them, but with the bandits on their tails, and Joan completely immobilized, he took one to help him across the sand. Made even sicker by the jolting ride, Joan was relieved when she heard the distant mooing of cows and understood that they had caught up with the rest of the farm. They were in the small village of Duiziliang (a place that was gradually overcome by the inevitable quality of the moving sand), where there was another small fort built during the Boxer Rebellion.

Everyone leaned up against a tree or building to catch some shuteye, but Sid's fatigue pills, which had no effect when he was on the sand with the stretcher, hit him full on, and he didn't get much rest. Feeling rather desperate about Joan and her fever that would not quit, he found the Jesuit priest, Father Wen, in that village and asked him what he thought it might be. (As Sid said, he was so worried that he would've asked the devil at that point.) The priest looked at Joan briefly and said helpfully that it was probably the plague.

That was the extent of the help they got in Duiziliang, so the stretcher crew pushed with the others onto Anbian, which had a big walled fort and thick door impenetrable to small arms. The PLA medic there was quite skilled in sewing up wounds on the battlefield, but didn't know much about whatever Joan was sick with. One medicine he did have was camphor, which when given by injection, sometimes would help with colds or diarrhea—but not, as it turned out, with Joan's flavor of fever. The injection almost knocked her out and gave her feverish dreams. In case it might be the plague, they had her isolated in an unused room full of cobwebs, a crack in the wall stopped up by an old boot and a hole where curious eyes would peep in. In her almost delirious state, the room spun around with eyes and boots and cobwebs swirling together. Lying in that room, she had some feelings of longing for a US hospital. She knew she was almost dead, because everyone began to appear to be very far away from her, even as they spoke right next to her bed.

That was as near death as I've ever been. In a situation like that, even though I told them to leave me in the beginning, I sort of thought if it was America, and they took me to a hospital it might be nice. And then I thought, "Well these people have lived and died here for centuries, and that's the way the life is." There were not doctors or anything and over thousands of years some lived and some died—but there were still people there.

Out of desperation, Sid asked the village's veterinarian to take a look. But because he was a Guomindang trained vet, he was too petrified to do anything, lest Joan die afterwards; having worked with the enemy, the possibility of her dying under his care was too much responsibility. With no other options, they called the army medic back, and not knowing what else to do, he loaded up another injection of camphor. Half dead, Joan still had enough wits to say, "No" enough times to get him to stop.

Finally, someone suggested that they go get a local Mongolian doctor who had worked for a Western trained medic. They sent a rider off in the morning and came back with him the same day. The Mongolian doctor didn't know what to do either,



but he told them about a drug he had very recently learned of that cured high fevers called penicillin.

The farm put guys on their four riding horses and sent them out in all directions to try to find penicillin. One went to the village of Dingbian, 30 miles out. There, amongst the small vending stalls full of small commodity black market goods, the rider found a small bottle of penicillin. By the time he galloped back to Anbian, Joan's fever was almost 110 degrees, and she was fading fast. Sid, who had never given a human injection before, mixed the medicine with some boiled water and put the needle in very slowly. He waited an anxious 30 minutes before he took her temperature again and nearly cried when he saw it was plummeting. By the time he gave her a second injection six hours later, her temperature was already back to normal. Just to make sure, they sent riders out to find a second bottle, which they continued to inject at regular intervals.

Meanwhile, the news with the bandit army was that as the farm evacuated, the bandits moved close enough that they saw a long line of people and animals filing out. They sent a scout to Deharjee's hut and asked him who it was. Deharjee told them that it was a PLA cavalry unit. So while the farm had been fleeing south to Anbian, the bandits had been making a beeline north, beating a hasty retreat.

Driving the livestock with them, the farm moved back to Chunchuan once the coast was clear. They left Joan with Sid and Liu Deying, along with one cow so that she could have milk every day. Her fever was done, but she was completely wiped out—unable to sit up and reduced to skin and bones. All of her hair fell out, leaving only a little tuft. It took Joan some time to recover enough to go back; it was a long time before she could even get up to go to the bathroom. But her progress was steady, and eventually she caught a ride back to Chunchuan, this time on a stretcher hitched between two donkeys.

With the bandits on the run in the opposite direction and eventually disbanded, and the warmer weather reinvigorating all living things, the Three Border Farm got ready to move forward with its work.

## Chapter 19

# Three Border Farm

*“In our work, the most important thing was the policy towards the Minority Nationalities.”*  
Sid Engst

The farm cadres’ first assignment was to eliminate the opium (the addictive narcotic derived from poppies) in the area as part of a national campaign. Not considered part of the Mongolian culture and therefore not protected by the Minority Nationalities policy, opium smoking debilitated many local men and undermined the new currency. So when the farm started a campaign for its elimination, the Mongolian women were some of the first to sign on.

As Sid put it, the Mongolian men were also supportive of the campaign strategically, because of the toll it took on their lives and families. But tactically they wanted to keep smoking—so the actual location of the poppies was difficult to get out of them. The way they got around it was to gather small groups of local people in one area and comb it by foot. Opium growers planted their poppy plants stealthily, in small patches in the sand where few people traveled, and so those who accidentally stumbled upon them wouldn’t know who they belonged to. When the groups combed the area destroying the clusters of poppies they came across, everyone took part in stamping them out, because no one wanted to admit they were his. This method pretty much completely wiped out the opium, not just in Chunchuan, but also all over the country.

In the animal husbandry department, the farm had two veterinarians to inoculate against and cure animal diseases, some fine wool sheep to increase the quality and quantity of wool that the local sheep could produce, big jackasses to breed to the little donkeys, and of course, the black and white Holsteins, fully recovered from their chase by the Guomindang, and ready to be bred to Mongolian cows to increase their milk production.

The problem was, the Mongolians didn’t trust the Han cadres enough to let them near their animals. The farm sent out propaganda teams of a couple people each to go talk to the locals about the work that they were trying to do, but made very little progress. Also, in addition to the historical precedent of the Han ripping off the Mongolians, Father Ma, the Belgian priest in the fort, also did his own propaganda work, sowing seeds of distrust. Once a neighbor mentioned to the priest that he thought it strange that he and Joan and Sid all spoke the same language but never seemed to talk to each other. Father Ma summed it up succinctly by replying: “We’re in different lines of business.”

Father Ma gave his service every Sunday in what people presumed to be Latin and then proceeded to lecture the congregation about how God was the only one who could cure diseases (this in spite of the nice profit he turned on medicine he sold to treat syphilis) and that the Communists were out to destroy their way of life.

So while on the whole, most of the Mongolians were very polite when the farm

cadres showed up at their door with offers of bulls for breeding and inoculations, they nodded and smiled and turned them down.

Inroads were made slowly through the fort's closer neighbors, who developed relationships of trust over time. But more importantly, one of the more well respected and prestigious people in the area was actually a Han Chinese who "became" Mongolian to marry his wife. Sympathetic to the new government and building socialism in China, he became an informal consultant, advising the farm on how far to go and which families might be more inclined to be friendly.

Another person of great help was a local guy whom they hired to help out with the distillery they needed to make alcohol for their lab work and experiments. The man they hired came to trust them and let it be known publicly when he took his animals to get vaccinated and had his cows bred by a Holstein bull.

The locals also soon found out that the farm had access to the same medicine to treat syphilis as Father Ma—and they charged half what the priest charged, essentially just the cost of the medicine. And while the priest sometimes would inject the sick person with distilled water and blame the lack of results on god, people came to see that the veterinarians on the farm seemed to have a better batting average than god's. That was true for the people as well as the animals they slowly started to take in to be inoculated very effectively against deadly diseases like renderpest, blackleg, and anthrax.

By the fall of 1950, many families were ready to accept the bulls that the farm brought around to put in their herds. But when they came back to ask how many cows the bull had bred so that they could write up their progress reports to Xian, the Mongolians suddenly became evasive. They weren't sure, or maybe he bred one cow, but then the neighbor wanted him and who knew where he was now? They found the same responses all over and realized that the Mongolians were betting that the farm was going to try to charge them for every cow that was bred. The only thing they could do was wait for spring to see how many new calves had the familiar black and white patterns.

At the end of 1950, several of the farm's cadres were called down to a month long meeting in Xian. They walked down to Yanan first, the same way they had walked up the year before, and then got on a mule cart to the nearest train station in Tongxuan.

[W]e piled our bedding on top of the coal on the coal train. Yang Chunhai put his on the very top and sat up there with crossed legs, like he was sitting on a *kang* like an emperor surveying the land. It was the first time... any of those guys had ever seen a train. The train started moving and his hair was blowing in the wind. We rode the coal train for a while and then switched into a regular passenger... coach, which we rode to Xian... At that time, Xian was a mess. At the railroad station when we got off the train, there was no way to go from our track to the station without going under and over some other freight cars. We passed our bedrolls through the doors of those freight cars, not knowing if they were going to start at any second.

Xian had been liberated only a little over a year before. The city streets resembled mud troughs, and residents wore high rubber boots to muck their way through them. Projects to build infrastructure and move China forward were on the agenda, though, not just for Xian, but also for all of China, city and countryside. The agricultural meeting dealt with a whole spectrum of issues, from increasing milk supply to the cities, to the effectiveness of the Minority Nationality policy on the work on the ground. So while the Three Border Farm sat far off in the remote Mongolian grasslands, the farm cadres and the work they were trying to do was intimately connected to what was going with the rest of China. They were a part of something much bigger than the walled fort and the sand surrounding it.

At that meeting, Joan and Sid happily reunited with their old friend and interpreter Kang Di. He surprised Joan, who thought that no one even remembered much less cared about the fact that she had been an elite physicist, by asking her if she wanted to teach in the physics department at the Northwestern University. Joan chewed on it and was filled immediately with murky thoughts of cobwebs. She'd also met a few university professors in China and hadn't been too impressed with their air of pretension. She thought about wrestling with Gala and striding on the Mongolian plains. She thought about her milk and cheese experiments and the wind that blew up her windmill.

And she thought she'd rather stay put. She politely but warmly declined.

The meeting ended right around Chinese New Year in 1951, so they stayed to celebrate it in Xian. New consumer goods were on the market, so in addition to buying medicine and equipment for the farm, the cadres also were happy to find a few useful things for recreation—like bicycle parts. Yang Chunhai, in particular was fascinated by the flashlight he picked up—he just couldn't believe that you could make light just by moving a toggle switch on something you carried in your hand.

By the time they were ready to head back, the new road to Yanan was completed, so they all piled into a truck to make the trip. The road, although it went all the way through, still left much to be desired in terms of engineering, and took them around hairpin turns so sharp, that they had to get out and block the wheel to keep from accidentally backing down the side of the cliff.

That spring, new black and white arrivals in the Mongolian cow herds brought a few different things: bigger calves, the potential for more milk, and a better relationship between the Mongolians and the Han Chinese at the farm. After calving, farm technicians came only to count how many calves with Holstein blood there were—not, as the Mongolians long suspected—to collect money. The polite but skeptical relationship towards the newcomers thawed, helped along by several other incidents that proved good will.

In one case, one of the Three Widows came running to the fort with the news that a wolf had jumped the fence and gotten into her sheep corral during the night. Joan grabbed some alcohol and the cure all sulfur drug and ran out on foot with another worker. What they found was a real mess of blood and wool and cut up sheep.

Working as fast and well as they could, they poured alcohol and the sulphur drug over the wounds and sewed the sheep up with needle and thread. Joan couldn't vouch for their technique as far as sterile procedures went, but their quick work managed to save many of the sheep, and all of the Three Widows were very pleased.

In another case, a cow, completely spent after the long winter, fell into a ditch and couldn't get out. When the Mongolian woman who owned her came for help, the farm sent three or four big guys who just grabbed the cow and lifted her out.

Their work, and their attitude while doing it, made steady inroads.

In the meantime, the farm had to figure out how to keep its own cows healthy and productive. The long tough winters were especially hard on the cows and the sheep (and the people of course), and many herds shrank considerably before spring as the weaker animals died off. The Mongolians depended solely on whatever grew naturally for feed, and the quality of the grasslands, after centuries of grazing, was poor. For the Holsteins, the conditions were even tougher—they were bred to make much more milk, but needed to have higher energy feed in the winter. The first winter they eked it out on some millet straw, chopped fine, but they were a little worse for the wear by the time they could get out on the grass again. So when the ground thawed, the farm planted a stand of corn so that it could make silage<sup>44</sup> in the fall, as well as different kinds of grasses.

Farmer Engst had a good amount of experience with grass—albeit under vastly different conditions, and Joan was eager to turn every step of the silage making process into a scientific study and experiment. She started with the corn, which came up tall, in neat rows. Joan spent hours going through the tall stalks, finding the healthiest ones that bore the most plentiful and biggest ears of corn. Marking them with a corn leaf tied off at the top, she told the workers that when they went to cut it down by hand to leave the ones she had marked. The kernels from that corn became the seed for the following year. They chopped the corn stalks, also by hand, to make silage and dumped it into big pits for it to ferment. As a result, the following winter, they were able to provide their herd with some protein-rich silage and hay.

Another major occurrence in 1951 was that the farm suddenly discovered that it was not where it thought it was. That is, they thought they were at the very tip of Shaanxi Province—but as it turned out, Chunchuan was actually part of Inner Mongolia. The border had, after years of warlords pushing, been moved about ten kilometers into the next province, and the new government wanted to right that wrong. The line was redrawn, and the farm ended up on the other side, which was a problem, because the government branch that governed the farm did not have jurisdiction over Inner Mongolia. So the farm leadership scouted out a new location just on the Shaanxi side of the original border, and began to build the new farm headquarters, at a site they called Storage Room Hill. It took until just about 1952, before the site was finished and everyone moved in, because all of the buildings had to be built from scratch. By

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<sup>44</sup> Silage is forage fermented to preserve its nutrients and moisture for when pastures are poor. Corn silage, if the stalks are fermented with the grain, provides high protein feed for cattle.

then, the work was really taking off, and the Mongolians did not want them to leave. So they decided to leave a small group at Chunchuan to maintain the work they were doing and the relationships they had worked so hard to build.

Joan, who was still working with the milk and cheese, stayed north, while Sid moved south with the rest of the farm leadership to work closely with the veterinarian group. By then the Mongolians had seen the concrete results of livestock improvement in their sheep. The first year, the farm only had Merino sheep of questionable quality to offer up for breeding. But by the time they moved, they had gotten another fine wool breed from Xinjiang, which they began to breed with the local ewes. The wool sheared off the Xinjiang sheep was almost ten times as much as the Mongolian sheep, was much higher quality, and sold for a lot more money. The success of fine wool sheep led them to set up a separate sheep farm in Heigeda, (Black Bump), about two miles southeast of the headquarters. They put Yue Shensi (Joan's co-worker Wang Fuping's husband) in charge of the sheep, an old cadre with an incredible attention to detail in his work—and also a horribly nasty temper. As a result, the sheep thrived in his care and his marriage was always on the rocks.

At the new farm headquarters, Sid lived in the breeding room, and Joan and he saw each other most Sundays. Depending on their work and schedules, one of them would make the three-hour trek across the sand and spend the night before going back to work.

A big problem for many people walking across the sand was that the path across it was almost always covered with fresh sand blown in from the wind. The only way that non-locals knew how to cut across was by looking for the trail of camel droppings, which were big enough so that the sand made a little dune over them, piling high up on the northwest side, and tumbling down the southwest side.

Just as Joan began to feel somewhat confident finding her way across the sand on her weekly treks to see Sid, a local came to the walled fort of Chunchuan for help with a mare that was having trouble foaling. She went with him to look and discovered that the foal's head was turned around inside the mare and couldn't come out. Joan knew that she couldn't handle the situation alone and told the owner that she would have to go for help.

To her surprise, the Mongolian man entrusted her with his horse to ride across the sand to the headquarters at Storage Room Hill for the vets. Galloping off, Joan felt a surge of pride—a Mongolian trusting you with his or her horse was not a small thing—and plus, she flew across the sand, in a direct line without having to look too hard for camel droppings.

When he heard the news, Liu Deying jumped up on one of the Soviet stallions that farm had just gotten for breeding purposes, and the two arrived in time for Liu Deying to get the foal's head turned around. The foal was dead, but the mare recovered, and her owner was moved.

Liu Deying was the main vet on the farm, although he never had much formal training. In 1952, after the farm moved its headquarters to Storage Room Hill, an

older, more experienced vet, named Lao Wang, joined them, and the two became known as the Big Vet and the Little Vet. Lao Wang was the guy who used to work for the Guomindang and had been too scared to touch Joan when she was about to die from the fever. That soft spine characteristic carried over into his treatment of animals, too, and any time someone brought him a sick animal, his response was either: a. “There’s nothing wrong with this animal, it will be fine, just take it home,” or b. “It’s over for this animal. It’s going to end up dead no matter what you do.”

In contrast, Liu Deying, though short on the technical training, would do whatever he could under any situation. His courage to act carried over to humans, as well. In Storage Room Hill lived an asthmatic man with no real family, who everyone thought was a little strange, and so gave a wide berth. But one day, a group of kids came yelling into the farm headquarters that he was flat on the ground and looked ready to die. By the time they arrived on the scene, he was so far gone that everyone had walked away; because of local superstitions about ghosts, people were terrified of dead people.

Liu Deying took in the scene and then sprinted back to the supply room and came back with a big syringe full of a strychnine agent. With no time for sterilization, he jabbed the needle directly into the guy’s heart and gave him a big dose. Within seconds, the guy made a strangled noise as he inhaled, and a few minutes later he got to his feet and, after many thanks, walked away.

On one of her visits to see Sid at the Storage Room Hill headquarters at the turn of the New Year, Joan followed Liu Deying out to help him assist a woman who was having a hard time giving birth. What she witnessed there would dramatically alter the course of her and Sid’s lives, although she didn’t know it at the time.

When they got there, one hand was out, but the baby’s head was still inside. Liu Deying felt inside and knew that he would have to push the baby back inside to get it turned around—but he didn’t have the strength to do it.

Liu Deying thought of a method to get a rather thick wooden pole like a rolling pin or something to push the baby back, but the woman wouldn’t hear of it; she got scared, so he couldn’t do it. We told them that we had to get her to Dingbian; we were all organized and were going to carry her on a stretcher to a place where there were doctors. But they wouldn’t do it, because they were afraid if she died on the road, her ghost would do something to them... We tried all night to convince them, but instead, they got a midwife witch, and she was awful. She took a knife in her hand and started cutting in there. She cut this and that and bits of the baby came out, but she didn’t get anywhere. The woman knew that what she was doing was wrong and sat up and said, “*Ni zhege lao biaozi*,” which means, “You prostitute.” When she said it she just had fire in her eyes.

Finally after all that, she agreed to let Liu Deying try with his method. He took a stick, pushed in, and got the baby’s neck around. As soon as the baby got turned around, the woman said, “Oh, that’s much better.” She

knew it was right. But then she suddenly started to die. We thought that a blood vessel was cut, and when the baby got turned around, it changed the pressure against the blood vessel, and she bled to death. If he could've done it before that midwife had used the knives on her, he probably could've saved her life...

When she started really dying, it was terrible; they started beating her to try to get rid of her ghost. She knew she was going to die, so she started talking to her two kids, [a]nd then she just died... Oh god! There was just nothing there but us and the witches.

The experience left a deep sobering impression on Joan, especially because in March, after long years of planning with Sid, she got pregnant (she conceived in the breeding room). She spent many long months thinking about it, and seeing the local woman at work with her friend Wang Fuping when she gave birth did not make her feel better. In addition to having all kinds of superstitions, Joan had to physically take her hands and wash them and prepare the disinfectant herself.

By the time that Spring Festival of 1952 approached, the farm on both sides of the borders had woven itself into the fabric of the local life and culture.<sup>45</sup> So Sid, along with the rest of the farm leadership decided that they should throw a big Spring Festival party and invite all of the local Mongolians to it. In addition to celebrating the New Year with their friends, their goal was to target some more influential residents, who were still not entirely won over to the farm and its work.

Preparations for the big festivities involved mostly making more liquor. Mongolians, legendary in their love for and ability to drink alcohol, had a saying that “the truth comes out when people are drunk.” And whenever they had you as a guest, their way of showing the ultimate hospitality was to physically prevent you from leaving until you were good and plastered. So the farm was determined to get the Mongolians drunk and win the last few holdouts over. In particular, was a guy named Chu Baiar—who was known among friends by the name of Chu Huzi, or Penis Beard. Always friendly, but still very conservative, Sid suggested they specifically focus on him during the party.

Joan, on the other hand, found drunkenness abhorrent. Even though brother Bill had long gotten over Carmelita's training about keeping your mind clear by abstaining from any kind of drug or alcohol, the two sisters never did. Once Sid, who had been invited to a party near Chunchuan, made the mistake of drinking a little in front of them; the last thing he remembered was leaving the hut and seeing the stars swimming in the night sky. Joan watched in horror, as he stumbled into their room, completely inebriated. Knowing he would freeze to death if she didn't do something to help him, she got him into bed and threw a big blanket over him before making her escape. Sid's hangover in the morning was probably pretty bad, but inconsequential compared to

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<sup>45</sup> Chinese New Year, which is celebrated for about a month at the new year based on the lunar calendar, is traditionally the most important holiday in China.



the Wrath of Joan. With the very real threat of divorce hanging over his head, he perfected the art of pretending to drink, while very little liquor actually made it down—and never got drunk again.

Getting drunk for the farm cadres was not too much of a problem, except when you were drunk, you would likely get caught off guard, and your guests could escape without getting drunk themselves—which meant that you were a poor host. The ritual was that the host was supposed to go to every guest personally and drink first, before giving the alcohol to the guest to drink. They also played a drinking game, where both sides would throw out fingers and try to anticipate the sum. If one person guessed right, the other person would have to drink. So the farm decided that if they were to have any chance to get their target so drunk that he couldn't even walk anymore, they would have to switch off with the hosting so that one person wouldn't have to try to out drink Penis Beard.

Sid went an entirely other route. With plenty of cream and milk, and enough snow around to freeze anything they wanted, the farm made big batches of ice cream for the party. With his drinking severely limited, he turned on the ice cream with a vengeance, claiming that a custom in the US was for the host to go around with the ice cream and eat one spoonful first, before giving a spoonful to every guest. On the night of the party, Joan, a great lover of ice cream, watched helplessly, as Sid gleefully ate his way through half the ice cream.

Everything was going as planned; the Han cadres were doing their job, getting the liquor to Penis Beard, until he began to say he had to go to the bathroom. Everyone knew the old “I have to go the bathroom trick.” In fact Joan and Sid had tried to use it to get out of a party that went on all day all night, but their hosts followed them out and told them they would not call off the dogs if they tried to get away. But after a few hours of drinking Sid and the others began to get worried that Penis Beard really did have to go to the bathroom, and that they were going to be responsible for him wetting himself if they didn't let him.

[H]e got up and his son went along with him, and they walked out. So I went with them to make sure he didn't try to leave, and we went to the johnny, which was just a mud thing just about that high, you could see right over it. And we went in there and peed, and we were looking up at the weather. Penis Beard was a bit unsteady but his mind was clear.

Mongolians always leave their whip outside the door... So... when we started to go into the room, suddenly he just grabbed his whip there and jumped just like a cat about three feet away. He cracked the whip at me and said to me, ‘Yang Zao, rape your mother, you think you can keep me here!’ And his son jumped over and untied their horses, and they jumped on their horses. Mongolians could get on a horse even when they were drunk—it didn't bother 'em at all. He cracked his whip at me several more times and then they galloped off.

Sid was mortified. As Vice Director, he had been the main person supporting the targeting of Penis Beard. And now he was faced with possibly ruining the relationship completely. The rest of the party went well, and late into the night, but Sid's spirits never recovered. He consoled himself by taking the tub of leftover ice cream back to his room and draping a big blanket over himself to eat it. Joan, finding him there stuffing his face after a whole night of eating spoonful after spoonful, after suffering jealously through a whole day of watching him do it—grabbed a spoon and joined in.

The next morning, the farm was up cleaning up after the party, when Penis Beard and his son rode in on their horses.

He rode up to me, and he jumped off his horse, came over and put his arm around me, and said, 'Ahhh, Yang Zao, rape your mother, you thought you were gonna get me drunk yesterday, rape your mother!' He was very happy; everything was well.

While the Penis Beard story turned eventually into family lore, Joan (and Sid, grudgingly) always insisted that getting everyone drunk at the Spring Festival was not the main impetus behind the Mongolians coming to embrace the farm. The party, thrown with good timing, cemented the sentiment that most of the Mongolians felt by then, due to the farm's diligent and sincere hard work.

Joan and Sid, as individuals, felt completely at home and accepted as they would most of their lives in China amidst the ordinary working people (intellectuals were another matter). At that time, in the early '50s, the US began flexing its imperialist muscles in Korea, trying to turn back the tide swelling with the success of the armed revolution in China and make sure they would have military access to Asia there.<sup>46</sup> Korea was close to Inner Mongolia geographically, and the analysis of the situation there dominated their political study. Those in agriculture across the country offered their solidarity to the Korean people through food support, and the Mongolians, won over to the new government through respect and trust, had to be stopped from giving away so many of their animals that their own ability to sustain themselves would be impacted.

As the US prepared to lay bombs and land troops in Korea, the folks they worked with in Inner Mongolia saw Joan and Sid not as US imperialists but as foreign comrades. Their ideology was anti-imperialist; as Sid said, it didn't matter what country you were from—it only mattered what side you were on. The only time they remembered anyone giving them a hard time about being from the US was at a party where Sid was beating everyone at the drinking game, counting fingers. A local merchant challenged

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<sup>46</sup> After World War II, the US rushed into Korea to get there before the Soviet Union so that it could accept the Japanese surrender. In the years after the war, the US divided the country and supported a reactionary puppet government in the south. When the Korean War broke out officially in 1950, the Soviet Union made clear that they would not rush to the aid of the Communist-led north. In addition to understanding that US intentions reached beyond Korea and believing in international solidarity, hundreds of thousands of revolutionary Koreans had fought side by side with Chinese comrades during the Civil War. That China would be ready to support North Korea was not ever a question.

him and was beaten into such a drunken state that he started sputtering about how a US imperialist couldn't beat the Chinese. Immediately, the other partygoers laid into him, telling him to play if he wanted but to cut the crap.

As well as the work went outside the fort walls, the farm had its share of internal problems and conflicts. Meetings dominated the work; the saying back then was “*Guomindang shui duo, Gongcandang hui duo*” (the Guomindang has a lot of taxes, the Communists have a lot of meetings). The main reason why Lao Huang went up to Chunchuan originally with Joan and Sid, was to resolve some of the problems that the intellectual cadre had come huffing back about. One was that Yang Chunhai, the farm's co-Director, liked to have a lot of different women at his beck and call and used his position to keep a girlfriend on the side in each village. Another was that their accountant, a guy named Zhang, used two different weights and rulers when he bought and sold goods, pocketing the difference. At one of their many meetings dealing with the local cadres' corruption, Director Huang got so upset with their attitudes that he ordered one of them to be bound up and shipped off to Dingbian. The local government at Dingbian, though, said that civilians had no right to arrest people and let him go.

Also, way back when the farm first got started, Joan had loaned her watch to the head of the worker study group (aside from the cadres there were some Han workers there who conducted their own study). Soon, the watch disappeared and meeting after meeting was dedicated to trying to find out what happened to it. The focus of the meetings was a worker, whom they accused of stealing the watch. The other workers gave a hundred and one different reasons why he was the one, badgering him until finally, he admitted that he stole it. The issue seemed resolved, until two years later, when Liu Deying happened to see a kid playing with a watch.

The kid had found the watch at the bottom of a grain storage bin after he'd emptied it. And because they could track who from Chunchuan had made the trip across the sand and filled that bin, they discovered that the thief was not the worker who had been accused. Instead, it was the guy in the meetings who had been most vehement in his attack of that worker.

As painful as the lesson was, not everyone learned it. A few years later, after the institution of wages for cadres, the accountant at the Storage Room Hill headquarters had a similar problem. He kept all of the monthly wages in a drawer until it was time to hand them out, and one day all of it was stolen. Again, the farm held meeting after meeting and finally accused a carpenter of the robbery. In the meantime, they had reported the robbery to the local security office, which sent people out to every store where you could possibly buy anything for miles around. They tasked each store with recording how much money each person spent every time they went in, and after months of tracking, they found that one person's spending exceeded his monthly wages, and that was the accountant himself.

In the early 1950s, the Central government launched the *Sanfan* (Three Antis) and *Wufan* (Five Antis) Movements, two of many movements that followed Liberation

with the goal of rooting out corruption and waste among officials and the counter-revolutionaries still living freely with the people.<sup>47</sup> The Civil War was not that many years behind them, and although the great majority of the Guomindang supporters who had not fled to Taiwan with their masters were eager too to build new China, a small select group were still against the new government in their hearts, even if they didn't dare to be openly.

The farm followed the movements closely in their studies and was surprised when one of the named issues came to their doorstep—or actually, to their church steeple. One day early in 1952, where there had been one priest, there were suddenly two. In addition to Father Ma, there appeared another, a visiting priest dressed in long robes, who could be seen every day in the churchyard pacing back and forth, getting his exercise. Three or four days later, a small group of strangers came quietly into the fort. Within a few minutes, three of the farm militia climbed up the wall to perch and another three went to the church and arrested the visiting priest. After he was nabbed, they found out that he was an infamous villain who had escaped from the North China Bandit Suppression Headquarters and had been passed from one church to another in hiding. Apparently he had fought for and been loyal to the mighty warlord Yan Xishan who had ruled North Shaanxi.

To hold him temporarily, the farm's militia kept him in one of their rooms and had a couple young men keep watch. They turned out to be a little too trusting and believed the guy when he said the bindings were too tight on his wrists. Waiting until dark to make his escape, he tore them off, pushed the paper through the window and disappeared into the night.

Aside from the guy who escaped, the people on the farm were never too sure who the other folks were that ended up being held there. They were, as Sid put it, involved in wrestling cows to give injections—not arresting counter-revolutionaries. But at one time, there were as many as three people locked up and watched over—more carefully than the first, by the farm's militia.

At the height of the movement to uncover the counter-revolutionaries, the local Mongolians of Chunchuan turned in their own priest. It began as first some suggestive talk, and then a Mongolian youth came forward. His family was one of the more wealthy and conservative families in the area, and they were faithful churchgoers. But as a result of the Minority Nationalities policies, he had the chance to go to one of the newly set up schools. As a result of being away and studying some of the things happening in the country, he began thinking about some of the things Father Ma asked him to do. When he got back, he went to the farm and told them that the priest had given him some poison, and asked him to “poison the big fox.” The preferred method

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<sup>47</sup> The “Three Antis” were against corruption, waste and obstructionist bureaucracy and targeted Communist Party members, bureaucrats (officials) and managers of factories/businesses. The “Five Antis” were against bribery, tax evasion, theft of State property, cheating on contracts and stealing (State) economic information and targeted representatives of the capitalist class who owned the means of production—that is, the bourgeoisie in the cities and landlords in the countryside.

to hunt foxes in the area was to use poison. But it was made clear to him that Father Ma meant for him to poison the Party Secretary of the farm.<sup>48</sup>

News of what the youth said motivated others to come forward until the Mongolians led officials to an X marking the spot where the priest had buried a cache of illegal weapons and ammunition. The evidence led to Father Ma's arrest, which the cadres feared would lead to repercussions from the local people. Instead, they proved relieved and happy.

Not one to go easily, Father Ma suddenly forgot how to speak Chinese and Mongolian during the interrogation, although he had been quite fluent the day before. They called Sid in to act as an interpreter, but the most they ever got out of him was that he didn't do anything wrong, and he wanted to be sent out of the country. Finally, they shipped him off to Dingbian, where he kept good company with the other Jesuit priest, Father Wen, the one who was convinced that Joan was going to die of the plague. Father Wen died unexpectedly in detention, and to fend off any allegations of wrongdoing, the local government put out a call to the Catholic Church to come visit and investigate the situation. Father Ma eventually got his wish and was deported through Hong Kong.

After the demise of Father Ma, the Mongolian guy who had studied under him took over the church. And while the new government made it no secret that they thought religion to be superstition, they did not have policies against it—they were after the counter-revolutionaries, not the Catholics. So the Mongolians continued to go to church, with the main difference being that they heard the sermon in Mongolian instead of Latin.

By that summer, the farm had so many requests for breeding bulls that they made all the bulls available for people to pick up and take back to their herds on Sundays after church services. People came in droves and snatched them up. One Sunday, a Mongolian woman came a little late after all of the bulls had been taken, save one who was still a calf. She was dead set on taking a bull home and would not listen to the vets, who told her he was too little to reach a grown cow to breed her. But she insisted, and they finally relented, only to have her come running back two days later. The people on the farm went out to her herd to see for themselves—instead of breeding her cows, he was taking all of their milk, nursing from them.

Early in the year Joan found out that her brother Bill was working in Beijing. She didn't think too much about it until August, when her belly was pretty big with a kicking baby and memories of witch doctors surfaced acutely. She decided it would be a nice time to go see her brother. And maybe it would be convenient to have her kid there. In a hospital.

So in August of 1952, Joan packed up some of her things, said see you soon to Sid and the rest of her comrades, and walked for seven days next to a donkey they

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<sup>48</sup> In the new government, leadership was set up in such a way that there were people in charge of work units with titles of directors, and people in charge of the overall political work, who were the Party Secretaries. The Party Secretary was always the most powerful person in the unit (and the country).

called “Penis Beard” (after the Mongolian neighbor who sold it to them) to Yanan. She was seven months pregnant and thirty-one years old.

## Chapter 20

# Peace

*“...I’d been a pure scientist, and it ended up with 150,000 Japanese people going up in a purple cloud...” Joan Hinton*

Joan hitched a ride on a truck from Yanan to Xian and then headed north to Beijing. When she stepped off the train, it had been over two weeks since she’d left the farm. The city she found at the end of her journey was much different than the one she had liberated herself from a few short years before, full of despondent and ragged Guomintang troops. In a symbolic move, the Communists had taken over the old palaces and made them the headquarters of the new capital; the city was bustling and moving and turned on its head. The people had fought the emperor, the Japanese and the Guomintang and when they won, they threw open the gates to the forbidden imperial grounds, the once guarded residence of inbred royals and their legions of servants and slaves.

Joan found brother Bill and her old friend Bertha at the Double Bridge Farm in charge of the dairy. Since she had last seen them, their numbers had increased to three with the arrival of their daughter Carma, named for Carmelita. She was the first of four children (between Bill and Joan) who would be born and raised in China and learn to speak English later in life as a second language.

Bill’s organization took her in and covered her medical needs, and Joan soon enrolled in a childbirth class at the local hospital, learning the method that Dr. Fernand Lamaze later popularized in the West after researching the Soviet method.

We learned a method of breathing, which came from the Soviet Union... The method was called “*Wutong Fenmianfa*”; it taught us to breathe so the birth pains weren’t so much.<sup>49</sup> There wasn’t anesthesia for childbirth then in China. They didn’t believe in it; they’d had babies since time began, and nobody ever thought you had to worry about whether it hurt or not. So in the class, all of us sat around in a circle with doctors and discussed whether they were afraid of having children and all different things, and then practiced breathing and holding our breath in a certain way. It was sort of a psychological class in that way, in addition to the breathing techniques... [I]t was sort of fun, all those women with big bellies telling their fears about having children.

While Joan was enjoying her big bellied breathing and “psychological” class, construction workers were working around the clock to put the finishing touches on the Beijing Peace Hotel and its surrounding compound; that fall, the Asian and Pacific Peace Conference was slated to be held in Beijing. Prominent attendees included Madame Sun and her old secretary from Joan’s Shanghai days with the China Wel-

<sup>49</sup> *Wutong Fenmianfa* means the “No Pain Birthing Method.”

fare Fund, Gerry Tannenbaum. Gerry had kept in touch with Joan while she was in Mongolia and had gotten her to write an article about conditions in North Shaanxi for Madame Sun's project, *China Reconstructs*. Once he discovered that she was in Beijing, together with the Madam, he asked Joan to join the US delegation at the Peace Conference. Exponentially more interested in an international peace conference than the ins and outs of being pregnant, she happily accepted and moved in with the rest of the delegates.

Holding the Asian and Pacific Peace Conference in the new People's Republic was a big deal at the time—the time being three short years after its founding. Delegates from all over the world flooded into the Beijing (Peking) Peace Compound and took up residence. Joan, feeling for once a little underwhelmed by her wardrobe, which at that time consisted of her two pairs of cotton summer suits on issue, put a sincere effort into creasing her pants by folding them carefully and pressing them under her cotton mattress at night. The results weren't bad for the first half of the day, but by early afternoon her baggy pants, cut even baggier because of her late-stage pregnancy, were looking a little scruffy next to the delegates all suited up and dressed in formal conference attending attire.

Gerry Tannenbaum took Joan's clothes up as an issue with his crew and decided the thing to do would be to borrow a suit from another participant. Looking over the crowd, they identified a "huge Australian woman who was rather wide around the girth." When approached, she generously donated a woolen pantsuit and matching blouse.

So it was that after two years of living in the Mongolian grasslands, where a piece of smokeless coal was the only thing that kept the water in the basin from freezing in the winter, Joan found herself living among a US delegation of ten in a fancy hotel, and lunching with delegates from other countries in a fancy pantsuit.

There was a member of the Communist Party of the United States, Starabin, and Talitha Gerleck was there from Shanghai. Sylvia and Bill Powell, the people who later went through the sedition trials, were there. They were still publishing *China Review* in Shanghai at that time. I have a picture of me, Gerry, Talitha Gerleck and Sylvia and Bill Powell, all sitting there listening to tapes from GI's who were captured in the Korean War.<sup>50</sup> They gave testimony that the US dropped different insects, which carried various diseases. One of the discussions at that time was how the American government refused to admit that they had used germ warfare.

At every meal, the US group sat with different delegates from around the world. One day, Joan found herself eating lunch with the Japanese delegation. Moved by her

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<sup>50</sup> The Korean War began in 1950 and an armistice was signed in 1953, but with no formal cessation of the war. While both sides were attempting to re-unify Korea under a single government that they would lead, the government in the South was in essence a US colonial puppet. The US financed its colony with military resources and soldiers on the ground, while the USSR supplied the North with heavy machinery and China with soldiers to aid in their fight for national liberation.



conscience, thinking about her part in the decimation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Joan stood up.

...I just got up and made a little speech about how I'd been a pure scientist, and it ended up with 150,000 Japanese people going up in a purple cloud, and how that was what pure science brought you. I talked about how you had to think about what you were doing science for; you couldn't just be above the politics.

Joan was a little taken aback by the kind of reaction she got with her "little speech." Starabin, who was a writer for the Communist Party newspaper in the US got fired up and convinced her to make her comments in front of the entire assembly—and then went to make it happen with the conference organizers.

The next morning, unscheduled and quite unexpectedly, Joan got up and read the short statement that she had written up the night before in her hotel room.

In memory of the thousands upon thousands of innocent people, of the children, the old people, the men and women of every walk of life who were so ruthlessly murdered, so wantonly burned to death at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I would like to send these few words to the scientists of Japan, through the Japanese Delegation at this conference.

As a scientist who worked at the Los Alamos, New Mexico atomic bomb project; as one who touched with my own hands the very bomb which was dropped on Nagasaki, I feel a deep sense of guilt and shame at the part I played in this crime against humanity as a whole, and this crime against the Japanese people in particular.

How was it that I as well as practically every physicist in the United States came to work in one way or another on this horrible weapon of mass destruction during the [Second] World War? Perhaps my own story could be used as an object lesson to all.

From as early as I can remember I had an insatiable desire to know how the world was put together, and I was determined to become a scientist. The more I studied science the more I absorbed the philosophy of "science for science's sake." This philosophy is the poison of modern science. It was due to this misconception, to this separation of science from society, of science from human beings and human lives that I came to work on the atomic bomb during the war. I believed, as did many of my colleagues, that our job as scientists went only so far as to find out the truths of nature. Anything beyond this, anything to do with the application of the knowledge we scientists discovered, was of secondary concern to us. In our study of pure science, we had no time to concern ourselves with such trifles. The application of science must be left to statesmen and engineers.

And I am ashamed to admit it took the horror of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to shock me out of this ivory tower of complacency, to shock me into the fundamental realization that there is no such thing as “pure” science; that science has a meaning only in relation to its service to mankind; only in so far as it helps to create a rich and beautiful new world.

I say to those scientists, both in Japan and the United States who even now are still engaged in research on atomic bombs, hydrogen bombs and bacteriological warfare: Think again what it is you are doing! You may believe that you are gaining scientific fame by the papers marked “secret” which you are now filing away in the safes of the U.S. Army, but this is utterly false and shameful fame is an illusion, which will soon be trampled to dust by the hatred of the peoples of the whole world.

I shake the hands of all those who have refused to join in this deadly work, and say—let us work even harder to force the outlawing of atomic bombs, bacteriological warfare, and all weapons of mass destruction!

*Joan Hinton, Former Fellow in Physics, Institute of Nuclear Studies, University of Chicago*

The world media, which had no idea who Joan was and that what she was going to say was going to be worth taping, missed the whole thing. At the following intermission, they descended on her and insisted she make the speech again to the empty hall, and filmed it as if she was in front of the assembly.

The effect of that footage, unbeknownst to Joan, who after the Peace Conference melted back into the world of dairy cows and crops, was like its own bomb. Previously off the radar, Joan suddenly reappeared in the US via the Peace Conference newsreel, during a troubling time called the “McCarthy Era.” Ominous knocks began sounding on the doors of relatives, friends and former colleagues, asking all manner of questions about Joan. In the upsurge of red-baiting and paranoia, engineered to combat the growing interest and sense of hope that the US populace had shown in the new socialist nations of the USSR and the People’s Republic, the government and its media partners seized on Joan’s story as an example of the “Red Menace” encroaching on the US way of life.

The result of the specific attack against Joan led to some harrowing encounters with the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation), but amounted to not much of anything. Even Joseph Teller, the guy in Los Alamos advocating for the annihilation of the Soviet Union, shut the door in their faces, telling them to “go to hell.” But the products of the smear campaign against Joan were still plentiful and in many cases, outrageous and funny in retrospect. One magazine even had a glamorous cartoon rendition of Joan in a stylish trench coat tied becomingly at her waist, looking secretively over her shoulder as she scribbled on a concealed notepad. The title, “*The Atom Spy Who Got Away*,” loomed menacingly overhead. There was even a rumor that she was working on

nuclear projects in China, flown to different locations on Mao's private plane.

Years later, when a visitor brought a stack of the publications that were circulated about her, she and Sid laughed to the point of tears at the idea of private planes, thinking about all of the donkey trains they had walked behind and box cars they had ridden atop over the years.

But at the time, the aftershocks of her speech didn't reach her; they bounced off the borders of the People's Republic. After all the excitement and the day's proceeding adjourned, Joan made her way back to the Peace Compound and her hotel room. That night, she began to feel uncomfortable in a way that "wasn't exactly like a stomach-ache." After confirming her suspicions with woman delegate across the hall that "the baby was probably coming," she called down to the front desk.

I rang the bell for the service and asked them for a *chi* (car) to take me to the hospital. I waited and waited and nothing happened, and then finally, quite a while later, someone came in with a tray full of food. And I said, "Gee, I'm about to have a baby, I'm not interested in food." So I learned at that point that in Beijing dialect, you had to say "*che*" for "car"; In my Shaanxi dialect, I said "*chi*," which meant "eat."

The car finally delivered her to the local hospital where she had taken her breathing lessons before the Peace Conference, and they shaved her and set her up in a room with three other women in labor. She settled in, comforted by the presence of the other women, all going through the same experience at various stages, when she became aware of many voices engaged in urgent conversation outside the room. Slowly, she woke up to the fact that they were all talking about her and trying to decide if they had enough time to move her across town to a hospital with accommodations more befitting an international delegate of the Peace Conference.

Because it was her first pregnancy, the doctors thought they would have enough time to move her, and Joan put on all her clothes again to be rushed by ambulance to Beijing's premier hospital and a private room jam-packed with flowers. Joan, not ever one to hold much stock in fancy digs, felt lonely in her new room, especially because it took another 24 hours for her to actually deliver the baby.

To the horror of all of the Chinese hospital staff, delegates from the conference began to arrive with the news of the baby's arrival with presents of ice cream and iced water.<sup>51</sup> Adding to their consternation, Joan also went around the ward chatting up the other women who had just given birth and explaining the concept of birth control; most of them were surprised that she was having her first baby at such a late age after

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<sup>51</sup> The custom China is for women to adhere to strict dietary and lifestyle guidelines for one month after a baby is born. Those guidelines include drinking and eating only hot and nutritious foods, not bathing or washing your hair and not leaving the home. The practice, known as "*zuo yuezi*," or month long rest, originated in feudal times as a way to ensure that women would recover from childbirth to work and bear other children. Over time those protective guidelines enforced usually by the mother-in-law during pregnancy and after childbirth ventured into different superstitions according to different regions such as not eating rabbit meat for fear that when the child was born, he or she would have a small twitchy mouth.

having been married for so long.

For her efforts, she got a long and stern lecture from the nurses; at that time, China, as a new socialist state, looked very seriously to the Soviet Union and their policies as their “older brother.” And because their population was relatively small, the Soviets actively encouraged people to have more children, disapproving of birth control. Somehow, that translated down to the hospitals in China into a general “no information” policy on giving women ways to prevent pregnancy. Joan was never one to follow rules that she disagreed with and continued her conversations with the women: “I said I didn’t care about the population of China or anything, I just thought that a woman should be able to control her own body, for heaven’s sake; they should be able to have babies when they wanted to and not have them when they didn’t... I argued with them, but they insisted that it was reactionary and that I stop spreading it.”

By the end of October, the nurses and doctors at the hospital were probably pretty happy to see Joan released. But Joan found herself with no money, no winter clothes as the colder weather rapidly approached, and carrying a newborn in her arms. Fortunately, she was still able to follow the US delegation back to the Beijing Hotel where they stayed after the conference in order to see the sites before they returned home. She put the baby on the bed, looked at him, and said, “Well, here we are. Now what?”

In another lucky stroke, Joan had become friends with Isabel and Dave Crook through her brother Bill (Sid had also met them earlier in his travels), and Isabel produced baby clothes and diapers from one of her sons who had outgrown them. Armed with those items, and also the “baby bible” by Dr. Benjamin Spock, Joan approached the difficulties of being a new mother away from home in the same way she would any problem.<sup>52</sup> Knowing that she should boil the baby’s diapers to prevent diaper rash, she wore down the hotel staff and got them to bend the rules about having a hotplate in her room. She set up shop with an electric plate and some pots and pans, and set up a system to wash the diapers early in the morning, boil them, and lay them out on the radiators for the brief time they were turned on. By the time the radiators went off, the diapers were generally dry. The other information in the baby book about things like fresh orange juice, she had to disregard.

Since the conference was more or less over, Joan prepared to head back to Xian. Gerry Tannenbaum, however, came by to deliver a personal request from Madame Sun that she and the baby accompany her to Moscow to give her speech again at the Peace Conference that was going to be held there. Joan readily agreed to wait around until she got word about the logistics.

In the meantime, the Peace Conference delegates ate their meals at a luxurious, Western style dining room at the top of the hotel.

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<sup>52</sup> Dr. Benjamin Spock was a US pediatrician who wrote *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*, published in 1946. It was a best-selling book that gave advice to a whole generation of anxious (mostly middle income) parents and countered some of the conservative standards for child rearing by encouraging parents to have fun and be flexible.

[P]eople would sit down and sort of nibble at this and nibble at that. God! All that food! In the first place, I hadn't seen food like that in a long time. Up in North Shaanxi... [w]e had steamed wheat bread on Wednesday afternoons, and the rest of the time it was just huangmi: yellow millet. I'd been eating that for two years, and then there I was with all that food on the table, nursing a baby, I tell you oh boy! They sat there and talked with that food all in front of them, and my little eyes were bigger than anything. I didn't dare grab, but oh boy I was so hungry! I remember trying to hold myself back so I didn't look completely like a pig.

So she waited until most people cleared out before going around to all the tables and finishing up whatever people had left on their plates.

Joan stayed so long waiting for word about the USSR trip that the conference coordinators began giving her some subtle hints about moving on. Finally, before she had totally worn out her welcome, she got word from Gerry that she wasn't going to go to Moscow after all. Unperturbed, Joan began packing for her trip back to Xian.

As a conference delegate, Joan received a trunk packed full of beautiful gifts that the government issued to all of the participants. She soon found, however, that especially with the addition of a baby and all things necessary for his well-being, she had way too much stuff. So when Bertha came to visit at the hotel, Joan gave her the hotel robe, towels, and slippers, because there was just no possible way she could take it all with her. When Joan moved to Beijing in 1966, Joan saw that Bertha was still using that bathrobe that she had unwittingly stolen from the Peace Hotel.

While Joan was still pregnant, Madame Sun stopped her on the way out of one of the conference sessions and asked what she was going to name the baby. At the time, most people urged her to name it Kim, in support of North Korea and their leader as they defied the imperialist powers. But Madame Sun had different ideas. "Of course it must be named Heping [Peace], because he or she has been at the Peace Conference." Joan, not one to refuse Madame Sun outside the realm of wearing lipstick and high heels, agreed. They named him Heping, and Fred, after Sid's father, the old union man from upstate New York.

Joan got on a sleeper car back to Xian with Peace in a bassinet and looking at the world with new eyes; the bundled up baby before her gave her a different consciousness about creating a new person, bringing a new life into the world. China itself was breathing a new life and its people would experience the preciousness of its growth, as well as all of the growing pains along the way. For Joan, the two life forces fit together comfortably, and she looked to the future with great promise.

## Chapter 21

# Xian

*“I was stuck with this baby that I just had to take care of, and nobody could care less.” Joan Hinton*

When Joan stepped off the train in Xian, she was met and taken in by people from the Agriculture and Forestry Administration, which was housed in a compound of simple single-story buildings where about 20 families lived and worked. They put her up in a room with another woman who also had a young baby, presumably to wait for a way back to the North Shaanxi grasslands.

Joan’s first task was to wash up all of the dirty diapers she had accumulated from the train ride. Leaving the baby in the room, she grabbed some of her pots and made for the kitchen where they heated the water for people to use. As soon as she knelt down to work, though, she was shocked to find herself being severely reprimanded for washing dirty diapers even in the vicinity of the kitchen and clean water. It was not the first nor the last time Joan would find herself culturally and politically at odds with the deeply ingrained feudal ideology towards women—but it certainly was the most difficult; alone in a new organization and a just born baby, Joan struggled to adjust to being put in the “mother” category, as opposed to the more familiar and comfortable nuclear physicist, Olympic skier, agricultural technician categories.

That was the hardest time I ever had in China, because nobody there could imagine what it was like to have a newborn baby in China when you were brought up in the US. There was no sympathy of any kind; you were just supposed to know how to do it. Also, it was all supposed to be women’s work, and it was all supposed to be hidden. If I’d been up in North Shaanxi, I suppose it would’ve been more difficult, except the people would’ve been more sympathetic. In Xian, it was a strange environment; I didn’t know anyone, and they were all going about their own business.

Her roommate, far from being helpful, was not remotely interested in Joan’s problems with her diapers, or in Joan for that matter. In fact, Chinese babies did not use diapers—they wore pants with a split down the crotch, and mothers held them out over the floor to pee or a pot to poop. Joan was at a loss as to how to train Fred that way, and she definitely did not know how to sew him any split-crotched pants.

It was already November when she arrived and getting colder by the minute. With no heat in the buildings, Joan got herself measured for some cotton padded clothes and got a cotton-padded cape for the baby. While waiting for word to return to North Shaanxi, she began to get the hang of things, referencing Dr. Spock, and setting up a new diaper washing system. Eventually, word came, but it was not what she expected: she would not be returning to her work in the grasslands. Instead, she and Sid were being transferred permanently to Xian and assigned to a dairy called Yan

Zhuang, on the outskirts of the city, just outside the ancient wall that surrounded the city center.

Apparently, people were worried about Joan taking a newborn into such harsh conditions in the north, especially as the cold winter months were setting in. Not too long before she got to Xian, a new mother had taken her newborn on the same route, and by the time she got there, the baby had suffocated. It was so cold, they had bundled the baby up with many layers of blankets, only to find it had been smothered by the end of the trip. Although Joan loved her life and work and comrades there, North Shaanxi did seem like a brutal environment for someone in her situation, even if she was surrounded by supportive friends. So she didn't put up too much of a fight. Sid got word to wrap up his work and join her as soon as he could, but it would be another five or six months before he reunited with Joan and their new son.

Once she knew that she was going to be there for the duration, Joan got to work on a project that would free her from having to carry Fred around with her all day, as was the custom for mothers in China: she started building a crib. No one in China had ever seen a crib before nor saw the point, but Joan went to town and came back with a pile of wood, screws and hinges. That winter, as the baby began to grow and become aware of the world, Joan worked on her project.

In the mornings, Joan joined the cadre study, trying for the first time to really learn how to read and write. (There were little "tests" at the end of the study, and she was bent on taking them herself.) The studies covered broad topics about the current situation and work ahead, political theory and history, and the international situation—in addition to local problems and work. In the afternoons, the cadre in charge of animal husbandry for the province gave Joan some statistical work to do, figuring up sheep and cows and their offspring. The work was simple, but Joan was grateful—the woman saw her as her own person, not just the mother of a baby.

One day, someone mentioned to Joan that the newsreel from the Peace Conference was playing in town. Excited to go see it, she left Fred in his newly built crib at noon and rushed off to the theater.

I bought a ticket and sat in the back... It was fairly long, and then, all of a sudden, there was I talking to an empty hall! It felt so strange sitting there with everybody around me having no idea that it was me. And they had no idea that I was talking to nobody. It also wasn't just me talking; it also had shots of atom bombs going off and things like that... I guess it was a little long for little Freddy because when I came back he saw me and was so mad... that he'd been neglected so long that he wouldn't even eat.

That pull between caring very much for her family and wanting to have her own life, interests and work outside the home would dog Joan until her kids grew up and became independent. She struggled with it constantly, often earning the disapproval of those around her. China was building a new kind of society based on the liberation of all people from all kinds of oppression, including gender oppression. But thousands of

years of feudalism couldn't be undone in a relative instant, not even through a mighty revolution.<sup>53</sup>

And so Joan solved many of those problems by asking for and getting domestic help. China had a long history of wealthier classes of people employing *baomu*, women who worked in the house doing all manner of domestic work, including raising children, cooking and cleaning. In pre-liberated China, many of these women went to work for rich families because they could not feed themselves and their own children. By living at their employer's house, working day and night and always on call, they could survive and sometimes send a very small amount of money to support their own families. The *baomu* had a bitter existence serving the needs of the wealthy and providing around the clock care for their children, while their own children were hungry at home. Under the cruelest circumstances, rich women would hire wet nurses for their newborns, finding poor women in the countryside who had just given birth, so that they would not have to nurse their babies themselves. Many infants died this way when their mothers were forced to give their milk to strangers.

In liberated China, the question of hired domestic labor was approached from a different perspective. The practice of hiring wet nurses was abolished. In fact, part of the urgency of getting the dairy industry off its feet was so that new mothers could have milk for their children when they went off to work. And with the call (and need) for women to come out of the homes to join in the exciting and massive work of building a new country and society, the idea of nurseries was introduced, and many cafeterias were built to feed people collectively where they worked. But in the absence of nurseries, in situations where women had contributions to make aside from rearing children, the *baomu* still played a role.

Cadre families, especially, who earned a little bit more money, hired women, mostly from the countryside to help out at home while they went to work. Or, people in leadership, who had heavy responsibilities, were assigned help, along with people who had special needs or status—foreigners who had joined the revolution for instance. From a socialist perspective, the *baomu* became a worker, equal to others in terms of status, and doing work based on the “division of labor.” It didn't always work out that way because of the long history of exploitation wrapped up in that relationship, but for Joan, it was a welcome solution. When she was assigned an old woman to take care of Fred, Joan made herself more available at the Nonglinting's office and became much more involved in the work. The *baomu* took over working on things like sewing the baby padded clothes and changing his diapers. Joan happily worked on other projects

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<sup>53</sup> During feudalism in China, landlords owned the land that the peasants tilled and held the right to rent (usually in the form of a share of the crops) from their labor. Within this economic system, women of all classes were considered the legal property of their fathers before they were married, and then of their husbands. Poor peasant women were often brought into the houses of the landlords and rich peasants to do the domestic work and child rearing, as well as in their own households. The ownership of women and their responsibilities toward home and children was an idea entrenched in society that had to continue to be wrested from it, even after Liberation, after the completion of the transition to the socialist economic base and after Mao proclaimed that “Women hold up half the sky.”



like finding a black piece of cloth to tie around his arm as the nation mourned Stalin's death in March 1953.<sup>54</sup>

Sid, on the other hand, never had to feel the pull between taking care of his family and working outside the home. As a man, he was given a pretty free pass by a society that was at the beginning of a long struggle to change the feudal relationships that existed between people for generation after generation. Selling women, binding feet, beating wives—these were wiped out with the revolution just as land was given back to the tillers, and China's resources were wrested from foreign interests. And while equal pay for equal work was written into the new constitution, the struggle for women's liberation would have to come with the hard work of building the understanding for the need to collectivize agriculture and worker led management of industry.

While Joan struggled in cold Xian to take care of their newborn son and also to have some kind of identity beyond motherhood, Sid finished his work as Vice Director of the Three Border Farm. It wasn't until the end of April that he packed all of their belongings on a mule cart and began the one-week walk to Yanan. Though reluctant as Joan to leave their happy life in the Mongolian plains, he recognized not only that life would probably be hard with such a young kid, but also that the work they had been doing had been only moderately successful.

While the Holsteins they introduced produced a tremendous amount of milk compared to the little Mongolian brown cows, they were much more high maintenance. The tough Mongolian cows could survive solely by grazing, but the Holsteins couldn't take it. Like many foreigners who went to China to work at that time, the cows from warmer climes couldn't adjust to such a low energy diet. And while the Mongolians in that area were not nomadic, and therefore could possibly begin to grow corn and make silage for feed, it just wasn't the way they knew how to raise livestock.

The big Soviet stallions that the farm tried to introduce were also pretty impressive to look at compared to the stout Mongolian ponies. But they weren't nearly as hardy, and, worse yet, were not natural pacers.<sup>55</sup> The locals weren't terribly impressed.

The only successful introduction of new livestock breed was the fine wool producing Merino sheep from Xinjiang. Along with an ability to adapt the tough conditions, the Xinjiang sheep produced higher quality wool and three times the amount—and won over the Mongolian shepherders. In the following years, after an evaluation and decision to shift agricultural work to other areas, the Three Border Farm left cadres and workers to continue the fine wool sheep project, which was still producing Merino

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<sup>54</sup> Joseph Stalin was the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's Central Committee's General Secretary from 1922 until his death. Despite the devastating losses that the CCP suffered from Stalin's heavy-handed direction during the Chinese Civil War and other missteps, Mao always maintained that while Stalin made mistakes, he was a steadfast comrade to the People's Republic.

<sup>55</sup> Pacers are horses that trot with their right front and back legs moving as a pair and their left front and hind legs moving as a pair, as opposed to how animals usually move with the opposite legs coupled. Some horses are born knowing how to pace and some are trained. Mongolians in that region gave a high value to natural pacers because they had a much steadier gait, and Mongolian riders traditionally stood up in their stirrups at a gallop to fire their bow and arrows.

wool decades later in Yulin.

So maybe Sid looked over his shoulder a bit as he followed the mule train to Yanan. Some of his fondest memories of life in China and some of his closest friends were from the Mongolian grasslands. But he also was looking ahead, to reuniting with Joan and meeting his son for the first time. And perhaps in Xian, the Cornell-educated farmer from Gooseville Corners might be able to put his old cow knowledge to better use in building a dairy industry in new China.

## Chapter 22

# City Dairy

*“[The silage chopper] went from being like cast iron in our hands to being putty in our hands.” Sid Engst*

The whole country was about to burst with excitement preparing for the celebration of the first May Day in a new China.<sup>56</sup> The city of Xian was afire, ready to push the new nation forward with everyone’s plans for what they were going to accomplish in the upcoming year.

Past midnight the night before the big May Day parade, Sid hopped off the train at the Xian station. He found a tricycle cart for his and Joan’s footlockers and other odds and ends and pedaled his way to the Agriculture and Forestry Administration to find Joan. After getting directions from a sleepy night watchman, he woke Joan up and lifted the small basket besides her cradling a sleeping boy.

Toting the basket’s contents the next day, Sid followed Joan and the rest of the Administration out on the streets of Xian, taking in all of the colorful posters and reveling in the camaraderie of excitement, determination and hope.

A few days later, they set off for the Yanzhuang Dairy site. It was the largest dairy in Xian, and while there were other smaller private dairies, Yanzhuang had the responsibility of producing milk for the city, because it was the only state-owned farm. In stark contrast to the as-far-as-the-eye-can-see landscape of Inner Mongolia, Yanzhuang was squished onto a small spot of land wedged between an orchard and a road. Everyone assigned to the dairy lived in a small compound composed of a few rows of single-story buildings, with one family living in one room. Just as it took a flattened cigar and some flaring tempers to negotiate living together in Yanan, minor adjustments had to be made in living together with a baby.

I went to town I bought a big black kettle for water... to have water in the room with the baby. Before we always just carried our basin to get hot water for washing and then went back and washed. ...Sid was used to that since he had done it ever since he’d been in China. So when I got back with a black kettle, oh boy he got mad. He said, “What do you mean buying all this stuff?! Cluttering the room with all this stuff!!” He was embarrassed because when he was in Yanan, everybody walked with everything they owned on their backs... Going from a guerrilla to a family man wasn’t that easy.

About 80 cows, many from the herd in Inner Mongolia that had been brought

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<sup>56</sup> May Day, first celebrated in the bloody campaign for the eight-hour workday and Haymarket Riot in Chicago, Illinois in the US in 1886, came to be celebrated all over the world as International Workers’ Day. In the US, fearful of its Left implications, in 1894 US President Cleveland proclaimed the first Monday in September Labor Day. In 1958, Eisenhower signed a law making May 1<sup>st</sup> “Loyalty Day,” and in 1980 Reagan made it “Law Day.”

down in 1951 and others bought from various farms in the Northeast, lived and got milked in two long stall barns—a tiny paddock completed the grounds. Because the land was so tight, there was no room to grow their own feed and they had to buy it from farms nearby.

Sid again was made the Vice Director of the dairy, along with an old Chinese veterinarian named Yan Rubi, and Joan was again made a technician. The head of the dairy was a guy by the name of Bai Jianguang, an old cadre. In Yanan, he had been in charge of the mule drivers, a tough lot, rough around the edges, who didn't take kindly to pretense or bureaucrats. Largely illiterate and a peasant most his life, his ability to manage people earned him Joan and Sid's respect, as well as the rest of the workers and cadres on the farm. Joan described him as:

...[O]ne of the best leaders I've been under. He didn't go into the technique of dairying at all; he didn't know anything about dairy or cows or anything, but he relied on everybody else, and he had extremely good judgment about whether a complaint was for the work or for selfish reasons. He was strict and at the same time very sensitive to the real needs of the workers...

Bai put Joan in charge of the general care of the cows, including feeding, milking, and keeping and analyzing all of the records and statistics. She was also responsible for overseeing the milk pasteurization. Working with a local tinsmith in town, Joan designed equipment to heat the milk and hold it at a high enough temperature to kill the bacteria before cooling it for shipment to the city by mule cart. The contraption made out of galvanized iron was Joan's first attempt at designing dairy equipment. It turned out much better than the blown up windmill and would lead to designing whole, completely mechanized dairies decades later.

As part of the farm leadership, Sid was involved in the larger picture, which included thinking about how to jumpstart the dairy industry in Xian. The intention from the beginning was always to design a new dairy and farm where they could expand and develop the herd.

In the summer of 1953, Lao Bai, as the Farm Director was called, and the two Vice Directors, Sid and Yan Rubi, went out the Caotan (Grassy Plain) State Farm, in order to scout out a spot to build a dairy. Caotan had been set up as a crop farm in 1951, by reclaiming a huge strip of land about that was originally river bottom. Tractors were able to plow up the alkaline soil in a way that peasants with hoes had never been able to. The farm stood on the southern bank of the Wei River, the main river that ran north of the city.

Scouting along the long sandy bank, the three decided on a spot, took their shovel and dug up a small pile of dirt to mark where they would build the first shed. Before the rest of the dairy got built, they would pasture some of their non-milking cows there to save some money on feed. Most construction was still done by private contractors then—the transition to a socialist economy would happen slowly and not be complete until 1956. So Sid, given the responsibility of building the shed, took the

contractors that they hired to the site a couple days later to show them where to begin construction. Wang Liping, a recent college graduate assigned to the farm as a technician, worked with Sid to design the building with the architects and builders so that by July, the shed was standing and Yanzhuang heifers (young cows not yet into their first cycle of milking) and dry cows (cows which were no longer milked because they were going to calve in a couple months) immigrated to Caotan.

The Yanzhuang cadres and workers came to understanding the unpleasant and frightening consequences of building the shed on the Wei River flood plain, when one day after the cows were moved, urgent news came that the whole place was under water with no sign of life around. They blazed to the site to find a very still lake where there once was land, and water waist high at the shed. No one was hurt or drowned and all the cows had made it to land. But when time came to build the rest of the buildings, they made them high off the ground before water conservancy and infrastructure projects solved the flooding problems.

After the first shed went up with some workers still milking and feeding the cows at the old site, and some taking up the work at the new site, there was a 20 kilometer commute between both places to manage the herd. In Yanan they walked. In North Shaanxi, they also rode horses. But in pancake-flat Xian, bicycles were fast becoming the transportation of choice for busy cadres and workers.

Joan rode a bike like she skied—fast and competitively. She had ridden since she was a girl in Cambridge and all over Germany, and she was all for it. Sid had some reservations. In fact, Sid, the same guy who was convinced that he could tame a wild stallion by riding it, thought that bicycles were too dangerous. A few years and the ups and downs of marriage made Sid more vocal in terms of his objections (by that time he probably wouldn't have smiled as much as he did riding bareback on a ridge-backed horse, as he did the time he went to visit her early in their friendship), but they still ended up getting a bike.

Relearning some shaky skills from early childhood involved Sid following Yan Rubi on his bike out and back to Caotan.

Yan Rubi was big and heavy... [and] he probably was in his 50s then. So he used to pump his bike tire up so hard! He said it was easier to ride that way; if you didn't have enough air in it, it took more energy to ride it... In the wet season the place was just mud, and the wagon wheels would make deep ruts in the road. You couldn't ride on the road because of all the ruts. There were little elevated paths on the sides of the fields that the peasants walked on, and Yan Rubi could ride on those. But my skill wasn't that high. So he'd go riding down on a sort of narrow road, and I'd get on and ride a little while, and then I'd take a flop and go off into the fields.

Yan Rubi, a big jolly guy who claimed he was going to live to be a hundred to see the onset of communist society, was a Chinese vet in the style of the old Chinese medicine doctors. In humans, Chinese doctors diagnosed problems by taking the pulse

at the wrist, looking at the tongue, making observations and asking questions. Then they wrote out long prescriptions of herbal medicine, which had to be boiled and taken in liquid form. Chinese medicine vets used a similar method with animals, feeling their pulse under their tails, walking around and making observations, monitoring their eating habits and checking their manure. Sid, who had worked with Western style vets all his life, grew to have confidence in Yan's abilities, in spite of what seemed at first to be the unusual techniques he employed.

We had another vet with western training. He had been a vet for the Guomindang cavalry. For contagious diseases, things like mastitis, things like that... Western vets were pretty good. But if you had a cow that was just in poor condition—functional problems—the Western vets were more or less zero. So if a cow was not eating well or something, that old guy was terrific at that... He had a... long mustache, and he'd go out and look at the cow, and pull his mustache here a little bit. Then he'd go on the other side and pull his mustache there and look at her and stand in back and squint: "Hmm. Hmm." Then he'd take the pulse under the tail. Then he'd go up in front, look at her. "Hmm. Hmm." Then he'd write out a prescription of herbal medicine made up of everything you can imagine. You know Chinese herbal medicine; they never tell you the exact name, because if they did nobody'd ever take it.

Most of the time, after boiling the juices out of the herbs and forcing it down their throats a few times, cows would begin to put on shinier coats and regain their appetites. One time the old vet even tied up a pissed off, snorting, pawing, Bull #3 that had Lumpy Jaw disease and took a knife to the huge cyst on the side of its face. To prevent infection, he grabbed a handful of dusty soil from the ground and threw it on the open wound. Not exactly explainable in laboratory terms, the Chinese vets had been successfully practicing the old dust in the wound technique for generations. Bull #3's facial features were a little lopsided thereafter, but he continued on to live a normal life.

The tremendous enthusiasm to get working and building new China was infectious. As Sid said, "Everyone was moving their butts." A big part of the motivation behind the mood—aside from the fact that people felt for the first time that they were making their own way in their own country—was the way they went about their work. A far cry from the landlord/peasant/serf relationship that exploited the hell out of the great majority of people, the call was to get the work going effectively and efficiently so that every person could benefit. So, even as people were squeezing all kinds of work into all hours of the day and night, cadres and workers, like everywhere else, always studied for an hour in the mornings most of the week, attended briefings at night and had an evaluation meeting at the end of every week. That was in addition to whatever meetings were called to resolve other problems that came up that had to be dealt with right away. For Joan, the studies were profound and complex issues and ideas laid out in a plain and accessible manner.

The study at that time was on the general line for the transition to socialism.<sup>57</sup> The economy, the factories and the commercial section were to gradually be taken over and become state-owned, and for the countryside to be gradually become collective. We studied the whole process of how to transform the leftover economic system that we had taken over from the Guomindang into a socialist economic system of ownership by the whole people. It was all out there, just exactly step by step what was going to be done. Another thing we studied was the *Sanfan* [Three Anti] and *Wufan* [Five Anti] movements against corruption... The idea of the *Sanfan* was that you put everything on the table—the past was the past and we were going to start again. Now if you let everything out, every crooked thing that you'd done, put it out on the table so everybody knew, from then on, you had a clean slate and you could start anew. But from that point on, if you did something, there was a heavy punishment. That movement was terrific, because all the things came out.

The Three and Five Anti Movements dealt with corruption by empowering ordinary people to speak up against corrupt officials and then giving people a chance to start anew. Everyone was absolved of past actions as long as they came clean, showed that they understood it was wrong and committed not to do it again. Those who refused and were found out faced harsh consequences. In the city of Tianjin (not far from Beijing), before Joan and Sid moved to Xian, people found that two very high level party cadres had embezzled a lot of money from the State. After a thorough investigation, the two were executed. The punishment was severe, sending a signal to cadres all over the country about what it meant to be in power, lest people get the idea that now that they had it, they could exploit people the same way they had been exploited when they had none. The point was taken—corruption from the highest ranks of the government straight down to the lowest level cadre became practically non-existent.

In weekly evaluation meetings, called “*shenghuo jiantao hui*,” or loosely translated “meetings to be self-critical about the everyday work,” people voiced their opinions about how the week had gone, what mistakes were made and how work could be done better. Lao Bai, the Farm Director, took up the spirit of the thing in earnest, using the meeting as a place to promote discussion and come up with ideas and solutions that were actually implemented. As a result, people came together to really talk about the work at hand and their roles and responsibilities in how it was going. Joan described the experience:

At that meeting, everyone said what they thought their good points and poor points were and where they could improve. Then everybody discussed it and said whether they agreed or not. It was a tremendous thing to sit there while other people told you what they thought of you. You'd think,

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<sup>57</sup> The transition to socialism refers primarily to the transformation of the economic base, or that transition of the means of production from the individual to the collective.

“Well gee I wasn’t like that,” and then, “My god, it’s lucky they’re telling me what they think, ‘cause they’re gonna think it anyway, and it’s better to know.” But the purpose of it all was to get the work going better, to help people improve and to really be comrades to them.

One incident that required a lot of meetings and study to resolve involved Wang Peilung, a young guy who knew Sid from the farm in Yanan and Joan after they were all transferred up to Chunchuan in Inner Mongolia. Back in the days of the Anti-Japanese War, he lived in an orphanage in one of the Liberated Areas when one night the Japanese broke through the lines and massacred everyone inside. Left for dead, he was the only one who lived through the night. Tied by blood to the cause of the revolution, he became a cadre responsible for the young kids at Chunchuan who milked the cows. But perhaps because he had lost so much and put so much into the revolution, after the founding of the People’s Republic, he was more than ready to reap some of the rewards. Sent out once with money to buy some goods for the farm, he ended up spending the money in Gansu Province to “buy” himself a wife. (Situations like his required a lot of meetings to be held back then in North Shaanxi too.)

The other guy involved in the incident was an old milker called Jiang Xiaodiar, a former mule driver, and rough around the edges. As a mule driver, he had picked up a broad vocabulary of curses and derogatory comments to draw upon, and when he got into a heated argument with Wang Peilung, he really let loose. Joan, counting the stock of wintermelons in a nearby storeroom, ran into them arguing but passed by, minding her business. The argument escalated until Wang Peilung grabbed a knife and brandished it at Jiang Xiaodiar. At the sound of Jiang’s shouts about being killed, people rushed in to separate them and wrest the knife away.

A cadre picking up a knife to threaten a worker was serious business. Meetings ensued. Wang Peilung blamed Joan, who walked away from the argument as if she wanted him to commit a serious lapse in judgment. While some thought that Joan probably should have tried to resolve their argument instead of minding her own business, the overwhelming sentiment was that Wang Peilung had some serious problems. The party leadership decided that he should be removed from his post and sent to study for six months, after which he would be transferred to another state farm—and the farm leadership concurred. Furious at his punishment, Wang Peilung appealed to Sid as an old friend from their Yanan days, asking him to intervene—he was a cowman at heart and the idea of six months of political study seemed unbearable. But Sid refused, telling him that he could probably benefit from the time studying. So Wang Peilung left with his wife from Gansu, a big chip on his shoulder and all kinds of fury directed at both Joan and Sid.

By 1954 Yanzhuang went full force into building the dairy at the new state farm, with Sid and Wang Liping working full time on design and construction. Wang Liping kept his nose in every design, tailing architects and builders with a slide rule in his hand. After getting a general idea of what they wanted, a design group in the city drew



up the plans and sent the blueprints to the contractors. But Wang Liping got his hands on some civil engineering books about material strength and objected to the designs because the building materials they called for were overkill. Not only was it a waste in natural resources, it was going to cost the fledgling farm dearly. So the young cadre cornered the guy in charge and politely confronted him with his calculations. In the end they cut out a lot of the extra lumber and concrete and ended up with a very well built dairy.

They also had to make a contract with the well diggers. Trying to dig a well in sand proved a bit frustrating until they learned a technique from the local peasants. Instead of digging straight down and engaging in a futile battle to bail out the sand that caved in from the sides, they dug a huge cone shape and made a circle out of wood at the bottom. They built the walls up from there with brick that would hold the sand back, but also packed the sides on the outside of the brick with broken tile and bricks, which acted as a filter to keep the sand from seeping in.

Once they hired the contractors, who were actually a couple of peasants from a village nearby, they saw them hauling in load after load of broken tiles and brick. When they asked where they were getting it from, they found that it all came from a mound of earth nearby. It turned out that the nondescript wall was actually the remains of a wall from the Han Dynasty over 2000 years old.<sup>58</sup> All of the tile and bricks that were going into making their well filter were actually Han Dynasty pottery and artifacts.

The peasants... brought loads of Han Dynasty tile and dumped it down into a cavity... Those things were preserved pretty well. Sometime when they're really getting short of Han Dynasty pottery, they can go dig up those wells! We didn't know enough I guess to really think twice about it. Anyway it was building new China.

In the midst of all the new building and attention to designing in a floodplain and Han Dynasty tile, production was still first and foremost at Yanzhuang. The first fall in 1953, they made silage out of corn and sweet potato vines, chopping it by brute force like they had in North Shaanxi. The corn came in on the stalk in mule-pulled carts and got weighed before being picked up by workers. One worker fed the tough fibers over a guillotine-like contraption made of wood, hollowed out in the middle and with spikes on both sides to prevent the stalks from sliding around. Another worker worked a two-and-a-half foot long knife attached by a hinge. Altogether six or seven guys chopped the stalks, corn and husks (and sweet potato vines) into small pieces before others carried it to big pits dug in the ground. There, still others had to stomp on the growing pile to compact it, and when it was full, seal it so that the fermentation process could begin. It was backbreaking time-intensive work.

But in the spring of 1954, Sid and Wang Liping made a short trip to Beijing,

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<sup>58</sup> The Han Dynasty followed the Qin Dynasty and was ruled by the Liu clan, lasting over 400 years and thought to be one of the greatest periods in the history of China. The overwhelming ethnic majority of China is "Han people."

where there had recently been an exhibit of Soviet designed agricultural machinery. There, among all of the other Soviet machines that turned earth, planted seeds and harvested crops, was a small, mechanized silage chopper. The Vice Director of the Ministry of Agriculture turned out to be a friend of a friend of Sid's, so they paid him a visit and told him that as long as the exhibitioners weren't going to do anything with it, they might as well give it to them to use in Xian. He agreed, and the chopper got carted back to Yanzhuang.

Chopping silage in the fall of 1954 was a whole different experience. Joan and Wang Liping found a small gasoline motor in town and rigged everything up on a frame. It was clunky and awkward and had a lot of room for improvement. But with no electricity and only knives on hinges as an alternative, watching the carts dump the corn onto a conveyer belt and get fed into the machine and seeing the blades chop it all to pieces directly into the silage pit was a cause for exultation. Those dozen or so workers who had been tied to the manual chopper with blistered hands were liberated with the first sound of that gasoline motor.

It was the only silage chopper in China.

With that chopper in their possession, the farm built silos at the new site in Caotan in anticipation of the increase in silage production they needed to feed their expanding herd and increase the amount of milk the cows could give. The fall of 1955 yielded a big crop of corn that everyone wanted to get off the fields in a hurry; if they moved fast enough, they could get another crop of wheat planted that year. Not only did the chopper furiously eat up all the corn they could get, a giant fan blew the chopped pieces up into the silo. But right in the middle of the process, when mounds of corn were still stacked waiting to be fed into the machines, one of the giant cast iron blades on the fan broke.

Even without electricity the farm did have a small repair shop where workers fixed up tractors and other equipment. So they hauled the chopper off the shop and called a meeting with what Sid and Joan called the Zhu Geliang Committee.<sup>59</sup> The "Committee" was actually just a group of four of the best workers, and they came together to discuss how to fix the machine. Early on, they scrapped the idea of trying to weld the blade back together again. With a blade over four feet long turning at over 500 revolutions a minute, someone was liable to get killed if the weld didn't hold. They settled on making an entirely new blade out of sheet iron—drawn and cut out and then pounded into the right shape by a blacksmith. It took all night and the next morning from start to end. Holding their breath, they fastened it on the machine and turned it on. It worked. They sent it back out to the silos that afternoon to finish cutting the silage.

Word got around. That winter, a group from a factory in Shanghai asked to

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<sup>59</sup> Zhu Geliang was a historical figure popularized in the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, an historical novel written by Luo Guanzhong about the end of the Han Dynasty and the beginning of the Three Kingdoms in 168 AD. Zhu Geliang was a famous strategist and inventor with great intelligence. His name became synonymous in China with those traits.

borrow the chopper, so they could take it apart, draw out the design, and make more. When the Shanghai group brought it back the next year, they gave them two extras.

After the Shanghai factory started making the choppers, and as the machines wore out their parts, the farm could write to the factory to get replacements, which they got regularly. Their requests for parts the following year in 1956, however, were answered with a surprising response: Shanghai couldn't give them any spare parts because all of them had been shipped overseas. It turned out that as China stepped up internationally to support Albania, locally, factories were called to give what they could.<sup>60</sup> The silage chopper and all its spare parts were one form of support.

With the experience of the first year and the broken fan blade behind them, the farm workers began to think that maybe they could fix the chopper themselves—in fact, they had to, unless they wanted to go back to the guy with the knife on the hinge. Adding to the urgency was that the farm had decided to expand the herd and build a whole new dairy at the East Station by 1957. To make that target they began to figure out how to make their own parts, from the blades to the complicated cast iron gears. The chopper wore out so much that during silage making season, days were spent chopping corn and nights were spent repairing the machine. One particularly troublesome problem was the cover that boxed the blades; the silage pushed down on the bottom of the cover so much as it was going through that it was always wearing holes through the metal.

Once there was a hole, the thing went to the shop that night, where workers began the labor-intensive process of cutting a piece of sheet iron to the right size, drilling holes with hand-powered drills and then riveting the metal patch over the opening. After a few all nighters making patches, though, people started wondering why the hole kept appearing in the first place. Joan decided to try to find out. She made a trip to the Xian library and found a Chinese translation of the Russian book on designing that chopper.

In my best Chinese that I could... I read it in the library and it had all sorts of formulas and everything in it. I figured out that the way our knives came down, they pushed the corn over instead of cutting it cleanly... It was obvious from the book that... the engineer thought that he was making the cut so that it didn't chop all the corn all at once; it would cut a little at a time. Theoretically it was evening out the amount of force it took to cut the corn, but what was happening was that because the knives were round, the angle was too great to cut. As a result, it just pushed all the corn over until it got to the angle that it could cut. The mouth of the opening wore out because the knife pushed the corn to the edge of the opening, so that there was a great space there and the corn would go through.

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<sup>60</sup> China's support for Albania was part of a deepening fissure between the People's Republic and the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was using its influence to muscle Albania, and when it refused, it was cut off from any kind of support. China defended Albania in the name of international solidarity and tried to fill in the gaps with resources and aid.

Joan went back to the shop with her new understanding and explained what she thought was the problem. The first thing they did was try to replace the part of the cover that got worn out so that there wasn't such a big opening for the corn to get pushed through. That meant sawing off the old part, making a new one and putting it back on again so that it lined up more closely with the knives.

It sounded easy. But to saw through the cast iron, their resources were limited to only one flimsy hacksaw blade. The whole room was quiet except for the sound of the hacksaw slowing grinding away the iron. After an eternity of sawing, the piece came off and everyone breathed again.

Then we tried to figure out why the knives were pushing the corn to begin with. I got a pair of scissors and cut with them to find the angle at which scissors can kind of cut instead of push. I decided a straight-edged knife was better than a round one cause you can make it much more easily. So I figured out the angle, we changed the shape of the *dabei* [big blade], and the thing came down whoop! When it hit, it always hit at a chopping angle that would chop rather than push. Sid and I and other people discussed it and decided that the fan blade was coming down at an angle, which meant that... some of the energy of the fan was pushing it against the metal and that was why it was wearing out the cover on the bottom. So we made the fan always perpendicular and made the knives so it was chopping like a scissors.

It worked. The chopper cut the silage cleanly and stopped wearing a hole in the bottom of the cover. To Joan, the experience of going from using to fixing to improving the machine was like a flash of understanding that integrated the things she had been studying—the relationship between theory and practice—with the work confronting her every day. They went from using the chopper to solve their problem of cutting silage more efficiently, to understanding through necessity the theory behind what made it work and what would make it work better, back to using it in the fields to fill the silos.

I can't describe that feeling. First we were prisoners of a machine that we bought from somewhere... But then if you learn you can make it yourself, you think, "My god, I can not only make it, but I can *change* it." And that's when you go into the world of freedom from the world of necessity. In a little tiny shop in the middle of nowhere, we made that other blade, put it on and you know that machine went from chopping 8,000 kg/hr., to 15; it doubled its efficiency. Oh god, it was just shooting it into the silo.

The news of the modified, doubly efficient model spread quickly. Everyone wanted that chopper, so the farm built a little factory to produce it. It became so popular that the bureaucrats in Beijing who made decisions about agricultural machinery got word and paid them a friendly visit. Using the Soviet model of bureaucratic man-

agement, they told the farm that because it was not an approved design, they had to discontinue its use and production.

The doubling of productivity, however, was not something that Caotan State Farm was so willing to give up. They kept on making their choppers until Beijing finally put its foot down. (By that time, Joan and Sid had transferred out of the farm, so they heard the story from a couple gleeful Caotan friends who went up Beijing to see them after they moved.) Faced with the pressure, Caotan challenged the bureaucrats to a competition: their chopper versus the old Soviet style one. If the Soviet design worked better, they would stop producing their version and go back to the old one. Beijing agreed.

Caotan was too small a spot for such a big to do, so they hauled the choppers to some big fields in Sichuan Province where Xian beat the hell out of the USSR, chopping the corn at twice the rate and blowing the pieces much farther back into the pit. The bureaucrats, forced to recognize defeat, went back to Beijing. But when Joan and her family transferred to Beijing more than a decade later, they found the old design still being used and manufactured at the Red Star Commune where they were working. Joan sent immediately for the Xian blueprints, but after the Red Star began making the new model, the thing was squelched again, because it was still not an approved design.

The story of the silage chopper was a decade-long example of what Joan, Sid and their co-workers would struggle with in the coming years of working in agriculture to build socialism. The message from the top to *“dagao jishu gexin”* (broadly engage in technical innovation) and the call for ideas of all kinds to travel up and down through the layers of cadres and workers for refinement was all too often twisted into a directive shot straight from top to bottom as it filtered down through the office bureaucrats.

It pissed Joan off—more specifically than Sid, because as a technician and dairy equipment designer, she was the one who ran headlong into those bureaucratic brick walls. Known as a “bulldozer,” sometimes her stubborn head butting could bust down a whole ministry and their beehive of red tape and regulations. But to her, this struggle was not about countering what some people attributed to the effects of socialism; it was about the struggle to build socialism in China, a country going through rebirth with a thousand years of oppressive, feudal history on its back. Legitimized and given power by the line from the top, workers and peasants were given the responsibility not just to increase light industry or grain or milk production, but also to put socialist ideology into practice, beginning in the work unit where workers and cadres met together to figure out how to solve problems.

For Joan and Sid, participating in this social and political struggle would prove to be their life’s work, rooted always in the struggle for production. And as Joan said, it was a hell of a lot more complicated than nuclear physics.

## Chapter 23

# Grassy Plains

“...[T]he whole concentration of everybody was production; China was a poor country, and we had to build it up, so the social life was all wound within the work. But you know the spirit of the people at that time was really out of this world.” Sid Engst

In the summer of 1954, around the time the new shed got built, Joan got pregnant for the second time. She planned to keep working up to the due date but got struck by the kind of high blood pressure that some women get when they're pregnant. By winter of 1954, Joan gave in and stayed at home to wait for the baby to come.

In December, Joan passed out while squatting over a chamber pot to pee and was sent to the hospital. No longer a Peace Conference delegate, as a local cadre from the farm she was glad to be put up in an ordinary room with another woman to wait out the rest of her pregnancy. January 2, their second boy, Billy (named for Joan's brother) or Jianping (a popular name for kids of that generation, meaning Building Peace) came into the world premature but without too much fuss. After delivery, doctors gave Joan a shot of an herbal medicine called ergot.<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately for Joan, she was extremely allergic to it and promptly blacked out. Even more unfortunate was that no one realized that ergot was the cause of her blackout. So when she came to, they injected her again. She woke up a day later seeing double, numb in her nose and pinky and with a constant ringing in her ears. Wiped out and a bit hazy, she spent several weeks in the hospital, breastfeeding Billy when they brought him to her.

It wasn't until she was ready to go home that the hospital staff mentioned, as they passed her the bundled up baby, that he “didn't like to cry.” That was all right with Joan, but when they got back to their one room home in Yanzhuang and unwrapped him, she realized why.

He was fifty-four centimeters long, but that's all. He was just skin and bones; he had no flesh on him, poor little boy. He was so weak and didn't cry—he could eat and that was about all. He didn't seem to be able to hear anything, so I thought he was probably deaf and dumb. I thought, “Oh boy, now I've got a deaf and dumb child, I've gotta send him to the deaf and dumb schools for the rest of his life.” It wasn't until he was four months old that I found out differently. When he was four months old, the cover of a pot fell on the floor and he blinked—he heard the noise.

Because of the extra work involved and the special attention that Billy needed, the family was assigned a new *baomu*, an older woman who Joan couldn't get along

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<sup>61</sup> Ergot is a fungus that grows on wheat and is extracted for its health properties for humans and other animals. After giving birth, getting the uterus to expel the entire placenta, and to get it back to its normal size is always a concern. Ergot promoted the process by helping the uterus contract. In those days, injecting women with it was a routine practice in China.

with. As a mother who had a background in science and in charge of the milk pasteurization to boot, she knew that the milk that Billy would drink might not be 100% in its sanitation. She had very specific ideas about how to sterilize it along with all the bottles and nipples to prevent bacteria and disease. The leadership, a little troubled by what they perceived as Joan's pickiness (but not Sid's because he pretty much left all of the household management to her), nonetheless found a different *baomu*, a woman who the family called Dama (Older Mother). When Billy switched to bottled milk when he was around four months old, Dama followed all of Joan's instructions to boil the bottles to a T. She stayed with the family for many years.

Also, at around four months, Joan returned to the hospital for a post-birth checkup. Most of her symptoms—the double vision, numbness and ringing—had slowly disappeared, but doctors found that her uterus still hadn't contracted. They prescribed her some pills—made of ergot. As soon as she took the first one she went back to seeing double and all of the numbness returned. Lessened somewhat in time, the ringing in her ears and the loss of sensation in part of her pinky would follow her for the rest of her life.

Billy was just a few months old by the time the construction at Caotan was far enough along that everyone from Yanzhuang got ready to move. In May 1955, the young family packed their two footlockers and miscellaneous accumulated household items onto a mule cart. With Billy in a basket and Fred riding up top, they walked from Yanzhuang to Caotan through the Han Dynasty ruins and down to the river plain.

The site of the first dairy, where all the first barns were built, was the Livestock Farm (the administrative offices were left near the original site). Because of that first flood, the long building that they built for housing was high off the ground. The row was divided into single rooms of which they were given two. In one, Sid and Joan slept on two put together bed boards with the kids in their basket and crib at the head. A small *kang*-style table (with a fire burning underneath) stood in the middle of the room. Dama lived in the other room along with some extra junk, including their two old footlockers. The farm had a cafeteria, providing decent low cost food for its workers, and Joan and Sid were happy and relieved to be able to buy all their food there. Dama, an old peasant woman who was saving her wages for her family, had her own grain from her village and cooked for herself at home.

When Yanzhuang officially combined with Caotan, the state farm consisted primarily of cotton, wheat crops and then corn as animal fodder. With Yanzhuang's addition of milk cows also came pigs and some rabbits raised for angora as well as burgeoning small industries, including the silage chopper factory.<sup>62</sup>

At Caotan Sid took his usual position as Vice Director of the dairy, as well as the Director for all of animal husbandry technology, and Joan hers as a technician. They entered into the same wage system as the rest of the cadres who were transferred over,

<sup>62</sup> Developing small industries in the countryside based on the needs of the local work to build up the capacity and standard of living was a key component to the new economic development plan, and a big shift away from centralizing industry in the cities.

except they were given one grade higher wage than others on their level: Sid got 100  *yuan* a month and Joan got 80. The respected Director Bai didn't move with the rest of the Yanzhuang crew; he got transferred to a forestry farm in the Qinling Mountains. The guy who took his place, He Zixi, turned out to be a sorry replacement. A consummate brownnoser who was always looking for an opportunity to look good, he stood in stark contrast to Bai, and became pretty unpopular with the dairy's workers and cadres as soon as it became apparent. In particular, he made Sid's life rather hellish. Unprincipled and authoritarian, he responded to every issue (except those that came from the leadership higher up) with, "No, can't be done." He also took Wang Liping and Gong Xugui (the head of a work brigade and a cadre who had come down from the Three Border Farm) aside to talk to them about Sid, telling them not to trust him.

Well of course that got back to me because the people told me right off the bat. So I went to the Caotan... Farm Manager, Xie Tianming and said, "You know it's not going to be very easy for me to work if the person directly in charge of me tells the people working under me that they should be careful of me." And he said, "Well, what you are and what your history you know, you're perfectly clear, so just don't worry about it. You can't very well tell him to not have that thinking, because he's got it. Just go ahead and work and don't worry about it."

Xie, the state farm Director, was of a far different character than He. Although he was mostly a report reader and didn't go check out what was happening on the ground, people found him to be fair and honest—qualities that would be crucial in the years ahead.

In the meantime, the tasks in front of everyone all had to do with production, and in the beginning, things were a mess. One problem was that being completely inexperienced in dairy design, Sid and Wang Liping had drawn out a place that looked really nice on paper but didn't have any drainage. (Learning that "water flows downhill" was a long hard lesson that would follow them for the rest of their dairying and designing careers.) As a consequence, the cow yards became muddy swim holes in the rainy season. Cows were up to their bellies in the water (a few even drowned), which meant their udders were soaking in a mud-manure soup. If that wasn't enough to cause mastitis, the farm soon got their hands on some Soviet designed and Chinese copied milking machines.<sup>63</sup> While they were far superior to the backbreaking work of hand milking, they spread the mastitis in the herd like crazy because they were so hard to clean.

Another concern was the prevalence of highly contagious diseases like Tuberculosis (TB) and Brucellosis (Bang's for short). The government put a high priority on

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<sup>63</sup>Mastitis is a bacteria-caused infection of a cow's teats and udder, which causes swelling and pain and can result in reduced milk production and compromised milk quality. Mastitis can be transmitted by milking machines that are not cleaned and sterilized properly, as well as conditions that force cows to lie in moist, dirty yards and stalls.



developing the dairy industry, so the Agriculture and Forestry Administration had an open mind when the state farm proposed to approach the problem through isolation rather than slaughtering (which is how they always dealt with TB in the West). So as the dairy grew its herd and they had to build a whole new dairy to the east for the expansion, they began to isolate all of the diseased cows out west, near where the first shed was built and where the heifers were still kept. Through a very disciplined process of isolating the cows, disinfecting and isolating the calves they gave birth to, and then reintroducing them to the regular herd if they were disease free, they managed to completely wipe out TB and Bang's in a very few short seasons. Because they were in charge of their own pasteurization, they could ensure that the milk they sent out wasn't going to spread the disease to people. When the government began to set up similar TB herds where local and state farms could send their sick cows, TB was virtually wiped out across the country.<sup>64</sup>

The milking machine problem was solved when Rewi Alley, another foreigner living and working in China, sent home for a milking machine.<sup>65</sup> Through his brother in New Zealand, Caotan came into possession of a brand spanking new machine with two milkers and a vacuum pump. The thing worked so beautifully that Sid, being in charge of the dairy technology, consulted with others and decided to try to copy the design in their shop. They had trouble with the plastic, though, and as a result the pulsators (the vacuum driving pulses that squeezed the milkers attached to the teats) never worked quite right.

[E]ven though we never really got that going, after we started milking by machines, we never went back to hand milking again. The workers at Caotan got so they couldn't milk by hand anymore... So our excursion into making milking machines was both a success and a failure. We made machines that we used and milked the cows with, but what we produced was not high quality.

Joan, in the milk room, had other problems—the first one being how to keep the milk from spoiling when the groundwater they were supposed to use to cool it was around 18 degrees Celsius (around 64 degrees Fahrenheit) most of the year. They desperately needed some sort of refrigeration unit and found one scouring the city one day: a leftover icebox from the US Army cafeteria. They rigged it up to a one-cylinder motor, which ran the compressor, and were able to cool the milk enough to keep most of it from going bad before it went into the city. But just like with any machine, parts break. And to fix them, you have to understand them. Joan was perfect for the job

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<sup>64</sup> After it was eradicated, tuberculosis (TB) was almost nonexistent in the dairy industry in China until the 1980s, when privatization led to sale of infected cattle to peasants for profit.

<sup>65</sup> Rewi Alley, a New Zealander who worked in China before and after liberation, was often called the Father of the Industrial Cooperative because of his efforts in Shanghai to build a cooperative movement to develop Chinese industry to help local people in the wake of the destruction of the Anti-Japanese War and the co-optation of existing industries for the service of foreign interests. The project was called *Gungbo*, or Working Together, which was then popularized to signal enthusiasm in the west.

both in training and temperament; she had been an experimental physicist and once a practical problem presented itself and got itself lodged in her mind, it didn't have a chance in hell.

That's when I really went into refrigeration, because I had to learn all about it to keep that thing going. Once it started leaking freon, and I used the technique I learned doing the cyclotron in Cornell. There was a copper tube that went into a cast iron tube, and we had to get that to solder together so it didn't leak at high pressure. We had a torch on it many many times and finally smart little me, I remember figuring out that the copper contracted faster than the other. So we heated up the other one and kept the copper cool as much as possible. Then we tinned both of them and since the copper wasn't that hot, we got them so that they contracted the same size and it didn't leak any more... They never realized that doing experimental physics was very useful for doing dairy mechanization. It's the same sort of techniques—it's just used in a different place.

Figuring out all problems included getting the milk sent to the milk station in the city every night to bottle it and get it out on bikes to city residents in time for breakfast. Because the dairy didn't have its own mule team, Xie, Caotan's Director, assigned the job to the three crop stations, telling them to take turns with it sending the milk through the crop brigade.<sup>66</sup> The problem was, there was no real system set up for doing it, so every day there was a battle to see which station would send the milk. Joan left the task to Yan Rubi, one of the vets, but after listening to him on the phone every day yelling through a bad connection to try to see who was going to come get the milk, Joan got mad. She got on her bike and pedaled furiously down to the farm offices, where she hunted down Xie and got into a yelling match with the Director about whether the milk delivery should be automatic or not.

That issue about whether the milk being sent into the city automatically didn't exactly get resolved then. But not too long afterwards, the dairy got its own mule team and was able to send the milk every day on its own.

Around that time, the whole concept of material incentive made its first appearance.<sup>67</sup> Material incentive was the idea that workers would work harder and do better work if they got individually rewarded based on what they themselves produced. The idea was promulgated from the Soviet Union. In 1953 Stalin had pledged Soviet assistance to China in the form of 156 major industries and sent huge numbers of Soviet "experts" or engineers and technicians to help build them. The Soviets came with their expertise, but also with their ideas about socialism, and their ideas about how they

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<sup>66</sup> In Chinese state farms, there was a solid distinction between crops and livestock. In essence they functioned as two independent departments under the larger state farm entity.

<sup>67</sup> Production in agriculture in the early '50s was not increasing very quickly, and some believed that material incentives would make people work harder. This line was counter to Mao's, which held that the masses had to be ideologically mobilized to unleash their productive forces, which would increase production far more than piece-work wages and bonuses.

should be treated as China's "older sibling" in socialism. That idea was that if the Soviet Union sent their people out into the world, they would have to live very well, in luxurious quarters with fine foods—so that people could see for themselves how well people could live in socialism. (China's policy, on the other hand, was that their people had to live exactly the same as people of the same rank in the country they visited).

It rubbed some people the wrong way, but technical expertise was in short supply, and the Soviet assistance was crucial to building China's industrial sector. Plus, with the US' tight blockade set up to contain the "communist threat" in response to China's participation in the Korean War, solidarity among socialist countries was vital; China had been pretty much economically isolated and knew that the many imperialist military conflicts like Korea and later Vietnam and India, were in large part about weakening and attacking China. The Soviet Union proved its intentions by basically giving China the heavy machinery to fight in the Korean War, along with technical aid and expertise, with the agreement that China would return those resources whenever they could and with no accrued interest.

So when the concept of material incentive came in from the Soviet Union, Chinese Communist Party planners who believed in it as a way to motivate people to work harder disseminated the idea down through the system as a model by which to increase production. Bill, still working in Beijing at the Double Bridge Farm, sent Joan the whole Soviet manual on how to implement material incentive in the dairy. The idea was that every worker would be paid for how much milk their cows produced, how many calves were born and how fast they grew or numbers of cows bred. Then if there was an increase in milk production, people would get bonuses.

It seemed like such a good idea to Joan—that if you worked harder, you got more money and what you produced more efficiently would be better of quality. Then everyone would be motivated to work harder. She was all on board and enthused, even though many of the cadres when they heard about it shook their heads and said that they didn't think it was going to work. But given the job of figuring out how to make it work in all parts of the farm dealing with livestock, Joan got to work figuring out all of the complex calculations. To work out the bonus for raising pigs, she had to use calculus—one of the only times she ever used it her whole life in China.

We put the system into effect and immediately our production went down. So we discussed what the problem was, and it was very clear that the workers weren't cooperating with each other; they became selfish. The mentality was, 'My cows are mine and your cows are yours'. So we decided not to give all the bonus to individuals; we had a collective bonus at the end, and something like ten percent of each person's wage came from how much they cooperated and got along with everyone else.

So maybe at the end of every *jidu* [quarter]... everyone sat down, and the workers were supposed to decide who cooperated best. Well, you know workers never do that. That was the first experience I had with that; no

matter how much they may have hated someone else, they weren't going to dock someone else's wages. Even in a sea of petit bourgeois ideology, immediately there's a feeling of brotherhood.<sup>68</sup> So on the whole, they always gave everybody the same amount of points on cooperation. So then the leader had to decide if one guy cooperated more than another, and then that guy became a pet of the leader and everybody hated him.

The effect was a dramatic opposite of what it was supposed to be—no one became more enthusiastic, and production continued to fall and fall. Not only that, many workers and cadres took offense and spoke out; they had given their lives for the revolution and were committed to building up a socialist country—giving them a few cents for an extra kilo of milk they might produce when they felt ownership over the whole country was insulting. Before the year was up, the thing was cut out. Joan, who had been so eager to flatten all of those complex human relationships and ways of thinking into numbers and calculations, learned and internalized that lesson.

In addition to being responsible for piglet math equations, Joan had some other problems that Sid didn't really have to pay attention to—namely the kids. Although someone else was taking care of them, working with Dama to solve whatever problems came up was clearly in Joan's realm of responsibility. After Joan weaned Billy from nursing, he got sick. With a *baomu* who followed all her instructions with the bottles, Joan turned him over to her and went back to work. Billy did all right at first, but then ended up with diarrhea and couldn't seem to recover. He was already weak and skinny, so Joan took him to the hospital. By that time, her own milk had dried up, and they told her that he couldn't survive on cow's milk; he couldn't digest it. There was nothing else to do because there was nothing else to feed him. So Dama moved with him into the milk station, which was near the hospital just in case, until Billy gradually recovered.

In the meantime, the oldest child, Fred was getting into all kinds of trouble. One time he fell down a well—fortunately someone saw him drop in, and the well was mostly dry. Then he got sick, also with diarrhea, but from a different cause than Billy. Joan consulted Yan Rubi, who went to get the farm doctor, who in turn knew enough to tell her to get him to the hospital.

By the time we finally got into the hospital and into the emergency room, he was calling, "*Ama, Ama*" [Mommy, Mommy]. I would say, "*Ma zai zher Ma zai zher*" [Mommy's here, Mommy's here], but he didn't understand, and god I was scared... They immediately gave him an IV drip; he was just dehydrated... Fred didn't die, oh god, and I thanked that doctor for telling me to get him to the hospital...

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<sup>68</sup> Petit bourgeois ideology reflects the class position of the petit, or small bourgeoisie, who may own the means of production but on a small scale and exploit mostly their own labor—or are unproductive wage earners who are part of the superstructure. In times of economic growth, their class interests align more closely with the bourgeoisie, but in slower times, they grow closer to the proletariat. The changeable nature of this class makes them much maligned for their wandering self-interest.

The Chinese health system ran on doctors and nurses who took care of medical matters, and family members who had to stay at the hospital to provide all the personal care. Scared and out of her element, Joan dealt with it the best way she knew how—she took on a project. Buying a strip of gray plush cloth, she designed and sewed Fred a teddy bear, with soda pop bottle tops for joints, so the arms and legs could move. Although later one of Teddy's arms fell off, at the time it provided both Joan and Fred some comfort.

Adding to Joan's anxiety was the fact that the ward where Fred was set up to recuperate was right next to the ward for children who had encephalitis, a contagious blood-borne disease that caused swelling of the brain. One bite from an infected mosquito, and there was nothing you could do but wait and see if your child would wake up as the same person. Early treatment was key for many of these diseases, especially for young children. China's health system was being overhauled and rebuilt to treat the ordinary people, and the existence of such a hospital in Xian would've been inconceivable in old China. But at the beginning of that process, whether the cases would end up as fatalities was dependent on just being able to get to the hospital in time. Director Xie lost his daughter to the same kind of acute diarrhea that Fred had in the ambulance on the way in. But another kid from Caotan survived the onset of encephalitis because she made it there early.

As more and more people got trained and sent out to outlying areas, those diseases dependent on early treatment got slowly wiped out. The second time Fred got sick, Caotan had a doctor who knew how to hook up an IV line and was able to do so right away. Just with that one skill, he saved the lives of many people, most of them children. Later, when many people began dying from a disease carried by the fleas on rats, Caotan, then with its own clinic, figured out through research and practice, how to treat it, and had the highest survival rate in Xian of people who contracted it.

When Billy got to be about a year old, Sid began campaigning to have another kid, or rather, to try for a girl. But Joan was not all that eager to get pregnant again, what with almost checking out the last time around.

...I wanted to have another one too, but it's a little bit different for the woman. The man just thinks, "Oh, let's have another child," but the woman thinks, "Oh boy, I have to go through all that again." Especially after my eyes went double. It's just the problem of having them, and it takes a lot of energy out of you. Afterwards they're fun because I had a *baomu*; I had somebody to do the work.

Although she wasn't overly enthusiastic about going through it all over again, Joan got pregnant again at the end of 1955. Just to make sure, she returned to the hospital to ask the doctors what they thought about it; even without the ergot injections, there was still the question of the high blood pressure. The doctors gave her the OK to continue with the pregnancy, because she had been fine with her first kid, and with most women, each one was different.

Luckily, this pregnancy was very different and much easier. She had to deal with her growing belly, but when Joan was feeling good, she had a lot of trust in her physical abilities. Plus, there was a lot of work to do.

When I was pregnant with Karen, I was in charge of all the silage. One day I was up on top of the silage pits; they had mud walls, and the chopper was down below. There was something wrong with the chopper, and I was up on the wall with this big tummy... I looked down and decided I had to go down and fix that thing. I also decided I wasn't going to walk all the way around, so I just looked down, aimed just right, jumped and zzzhiii! down to the machine and fixed it.

When it came close to her due date, Joan decided to move out to the milk station in the city, so that she could get to the hospital easier. A couple nights later she felt labor pains and went to the hospital the next morning so they could check if she was dilated. As soon as they took a look, the doctors told her to stay put; her cervix was already wide open. Joan, however, told them she had to go back out to take care of her bike, and they were horrified to find out that she had ridden there nine months pregnant and already in labor. In general, delivery gets easier with every kid, and this was no exception. Having no real physical urge to push, Joan bore down as instructed by thinking about it. Once she started to push, though, her body took over, and in spite of the doctors yelling at her to stop, everything came out of her in one big gush. Sid got his wish—it was a girl, and they named her Karen in English because they just liked the sound of it, and Jiping in Chinese for Peace in Egypt.<sup>69</sup>

Karen was headstrong from the beginning. When Joan was out in Shanghai looking for refrigeration parts, she saw her mom's empty place at the table and managed to climb out of her crib, off the *kang*, crawl across the room and sit with the rest of the family. She also had a temper and liked to pick on Billy, because Billy would put up with it for much longer than Fred. She liked especially to smack him repeatedly, which Billy would take and take until he finally smacked her back, sending Karen wailing off to tell Joan or Sid that her big brother hit her.

Billy, who had recovered completely from his slow start, was the most even-tempered and a patient observer of the dynamics around him. His great love was basketball, and he spent hours on the court with a ball almost as big as he was.

Billy just went all by himself, with his big ears and his big cotton padded pants to shoot baskets. He looked about as round as he was tall, because he had big pants and a floppy hat and those big ears. He went out there and practiced and practiced... Then one day I was home, and suddenly little Billy, *du du du du du*, came back into the house and said, "*Ma! Shoot*

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<sup>69</sup> In 1956, Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal, which prompted an invasion by England, France and Israel to try to reclaim it for foreign interests. Egypt had recently angered the West by recognizing China, which was supportive of Egypt in its fight for national sovereignty, and much of the political study then was focused on the imperialist actions of the West in the Middle East.

*jingqu le!*" [I shot it in!] And he went du du du all the way out back again to practice more.

And Fred was always getting himself and everyone else around him in trouble—innocent in his motivations, but often disastrous in the outcomes. He had a particular fascination with fire, and no matter how many times he was told no, liked to light matches and see what happened. One time Sid chanced upon seeing him setting some haystacks on fire and had to rush over to stamp it out to stop the whole barn from going up in flames.

For the most part, Dama looked after all the kids, while Sid and Joan were immersed in their work. The dairy operated 24/7, and everyone was single minded in getting production going, so there weren't really any weekends. Plus, as a new state farm, they wanted to be right with the peasants in the area—and peasants definitely didn't have a day off. But eventually in the late '50s, the farm gave its people every other Sunday off, and Sid and Joan sometimes grabbed a Sunday for a family outing. By that time, Sid had gotten over his apprehension about bikes, and they had gotten another one, so one person took the two little kids on one bike, and the other would take the big kid on the other. Those Sundays saw a massive influx of folks pouring into the city. But Sid and Joan couldn't imagine wanting to spend time in the crush of people on the noisy streets. So unless they had something they needed in town, they rode clear in the opposite direction, through the small forest of locust trees and down to the sandy banks of the Wei River.

One of their favorite activities was playing "Fox and Geese," a game that involved drawing a big circle in the sand with an X inside. The middle was home base and safety for the geese, as the fox chased them up and down and around the tracks. They'd bring lunch to eat on the bank or in the trees before heading home. More often than not they would bring back little animals—tadpoles or such—that they fished out of the river or maybe from the drainage canal that ran in front of their home, to raise and release when they were done learning from them.

One time they did go into town to buy something, they brought Fred along and found all of a sudden in a crowded department store that he had disappeared. They split up to look for him, and Joan went to ask a man selling watermelon on the corner if he'd seen a little yellow-haired kid. The vendor said that not only had he seen Fred, he'd eaten a piece of watermelon and moved on. Joan got Sid and tracked him to a traffic cop on the corner who said he'd taken him into the big People's Hotel, where a bunch of people from Xinjiang were having a meeting—assuming that Fred was Weiwer [Uyhger] or Russian.<sup>70</sup>

He was... big enough to eat watermelon, but he couldn't talk very coherently. The people thought it was so funny because they asked him where he lived in every kind of language they could, never thinking to try Chi-

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<sup>70</sup> Xinjiang is a northwest province of China, where the Weiwer or Uyhger minorities look very different from Han Chinese, often with light colored hair and eyes.

nese: Russian, European languages, and Xinjiang Weiwer. Finally a brilliant guy got the idea of trying Chinese on him, so they asked him where he lived. He said, “*Naizifang* [the dairy].” Of course that didn’t help them very much—they didn’t know where the hell the dairy was!

When his parents walked into the dining hall, they saw Fred sitting at a table stuffing his face with all kinds of goodies—but as soon as he saw them, he burst into tears, realizing just then that he had been lost.

Although they were accepted completely into the social structure of the farm, the Engst/Hinton kids were raised a little differently than the other kids. One big difference was that they had to go to bed much earlier than everyone else. Most of the other families did not have bedtime for their children—everyone just went to sleep at the same time. But Joan and Sid couldn’t figure out how the kids would get enough sleep that way, so they put theirs to bed early. It was no easy feat, especially in the summertime, when it was still light outside, and all their friends were still running around. Joan solved the problem by grabbing them and hugging them tight to calm them down, starting with Karen, who was the first in line for bed.

Sid, though, who grew up in a huge farm family where kids didn’t mess around with bedtime, couldn’t stand what he saw as coddling. He thought Joan (and Dama) spoiled the kids, especially Karen as the youngest, and the two would get into constant arguments about it. Much stricter than Joan, Sid responded to disobedient kids the way that he had grown up—by giving them a spanking when they did anything wrong, the severity depending on how wrong the thing was (setting fire to haystacks was really really wrong). Joan, who grew up in a family where it was wrong to ever hit a kid, was appalled. The only time she ever spanked one of her kids was when she made an agreement with Fred about eating sugar. He was crazy about it and would sneak some whenever no one was around. Joan explained to him that it was wrong to take the sugar and made a deal with him that if he did it again, she would spank him. She left the sugar jar out in plain sight, and when she saw that Fred was at it again, she took him aside and spanked him. Just not very hard. Her only other foray into corporal punishment was catching Karen in a bald-faced lie. Not knowing what else to do, she washed her mouth out with soap.

Later, when the kids were older, the family instituted regular meetings, modeled after the cadre meetings that were so much a part of Joan and Sid’s discipline. The whole country, in fact, was immersed in a culture of doing “criticism, self-criticism,” trying to foster a de-personalized and open evaluation of people’s work. So Joan and Sid brought it down to the family unit, and everyone had a chance to talk about what they thought was right and wrong in people’s actions.

...[W]e’d have a family meeting in which... [the kids] would say that Sid shouldn’t spank them, that it wasn’t right; you didn’t hit people in socialism. Then Sid would have to make a self-criticism in front of those three little kids! They’d say, “Yeah, but you never change.” Oh, those were cute



little family meetings.

While Sid was the guy who got it in the family, the one who the kids got mad at and thought unreasonable, he was very much liked and respected as a cadre and director. At his very core, Sid had absorbed the lessons of the Yanan evacuation, which meshed with the strong gut feelings and perspective of growing up in a poor farm family. One critical lesson was the discipline of cadres to put public before self, that building the country for the benefit of everyone had to be more important than your (or your family's) personal well-being. Sometimes it had its not so great effects on his family in a practical sense; he once gave away all of the family's shoe rations—just as the kids were growing and wearing holes in them.<sup>71</sup> But truly, that was the only way the revolution had been won, with people leaving their families and giving up their lives so that China could throw off its brutal oppressors.

Post liberation, some cadres began to want to cut themselves some slack, and thinking about all the sacrifices they had made, maybe felt entitled to a bigger slice for themselves. Others took leadership to mean that everyone should just do as directed. How to really provide leadership, to manage people and work with a socialist ideology was no small question, when all that most people ever understood about governance was the feudal relationship between the landlord and the peasant and the oppressors and the oppressed. But Sid's strict discipline, coupled with continuous study and the practice of criticism, self-criticism, made him a leader that people felt like they could go to, confident that he would solve problems with principle.<sup>72</sup>

Joan, on the other hand, while a great believer in the revolution, as well as the socialist principles behind China's rebirth and construction, never went through the Yanan evacuation. She spent most of her pre-Liberation time in the cities, trying to get into the Liberated Areas, which was a very different perspective of the revolution and the people who gave their lives to it. She also had her roots deep in the intellectual middle class. So, perhaps with the exception of Mao himself, she always had a little more confidence in her own thinking than the thinking of others. As the country catapulted forward, these differences between Joan and Sid would often spark conflicts, both in the family and in their work. But combined with a mutual and fierce dedication to the ideals of the revolution and the cause to build socialism, their different perspectives would often serve them in understanding and analyzing difficult situations in the complex times ahead.

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<sup>71</sup> With such a hugely populated country still recovering from centuries of exploitation and war while trying to build its agriculture and industry, resources were tight. Most goods that people needed to live were rationed, including food staples and clothes.

<sup>72</sup> The practice of criticism, self-criticism (CSC) was essential to the revolutionary movement in China, before and during the Liberation War and in the construction of socialism: building a new kind of society on a large scale, changing the old feudal relationships to new, democratic, socialist ones. CSC was a vital tool to help people practice, in work and everyday actions, moving from a perspective of self-interest and competition to the interest of the whole society and the whole world.

## Section 4

# Contradictions Within

## Chapter 24

# Movement

*“As soon as the comprador and bureaucrat capital was confiscated and came back into the hands of the State, which was run by the proletariat, then suddenly we had money for roads, for building buildings, for health; ... the method was to use state funds and banks to support the type of society you want.”<sup>73</sup> Joan Hinton*

In 1956, after the Soviet experts had been in China for three years, Mao’s report called the “*Ten Great Relationships*” (“*Shi Da Guanxi*”) came out. A call was made to the farm cadres to go to Xian to hear about what was in it. Joan and Sid and others rode their bikes in, while others walked the three hours into the city. The report was China’s first comprehensive analysis of its own situation, internally, as well as in an international context. Spelled out in terms of the relationships between the countryside and the cities (agriculture and industry), coastal and inland regions, and between China and other countries, the analysis was a way to understand the specific and complicated situation in China.

In essence, it was the continuation of what Mao had always advocated, that making revolution, and in this case, building a socialist country, had to be done in a way that fit the needs and conditions of each particular experience. Along those lines, Mao had won a Marxist revolution, not with a base of industrial workers as Marx had proposed, but with an overwhelming majority of peasants in the countryside.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, he would lead China’s socialist development, not based on the Soviet model of concentration on heavy industries in big cities, but by developing both industry and agriculture through their mutually dependent relationship on each other. With such a massive country and huge population, concentrating development on the coastal cities would have led to a complete imbalance and dependence on the cities; what he called for instead, was to develop the countryside and inland regions so that they could be self-sustaining at first, and then just continue to develop industry as the local and regional conditions demanded.

Sid and Joan and the other Caotan cadres were wowed by the report. Talking excitedly about what they’d heard, they stepped outside to find that it had rained while they were at the meeting, and the dirt roads back to the farm were a mucky sticky mess. Their feet picked up giant globs of mud walking the three hours back to the farm with

<sup>73</sup> Comprador capital, bureaucrat capital and proletariat are all Marxist terms. Compradors refer to the class of capitalists that exists in a semi-feudal, semi-colonial state and facilitates the imperialist interests. Bureaucrat capital comes from the class of bureaucrats who serve as administrators in a semi-feudal, semi-colonial state. The proletariat are the class of people who earn only from selling their own labor and have the most revolutionary potential in working class, because they have, as is often said, “nothing to lose but their chains.”

<sup>74</sup> Karl Marx, the revolutionary German philosopher and political economist who lived in the 1800s and upon whose life’s work was laying out the framework for all modern communist theory—posited that the first successful communist revolution would take place in an industrialized country, with the proletariat making up the main revolutionary forces.

their bikes on their backs.

Leading up to 1956, almost all of the morning studies on the farm were focused on the transformation of the economic base and how it related to their specific situation. What the transformation meant practically was that the government initiated a process from the point of Liberation to systematically transfer all of the “means of production” from private hands to public—or from individuals to the State (or to collectives in the countryside).<sup>75</sup>

The policies at the time were directed towards moving from individual ownership to mutual aid teams, then to collective and finally communal ownership.<sup>76</sup> The emphasis was on the people’s participation from the bottom up. While people were eager to see the countryside get together in cooperatives, it was regarded as a step-by-step process that could only be initiated by the needs and desires of the peasants themselves. For a while, there was a discussion about whether the small villages to the north of Caotan should merge with the state farm. The idea seemed exciting, and everyone began studying papers to prepare for it, but soon the process came to a halt, as people realized that it was an unnatural progression to expect the peasants from the villages to jump directly into being state workers. They went back to working on collectivization from the ground up, beginning with mutual aid and work points.

After Liberation in 1949, the new government immediately confiscated all of the property held by comprador capitalists—that is, capitalists who were basically the local arms of foreign interests—as well as capital held by the Guomindang, such as what was left of the railroads and telecommunications. With that capital, the State was able to immediately begin building sorely needed infrastructure and public service projects, like roads and schools and hospitals. But in the beginning, the State let capitalist enterprises (or national bourgeoisie) continue to operate, because China very much needed to keep production going. While the State did dictate in which markets they could operate, and set production quotas as well as wages for the workers, the owners were still owners and the State bought what they produced from them and supplied them with raw materials. But part of any transition to socialism involved getting rid of individual ownership of the means of production—so the State began the process of buying them out by assessing their value, seeing what capital they had invested and paying them for it along with a fixed dividend of about 10%. Everyone in the new economy was given a job, and the former owners were no different. Most became managers or vice managers under Party’s supervision.

When the transition was completed in 1956, the whole country turned out to

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<sup>75</sup> In a Marxist sense, “means of production” are the concrete items used to produce goods. Ownership of the “means of production” encompasses not just the ownership of the contents of, for example, a factory, but also the power to determine how the factory is run and what to do with surplus.

<sup>76</sup> After Liberation, peasants had their own plots of land, the amount depending mostly on their family size. Mutual aid teams formed when it became logical for peasants to pool farming implements or draft animals while retaining individual ownership. Collectives formed when peasants saw the benefit of the group owning the implements and animals and land—and these things became “collectivized.” On the commune level, peasants became state workers and received wages based on work points accumulated over the course of a season or a year.

celebrate. And because they had been studying the transition as it was happening, people in their hearts and minds understood exactly what the celebration was about; China had a socialist economy, and that meant that the whole structure of the country had evolved past the exploitation of labor for profit. While old ideas still existed and reared up often enough, even in the highest levels of leadership, the idea that the whole country stood systemically for a different kind of society was cause for great joy and excitement.

Those feelings were reflected in the spirit at that time. Joan, though she was raised in an environment that strived to be progressive in the way it fostered relationships between people and society, was blown away.

The whole atmosphere was one of: now we're all in it together and nobody's getting rich off of anybody else. Suddenly, all of the social problems from before just evaporated. Anybody who went through that time knows there's no reason for all these problems that we're having now; it only comes when the top is corrupt. When the top leaders are taking from the people, nobody can expose them, so they scapegoat the people down below, and it's an impossible situation... But just in those few years after Liberation, people didn't steal anymore... Basically in '56, if you dropped a ten-dollar bill in the road, somebody'd pick it up and chase after you to give it back to you.

There was so little crime. I rode my bike—and it was at least an hour's ride into the city—and sometimes I didn't get back until eleven or twelve at night. I never was afraid, and I was all by myself... So few people have ever seen a society like that that they don't believe it's possible, but that's the way it was. Once somebody lost some *fanpiao* [meal tickets] at the farm. The system was when we went to the kitchen we didn't give them cash—we gave them meal tickets. And maybe a few dollars worth of meal tickets were stolen from our dairy. We had meetings and meetings about that. It was just a little amount, but it was a big deal.

After Liberation, the Party periodically launched what it called “rectification” movements, grassroots campaigns to solve problems that were confronting the country or the Party itself. These movements had actually started way before Liberation, the most critical of them occurring in the early '40s, when the Communists were being wiped out as they were trying to take the Guomindang strongholds in the city. After going through the rectification movement, where they struggled through all of the problems in ideological line and thinking that got them into that mess, the Party was able to get together again. By the time the Seventh Party Congress was held in 1945, the Central Committee was again in complete unity, and the Party began to regroup, recoup its losses and go on to win the war.

After Liberation, the Party continued to hold rectification movements, beginning with Land Reform in the countryside, and also against counter-revolutionaries, when the Belgian priests got found out in the Three Border Farm. The Three Antis and Five

Antis followed, and both proved successful in rooting out the small numbers of party cadres who were corrupt. But as each movement concluded, China moved further and further away from the point of Liberation and many cadres became more and more distant from the people. During the Revolutionary War, closeness to the people was actually a life and death matter. But post-Liberation, some cadres got a little murky in the way they thought about their place in society. Part of it came with trending towards bureaucracy as the Party moved from armed struggle to the day-to-day problems of running a country. Also, after so many years of living such a tough life with the iron-clad mantra of “Serve the People,” and as they aged and had children, some cadres’ focus became a little blurry. As their life settled down, their ideology settled with it.

As part of an effort to shake things up before that kind of thinking got solidified into party culture, in 1956 Mao launched a movement called, “Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom and a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend.” The idea was to encourage critical thinking and new ideas, in arts and culture (flowers) and science and technology (schools of thought).

The Hundred Flowers Campaign, as it came to be known, initiated a flurry of papers and articles written about what was happening in China and where it should be going as a country. Among the writers were people, mostly intellectuals, who launched attacks on the Party and called for the Party to step down. Their call was for a two-party system, and since the Communist Party had been in power already for six years, it was time for them to move aside and let other people take power.

In what would become Mao’s preferred method in dealing with people who were attacking the socialist principles of the Party, his instructions were to let them say and do what they wanted so that the people themselves could understand what they were about, by seeing and experiencing firsthand their intentions and motivations. After about twenty days, those calling for a two-party system had become increasingly high pitched in their rhetoric. And the people in general were pretty pissed off. So through the Party paper, the Party countered, laying bare the different issues involved with socialist development and the dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>77</sup>

An added layer of complexity was the beginning of a line struggle within the upper levels of the Party itself.<sup>78</sup> It would later be articulated at a meeting at Lushan (Lu Mountain in Jiangxi Province) in 1959, but at the crux was that two ideological lines emerging since Liberation were becoming more apparent. Put simply, one was socialist and one was capitalist, and the Party was split from the very top, with Mao and Zhou Enlai on one side, and Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping on the other.<sup>79</sup> Essentially, all

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<sup>77</sup> The dictatorship of the proletariat is a Marxist concept that defines capitalism as a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, and therefore reasons that in socialism, a dictatorship of the proletariat is needed to suppress the interests of the elite few for the interests of the greater majority.

<sup>78</sup> Line struggle refers to the struggle between ideological lines—socialist and capitalist/Rightist/revisionist—in communist parties or organizations. While the concept of line struggle existed early on in Marxism, Mao further developed and articulated the phenomenon, which he strove to carry out through raising the consciousness of the people to join the struggle through participating in mass movements.

<sup>79</sup> All four were party leaders in the Anti-Japanese and Civil Wars.

of the complex and heated movements that followed, including the Hundred Flowers Campaign, straight through to the Cultural Revolution, were an expression of this ideological struggle among the Party's top leadership.

The Hundred Flowers Campaign ended with Liu and Deng criticizing Mao for unleashing the bourgeoisie and allowing them to attack the Party. And because there had been an attack on the Party, the Anti-Rightist Movement was launched in 1957 in order to seek out the people behind it. Deng Xiaoping was given the responsibility of running it.

At Caotan, the movement started out as it always did: with a call for everyone to put everything out on the table, to give and take open and honest criticism based on the work. Joan's contribution was a poster, because her Chinese was still pretty lousy, a painting of Farm Director Xie. The idea was the feeling of respect that people had for him as a principled leader was tempered by the fact that he rarely physically went into the work areas to understand firsthand what was going on in production and with the workers. The first scene was on him approaching the dairy to the surprise and delight of the workers who had come out to the road to meet him, clapping, with big smiles. The second scene was of him walking past all the workers without stopping, and the workers looking after him dejectedly.

In a short time, however, the Anti-Rightist Movement turned ugly. At its start, Mao estimated that there were maybe 400 Rightists in Beijing and 4,000 in the entire country. Within three months under Deng's leadership, however, 300,000 people had been targeted and accused in a bona fide witch-hunt.

The Caotan Dairy Director, He Zixi, was the kind of cadre who really took to a witch-hunt. Eager to show those above him how revolutionary he was, he had no qualms about setting other people up to make himself look good. Along those lines, he decided that the dairy would have find a Rightist counter-revolutionary in its midst. He set his sites on the old veterinarian, an easy target because of his former post with the Guomindang cavalry. Who could be better than someone who actually worked for the enemy a few short years ago?

One of the other vets, a young guy who was more than eager to participate in the movement, gave He Zixi some information about how the old vet had given a sick cow the wrong medicine and the cow had died. He Zixi seized on it and extrapolated until somehow every dead cow was the result of the old vet trying to sabotage the work. The old vet's response was to ask, "If cows don't die in the dairy, where do they die?" which infuriated He Zixi. Once the vet was labeled a Rightist, he was confined to his room with someone standing guard until he was ready to admit to his counter-revolutionary ways.

Up to that point, all of the movements and campaigns that had been waged since Liberation had been clear and successful in accomplishing what they set out to do; they got people to speak out, identified real enemies of the revolution and solved problems in leadership. So people were confused during the Anti-Rightist Movement. Most people, especially the workers in the dairy, knew in their hearts that the old vet was not

sabotaging the work, and that cows die for all kinds of reasons, including disease and old age. But the pressure from He Zixi and those above him was intense, and they were adamant about his guilt. Even Joan, never one to hold her tongue when she thought differently, had a hard time speaking up.

At the time, we had no idea that the Anti-Rightist Movement was really going to hell, because with a person like Xie... as Director, it shouldn't have happened. But... it was very hard to stop this kind of thing... I remember this time at the *jianding* [evaluation] meeting at the end of the year... and the leaders said what he had done right and wrong and then everybody would *tiyijian* [comment or raise objections]. At certain times in your life, you do things that are against the current and you get flutters in your heart. I had flutters in my heart at that big meeting when they said the vet had sabotaged and killed all those cows, because I got up and said, "I don't think he did." I remember feeling flutters because it was like I was supporting the counter-revolutionary. ...I said there were reasons that the cows died, and I didn't believe the vet was sabotaging and intentionally killing them.

After the year end meeting, the old vet asked Gong Xugui, the head of the work brigade, to come see him that evening to talk. Something came up, though, and Gong Xugui didn't make it. The next morning, the guard standing watch called Sid and Joan to come down to the vet's room; he had committed suicide by running a knife through his guts.

After his death, others on the farm began speaking out; it took the vet's suicide, but people became clearer headed about what was right and wrong, even if they didn't completely understand why it happened. The case never went any further after his death, but it left a mark in their minds and those buoyant feelings of exuberance and complete confidence in spirit had been dampened.

In the midst of the Anti-Rightist Movement and the intense struggle against the vet, the work continued to hurtle forward. For Joan, who was responsible for the milk, the steady increase in production meant managing all kinds of problems and all kinds of workers. Of main concern was that they spoiled a lot of milk, milk that went into the cities to working mothers' babies, young children, and sick people. The cooling system was pretty primitive, even with the refrigeration unit, but the coordination of a lot of complicated work that had to be done in a very detailed way meant that workers made mistakes. Those mistakes would inevitably result in whole cans of milk that went sour by the time it got into bottles at the milk station in the city. Joan got phone call after phone call from the milk station about spoiled milk, the worst of which were when they put hungry and crying babies on the phone to drive the point home.

After every phone call, Joan rode her bike to each station to try to figure out what happened and whose fault it was. She did a lot of yelling, particularly at the two guys who worked under her leadership in the milk room, Lao Li and Lao Zhang. Lao Li, an older worker, was responsible for filling out the slips of papers that recorded



which milk was the freshest. Those slips told the milk station which milk had to be bottled and go out first to prevent the older milk from spoiling. But he had a hard time remembering to fill them out right, and that meant that Joan traced a lot of the sour milk back to him.

One particularly bad spell of spoiled milk for the city as well as for the calves came on the heels of Lao Zhang tripping and dumping an entire can of milk. Joan was beside herself, angry, and frustrated and gave them all “holy hell.” Finally, the Farm Director let her know that he was calling a big meeting to talk about the problems with the milk. Joan went happily to every station to announce it, eager to have the opportunity to lay into Lao Li and Lao Zhang for their shortcomings in their work. Lao Zhang, though, said he couldn’t make it, that his cousin was sick and he needed to take care of her. Joan insisted, but he said he wouldn’t go. Not believing that he would actually not show up, she felt quite pleased preparing how she was going to dress him down.

## Chapter 25

# A Lesson—Part 1

By Joan Hinton (Fall 1958)

I knew that telephone call so early in the morning could be nothing but more spoiled milk. Reluctantly I got out of bed. Once up it wasn't so bad after all. The morning being the only cool part of those hot August days was fresh and clear.

I walked over to the telephone room and picked up the receiver. It was humming softly. Only long distance connections hum like that. It must be the city calling.

"Wei?" I questioned into the phone.

"Lao Han, this is the milk station," came a voice through the hum. "Some milk spoiled this morning. The full amount we don't know yet. People are still telephoning and coming in with an occasional spoiled bottle. We just had a baby on the phone howling. Her parents asked, 'Where's her milk?' Seems to be can 59. Can you hear me?" The voice asked.

"Can 59 spoiled you say?" I shouted back.

"That's right. Can 59. The whole can, would be 91 cattles. Was it afternoon or morning milk? There was no mark again on the receipt today. We had no way of telling."

"Thanks for notifying us. I'll look into it," I said and hung up the receiver.

That's Lao Li again. What a muddle head. Never can do anything without leaving a tail. It must be the tenth time I've told him how to write the receipt, and here he goes again. What can you do with workers like that? Maybe I should really give it to him this time. Then he'll remember. But last time I gave it to him bad enough and that was only a week ago. He swore he'd never write it wrong again. What good does it do? Getting old, just don't have the memory anymore. You can't get mad at him for that. But you can't have the milk spoiling because Lao Li has no memory. So there you are, a carrot chopped at both ends.

As there was no point in going back to bed, I decided to take a look around. I went to the dairy first to look up the record of can #59. Sure enough, it was morning milk, and from the West Station at that, the oldest milk of all, and they had treated it as the freshest just because of that stupid receipt.

There was nothing more to do about it now. So I went to the barn to have a look at the cows. When I got there, the last can of milk was being carried to the dairy, while in the barn it was just time to feed the cows again. The first cow in the line was #1, the dam of our herd sire.<sup>80</sup> She was a great black Holstein with soft black eyes. Being an older cow, she was waiting for her grain more patiently than the rest. Last year as a ten-year-old she had had 16,600 cattles, our highest record so far. A record she owed in good part to Lao Yang who took care of her as though she were her own child. Lao

<sup>80</sup> In animal husbandry the female parent of an animal, especially in livestock, is called the dam; the male parent is called the sire.

Yang had ten cows to care for altogether. Sometimes she had a hard time deciding which was her favorite.

I stood for some time watching the feeding proceed. Some workers threw the grain to the cows as they would throw it to a machine. But Lao Yang was different. She'd talk to each cow as she came to her, scolding her, praising her as the occasion demanded. Asking one why she hadn't finished up her silage and calling the next a pig for having cleaned hers up so fast.

"Lao Han," Lao Zhang called me to the dairy.

"Look at this strainer! West station milk again!" He said, showing me a cheese-cloth covered with clots of curdled milk as I came in.

I smelled the cloth. "Strange. It's not a bit sour. Take a cup—heat it up; if it doesn't curdle the milk it's OK. Might be it's a bit of mastitis milk poured in with the rest."

"But mastitis milk doesn't curdle like this at all," Lao Zhang said as he poured out a cup to heat. He put the steam hose over the milk 'til it was up to 90° but there was no curd formed.

"Not the least sour. No doubt it's mastitis alright," I said.

"But it isn't mastitis. Mastitis isn't like this," Lao Zhang insisted. Just then Lao Yang came over from the barn to check up on her morning's milk production. Seeing us intently inspecting the cup, she asked:

"What's the trouble?"

"Mastitis milk from the West Station," I answered confidently. "Just..."

"But it isn't mastitis milk. It can't be," Lao Zhang interrupted curtly. My temper rose. "Christ, why do you always have to be so hard headed?!" I shouted. "If it's black it's black, if it's white it's white that's all there is to it. Even a stone will wear smooth with rubbing they say. Sometimes I wonder just what is in your head—what your head is made of!"

Lao Zhang held his temper. Gave me one hard glance, turned sharply, and went on with the pasteurizing, not saying another word. "Always like that. Got to have his own way in everything—can't stand criticism either," I thought. "I'll go over to the West Station right now—find that mastitis cow. Wonder if that will be enough proof for him?"

When I got to the West Farm, they told me they had just discovered that #114 cow had bad mastitis. They had also found a hole in the strainer cloth, which had gone unnoticed in the first milk, it being still dark at the time.

"So there," I thought, "This will show him," and started back.

The calf pens, for isolation purposes, were situated halfway between the two farms. As I rode my bicycle past them, I decided to stop in to see the calves and have a chat with the two young women in charge.

"Oh, good you've come!" the two young women shouted simultaneously as soon as they saw me. "The skim milk has spoiled completely today. The first time this year. Strange, the whole works curdled like cottage cheese—nothing left to feed the calves!"

My heart dropped. Milk again! And this is Sunday. Well, I guess that means the end of this little visit. The milk station, the West Farm and now the calves. When it rains it sure does know how to pour. But I merely said:

“Hmm, I’ll investigate immediately,” and rode off again.

In order to get back faster I turned off the main road onto a footpath that led across the fields directly to the milk room.

“But why? Why the skim milk?” I wondered as I peddled along. Soon the path became terribly bumpy. “Oh these bulldozer drivers,” I swore. “Just about all you can do to ride a bicycle after they’ve been over a path, digging it all to pieces with their clanking steel tracks, let alone think!” Bouncing along, I attempted to think again. “But the skim milk is morning milk fed by noon. What can be wrong with it?” The path ahead got even worse. “Those inconsiderate implacable creatures! They’ve gone and plowed the road right up! They’re not satisfied just to make it into a washboard, eh?” I cried out loud.

And so as I jounced along over the clods, the thoughts jounced in and out of my head until suddenly I realized—it’s the separator! Lao Li started using the new separator today. We were separating cold milk until now. With the new machine, we agreed to use warm milk and you can bet your life he never thought to cool it afterwards. Muddle head—I never seem to be able to get him to understand that situations change. That there isn’t a job in the world that can be done without using a wee tiny bit of brain. What can you do with a fellow like that!

With all the milk we’ve spoiled this year, and Lao Li still won’t use his brain. There’s also that hundred cattles which Lao Zhang spilled. Maybe I should get the union to write a good stiff criticism of them on the blackboard—show them up before the whole farm. No, even better—I’ll make them write a good stiff self-criticism. I’ll call a meeting tomorrow.

With the decision made, my heart felt much lighter. But even so I couldn’t help thinking what to do with Lao Li in a more basic way. “He should,” I thought, “be removed from such a responsible job, beside he’s got a hernia, and lifting a thousand cattles a day is not safe for him. I’ll recommend that he be transferred to night watchman. That’s what I’ll do. But then there’s a hitch here too. He’s a skilled worker. Perhaps there’s no such thing as a skilled night watchman. That means he would have to decrease his pay. But even now it’s pretty tough for his family, five kids and a wife—none working. A night watchman’s salary would never do. Maybe I could convince the Director to put him on night watch keeping the same salary—sort of a recognition of his years of work. But of course then there’d be the other night watchman to think about. They’d be reminding us of their years of work too. If it isn’t one thing, it’s another. I guess there’s no decent solution yet. We’ll just have to wait and see,” and I left the thought at that.

The next day I called the two dairy workers to a meeting. In order to get them to accept the idea more easily, I had decided to write a self-criticism too. After they were all seated in the office I began. I went over in detail how each can of milk had spoiled.

Whose responsibility it had been and how it could have been avoided. Then I talked a lot about how we should get rid of our old way of thinking and build up a new socialist thinking in which we recognized that we were no longer exploited workers but masters of our country, how we should feel responsible on our jobs, just as we do for our own families. I finally ended by suggesting that we think over all that had happened this summer and each one of us write a thorough self-criticism, in order to start off clean, and see if we could go to the end of the year without spoiling another catty of milk.

Being thoroughly pleased with my plan, I was rather surprised to find nothing but silence when I got through. I looked at each face in turn, but there was nothing to be seen but sullen silence.

“Well?” I finally asked. But nobody spoke. My temper rose. “Perhaps you don’t think several hundred catties of spoiled milk is worth criticism is that it?”

“Why all the talk? Why not just give us an official reprimand and be done with it?” Snapped Lao Zhang, and he fell silent again.

“What about you Lao Li?” I asked.

“Well,” he said, “Of course I made mistakes but—what about all the other people? Take the calves’ milk yesterday. You say I didn’t cool it in time, true, but when it gets to the calves, they [the workers feeding the calves] leave it right outside there for 12 hours and no one says a word. They’ve even been elected model workers this month. But what are we? Irresponsible muddle heads!” He fell silent, then added, “I’ll think about it. If I can think it out clearly, I’ll write one—tell you tomorrow.”

Good old Lao Li, no matter how I’d lost my temper at him, I’d never seen him fight back. Long years of training I guess.

The time was up. The two of them walked out and left me alone. Another failure. I pondered, “How much easier it would be if I could just do the work myself. And some people think there’s nothing to this thing called leadership! I have more trouble with these two workers than the Director does with the whole farm. Why is it that they can’t seem to do anything really thoroughly—really well—always got to mess up the job in one place or another.

A few days later the Farm Director informed me there was going to be a special meeting called concerning this year’s spoiled milk. All those concerned were to attend including the two dairy workers. The meeting was called for the following day. After notifying Lao Li, I hunted up Lao Zhang. He was resting in the workers’ dormitory.

“But tomorrow’s my day off,” he said on hearing the news. “My cousin’s sick in the hospital. She just had an operation. None of her relatives are around. I have to go to see her.”

“We could arrange to shift your day off to another day if you need it, but you will have to come to the meeting,” I replied firmly.

“My day off is my day off, and I can do with it as I please. Besides, the hospital won’t take visitors any other day,” he snapped. I looked at him coldly for some time then said:

“You are ordered to come to the meeting tomorrow,” and walked out. It never

occurred to me that he would really skip the meeting. In the morning I went to hunt for him, but his wife said he had gone to town. "Oh well, he will certainly be back by noon," I decided and thought no more about it.

When the meeting started, however, there was no sign of him anywhere. "He'll be a bit late," I figured. But the meeting went on and on and no sign of Lao Zhang. "Do you mean to say he's really skipped out?" I suddenly realized that's just what he had done. Actually, he had always been a good and responsible worker. It was just that his tongue was a bit sharp. But this was different. This was serious. Reluctantly I broke the news to the meeting.

"Not only was he unwilling to write a self-criticism after spilling a hundred catties of milk, but he is also irresponsible enough to break labor discipline and defy an order from the leadership to come to this meeting," I said.

Everyone seemed as amazed as I was. This was really carrying things a bit too far, and a good worker at that. He needed a real reprimand. The secretary wrote down Lao Zhang's intentional absence in the minutes with a recommendation that he receive a severe reprimand.

I let the matter ride for about two weeks hoping Lao Zhang would come to his senses and see reason after he had had time to cool off. Then one day I asked the Director if he wouldn't help me run a meeting with the dairy workers to see if we couldn't settle the question, and after making Lao Zhang see his mistake, let the workers themselves decide on a proper punishment. The Director gladly complied; he was interested in the case himself.

We held the meeting that afternoon with the Director as chairperson.

"I'm glad to have the opportunity to meet with you dairy workers today," he said, opening the meeting. "I don't think I've ever been in a meeting with you people alone. The result has been that your specific problems have always been swallowed up by the many problems of the more numerous farm workers. My idea for today's meeting would be, if you all agree, for each of you to say whatever it is that's on your mind, so that I and all of us for that matter, can become more familiar with your work and your problems, what specific problems each one of you has, and what if anything is troubling you. In particular, I would suggest you take this opportunity to bring out any suggestions or ideas you may have about the leadership. I would like to add that I hope no one will be bashful. Only if we bring things out in the open, will they get a chance to be cleared up. Keeping troubles to ourselves and not letting others know only prevents us from having even the hope of solving it. We should have faith that many minds working together always have more power than a single one alone. Who will be the first to speak?"

There was a long silence. "I thought we were having a meeting to settle Lao Zhang's question," I pondered "—seems a funny way to start. Maybe the old man's getting them to unload their troubles first so as to make it easier to criticize."

Finally Lao Zhang spoke. "I'm very glad the Director has come to our meeting today," he started slowly, "I hope he'll find some time to come more often in the future.

I'll try to say some of the things that are on my mind. I've made bad mistakes this year in the work. I tried to carry two cans of milk at once to save time. We have to go so far to carry the milk from the back barn. We don't dare leave the pasteurizer cooler for long. We work in shifts. Much of the time we are all alone. We put an empty can under the cooler. Then we dash out to the back barn. It's quite a distance too. We get the milk. Sometimes they aren't through milking. We have to wait. We picture the can under the cooler in our minds. We imagine how full it is as we wait. Sometimes we don't dare wait any longer and hurry back empty handed to change the can. It all takes time. There are two cans to get out back. That day I was late anyway. I had trouble with the boiler. The steam for pasteurizing came over late. Both cans were full when I got there. I suggested we take them together, with the milker helping to carry the cans. He agreed—there were about 270 cattles in all slung on a pole between us. I was anxious about that can under the cooler. I tried to go too fast. I stumbled and fell. We grabbed at the cans, but half of the milk was already spread in a great white lake over the ground. I did wrong. We never should have tried those two cans. I think I deserve an official reprimand. Please give me one." He was talking faster now. It seemed he had a lot to say.

"The other day I was told to come to a meeting." He continued, "I didn't come. My cousin was sick. She had a transfusion. She had no other relatives here but me. She is all alone. But," he hesitated, "...I could have come. I could have come late. But I didn't come at all. Why? Because I was mad. Why does Lao Han have to shout at people all the time? My attitude is bad. I know that. I've got a temper too. But we should expect more from a leader. She never asked me how sick my cousin was. What the operation was for—no—only says to me, 'You are ordered to come to the meeting tomorrow.' She treats people like machines. She doesn't really care about us at all. Last year I told her there was an empty staff house. I asked her if I could move my family into it. They were living about four miles away at the time, pretty inconvenient for both my family and me. But she paid no attention. A few days later, another worker moved in. She said nothing. Her family lives right here in a tiled roofed house too.

How other people live doesn't mean anything to her. She's terribly hard headed—always thinks she's right. Our work is not any easier than any other work on the farm. Your mind has to be right on the job every instant. Just one miss in the sequence and you're off for the whole day. The incoming milk must be weighed and recorded. The calves' milk must be sent. The cooler must be kept full of milk. The temperature of the pasteurizer must be watched like a hawk. And then there are the cans. You got to be sure you've got them ready—scrubbed with HDH powder and rinsed, and if you haven't got them ready, you'll have no cans to steam those few minutes while you're changing the milk in the pasteurizer. And no cans to steam means no sterilized cans to catch the milk from the cooler and no cans for the cooler means what? Means milk all over the floor when the can overflows and have none to change it for.

Well, as I say, you've got to keep your mind on the job when you're at work. Then, here you are in the midst of it all and in breezes Lao Han. Does she ask you 'How is it

going?’ or ‘Any trouble?’ No, not her. She wouldn’t think of that. She’s too busy looking for faults in the work. She goes scrutinizing around and pretty soon there’s ‘Why can’t you ever remember to get that receipt written right?’ Or ‘Those overalls of yours look like they’d do better working with pigs than in the dairy. How long since you’ve washed them?’ And with that she breezes out again. And that’s what she calls leadership.”

There was plenty on his mind. It was as though a dam had been broken. Thoughts and feelings pent up inside him were suddenly released, and he was letting it all out at once. At first I was surprised, and a little bit hurt by what he said. Could this be me he was talking about? But I did tell the Director about that empty staff house. He got that wrong. And I do ask him how his work is going quite often. Why should he exaggerate things so? But even so, in spite of myself, a struggle started taking shape in my mind. I kept thinking of Chairman Mao’s teaching: when someone criticizes you, don’t try to look for all that is wrong with what they are saying, look for what is right. Even if 90% is wrong, look carefully for that 10% that’s right. Analyze it. Think about it. Make it become part of you. Only in this way can you expect to improve. And after all, what he was saying was not all wrong. The main thing was he had plenty of ideas about me. That was certainly a fact. Secondly, he felt frustrated under my leadership. That was obvious too. How strange. And here I’d been thinking how frustrated I’d been with him to lead. “We expect more from a leader,” he had said. And what else was it? Oh, yes, “She treats people like machines.” I recalled the barn, the expectant look in the cows’ soft eyes as they had watched the grain cart moving slowly down the aisle. “Some workers throw the grain to the cows as they would throw it to a machine. But Lao Yang is different...” That is what I had thought that morning. And now I myself was being accused of treating human beings like machines.

“I let myself go on a bit today,” I heard Lao Zhang ending up, “but I feel better with it out. I hope Lao Han won’t take offense. In general, what I would like to say is that I hope she will be more careful of her temper in the future.”

“Is that all?” asked the Director.

“Yes,” said Lao Zhang, his eyes fixed on the corner of the table but seeing something far beyond. “That’s all.”

There was a long silence.

“Lao Zhang spoke from his heart today,” the Director said softly. “That is good. Saying what is really on our minds, that’s always the first step. That’s the most important thing too—getting things out in the open—only then can we have a chance to sort them out, to analyze, to learn from our mistakes. We’re not afraid of mistakes. They are the price we pay for learning. What we are afraid of is paying that price without learning. If we all say what we really think, then we can work together to analyze our common problems. I hope the rest of you will bring out what is on your minds too.”

There was a short silence. Then Lao Li began. He spoke more like a father might speak to his son, slowly and softly, thinking as he spoke. Though he lacked Lao Zhang’s fiery temper and biting tongue, still the essence of what he had to say was much the same. He suggested that during the heavy rains more attention could have been paid to



the living conditions in the thatched roof staff houses.

“When one comes home at night to find one’s wife and child sitting there on the *kang* holding an umbrella and looking at you with accusing pleading eyes, well it can’t help but affect your work. Those roofs should have been fixed long ago.” Later on, he brought out my temper.

“And it would have been better not to swear at Lao Zhang about that mastitis milk,” he said, “But rather to convince him by explaining, by teaching, and not by trying to shout him down. Actually Lao Zhang did pretty well that time. He held his tongue and turned away.”

As Lao Li talked, I kept watching the Director. He was a fairly big man around 45 with sparse hair and a rounded face. But it was his eyes that one noticed most. They were soft and black and seemed always ready for a smile. Even now while he was sitting here seriously thinking there was something about the light of those eyes that showed a sort of—what was it? A basic belief in the goodness of life and an inherent love of people. Maybe that was it. I tried to guess what he was thinking about. How would he sum up the meeting? What would he say to Lao Zhang? After all the meeting was called to settle Lao Zhang’s question. The minutes of the executive meeting even stated he was to get a reprimand. Yet so far the Director had said nothing and time was nearly up.

Soon Lao Li finished talking. The Director cleared his throat, jotted down another note, and began to speak. He started out talking about me. “Of course,” I thought, “he’s got to take me over the coals first, or Lao Zhang won’t accept his criticism so easily. You always have to start with the leadership.” But as he talked, on I suddenly began to forget about Lao Zhang. I felt more and more as though I were standing in front of a great long mirror looking at myself as others saw me.

“Perhaps her trouble is she thinks she’s the only one whose whole heart is really in the work,” he was saying, “the only one who really cares if things are done right. She doesn’t really realize that others want to get things done right too, that we have all joined the revolution together, and that basically we all want to try to work as well as we can. None of us want the milk to spoil anymore than she does. Because of this she often neglects to notice the positive side of people first—the difficulties they have overcome, and instead thinks of the work as it would be in perfection, and measures its faults from there. Of course it is right to find the faults in our work. But we must see it as a whole, as a reality, and we must understand and appreciate the efforts of our accomplishments. With a basic recognition of accomplishments, we can work together to improve still more. In this way people will not feel frustrated and oppressed, but excited, inspired. We have spoiled a great deal of milk. This is a bad thing. This should be pointed out and we should do everything we can to keep from letting it happen again. But to see the thing as a whole, we should realize we have spoiled 0.1%. 99.9% has passed through our hands without spoiling, and this, of course, is the main thing. And this was not accomplished easily.”

As for Lao Zhang, the Director merely mentioned that he should have come to the meeting that day—nothing more. The meeting was then adjourned.

It was late afternoon. I walked out along the bank of our little drainage canal, thinking over all that had been said. It was raining slightly. The cool drops felt good on my face. My head was in a swirl. Here I had thought I'd worked so well, so conscientiously. I'd fought so hard to get things going and bumped my head against so many stone walls. Then suddenly the world had turned upside down, and there I was at the bottom. The main stone wall was myself. Evidently I had been living for years in the world of things—of cows, of milk, of science, and technology. But there was a whole other world—the world of people—which I had missed. I had thought of the spoiled milk only in terms of spoiled milk, while the workers—they were just instruments to keep it from spoiling. Without conscientiously realizing it, I had not thought of them as human beings like myself at all.

The truth was that I had actually not believed in them and this fact, after all, more than anything else had been the main cause for so much milk spoiling. And now? Now I must start again from scratch. The point was not that my temper was bad, but rather why was it bad? A temper is an outward expression of an inner existence. One cannot just decide: "I've got to change my temper." It doesn't work. I tried that many times before, but always failed. Why? Because I never took it by the roots. You must change your whole outlook on life and people. You must really believe, not only in people in the abstract, but in people—real, live, everyday people. The abstract is derived from the specific. Without any specific, how could there be an abstract?

The thoughts crowded through my head. I sat down on the dike, watching the brook below. Now and then a tiny fish would go darting upstream, while three or four fat pollywogs were lazily, nuzzling into the bits of green slime caught along the bank.

To believe in people. To understand the duality of things. To be able to see the positive side of each and every human being. This is what one must strive to learn. Science, technology, production—what are they without people? Machines are made by people. Cows are milked and fed by people. What meaning can there be to pure science, abstract from people? And the concept "man" itself is abstracted from the existing reality "men," from the millions upon millions of thinking, acting, living individuals, men and women busy in all the daily tasks of production which go to make up society. Each of these individuals has his/her temper, his/her faults, his/her own characteristics different from all the others, but each also has his/her brain, his/her hopes, his/her enthusiasm, and his/her desire to make a better world. Without individual "men," there is no "man." Without "man" there is nothing but raw nature.

## Chapter 26

# Movement Continued

*“Everyone was talking about how we were going to remake the world; [the Great Leap Forward] was like it was an electric shock, a burst of enthusiasm.” Joan Hinton*

Joan took the criticism in, tried to understand it at the roots, and turned her efforts to changing her leadership style. Her relationship with the workers slowly took a turn for the better as she did less yelling and more listening. But the problem of the milk wastage still drove her crazy. In addition to the milk not getting cold enough, the way that the milk was pasteurized left a lot to be desired too. The old sheet iron cooler that she made at Yanzhuang was supposed to cool the milk but didn’t do it very efficiently. And the old double boiler that they used as a pasteurizer was not terribly refined—it raised the temperature of the milk to 60 degrees Celsius and kept it there for half an hour, but they needed to keep stirring it and the milk got burned along the edges.

Joan eventually remade the cooler plate out of stainless steel and made it much bigger so it could cool more milk at once. The thing she really wanted to do, though, was to build a new pasteurizer, a high temperature pasteurizer that had a heat exchange on it to save energy. The bacteria in milk can be killed either by holding the milk at a medium high temperature for an extended period of time, or by taking it to a much higher temperature for a few seconds. Joan wanted to use the high temperature method and then have the hot milk heat going out and the cold milk coming in flow right next to each other. That way the hot milk would warm up the cold milk so it wouldn’t take so much energy to heat it up to the pasteurizing temperature, and the cold milk would help cool the hot, so that it wouldn’t take so much energy to get it down to where it wouldn’t spoil so fast. The ingenious design spoke to her and seemed to be just what the dairy needed.

After chewing on it for a while, Joan rode her bike out to see Farm Director Xie again and convinced him that they should build it. She started immediately and when the farm needed to buy some breeding bulls and machine parts in Shanghai, they sent Joan to do the job so that she could also look around in the much bigger city to see if she could get what she needed for parts.

With only a letter of introduction from the farm, Joan got on the train with no fuss, just like any other cadre going out of town to do the State’s work. She rode in the hard sleeper compartment and took her well-worn copy of Einstein’s *Theory of Relativity* (because it was “so little it was easy to take as something to read”).<sup>81</sup> When she arrived in Shanghai, she looked up her old friends who were still in town, like Gerry Tannenbaum and Talitha Gurlick. They helped arrange for her to stay for free in the

<sup>81</sup> Chinese trains had several different categories: soft sleepers with four berths in a compartment and soft mattresses, hard sleepers with rows of triple bunks and harder mattresses, soft seat with soft cushions, hard seat with hard boards and standing—for when the tickets sold out.

dorms of the All-China Women's Federation, which she used as a home base.<sup>82</sup> From there, she took the bus to all kinds of factories all over Shanghai to try to get all the parts she needed made to order. Then she went looking for bulls.

Joan arrived in Shanghai just when there was a debate going on in the Soviet Union on genetics. Trofim Lysenko, a Soviet scientist, came up with a different theory of inheritance based on how the environment can influence and change heredity. The theory was actually developed on the basis of politics and philosophy rather than science, so the concrete work that came out of it was a little off. But the USSR produced a bunch of bulls called Kostomos using Lysenko's theory and sent them to China. Joan, still thinking about her arguments with her religious classmate in Wisconsin, had an open mind and bought one along with a Holstein. The farm sent someone up to cart the bulls back, and Joan got on a train to Hangzhou—where she had once been chased out of town with the China Welfare Fund's Cultural Group by the Guomindang—and she knew there was a big refrigeration plant.

The centerpiece of the city was a famously beautiful Westlake, and Joan found a small hotel right off the water where she got a room. As she tracked down the plant, the tranquility of the scenery was broken all of a sudden by a huge outpouring of people on the streets beating drums and chanting slogans. Joan had no idea what was going on, just that people seemed extremely excited. Focused on her work, she skirted around the happy crowds and didn't pay too much attention so she could finish her business and get on the next train back to Shanghai and then home. But in Shanghai she found out a similar scene and discovered that buzz had to do with the Anti-Rightist Movement ending and the subsequent announcement of the Great Leap Forward.

Launching the Great Leap Forward was part of Mao's response to the hijacking of the Anti-Rightist Movement. As it became clear that the movement was being used by some party cadres to make their mark at the expense of hounding innocent people sometimes to their deaths, Mao and his allies in the Central Committee realized that they had to find ways to break through the increasingly entrenched bureaucracy, especially as it provided a fertile breeding ground for the kind of opportunism seen in the movement. The Great Leap Forward was really a push back in the form of refocusing on production. A little taken aback by the fallout from the Anti-Rightist Movement, people were low in spirits and not too clear about what the hell was going on with the Party; the Great Leap Forward would give people the opportunity to really grasp their strength and potential by building up China with their own efforts. The slogan for the Great Leap was four characters: *Duo* (Many), *Kuai* (Fast), *Hao* (Good), *Sheng* (Frugal). That is, produce a lot of good quality goods quickly and with little waste.<sup>83</sup>

Joan arrived home after a day's ride on a train that was noisy with discussion

<sup>82</sup> The All-China Women's Federation was organized by the Party in 1949 as a mass-based organization of women working for the liberation of women.

<sup>83</sup> Mao announced the Great Leap Forward in 1958, calling for a big push for the rapid industrialization (including rural industrialization) of China, particularly in heavy industry. In the speech, Mao mobilized the people to catch up to England and the US in iron production in 15 years—for which he criticized himself for being unrealistic after the end of the movement.

about the Great Leap Forward to find the dairy also hopping and already in the midst of planning their contributions. Leading this movement in production was right up Farm Director Xie's alley. Already every six months or so, he had instituted a practice of organizing everyone to look objectively at their work and figure out ways to cut out waste. Workers and cadres would get together, make changes to increase efficiency, and at the end of another six months, everyone would calculate how much money they had saved by reducing the waste. This time, he asked everyone to look objectively at their work and figure out how much they thought they could increase their production. The dark cloud of the Anti-Rightist Movement dissipated as their enthusiasm mounted, and workers throughout the farm took up their task in earnest. In the dairy, discussions ensued about how much more milk each of the cows they were responsible for could give if the workers did their work better. Based on those assessments, they submitted their reports and pledges to the leadership.

All of the plans made early in 1958 were sent to the Agriculture and Forestry Administration in the city where they were marked up with suggestions for improvement, questions and comments and sent back out to the people who made them and then back out to the city again. Through this dialogue, the plans became more refined and detailed; Caotan as a whole ended up with a comprehensive and ambitious plan for the year that everyone felt they could realistically achieve with their greatest efforts.

In the milk room, with the new pasteurizer and cooling system still on the drawing board and still no electricity, Joan and the workers discussed their work and agreed that they could prevent the milk from spoiling if they worked harder and more conscientiously. Their pledge was that they would not spoil one *jin* (500 grams) of milk in the entire year.

Going into it, Joan had a new recognition and understanding of the workers and their commitment to the work that they were doing. Through the process of making mistakes, being criticized and internalizing the criticism, she came to understand in a way that was different from her theoretical understanding, that the workers would put their hearts into the plan, because they had a stake in building this new country. These lessons would only deepen in the coming year, as the milk room struggled to keep their pledge to the State.

## Chapter 27

# A Lesson—Part 2

*Joan Hinton (Fall 1958)*

January went by. No spoiled milk. February the same. March, April, May, June, July the same. Now it was already August, still no spoiled milk!

Again I was out on the dike, watching the pollywogs nuzzling the green slime along the bank of that tiny brook in the farm's drainage canal. Just like a year ago, it was raining slightly. The cool drops felt good on my face. Again my head was a swirl. What had happened? Last year, I worked so hard—yet nothing but spoiled milk. This year I worked the same, yet here it was August already, and not one catty spoiled so far!

The rain got heavier. It rained all night. Then as though gathering for the final blow, at about 10:00 the next morning, there was a sudden crashing downpour. It lasted for half an hour. The drops were as big as marbles. They came shooting down in a thick mass of slanting silver streaks, the myriad of tiny splashes as they hit the ground rebounding into a great misty carpet.

“The bridge!” I heard someone shout. I dashed behind a black figure running in the direction of the bridge. When we got there, though the rain had stopped, the water in the creek was rising fast. It had already reached the top of the bridge buttress, and a tiny trickle was meandering over the low side of the dike where the farm road to the bridge passed through. As we watched, the trickle it began to grow. More people came. An alarm bell rang. There were shouts on all sides.

“Save the fields! Save the bridge! Bring bags! Bring gunnysacks for sand!”

Shovels and people appeared from all directions. Soon there was a great milling mass. At first each had his/her own idea what to do. There seemed to be nothing but confusion. Meanwhile the stream kept steadily rising and the bridge, now acting as a dam, pressed the water back, forcing more and more of it to spill over the dike. The tiny trickle had become a steam.

But soon out of the conglomeration, a new dike appeared. It made a wide circle around the farm-side of the bridge, bringing the overflowing water back into the river below it. By now this bypass water was up to our knees, and the bridge was completely isolated.

“The wagons!” someone shouted. “Right, quick, the wagons!” many voices repeated, “Get the wagons across before it's too late.” If the bridge went out with the wagons on this side, there would be no way of getting the milk to the city.

Soon our two mule carts loaded with grain came up. We unloaded the grain. Leading and shouting we managed somehow to get the empty wagons across. Then the mob moved in on the grain. In a few minutes the wagons were loaded again with the same 40 hundred-pound sacks and sent on their way.

We worked all afternoon banking up both sides of the bridge with sandbags and building up the dike. By night the water had stopped rising and the bridge was still

holding. It stood as a lone stone island stubbornly cutting through the current of a turbulent river where only yesterday the fat pollywogs had been nibbling on the green slime of a tiny brook.

After deciding on turns for night-watch the crowd dispersed. Only now as we headed home did we suddenly realize how tired we really were. Our wet clothes felt cold and clammy. There were blisters on our palms. It was already quite dark by this time. We had to pick our way carefully along the narrow dike path. No one spoke. Only the sound of water passing by and the occasional muffled splash as an undermined lump of sod fell off into the river broke the silence. Ahead the kerosene-lighted windows of the farm grew bigger. They stood in a long row: the living quarters. Then suddenly a lone light went on far to the right in the milk room. Lao Li and Lao Zhang were back at work.

The next morning I woke up with a start. I had overslept. “The milk—what about the milk? We’ve got to get it to the bridge somehow and fast. The carts will be waiting soon on the other side. But how shall we get it there? Carry it can by can? There aren’t any mule carts left here.” I pulled on my clothes and ran out toward the dairy, but soon I realized Lao Li and Lao Zhang had gone there first. At the loading platform stood “Li Kui,” our herd sire, hitched to an oxcart waiting patiently for his load.

“Make him work for a living,” Lao Zhang beamed as I came up. The huge black bull merely turned a sleepy eye and shifted his weight to his other hind foot. His having never been hitched before made me just a bit worried. But after the cart was loaded he nonchalantly walked away with it as if to say, “You call that a load?”

We gathered at the dike by the bridge. The bypass water between us and the bridge was now about a meter deep. At first we had thought of sending Li Kui across with his load. But it was soon evident that this was impossible.

“Unload!” someone shouted. “We’ll carry the milk across.”

And with that, three workers, Lao Zhang among them, grabbed a can and started across. The bridge, acting as a dam, made a difference of about two meters in water level between both ends of the bypass. Thus the current was especially fierce. As they moved slowly across, their three bodies breaking the current with their waists, caused three whirlpools which moved across with them like shadows.

Suddenly Lao Zhang went under. The others grabbing after him and somehow managed to pull him up as the milk can bobbed in the current.

“The hole,” he shouted, “goes right under. The water has undermined the bridge.”

At that another worker jumped forward from the bank. With a long stick he slowly felt his way across to the hole. Bracing himself with the stick—a human buoy—he shouted, “Come on with the rest of the milk!”

And so, laboriously some 22 cans were carried across and loaded onto the wagon.

While the rest went back to breakfast, Lao Zhang and I stayed on watch. We were standing on the bridge when suddenly we noticed the water began to trickle over the top.

“Strange,” we both said at once. Then looking around, we saw a leak breaking

through the bags banking its left flank.

“Quick, stop it with another bag!” Lao Zhang shouted. We started heaving and hawing on a bag of sand, which had been left on the bridge unused. We couldn’t budge it. The leak was opening wider. We furiously dug out some sand with our hands. Then putting all our strength on it, we managed inch by inch to steer it toward the crack. But by the time we got there more leaks had opened up. We took another good look around.

“It’s useless. The water’s rising!” I cried. It was now flowing over the bridge in several places. “Quick, lets get to the other side before it’s too late!”

We jumped into the bypass. The current was even stronger than before. Supporting each other we slowly made our way across. The top sandbag on the temporary dike began to move. It slowly, ever so slowly was slipping outward. We moved faster. I clung to Lao Zhang’s shirttail as he grabbed some sod on the bank. Just then, the sandbag fell to the ground. Gushing through the gap, the water tore two more sandbags along with it and the whole bypass started flowing out into the fields. We managed somehow to get up onto the dike, then ran back shouting at the top of our lungs. Someone started ringing the bell. Soon again there were mobs and shovels and bags and in about an hour the hole was plugged and the dike rose another two feet. But this time the pressure was too great. The bridge couldn’t stand it anymore and bit by bit it cracked and disappeared. The fields were saved, but what about the milk? Tomorrow morning the milk must go out as usual.

“At least the carts are on the other side,” someone said. “We’ll make a boat to send the milk across,” came another voice. “But how?” came the first. “We’ll think of a way,” answered the second.

And sure enough, by night a boat was made. It consisted of four empty gasoline barrels fastened together with wire and bamboo poles. Wired to the top were three bed boards, making a flat raft about seven by nine feet in area. But how to get the raft back and forth across the river? Most people around there had never learned to swim. As the crowd milled around the farm-side of the bank, a young man suddenly cried out, “Give that thin rope to me!” He tied the rope around his waist and dove into the swirling river. Soon he popped up on the other side, where the mule carts were already waiting. People then quickly fastened a thick strong rope to the end of the thin rope. The young man pulled the thick rope across to the opposite bank and anchored it down. With the thick rope fastened tightly across the river, the raft was then fastened to it through a sliding ring. A rope from each side of the raft over to each bank served to pull the raft across. And the next morning at dawn, the milk went out as usual.

When I asked Lao Li and Lao Zhang where they had gotten the bed boards for the raft, they only smiled. Thinking something was strange, I took a peek in the dormitory, and sure enough, they were sleeping on the floor. It was six days before the river began to subside, but the city never knew the difference. The milk was delivered as usual, and the babies and the sick people drank their milk, and each day at 11:00, the kids in the nursery school drank their milk too.



One afternoon before work I found Lao Li sitting on the dike, alone, staring into the river thinking. I sat down beside him. After some time he began to speak.

“I am 59 years old now,” he said. “I spent 50 years in the old society. One year there was a flood. The dikes broke. I was away at work. When I came home... nothing, nothing but water... my wife and three kids...”

“But you’ve got a family now?” I queried.

“This is my second family. After many years I married again. But it’s not easy to forget. With a little effort then, with a little organization, that flood never had to be. Those thieves. They fled from the area, pocketed the relief money. What did they care about us?” he fell silent. Then in a little while he said, “4:30, time to stuff the boiler,” and getting up, headed for the dairy.

I sat there alone. A small white water bird with a jet-black crown soared up stream, flying low along the water. He hovered for a second, his head moving slightly from side to side searching then suddenly—flopping his wings—splash! He swooped a tiny fish from the surface and soared away. Between the banks pressing the grass flat on both sides, the river moved on its smooth surface broken here and there broken by rising in a swirl. Evidently the water below, occasionally reflected off some ridge on the bottom, was rising to the top making the river appear in a constant process of turning itself slowly inside out. The water, originally clear, was now quite muddy. And only when an occasional fish up from the depths would go darting along the surface, could one see any life in it at all.

“The trouble with Lao Han is she thinks she is the only one who wants to get the work done well.” The words of the Director kept going through my mind. And I had thought Lao Zhang and Lao Li didn’t really care. For nearly a week they had been working fourteen to fifteen hours a day. They’d even given their beds and slept on the floor. I suddenly felt as though I were standing on the border of a whole new dimension, as though for the first time in my life I began to really realize, to feel with my heart what, “History is made by the masses” means. It was dark. I went out to the dairy. Lao Li was sitting at his desk alone.

“What are we up to now?” I asked. He looked up at me with a sheepish twinkle in his eye.

“Making myself a new method,” he said noncommittally.

“New method for what?” I asked.

“Well, care to make a wager? You’d better not or you’ll lose! There won’t be any more receipts written wrong after this. Do you believe it?” He laughed.

“Yes.” I said, “I do.”

## Chapter 28

# Great Leap

*"[Sid's] ...experience in 1947 was so deep that he really really trusted the Party. So it took awhile for him to realize that you had to analyze what was coming; it wasn't all like it was in Yanan." Joan Hinton*

In addition to managing the milk room and learning that managing people was more challenging than nuclear physics, Joan continued to plug away at building the new pasteurizer and cooling system. She worked with a young mechanically minded guy called Liu Guojin on a complete new system that involved compressors and refrigeration, so that the milk would be kept much colder. On one of her many trips into the city hunting for special parts, she decided to look up an American woman who her old friends Sid Shapiro and Ione Kramer had told her about when they stopped in Xian on a trip to North Shaanxi. Her name was Jane, and she worked in a Xian army hospital as a lab tech where her husband, Su Hongxi was a heart surgeon.

The hospital gave her directions to their house, and Joan simply walked up to the door and knocked. From the moment Jane Su came to the door, the two became close friends. Jane told her story, how she had met Su, a heart surgeon originally from China, in a US hospital. And how after they got married, they decided to return to China, to use their skills to help China rebuild. At the time, Jane was pregnant, Su was toting a heart and lung machine, and the US government had an embargo on China. So they left separately, met up in England and from there together brought the first heart and lung machine—and the first surgeon who knew how to use it—to China. The Chinese government told Su he could choose anywhere he wanted to go as a highly skilled surgeon, but suggested he work in an army hospital, because they tended to be the most advanced. The top at the time was the huge central hospital for the People's Liberation Army in Xian, and Su and Jane took their advice and made the city their home.

In turn, Joan filled Jane in on all of her adventures, from arriving in Shanghai to going into the underground. She recounted Sid's experiences in evacuating Yanan and running with the cows and about their lives in Inner Mongolia. They talked for so long and far into the night, that Joan spent the night and went home in the morning.

Although Joan had melted quickly and thoroughly into the Caotan community as regular cadre, talking to Jane made her suddenly realize that she had only had one person to speak English to for a long, long time. While her Chinese was getting better all the time (and a far cry from when she first arrived in Yanan, although she still cursed like a sailor), she found in Jane someone who she could talk and laugh with in her most fluent language and from a similar cultural background. Jane too, was a Western woman, with a more "famous" spouse and raising kids. They encountered many similar difficulties, and it sure helped to have someone who could relate to them. From then on, whenever she had time during her buying trips into the city, she would stop in to say hello and share stories.

While Joan was busy designing and building new dairy equipment, Sid, as part of the farm leadership, had his share of paper pushing to do. But he was also responsible for all of the technical work, including especially the animal husbandry part of the dairy. Although he wasn't actually a veterinarian, as a practiced dairy farmer who had once milked his own herd and also a Cornell ag student, he had much more technical experience than most of the vets on the farm. So he spent a lot of time working with them on issues like breeding, calving, and sickness and disease.

In particular, one vet who they called Lao Meng, called on Sid if cows had a difficult time calving or had some kind of emergency, especially if it was in the middle of the night. Lao Meng, stationed at the main dairy, was a little more skilled than others—he had gone to a technical school for a couple years—and was responsible for overseeing most of the vet work. So when the station vets had trouble and needed help, they called him.

During the daytime, Lao Meng did fine—sometimes Sid would go with him if it were an especially prized cow or a difficult problem to solve—but in general he handled most of the stuff that came up pretty well. It was just at nighttime when he seemed to need more help, and specifically in the form of Sid riding his bike with him to the outlying stations, and in particular, the East Station. Eventually Sid realized that the ride out to the East Station passed by the Wei River through some woods, and Lao Meng, although he would never admit it, was afraid of ghosts.

As the herd grew and grew, a new young vet fresh out of bona fide vet school was assigned to the farm. His name was Jian and had a unique approach to curing cows.

Feng Yiqi, who was a good worker... had one cow one day that he couldn't milk out. He could feel a lump up in one of the teat canals. So of course he got very excited and called the vet. So then Jian Shouyi (Vet Jian) went out, looked at it, and went back and read his book. He said that the problem was that the cow was nervous, and they had to calm her down. And one way to calm her down was to pump air into her asshole!

So Feng Yiqi came in and grabbed me; he could hardly talk he was so excited. He said, "Jian Shouyi says you gotta pump air in her asshole!" He said he told the vet, "Lookit, her teat is right there, it's got a lump in it right up in there and I don't know how the hell you're gonna cure that lump by pumping air in her asshole!" So Feng Yiqi said to me, "You gotta come out and solve this!"

Sid jumped on his bike and made it there before Jian got at the cow with the bike pump. He suggested that they might thread a plug up the teat with Vaseline instead.

Sid's experience riding back and forth between stations on his bike (which included one midnight flight over the handlebars) was greatly improved when Caotan listed building a gravel road as part of its contribution to the Great Leap Forward; it would make for much smoother travel during the rainy season. Also included in the plan was getting electricity and phone lines.

With electricity, all kinds of new projects were possible. For one, they were able to really utilize the farm's location off the Wei River to irrigate their fields for the first time. When they brought an electrical line in from the city to the farm, one of the first things they did was hook it up to a new irrigation pump set up on one of the banks. The problem, though, was that the Wei River continued to flood periodically, and one day the alarm rang again during the afternoon, heat of the day siesta signaling a flash flood.<sup>84</sup> Sid rushed to the scene to find that the river, ordinarily about 500 hundred meters across, had swollen to be a three-plus-kilometer muddy gushing expanse, which had completely wiped out the irrigation pump.

That big irrigation pump was a hefty investment that the farm had made and no one was willing to just let it get swept away. Swimmers were in short supply, so Sid dove in along with another guy to try to find it. Diving through mud, however, proved fruitless and dangerous, as they resurfaced 20 meters or so away from where they first dove in. They never recovered it, and as Sid said, "2,000 years from now when the Wei River's in a different place, people are going to dig down and find that pump that primitive man used and say, 'Jesus, it wasn't too many years after the Stone Age that they used those things!'"

A side benefit of that failed attempt to save the pump was that Sid had to go to the doctor to treat a nasty sinus infection that cropped up from all the river crud that had gone up his nose. After a little local anesthesia, the doctor jabbed a big needle right into his sinus cavity through his cheek and flushed it out with saline solution. All the river crud came shooting out of his nose, along with whatever else was causing the low-grade infections that had made his breath so stinky for so many years.

1958 saw a tremendous increase in production and efficiency at Caotan. The milk room kept its seemingly impossible pledge and did not spoil one *jin* of milk the whole year. But as the year drew to a close, some different ideas and policies popped up, along with increasing pressure from above. In the beginning, it seemed mostly like good ideas that when put into practice, turned out to be not so great.

Many such ideas came from an old revolutionary cadre named Wang Zhen. Wang Zhen was a famous hero of the revolutionary war, who had made his mark during the Anti-Japanese War. When the Guomindang blockaded the Communists with the intention of starving them out of their loess-hilled base, he was given the job of making the PLA self-sufficient. Wang Zhen led the famed 356 Brigade on a massive production drive in a village in North Shaanxi, plowing new fields and planting them with grain and cotton. His efforts, which had everyone including Mao and Zhou spinning cotton to make clothes, were a great success, and the Communists were able to outlast the Guomindang to break the encirclement. Based on his experience during the war, he became the head of the Land Reclamation Ministry. So at the end of 1958, when Wang Zhen came to Caotan to participate in a national meeting for state farms, people were excited to meet him and hear what he might have to say.

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<sup>84</sup> Following the tradition of peasants in the countryside, most people in China went to work very early in the morning, stopped at around 11AM when the sun was getting hot and then went back to work at 2 or 3PM.

After the meeting, Wang Zhen toured Caotan and then sat all of the cadres down to a meeting and laid into a lengthy criticism: the farm was being too conservative in its plans and vision, and they'd better get off their butts to change. His focus was on the Wei River; he didn't believe that Caotan was using this great resource to its full potential to get production going. So with one look around and one meeting where he was doing all the talking, he gave them a directive: raise 100,000 ducks and 100,000 chickens in one year.

As Wang Zhen continued to hold forth, Joan elbowed Sid and leaned over: "What are we gonna feed them?"

Sid: "Well if the Ministry wants us to do it, then I'm sure they've figured that out."

Joan frowned, not entirely convinced the Ministry's plans were all that well thought out. Her frown, however, quickly turned into a look of horror when the farm leadership decided to give her responsibility of heading up the entire project. It wasn't that Joan thought she couldn't do it, nor was she thinking that finding feed for the poultry was going to be impossible. What she was thinking about was—there was no way in hell she wanted to be a poultry farmer. She wouldn't have necessarily put it that way, but she thought it was sort of beneath her. Her work in the milk room put her in charge of mundane work too, but she was also in charge of the technical work of designing pasteurizers and refrigeration systems. Plus, cows were big animals with big animal status. Ducks and chickens were sort of stupid little things that clucked along on the ground, and damn it, she was still a nuclear physicist who could flex her theoretical muscles figuring out angles for silage choppers and soldering copper to iron. Now she had to raise chickens. Couldn't her skills be better used elsewhere?

Those times were not exactly the optimal times to come out with those kinds of complaints. So she kept them to herself and put on a good face.

I was given two workers, Jiang Kunhuai and Lao Hua, and I was transferred to do ducks at the West Station. I'll never forget: Jiang Kunhuai came one day pulling a little cart with five white Peking ducks in it... and when he found me he said, "Han Chun, what am I to do with these?" ...He was all enthusiastic, because he was just an ordinary worker who had been given the job that Wang Zhen wanted done. He felt like it was an upgrade for him, and I thought it was about the last thing a nuclear physicist should be asked to do. So I had to pretend that I was enthusiastic and figure out what to do about those Peking ducks.

What to do about those Peking ducks turned out to be more complicated than it seemed. Bred for generation after generation to convert grain into meat, the birds had become completely dependent on humans for their survival. They could no longer fly, and they had "forgotten" how to sit on their own eggs. So when the five ducks laid eggs, Joan had to figure out what to do with them. Thinking on her feet, she called up Jane Su and asked if they had a spare incubator at the hospital that could take the eggs for

28 days. The five ducks that came out of the People's Liberation Army hospital in the city about a month later, however, looked a little worse for the wear. Their legs were all soft, and by the time they got them back to a little mud hut they had built and onto the tiny *kang* to keep warm, they were ready to keel over.

The next batch did a little better, because Joan took them to a duck hatchery in the city where the incubators were adjusted for the higher humidity that ducks needed. But after bringing them back, their legs splayed out again and the little guys bit the dust.

Now Joan was mad. Here she was a nuclear physicist, and these little ducklings were getting the best of her. The gauntlet was thrown down. In response, she pedaled furiously around the city looking for every book that she possibly could about how to raise Peking ducks. She found one written by a professor in Beijing that described in detail what it took from egg to butcher. After devouring that book, she rode around the countryside looking for local peasants who were raising ducks to learn how they had been doing it so successfully, many times for generations.

What she found astounded her: peasants, as they had been doing for hundreds of years, hatched hundreds and sometimes thousands of eggs at a time on *kangs*, with no thermometer or electricity. They controlled the temperature of the eggs by holding them up to their eyelid to judge the temperature and then adjusting the fire underneath the *kang*. They also kept turning the eggs over every few minutes until the duck embryo had developed enough, after which they put them in a layer close together. They did this for 28 days, sleeping a little, then waking to flip the eggs and check the temperature on their eyelids, then sleeping a little and waking and on and on until the ducks broke through their shells.

Joan was impressed. But she was way more into electricity and mechanization than 24-hour round-the-clock care. After she discovered another duck and chicken hatchery in Xian, she got a few new buildings built and brought back some freshly hatched ducks. Always the scientist, she decided to conduct a test study by separating out ten ducklings from a control group and raising them exactly as described by the duck professor from Beijing. Well, it was supposed to be ten, but one jumped over, so it ended up being eleven.

Just then, the Soviet Union stunned the world with the first successful satellite launch into space. Many of the workers' morning studies were about how to launch "satellites," or innovative scientific projects in the Great Leap Forward. So Joan and the workers launched their own scientific experiment calling the one group the Eleven Satellites, and what they discovered was, the professor was right. The Satellites gobbled up high protein feed that he said they thrived on like there was no tomorrow, shoveling it in by the beak-full, pausing only to wash it down with some water.

By the tenth day, Joan, who had been measuring their feed and weighing them every day, could see a marked difference between the Satellites and the others. At day 60, the Satellites were mature, white-feathered ducks, while the others were still fuzzy with yellow feathers that were just beginning to change. And by the time the Eleven

were ready to lay their own eggs, Joan was completely hooked. In the process of going deeply into her new work, she learned not only all about ducks but also that any kind of work had the potential of being intensely interesting.

I'd gotten over my disappointment about having to raise ducks. My biggest experience is that whatever you do, as long as you go right into it, it becomes interesting. It's not interesting if you don't try to understand it, but anything can be your *zhuanye* [field of study or expertise]. A lot of people in China say to me, "Oh, you changed your *zhuanye*." But to me, I'm not any *zhuanye*; whatever you're doing is your *zhuanye*. You go deeper and deeper into it and it becomes fascinating if you really try to find out what the laws that work are—otherwise it's just fluffy. It's really observing nature, and in China it was observing people and the relations between people, and the relations between production and the enthusiasm of the people.

With her new understanding, both of how to keep the ducks alive and make them fat, and about what made work interesting, Joan and the two workers she had working with her really got going. They moved into the barns where the TB herd had been isolated before the disease was eliminated, and set up shop. Wang Zhen, letting them know that he still had his eye on them (and that he thought they weren't moving fast enough), sent them two huge 5,000-egg incubators. With her background in physics and basic understanding of electricity, Joan got them wired up, and they prepared to load them with eggs. But using the incubators to capacity meant that every 28 days, they would have 5,000 ducklings on their hands—and that was just using one! That prospect seemed overwhelming, so they scaled it down a little, loading 500 eggs at a time to hatch at different intervals.

Just when Caotan assigned Joan the task of hatching Wang Zhen's 100,000 ducks and chickens, a team of Soviet experts began working on a mammoth project on the nearby Yellow River. Their plan was to build a huge dam in the gorge to generate electricity and then reforest all of North Shaanxi. That, of course, meant there would be a big reservoir flooding the land where three villages were, so the State had to find a place for them to relocate. The dam never succeeded (and North Shaanxi is still barren loess hills), because the Soviet experts seriously miscalculated just how difficult it would be to get the silt out of the river. But the villagers were relocated permanently to Caotan, one village at each station.

When the ducks began hatching all over the place, 500 at a time, peasants from one village arrived at the West Station, and a group of the women were assigned to work under Joan to raise ducks. As soon as she started with them, Joan realized that the previous policy of collectivization from the bottom up (as opposed to dumping peasants into the state farm system and making them workers overnight) had been right.

They had arrived with all of the contradictions that they had in the village still intact. They had a *yiguandao* before, which was, under the old society, a secret society. And they kept track of the landlord's daughter and the

original poor peasant's daughter and everything, and I was supposed to get them raising ducks. All I had to do before was lead Zhang Dangyuan and Lao Li in the milk room. Then I had Jiang Kunhuai and then Lao Hua... for the ducks. Suddenly I was in charge of that group of women ...[who] became workers overnight, without any background for being workers on a state farm. ...[T]heir thinking wasn't like the state farm workers ...[who] on the whole had much more broad perspectives and had more experience in production in the State and in relations between people and so forth.

Each woman was given a flock of 500 ducks to raise right out of the incubators. There were three eight-hour shifts a day, so three women minded one flock. In the morning, when there was about half an hour that the ducks could be left unattended, Joan began conducting study sessions with the workers with a globe and lots of international and domestic news. They learned new things about the world and also got technical training on how to raise ducks. And, drawing on her lesson with Lao Zhang and the milk room, periodically after a shift, she held a meeting with all of the workers from that shift to talk about what was going on and solve whatever problems came up.

In the beginning, ducklings died by the hundreds because of some kind of disease or another. But as the women workers began to get into the work, they learned how to tell if the ducks were having problems and head it off with medicine and isolation before there was a big die off.

The more Joan got to know the women, the more she understood the village and family relationships between them to be tremendously complicated and narrow-minded. In addition to all of the problems of technical skills and coordination, those old feudal relationships ran deep and sometimes wreaked havoc in the work. But with their careful tracking of feed and duck weight, they were able to uncover problems and solve them.

One flock in particular looked right on paper with the feeding, but the ducks were well underweight every time they got put on the scale: healthy but underweight. They held meetings about it until finally it slowly came out that one woman, who was from a rich peasant background, was working with a poor peasant background woman, a fellow villager whom her family used to exploit and oppress. The former poor peasant, who for the first time was out of the house doing work on her own, flourished in her new environment and did very well with her ducks. So the other woman took the grain from her flock to sabotage her success.

At the meeting, Joan told the woman that wrecking and sabotage were very serious. But she kept her working until she became so engaged with her own work that sometimes Joan would find her in the barn off shift with her baby, just watching and checking in on the ducks as they grew. In a short time, their survival rate reached close to 100%.

That method of leadership took a lot of energy from the leader... with mid-night meetings and going to their families and finding out what their prob-



lems were. But the results were just tremendous. Those women changed from being ordinary *jiating funu* [housewives], to being workers on a state farm and being responsible for public property. The collectives hadn't been in existence very long then ... [and] for centuries they'd been in that village, and all those... complicated relations between people came from things that had nothing to do with getting production going. It all had to be dealt with, so in our study we studied the Great Leap Forward and China's development. It wasn't very deep, but at least [we] went over them, and in the end we got 98% living of those little ducks.

After the ducks were up and running around, Joan started in with the chickens. They got a bunch of Leghorn chicken eggs and put them in the incubators. It got so 500 ducklings would come out and then five days later 500 chicks, and then ducks and then chickens. Chickens, it turned out, were much more difficult to keep alive than the ducks, because they were so prone to disease. Once one caught something, they were all easily susceptible, and then the whole flock would be wiped out if you weren't right on top of it with medication.

The other problem was that the chicks were smaller than the ducks and turned out to be just the right bite size for the rats. They lost so many chicks to rats that they came up with the brilliant idea of electrocuting the rats on the wire that they climbed down to get to their next meal. They bared some of the wire, attached a ground and were so pleased with themselves that they turned off the lights late at night and waited quietly to watch the rats get fried. It didn't work; the rats just grabbed right onto the bared wire and ran down to the waiting chicks. Eventually though, they began to win the workers/cadres/chicks vs. rats battle, and their chick survival rate climbed to match the ducklings. They were able to maintain the 98% survival rate until in the middle of trying to keep up with the thousands of fuzzy little things hopping out of the incubators, the policy of piece-wages and material incentive came sweeping down on them again.

Joan wasn't too eager about it this time around, having seen the results of her calculus calculations and their impact on pig-raising the last time. But she didn't have much choice in the matter, and they instituted the policy based on the survival and growth rate for each worker's flock. Almost immediately, the overall survival rate dropped to 60%; workers stopped helping each other, and they had tremendous losses as a result. It wasn't too long before the policy was cut out again.

Wang Zhen's harsh criticisms and intense pressure to do more and produce more fit right in with the Vice Director Chen of the Department of Agriculture and the person specifically in charge of livestock. Chen's agenda was to show his leadership that he was working hard to meet the goals on the Great Leap Forward, and to do so, he put the screws on those below him and berated them for failing to meet his impossible goals. Unfortunately, Caotan was one of many farms that fell under the Department of Agriculture's direct authority, and even more unfortunately, the dairy, because it dealt

with livestock, fell under Vice Director Chen. He took Land Reclamation Minister Wang Zhen's edicts as a personal mandate and turned up his righteousness several notches.

As a Vice Director, Sid bore the brunt of a lot of it: how they were wasting too much, not producing enough, spending too much money. He and the other farm leaders were under constant and mostly completely arbitrary criticism. Joan heard about it and was certainly directly affected but never heard much from Sid. He maintained a strict discipline as always and did not discuss the problems he faced as the Vice Director—at least not with his wife, who was not in the leadership. So Joan knew he was having a tough time, but not the extent of the kind of pressure he was under. He knew that everyone was working their tails off, and he knew that it was because they cared about building socialism in China. But the unrelenting criticism from above put him in the position of asking more and often unreasonable things from people who were already giving all they had. At the time, no one knew about the fierce struggle being waged at the very top levels of the Party leadership, and so the farm leadership could only plow doggedly if somewhat dejectedly ahead.

Once he got over his naiveté about Wang Zhen and the Ministry, Sid was stuck trying to negotiate between orders from above and the reality of conditions on the farm. In addition to the ducks and chickens project, which was never going fast enough, Vice Director Chen pushed for the farm to begin raising all different kinds of livestock. It started after the poultry with goats. To Joan's ever increasing dismay, she was put in charge of yet another ill-conceived project. Liu Xiansheng, a cadre and professor who had apparently done a lot of work with individual goats in individual families in North Shaanxi, though, felt confident in advocating for them.

The problem was raising goats in a herd was different than raising them one by one, and the goats began to die off. Bought from peasants who had given them individual attention, they couldn't survive being all herded together; they got run down and just gave out. Then when it came time for them to give birth in the spring, they lacked selenium. So the kids came out all wiggly but then would fall down and die. In the middle of all these unresolved problems the leadership succumbed to pressure to increase their efforts with the goats and put Wang Liping (the cadre who had designed the dairy with Sid) in charge of yet another herd at the East Station. Needless to say, the survival rate did not improve.

As the head of the brigade in charge of the goats, Ma Xuankun got nervous about the goats dying off. Under constant pressure, he implied to He Zixi, the asshole in charge of the dairy, that maybe Joan was guilty of sabotage. The charge never went too far, probably because He Zixi was a little skittish about trying to really go after a foreign comrade. Although in the end she didn't make a good target, Joan got a little dose of that feeling the old vet must've had, as she worked day and night trying to save those goats.

They got donkeys and mules, and then they got yellow cows to breed with the Holsteins. Sid was in charge of the livestock, going crazy with all of the different orders

to raise different animals. One disgruntled worker commented that maybe they should get camels too, because it seemed like Caotan had to have every animal in China. But the kicker was when Vice Director Chen from the Department of Agriculture decided that Caotan had to raise yaks.

Sid told him no, that yaks were long haired animals raised in high altitude, cold climate regions like Nepal and Tibet, and would not do well in hot and humid Xian. Vice Director Chen's response was that Sid was continuing to show that he had conservative thinking and wasn't grasping the spirit of the Great Leap. They had to do it and that was that. So Sid sent off a guy who was working under him to Qinghai Province in the far northwest.

[W]e sent him off... over our protest. He got out there—this was in the summer—and he wired back immediately and said, 'Geez you gotta get me permission to buy a leather coat, I'm freezing my butts off up here! It's cold!'

While their guy was shivering in Qinghai looking over herds of yaks, Zhao, the Director of the Department of Agriculture and Chen's boss, went out to Caotan on a Sunday to have a look around and get a little respite from his nose to the grindstone schedule in the city. His reputation was of being a reasonable and well-intentioned guy, someone who you could talk things over with and had some principles. So while showing him around, Sid casually engaged him in some livestock conversation.

I said, 'You know, I don't think we can raise yaks up in this place here.' [He said] 'Raise yaks, what do you mean? Of course you can't raise yaks here.' I said, 'Well, you know Chen Tingzhang [Director] says we gotta raise yaks.' 'Raise yaks, here?!' he asked me, 'Does he know what a yak is?' I said, 'Sure, I guess he knows what they are... We gotta person off right now in Qinghai buying 'em.' He was very excited and said, 'You gotta person off there buying 'em? What the hell's the matter with you people, you can't raise yaks here!' Well he blew his top. And he said, 'Send that guy a telegram and tell him to come back right off the bat and don't buy any yaks... As far as Chen Tingzhang [Director] is concerned, I'll talk it over with him.'

But the pressure still continued to mount. Chen eventually called a big meeting of state-sector agriculture in the city, and the Caotan cadres made their way into what they were pretty sure was going to be a meeting to criticize them. Sure enough, Director Chen opened up the meeting by righteously plopping a bunch of baby ducklings down on the table.

According to Joan's book by the Beijing professor, for the best results, duck eggs should be of a certain size for breeding. So after the project really got on its feet, Joan made a gauge to measure the eggs and cull out the ones that were small, setting them aside to sell. Looking for any proof he could trot out that people weren't working hard enough or with the right spirit, Chen sent a guy down to the farm when she wasn't

there to buy some of those culled eggs and put them in an incubator at a hatchery—the result was the ducklings on the table.

Here, quacking on the table was concrete proof of the conservative thinking of the Caotan leadership. Chen asked the people in the meeting what they thought about those ducks, then told them what he thought; he thought that those ducks were just fine, but Caotan had culled them. He came down on Joan hard, accusing her of being too conservative and wasting eggs that had proven perfectly fine for breeding.

Chen moved onto the pig-raisers. He berated them for a good long while about how they weren't getting the sows bred fast enough, how they should be studying advanced techniques and do multiple breedings during each heat and how you could breed them again before the litter was weaned on and on. Sid, by this time, was pissed off. On their way out, he ran into Chen in the hallway and remarked sharply, "Well Director Chen, at least we can agree on one thing—that the piglets have to be out of the sow's belly before she can be bred again!" But his comment just provided the Director the opportunity to come down on Sid, accusing him of being unable to accept criticism.

The "zoo" movement to raise every kind of animal at the farm was the first of many movements that came down one after another. The farm leadership protested most of the movements, but the pressure was too great. One was for ball bearings. Suddenly, ball bearings were the technical innovation that would increase everyone's efficiency exponentially. Everything that had wheels had to have ball bearings, and the wooden carts and wheelbarrows of Caotan all had to be taken apart and put back together again with bearings—even though the people who had to do it knew it would never work. The cart that Li Kui, the breeding bull from the dairy, had used to move the milk during the great flood the year before was completely destroyed in that way and never used again.

Then the bureaucrats decided that they should spend their time cultivating plants on the water, greens that had a lot of nutritional value, to feed the cows and the goats. So after a while, all of Caotan's ponds were covered in green plants, which after they were all harvested amounted to about half a bite for every other animal.

There was also the great movement to increase iron and steel production, to "catch up with England in 15 years." Mao's call at the top to make a Great Leap Forward in that industry, by the time it trickled down to Caotan, was turned into a ridiculous effort to sift the sand from the Wei River banks for iron particles. Piles and piles of sand ended up in their scrap yard, with no possible way to turn the sand into metal without using up all of their energy resources to do it. It went so far, that when the cotton was ripe in the fields, workers and peasants were down by the river sifting sand instead of harvesting the crops.

Deep plowing was another movement that got more and more distorted as time went on. It started out with the idea that deep plowing would yield better crops, because the roots would go down deeper and be stronger. But the idea turned to policy, and the policy was implemented in a way that tied the results in production to whether

the fields had been plowed deeply enough. The call went out to plow two, three meters, and eventually a ridiculous and impossible ten meters deep. With such intense pressure from the bureaucrats above to produce the impossible, reports began coming in with numbers that matched those impossible expectations. Collectives all around Xian began reporting astonishing production figures that they attributed to deep plowing. Praise heaped up around them, while the Caotan crop team got beat down with criticism after criticism, accused of not trying hard enough; as the state farm, they were supposed to set the example, to be a model in agriculture with the highest production, and yet they seemed to lag far behind everyone else's enormous figures.

The next dairy over from Caotan, a dairy that had been transitioned from private to state ownership, claimed to have a cow that produced 60 kilograms of milk in a day. Caotan's top cow made 52 kilograms, which was actually extremely high under those conditions and quality of feed. But when the other dairy got in the paper with their tremendous accomplishments in production, Caotan got slammed again. Frustrated and mystified at how the other dairy could be doing so much better than their best efforts, a Caotan worker went down to check it out. It turned out that it was true that their top cow produced 60 kilograms—but in a 24-hour period, where they milked her about five times. Ordinarily, the standard to have healthy cows at the highest production for mechanized dairies was three milkings a day.

Farm Director Xie, though, refused to falsify any production figures. On the contrary, he was very confused and worried about why his people were working so hard but accomplishing so little compared to everyone around them. As Sid said, "He used to come back from the meetings and... say, 'I don't know what's the matter with us out here.' He'd say, 'Everybody's getting such high production and everything, and all we can do is just inch along like an inchworm.' But he wouldn't falsify."

By the end of 1959, the Caotan leadership, cadres and workers were exhausted and dejected. No matter how hard they tried, they could never seem to catch up with everyone else. While many people suspected that the production figures being reported were a little fishy, they also couldn't help but believe that they really were far behind everyone else in their production efforts. Then near the end of the year, Zhao, Director of the Department of Agriculture, came out again to the farm to meet with the farm leadership and all the station heads. Everyone was edgy, trying to steel themselves for whatever was coming next, whatever criticism, whatever ridiculous new movement he was going to unleash on them.

But what he said was: "*Nimen xinku le,*" which means, "You've been working so hard." Sid was in shock—everyone in the room was in shock, and the shockwaves reverberated throughout the farm as the news reached the other cadres and workers.

We hadn't heard that in about a year and a half. We'd been getting hell. He said, "You people worked hard in this period and you've done a lot." And we thought, "What the hell's going on here anyway?"

Well, turned out that all these places that had had these tremendous figures

about their production—it had just come out that they were being falsified, right at high levels. And as innocent as we were, we were out there working our butts off trying to get things going... [We]knew that there were some things that were being falsified, but we didn't realize that it was on the scale that it had been. The guy that was the counterpart of me for crop production said, 'But you know they had those figures printed in the *People's Daily*.'<sup>85</sup> And the department head said, "Well it doesn't take any more ink to publish that figure than it does to publish an accurate figure!"

We were flabbergasted then to hear about all of the falsification that had been going on. And it makes tears comes to my eyes... a lot of cadres had tears too. Worked like hell... just getting criticized all the while, and then to find out that these other places that were getting all the praise... were false. Anyway, we were exonerated. Course the policy of the Party was that this exaggeration wind was the fault of the leadership, and you couldn't blame too much the people that were carrying it out. They should be criticized, but that was all. I would've like to have thrown that guy, Chen, out on his butt! It's a good thing I wasn't Chairman of the Party then or he sure as hell would've gone flying out the window!

The experience proved to be a critical learning process for everyone involved, who had believed that with Liberation, the Party would do all the thinking about the direction of China for them—that as cadres who believed in and gave their lives to the revolution, they would just have to be disciplined in following the Party leadership, because the leadership would know what was best and act with principle. The cadres and workers learned that they would have to use their own critical thinking skills and that the very success and sustainability of the revolution and the revolutionary Party would depend on it.

What was going on in the Party leadership they only found out after the fact. There was actually a sharp struggle at the very top of the Party between Liu Shaoqi (and his sidekick Deng Xiaoping) and Mao about the direction of China's development. The struggle sharpened and came into focus in 1959, when the Political Bureau of the Communist Party held another meeting at Lushan, followed by a meeting of the Central Committee.

There, Liu Shaoqi's front man, Peng Dehuai, charged that the Great Leap Forward was a disaster. His criticism, however, was not directed towards the immense pressure that party bureaucrats were putting on people in production as a way to highjack the Great Leap Forward for their own status; instead, he argued that the premise of the Great Leap Forward itself was wrong—that changing the relations of production could not unleash the productive forces.<sup>86</sup> He opposed the collectivization of agricul-

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<sup>85</sup> The *People's Daily* was and continues to be China's national daily newspaper. During the socialist era it was the main method of disseminating news and information to the people.

<sup>86</sup> Mao put forth that by changing workers' material and ideological relationship to their work (in terms of

ture into communes (established in 1958), advocated for material incentive, and said that the peasants should retain individual ownership over their land. Mao vehemently disagreed, saying that China could never fully develop as a whole country if production was tied to individual gain. The Lushan Meeting clarified the struggle as being between a capitalist and socialist mode of economic development. Mao argued that winning the revolution against the Guomindang did not mean that the revolution of ideologies had been won. Although the Communist Party had seized power, his constant and sharp reminder was: “Never forget class struggle.”<sup>87</sup>

The contentious struggle continued and would continue for several decades, with the Liu/Deng line manifesting in policies like piece-work wages or family ownership of land, and the Mao line manifesting in the countrywide mobilization of the people to recognize the struggle and build a better society for everyone. Tactically, the line struggle would manifest in the Right hijacking movements and carrying them out to an extreme as a way of discrediting it with the people, as with the Anti-Rightist Movement and the Great Leap Forward. And then tactically from the Left, that would precipitate the launch of another mass movement to counteract it.

For Sid it was a continual process of seeing the effects of the struggle manifest in his work and life at Caotan, coming to the understanding of the larger forces at play and understanding what was going on in Caotan as a microcosm of what was happening in larger China.

[There are many] examples of... the crazy things that happened at that time in '59 because of the struggle at the top. But in 1958, we got the highest production of milk that we ever got that year. We didn't spoil any milk, and the grain production was the highest ever and the spirit of the people was incredible. There were terrific accomplishments in the Great Leap. But... it was always a struggle between the people who were really trying to get something going and the people who were trying to make it look like they were getting something going. And they weren't necessarily wrecking, but they just didn't know what they were doing. I won't say that there weren't any that *were* wrecking, but on the whole, that wasn't the case. They were just bureaucrats and people who were just doing a dance, instead of doing anything real. So the spirit got wetted down considerably.

The struggle at the top continued to reflect clearly (although only in retrospect) in many of the various ways that Joan and Sid experienced it down on the state farm in Xian, even after the meeting with Zhao. In addition to making a caricature of the

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changing from hired labor from which to extract profit to ownership of all aspects of production—a change in the relations of production), society would experience a tremendous increase in production. This theory was in opposition to people who believed that people needed material incentives based on their self-interest in order to work harder to produce more, especially in early stages of socialism.

<sup>87</sup> Class struggle is defined as the conflict between classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Mao's reminder was an acknowledgment that even though China had made the transition to socialism, classes and the need to continue the revolution still existed.

Great Leap Forward through the exaggeration of various movements, those on the Right also fanned the “Communist Wind” in order to focus people’s attention on wealth and material goods—and the lack thereof. Word on the Xian streets was that everyone was going to get a watch and a leather coat and become rich; people would get whatever they needed and whatever they wanted. At the farm, they followed the policy to require that everyone eat in the cafeteria, where all the food was free; everyone could eat as much as they wanted. Forcing the premature jump from a newly born socialist society still struggling to transform deep-rooted feudal ideology—directly to communist economic policies, of course created lots of problems. In the cafeteria at Caotan, that meant that for the short time the “communal kitchen” operated, a huge amount of food was wasted.

Another wasteful venture was the building of enormous and elaborate buildings all over the country to commemorate the ten-year anniversary of the People’s Republic. The building went on and on until Mao posed the question of whether a poor country like China should really be putting so many of its resources into fancy buildings, when it needed to build basic infrastructure that would benefit the ordinary people. In response, in Beijing several building designs were changed as the things went up, resulting in some odd cut off shapes on some of the bigger, fancier buildings.

Caotan began erecting new buildings too, preparing for the commemoration. They built a guesthouse, with a small meeting room attached to it and also a bigger meeting hall. There was another building too, a single story place, with a porch in front. Joan came home one day from her work with the women and the ducks and found out that the house was being built for their family and that Sid had already agreed to move in.

I was so mad at Sid, because he didn’t tell me. He just accepted it. Whatever the leadership said he’d just do; he never thought he’d have to ask me or anything; he just agreed that we’d move into this thing. It came down, actually, as a positive thing... a comradely thing to take better care of us foreign comrades who had been there all this time, and Sid accepted it. But I was furious at him, because it put us immediately into a separate category from the people around us, which we’d never been before. Our little house was too tiny, it’s true, but to move into this special house, I thought it wasn’t that good for the kids or us.

Sid also actually opposed the idea when it was first brought up with him, but as he said, “I didn’t mind that much that my arm was being twisted.”

The way that it came about was the old revolutionary cadre who was the head of the Border Region Government, Lin Bei-qu, came to visit. He was in Yanan at the time that Sid and Joan were there together, and it was in his old Chevy that they had ridden 20 feet to the meeting hall to get married. He brought up with the Caotan leadership that they should maybe take better care of their foreign comrades; the house they lived in, all five of them, was basically one room.



Since Sid had already agreed, and he was the Director of all of the technical work in the dairy, Joan didn't have much choice but to go along with it. Moving into a new house wasn't even the worst of it, though—the kicker was the design of the place. The rooms were all in a row, with the kitchen and Sid and Joan's bedroom in the middle and then two rooms off of each side. On one side was the kids' room, and off their room, Dama's slightly smaller room. Walking through Sid and Joan's bedroom on the other side was Sid's big office, with a little storage closet off the back.

Sid's office was spacious with a big desk and a window that let in sunlight to make the room bright. He had a sofa where people who came to meet with him could sit, and unlike the rest of the house, it had heat in the wintertime. He moved right in and took up residence. Joan thought that there was plenty of room in his office for her desk too, but Sid disagreed—not in the sense of physical space, but in the sense of space between his work and his relationship with his wife. The reason he was given the office was, after all, because of his position—many people would be coming to look for him, to talk over work matters, and so he was given a space for that to happen. Joan, on the other hand, was a technician, one among many, who all had their desks in a general office space at the headquarters.

He... thought, "Why should I invite my wife in? Why shouldn't I invite all the other technicians? There are a lot of technicians, not just my wife." I think, though, that either they didn't have enough office space at the place where my old place was, or I wanted to work at home. In any case, I landed there with my desk all crammed into our bedroom and Sid with his office. After a while he began to think it wasn't too good either. He began to see the problem, which was that the kids and the *baomu* were right there, and it was very noisy and hard to separate where the kids were. You had to go through our bedroom to get to his office, so he was more separate. I don't remember the details, but eventually he just invited me to put my desk in there.

Their new place was much more livable—they had some room to breathe, and also a big porch off the front of the house where the kids loved to sleep in the summertime, and used as a stage to put on Peking operas with the rest of the kids on the farm. But it also was, as Joan put it, "the first time... that Sid and I had been separated from our colleagues, ever since we'd been in the Liberated Areas. After we moved into that house, people had to come hunt for us." But because they still had study every morning at the main offices, they felt connected in that way.

Right after they moved in, the family got a rabbit for the kids to raise and named it Lopears. The kids were growing up on a farm but had no real contact with the animals, not in the way that both Sid and Joan had when they were little, in terms of learning responsibility through caring for another living thing. Joan, remembering her childhood and the way Carmelita raised her to be in the world, also wanted them to observe nature to learn how best to raise the rabbit, instead of just playing all day.

Lopears was taken from the other rabbits being raised for angora and put into a wire mesh lined hole with a roof over it in their yard. The kids, while they liked the rabbit OK, were not terribly enthused about having to go cut hay and pick greens for the family's new addition. But they learned to take care of her and the little bunnies that she gave birth to after she was bred, even cutting and drying vines to bale for feeding in the winter months.

In the fall of 1959, Joan contacted her brother's wife (ex by that time) Bertha and asked her if Carma, their daughter, was interested in having a little brother; she wanted to send Fred to Beijing to live for a year. Even though he was only seven, he was her eldest son, and she wanted to have him go out and see more of the world, broaden his horizons, and learn English, along with the more standard Beijing dialect. Sid wasn't too happy about it—he didn't see why it was important for Fred to go and leave all of the other farm kids. Bertha, though, hounded constantly by Carma, whose schoolmates all had brothers and sisters, agreed right away. Joan got special permission to take Fred out of the Caotan school and put him into a school in Beijing.

Joan, who was being sent to Beijing to buy a bull for the farm anyway, took Fred on the train with her. While visiting the dairies around the city, Joan stayed with Bertha—she and Bill had been divorced for many years, and he had returned to the US to write his first book—at the Foreign Languages Institute where Bertha taught English.<sup>88</sup> She rode Bertha's three-speed bike to check out various bulls and their parents, siblings and offspring before settling on the one she thought Caotan should get. After making arrangements for the bull's journey south to his new home, she said goodbye to Fred for a year and got back on the train.

Fred stayed in Beijing for that year, even though Carma decided pretty quickly that she wasn't interested in having a little brother after all. Bertha was not all that excited either when she realized that her style of raising kids was a bit different from Joan's. Joan was very physically affectionate with her kids, letting them climb all over her at their bedtime and blowing raspberries on the backs of their necks. But Bertha didn't really appreciate that kind of thing, and Fred soon learned to keep his distance. By the time Bertha sent him back the next year, he no longer liked to be hugged and couldn't speak one more word of English, but he did have a dazzling Beijing accent.

By the time Fred went to Beijing at the end of 1959, the grain situation all over China was tightening up. The gross exaggeration of production figures as reported to the State was not confined to the areas around Caotan, but happened all over the country. It meant that when the time came for the collectives to send in their surplus, local bureaucrats had to decide between telling the truth about their falsification, or be left with not enough grain to feed their own people. Lots of people chose the latter,

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<sup>88</sup> Bill Hinton, after collecting a trunk full of notes to write his book about Land Reform in Longbow Village, arrived in the US at the height of the McCarthy Era. They seized his passport and his trunk, and he was blacklisted from any kind of employment. Bill engaged in a protracted legal struggle to get them back. The reactionary Senator Eastland also called him before his committee, accusing him of being a Communist traitor. It took him over ten years to regain his notes and begin to write *Fanshen*, one of the most well-known and well-respected books about that time period in China. It was eventually translated into ten languages.

choosing, in fact, to sacrifice the wellbeing of the people rather than get caught in the lies they had been telling to balloon their production figures. Even when the collective storehouses were empty and people under their leadership were going hungry, many did not immediately come clean in order to get some grain back from the State.

Adding to the impending crisis with the grain supply were major crop failures, because of two huge, natural disasters, historic in scope and scale, one after another. The first was the flooding of the Yellow River in 1959, which wiped out huge expanses of grain and drowned many people. A sustained drought followed in 1960, when, for the first time in living memory, the Yellow River ran dry on its way from the far Northwest to the sea. The drought resulted in massive crop failures all along the Yellow River in China's grain basket.

What was happening on the international scene added an extra and final push to China to a place where many of its people were hungry, suffering from malnutrition, and in some extreme cases, starvation. Shortly after Liberation, the US raised the specter of the "Communist Threat" in Asia. With such a big country like China demonstrating to the world that a poor, backward country could throw off eons of feudalism and colonial and imperial oppression by engaging in a socialist revolution, the US felt threatened. The Korean War was a reflection of the US' attempt to beat back the communist "threat," but also to try to develop a base from which they could challenge China at its back door. US aggression aimed indirectly at China and played out in Korea forced China to respond. However, because it was a poor country just getting on its feet after a brutal civil war, it lacked material resources. So Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union gave China the heavy machinery that accompanied the People's Liberation Army into the war and told them to pay it back whenever they could.

Largely unsuccessful in Korea, the US was up for trying again with Vietnam at the end of the 1950s. In the meantime, the US embargo of China continued to isolate it from the rest of the world economically and technologically.

Stalin died in 1953, and Nikita Khrushchev, his successor, paid China an official visit at the end of 1954 to transfer control of the formerly "jointly" controlled military base at Dalian to China.<sup>89</sup> From that visit forward, Khrushchev began to make his intentions clear. The Chinese Communist Party had sometimes-sharp rubs with Stalin, especially pre-Liberation when the Communist Party of the Soviet Union tried to direct the Chinese Civil War from Moscow. But when Khrushchev denounced Stalin in 1956 at the USSR's 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, it came as a surprise to China. Even more of a surprise was that the news came not through Party to Party channels, but only after the Western press made the announcement in the US and Europe.

Khrushchev's denunciation and lack of transparency about it in part prompted

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<sup>89</sup> Dalian was a strategically important military base and port in the far northeastern part of China near the Korean border, because it was one of the few "ice-free" entryways onto the continent. Originally under Japanese and then Russian colonial control, after the Japanese surrender the base was freed from colonial rule but put under joint control of China and the Soviet Union with the agreement that it would be returned fully to China in 1955.

a trip by Mao and Peng Dehuai (who later attacked the Great Leap Forward at the Lushan Meeting) to the Soviet Union in 1957. Mao found out quickly that Khrushchev did not share Stalin's ideas about how to deal with the capitalist world. Instead of Marxist-Leninist analysis that as long as capitalism and socialism existed in the world, there would inevitably be armed conflict between them, Khrushchev was pushing what became known as the idea of "peaceful coexistence."<sup>90</sup>

Mao didn't buy it. Making concessions to the dominant capitalist countries seemed more like capitulation than coexistence, and historically, imperialism didn't tend to be all that peaceful.<sup>91</sup> Peng Dehuai, on the other hand, really hit it off with Khrushchev, who plied him with all kinds of goodies, including a brand new jeep to take back with him. In return, Peng generously promised Khrushchev many of China's seaports, including giving back control of Dalian to the USSR to use as a military base. Peng Dehuai was heavily criticized once he got his feet back on the ground in China, and then, after his attack on socialist development at the Lushan Meeting, was removed from his post as Minister of Defense. Control of Dalian stayed with China.

While China did not make its disagreements with Khrushchev public, tensions mounted. For a while, the two parties fought out their disagreements in polemics, with the Soviet Union attacking China's ally, Albania, and China attacking the new Soviet ally Yugoslavia.<sup>92</sup> By 1958, Khrushchev was demanding that China agree to have a joint fleet (but under Soviet command) patrol China's coastline. His intention to effectively blockade China was not all that subtle. Khrushchev made a trip to the US the following year, holding a summit with the US President Eisenhower to reaffirm his intentions about "peaceful coexistence."

That same year, Khrushchev also traveled to India to give his support to Jawaharlal Nehru, India's Prime Minister. Nehru was one of the co-founders of the 1955 Bandung Conference with Zhou Enlai, which was an historic breakthrough alliance between African and Asian countries against imperialism. During the time of the conference, Nehru had been a close ally of China, even protecting Zhou Enlai from CIA assassination attempts with Indian security teams. (The plane that Zhou was supposed to be on at one point was blown up by a bomb placed by a later confessed CIA operative.) But shortly after Khrushchev met with Nehru in 1959, China began to have trouble with India at their shared and disputed border. Indian troops massed and looked to push forward.

Then, in 1959, Khrushchev arrived in China to attend the ten-year anniversary

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<sup>90</sup> Khrushchev's theory of "peaceful coexistence" was based his conjecture that capitalist countries were gradually evolving towards socialism, or "peaceful transformation," rather than the Marxist view that the capitalist state has to be violently overthrown and replaced. Khrushchev essentially put forth the notion that history had reached a stage where there were no longer any class contradictions.

<sup>91</sup> A simplified version of Lenin's definition of imperialism is that it is the highest stage of capitalism, or the monopoly stage of capitalism, which has replaced competitive capitalism and expanded beyond commodity markets to finance and moves freely beyond national borders.

<sup>92</sup> Stalin had formerly denounced Yugoslavia as a reactionary state. The polemics, or lengthy written arguments back and forth between the two Parties, were a forum by which they could air their disagreements. There was no public revelation of a split until 1963, when the letters were published as editorials in the *People's Daily*.

celebrations. During his visit, he met with Mao to again demand Dalian and other seaports for Soviet bases. Mao, temper flaring, responded, “If you come down our coast, we’re going back into the hills,” and sent Khrushchev back frustrated and empty-handed.

At the same time, the elite CIA-trained Tibetans surrounding the Dalai Lama in the northwestern province of Tibet staged an unsuccessful revolt. India did its part on the advice of the Soviet Union by opening up its doors to the fleeing Tibetans. Zhou Enlai made a trip in the middle of the negotiations to talk to the Dalai Lama himself, to try to convince him to stay and work things out. He assured the young Lama that the Central government had no intentions of destroying Tibetan culture—but that the practices of feudal oppression, slave ownership and serfdom had to be abolished. The Dalai Lama developed a respect for Zhou Enlai that he would talk about candidly in the following years, but in the end took the advice of his inner circle and went into exile in India.

By the time the two Parties attended a meeting in Romania in 1960, the tension blew up between their representatives, which ended with Peng Zhen calling Khrushchev a straight up revisionist.<sup>93</sup>

Khrushchev was not the kind of guy to take kindly to criticism, especially in front of an assembly of other communist parties of which he claimed overall leadership. He wrote a long paper criticizing China and said that all of the debt that China still had left from the heavy machinery the USSR had contributed in the Korean War, as well as from the investment of the 156 major industries that Stalin had sent his experts to help build, had to be repaid immediately. He withdrew all of the Soviet experts in China that summer, with orders to take all of the blueprints of what they were working on with them. While some followed their orders, many others secretly gave copies to their Chinese counterparts, heads down and eyes wet.

The following Fall 1961, the Soviet Union held its 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress in Moscow. As Khrushchev got up and began denouncing Albania, Zhou Enlai, the Chinese representative and Premier at the time, stood and directly and openly criticized Khrushchev. The essence of his criticism was that Khrushchev’s unrelenting criticism of a comrade country in the face of the forces of imperialism was only helping imperialism. He also pointed out that it was not a very Marxist attitude to have in dealing with other communist parties. Then Zhou Enlai walked out of the assembly, signifying the deepening and very public chasm between two former allies.

When the Soviets withdrew in 1960, China was in the midst of massive crop failure and the over-reporting of grain, which was leading to food shortages all over the country. But the choice China faced was to knuckle under Khrushchev and become

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<sup>93</sup> Peng Zhen was a party leader who had fought in the Civil War and was made mayor of Beijing in 1951. A revisionist or revisionism is a Marxist term describing the abandonment or negation of Marxist ideology in theory or practice. Khrushchev’s theory of “peaceful coexistence,” for instance, supposes that imperialism and socialism can exist side by side without coming into conflict, an idea that “revises” the Marxist theory that the two ideologies will always exist in violent opposition to one another.

dependent on and therefore subservient to the Soviet Union, or to grit their teeth and repay the debt to maintain their independence. Zhou Enlai, in an interview with Anna Louise Strong said that they made the decision to repay the debt to the Soviet Union—that it would be a matter of everyone tightening their belts together and going through a few hard years, in order to keep China independent for generations to come.

People raised little objection—after centuries of living under oppressive colonial rule and fighting so bitterly to win their own liberation, they were not about to let the Soviet Union take control of their future because they were afraid of hardship. It wasn't too difficult to understand the stakes and mobilize to take action. Understanding the complexities of what was happening in the Soviet Union and China's relationship to it was just as important. Almost all of the studies at that time turned to analyzing the Soviet revisionist line and the idea that class relationships could still exist within a socialist country.

When in 1964, China announced to the world that it was completely free of all external debt, in addition to the tremendous relief and joy that most everyone felt at the time, there was also an enormous sense of pride and self confidence: China was not going to kneel down before any other country anymore. For Sid and Joan, who had come from one of the richest nations in the world, the fact that the country went through it without masses of people dying in famine was miraculous. In stark contrast to Sid's memories of truckloads of corpses and children crawling with flies in relief tents to clutch at bowls of raw flour when he arrived in 1946, socialist China had organized its meager resources and pulled most everybody through. And Joan gained ever more respect for how Mao approached people who had really done wrong.

That was a tremendous feat that we went through it by everybody going through it together, including Mao; Mao didn't have any meat either. [And]...the only places where I heard had actual starvation were places that had those eager beaver cadres who had given false reports of how much grain they produced... Those were the cadres who were trying to get up the ladder. The pockets that I heard about at the time were Anhui and Gansu. Mao, though, didn't transfer those cadres out. He said, "OK, you made the mess, now you go in and clean it up." He made those cadres go right back there and get production going. They gave back grain when it was apparent that there was actually some starvation, but of course took a bit of while to sort out, because the whole country was very short. And while there were people who died in Anhui and Gansu, there wasn't mass starvation. There was no migration of people... no famine. People who didn't have that much resistance—the old or the sick were the ones in the villages that died.

For Sid and Joan, even though they lived on a farm that had not exaggerated its figures to the State, people were focused on repaying the Soviet debt quickly, so 1960 and 1961 before the fall harvest were both very hard years. Because China didn't have much of anything else that the Soviet Union was interested in, most of the debt

was repaid through agricultural products, and specifically at Caotan it meant pigs. So while everyone all over China (including Mao and Zhou and everyone in the Central Committee) was pulling in their belts and going on what would be called today a vegan diet, fat pigs were being sent up to the border in the north to be checked out by Soviet officials. The Soviets, as Sid put it, were “quite nasty about it,” and inspected every item against a very high standard. Each pig had to have so many fingers of fat on its back, or it was rejected as payment. The atheist border town of Manzouli was covered in rejected Christmas tree lights for the same reason.

During one of her lunchtime stops with Jane on a trip to the city, having brought her own steamed bread ration because no one had anything to spare for guests, Joan found out that Su Hongxi was having a problem with his hands shaking during surgery because of his low calorie intake. Joan went to Director Xie and asked for permission to bring him a box of culled duck eggs, which he approved.

That was the main army hospital of the whole country, and in order to get protein for their doctors, they sent a team of people way out to Xinjiang to shoot wild ass. They came back with the meat for their doctors. Oh boy! I tell you. We were shooting wild ass, while our pigs were going to the Soviet Union, and the Soviet Union was rejecting them for not being fat enough. It was really a situation, but the wonderful thing was that everybody went through it together. At the time I thought, “Boy aren’t we lucky we have socialism, because without socialism, some people would be hoarding and some people would be starving to death...”

In 1960, every square inch of Caotan and the surrounding areas was planted with some sort of crop. A small crop of wheat in Sid and Joan’s yard stood where there had been flowers. But before the little strips and patches of wheat ripened, there was not enough to eat. Caotan continued to grow corn as silage for the cows, but as the corn became mature, peasants from the surrounding villages began coming into the fields and taking some of the ears to eat. Because those ears were what gave silage its protein content, which cows used to turn into milk, everyone on the farm knew to maintain a strict discipline about leaving the corn on the stalks. (Everyone except dairy Director He Zixi, who Sid caught with an armful of ears in the field.) But in fall 1960, as things got tighter and tighter food-wise, Director Xie came out with an order: Do not stop the peasants from taking the corn. Much like Sid’s father, who didn’t stop hobos from taking corn out of their fields during the Great Depression, Xie explained that people were not stealing—they weren’t taking the corn for profit. They were taking it because they were hungry, evidenced by the fact that in those years, there continued to be almost no crime of any kind. So instead of grabbing people and accusing them, the farm sent out cadres and workers to talk to the people, to find out what their problems were.

Everyone was on tightly controlled rations. Although Sid and Joan could have used their status to eat better than others on the farm, they chose not to. Zhou Enlai had talked about everyone going through these “Difficult Times” as those three years

came to be known in China, together, and Sid and Joan did not feel separate from that.

As far as our own family was concerned, according to regulations, we could've been special. Evidently, we had special rations, but what I remember is we kept within the grain ration that everybody else had. I remember Sid and I each got thirty catties of grain, and the kids got something like 20 something. But there were only two ounces of oil per month per person, and two ounces of cooking oil is not very much. I found out then that you don't get fat on grain. Of course we didn't have enough grain either, but any amount of grain without oil won't make anybody fat.

Eventually, though, as the family got to be more and more skinny, Sid and Joan decided that as long as they were working on a dairy, that they would buy a catty (about a half kilo) of milk, heat it up on their stove and each have one glass. Joan felt the difference immediately.

We just drank one glass of milk per person, but after we started drinking it, we just felt different. That was interesting to me. I mean, now I drink one or two glasses, and it doesn't make a difference. But when you're on a very lean diet like that, one glass of milk just makes a difference. So we bought one glass of milk that other people didn't have.

It wasn't just food that was rationed—all material goods were scarce. To sew a button back onto her jacket, Joan had to use some of the cotton batting poking through her padded suit instead of thread. So to make sure that people had the same kinds of access to what limited resources were available, each family was issued a ration book, with coupons for anything from soap to shoes.

Sid, in his generosity, gave their family's rations for shoes to a dairy technician who said he was in need, and Joan was stuck trying to figure out how to get shoes for the kids. The first winter was passable, but then in the summer, Karen lost a pair of her shoes playing in the sand (not a big surprise since the goal of the game was to bury your shoes and see if you could find them again). She had to go through the rest of the summer barefoot, and the two boys' shoes were a little worse for the wear after being patched up twice. But by winter, Karen needed to put something on her feet, and Billy's big toe was coming out the front of one of his threadbare shoes. After several attempts to try to find some shoes, even trying to buy leather shoes in the city, Joan brought the problem back to Sid and made him solve it, since he was the one who created it. After some awkward meetings with the farm leadership, that winter the kids all got new cotton padded shoes.

In 1960, just as the Difficult Times hit, Joan got a letter in the mail from her cousin Howard Hinton, who she had last known as a horrible kid in Mexico who liked to shoot off the legs of dogs. In his adult life, he had gone to school in the US and then in England, where he became a very well known and respected entomologist. Seven years after the ceasefire in Korea, China was still helping to unearth the evidence and



deal with the consequences of the US' use of germ warfare there. Howard wrote that he had accepted China's invitation to come as a bacterial warfare specialist and wanted to know if she could come to Beijing to see him.

Joan got the ok from her leadership, and Howard said it was fine for her to come with one of her kids. Since Fred had spent time in the capital, Joan took Billy because he was next in line, although an infuriated Karen remembered that Joan told her she couldn't go because she was too naughty. On their train ride north, they could see the results of the mobilization to plant food everywhere—every spot of land from Xian to Beijing was green with some kind of crop.

They met Howard at the Beijing Hotel—where Billy was fascinated by the elevator and flush toilets—and also by the tubful of turtles that Howard had collected in the Northeast to take back home to England. For meals, they ate together in the hotel restaurant, veritable feasts of fancy foods, so different from the food on the farm that Billy asked his mother, “Is there any steamed bread?” His thick Shaanxi accent melted the wait staff, who fell in love with the little towheaded white kid who spoke in local dialect and preferred steamed bread to all of the fanciest food spread out before him.

Rewi Alley, who had gotten Caotan their milking machines, was in Beijing and offered to show them the sites: the zoo, the temples, the imperial ground. They were both ready to go home at the end of their trip, but made one stop at the famous shopping district called Wangfujing, where Joan subtly tried to clue Billy in to the fact that she and Sid were really Santa Claus. Non-believers in anything but the people, Mao's leadership, and socialism's path to communism, Sid and Joan nonetheless celebrated Christmas with the kids every year, as a way to transmit some sort of their culture to them. Plus, they liked the ritual of giving presents; every year they hung up stockings (Sid hung up a gunny sack) and in the morning the kids would find them stuffed with candy and small gifts. At the bottom was a lump of coal for all the bad things they did that year, and everyone would compare to see whose was biggest.

In the store Joan told Billy that Santa had asked her to help him buy the gifts that year, asking him if he thought Santa might like this or that. Billy took it all very seriously and didn't suspect a thing. The kids all kept believing until one time some of their friends slept over on Christmas Eve and stayed up to see Joan and Sid filling the stockings. The farm kids were always a little skeptical, because they were never visited by Santa, so they were more than happy to blow the whistle on them.

Back on the farm, aside from the pigs, which were being fattened up for the Soviet Union, the rest of the livestock on the farm had to take a cut in feed along with the people. The Peking ducks, in particular, had a radical change in their diet from huge quantities of grain to simple bran. They got very skinny, until one day, a worker came to Sid and Joan's house just as they were getting out of bed and told them that they'd better come down to the West Station: giant turtles were attacking the ducks! As soon as they put the ducks out on the water, they would start squawking and then get pulled under and drown.

Joan and Sid got on their bikes and raced over to the pond at the West Station to

see what was going on. Sure enough, the ducks on the pond were meeting an untimely death on the water. Instead of giant turtles, though, the culprit was the low-fat diet that the ducks were on. Without enough fat, the ducks weren't producing anything in their oil gland—the gland at the base of the tail that they would use to preen themselves. Without the protective oil in the gland and in their feathers to keep them dry, their feathers got waterlogged, and they sank like any other animal that was thrown in the water not suited for the doggie paddle. No longer physically able to cruise around the ponds, the ducks did find other new pursuits; they lost so much weight that Joan actually saw one flap its wings and take off in flight—a sight unseen in the history of raising Peking ducks.

With the ducks losing what they were being raised for in the first place—their meat—it wasn't too long before they and their chicken counterparts were cut out altogether from Caotan. Wang Zhen did not come by to berate them, as he was busy with realistic projects to make sure people were fed. Absent the poultry, Joan was able to turn her main attention back to refrigeration. Her first attempt with Liu Guojin had been on the advice of an old worker named Lao Zhao, who Joan had met at the Xian refrigeration plant. Zhao, although he didn't necessarily have a theoretical background for the stuff, knew all the ins and outs of how a refrigeration system had to be built and taught Joan everything he knew. He also told her where to find second hand parts to keep costs down.

Joan got to work with Liu Guojin and made a refrigeration system out of galvanized iron. It worked, but it leaked like crazy from the high pressure. So they put their heads together and decided to remake it—with a better design, higher quality, and with tin plate rather than iron. When they were done, the milk would be almost frozen when it went into the cans, and they would have the ability to keep it at a miraculously cold four degrees.

To get started, Joan had to enlist the help of the machine workers on the farm. The machine shop had expanded tremendously in a few short years from the small group of workers holding their breath with one hacksaw blade working by candlelight. Now equipped with electricity and a giant lathe, they were busy working on all sorts of projects and inventions in addition to continuing to produce the famed chopper.

Joan had seen the amazing things that those shop workers did with metal and knew that they could make the parts for the new refrigeration system she was drawing out in the office she shared with Sid. Master Wang was the one who took it up, and Joan had a great time working things out with him, inventing new methods to create the parts that they needed. It was also the process for Joan of learning yet another way of working with people.

My idea was that I'd make the design... then go with him and start making it. But the only way to work with him was to do all the heavy work myself. The cooler was made of copper pipes, which we tinned and soldered together so that they were one piece... The pipes were very close to each

other it was difficult to solder. We had the cooler on a pit where they fixed tractors so one person could be underneath and the other on top. Of course it was me underneath. He'd solder on top while I held it underneath—I'll never forget. He'd say, "Hold it better there! Hold it over here!" while I was underneath with all the solder dripping down on me. When it was drawing and designing, it was me. When it was the work, it was him. He'd ask me what the drawing meant if there was some question about it, and I'd tell him just how it was going to be. Then we'd start to work, and he'd tell me: "Go get a screwdriver, go over and get that!" and I'd run over and get it. And you know, all I had to do was the heavy work, and he was tremendous.

All of this work happened as the Difficult Times hit. While the farm didn't have much extra to give, Joan took a piece of butter once to Lao Zhao, the old worker in the city, as a thank you for all the help he gave them. Then, as things got tougher, Joan found it harder and harder for the factories in the city to pay attention to her and the work she needed to get done. One place was an old German-built factory that made copper meters and gauges. It had been making parts for the refrigeration system, but then one day, Joan sat in their office for a whole day and was largely ignored. She went back the next day and continued to sit and wait until finally a guy asked her what she had to offer. The only thing she could think of that Caotan might agree to was butter. The guy asked her what butter was, as the dairy industry was still quite new in Xian, and when he found out that it came from cows, he took her to meet with one of the cadres in the Department for Sales and Purchasing. She told Joan that things were really hard there, and if she could bring a box of butter, they would really appreciate it.

Joan went to talk to the Caotan accountant, who approved it, and she returned the next day with the box, which the Department for Sales and Purchasing paid for. With the butter, the factory opened up to her like magic. All of the things she wanted to get done were taken care of in a minute. The same thing happened when she went to the aeronautics plant, where she needed some other work done.

But by the end of 1961, even butter wasn't getting the job done, and Joan needed one last part to finish the pasteurizer. She talked with Director Xie about the problem, and he suggested that they visit the factory director, an old acquaintance of his, and bring him five ducks. It worked. He took the ducks, and Joan got her part made.

Joan was ecstatic about getting her parts and finally being able to finish the pasteurizer, but didn't feel too great about the fact that the people who got the butter and the ducks were the administrative cadres—not the workers on the floor who were actually doing the work.

Not every factory was like that, though. While she was building the pasteurizer, Joan was working on an electrical fence for each station, so that they could let their cows out into the yards without fear of cows running loose all over the place. She made a design with vacuum tubes and took it to a radio station service center in the city where the workers, once they became interested in what she was doing, let her work

on her circuit. Not once did those workers ask her for anything in return, so when she was done and ready to install the fences at the dairy, she brought them five ducks too. People called that kind of exchange, where it was more like helping each other out and sharing resources, industrial/agricultural cooperation. Cooperation with the radio station workers felt much different to Joan than the feeling of holding the work hostage at the other factories.

Because the Difficult Times were so hard, Liu and Deng took the opportunity to try again to push China's economic development in the direction of capitalism, implying that the situation was in part the result of peasants' lack of motivation to work hard. They went back again and again to the idea that privatization—land to individual peasants—was a better system than collectivization, and that free markets were better than state-controlled ones. Soon, a free market opened up in Xian, and one day Jane Su called Joan, insisting that she and Sid come for dinner; Su had found a pheasant in the free market and had sent it to a fancy hotel in the city to have it professionally prepared. Joan and Sid pedaled out to their house, and they all ate meat for the first time in many months.

Su's mother was living with them at the time, and the couple also had three kids. So even though she was nursing the youngest, Jane was on the bottom of the food ladder. To assuage her mother-in-law, who was terrified that she might be left to starve to death, Jane made sure she was fed first, then Su, so he could continue to operate, and then the kids.<sup>94</sup> As time wore on, Jane's hair and teeth began to fall out. To try to up their calorie intake, they planted a crop of sweet potatoes in their front yard, and Joan pitched in by helping them turn over the hard virgin soil. Their diet improved dramatically when they were able to harvest a huge crop of sweet potatoes, rich in vitamins and other nutrients.

During the Difficult Times, the farm leadership decided that Dama, the family *baomu* had to return to her village. The rub with the leadership started at the time of the "Communist Wind," when everyone was supposed to go eat in the public cafeteria and she refused to go. She was an old peasant woman who had always cooked her own food and eating in the cafeteria just wasn't something that was in her culture. When the grain situation began to tighten up, the leadership wanted Joan and Sid's family to eat at home; although they stuck to the same rations as everyone else, they were allotted more, and the leadership had concerns about Dama. She brought her own grain to eat from her own village, but because it was very close to Caotan and the family had more access to grain, the farm didn't completely trust her not to dip into it for her personal use.

Joan felt terribly about it, especially since she was the one forced to tell her. Dama wasn't Sid's or even her favorite person, but she raised and took good care of all the kids and kept the house so that they could both work. Dama's leaving was the hardest on Karen, who as the youngest in the family and the only girl, had gotten a lot of special

<sup>94</sup> In hard times during feudalism, the decision to leave the older generation to starve was sometimes made because they were past the prime of their lives when they could be useful in production.

attention. With her parents at work most of the time, Dama was really the one who raised her from the time she was born, and when she had to leave, Karen was still very young. So when she left, Karen went with her and stayed in her village home for a little to ease the transition.

The woman that came to take care of the family after Dama, they called Nainai (Grandmother). She was a nice old woman, and the family hit it off with her—but she had a distinct hatred for cats. When she arrived, the kids had adopted a cat named Mimi, an orange-striped tom, who she would curse out with a vengeance and try to beat with a broom. In the interest of Mimi's physical and emotional wellbeing, the family instituted a rule: Nainai could not chase and beat Mimi if the cat was in the kids' room. The rest of the house was fair game, but the kids' room was home base for the cat.

The only thing Nainai hated more than cats was mice, and to her horror, one day she uncovered a big nest of them in her room. The kids heard her shouting and grabbed Mimi, who systematically killed the entire mouse family right on the spot, an act that turned the tide on the war between Nainai and the cat. A few days later, the family peeked into Nainai's room to find her stroking Mimi on her lap, murmuring lovingly, "Oh Mimi, you motherfucker, you..." Soon the cat was even sleeping with Nainai on her pillow right next to her head.

Nainai became part of the family—but Joan always had what she called a "knot" in her "memory" about how and why Dama had been told to go.

At the end of 1961, all of the movement towards privatization stopped. The free markets closed down and a new movement began, again to turn people away from the focus on the self, the individual, rather than the wellbeing of the larger group or collective. This movement was against what they called the "backdoor." While times were tough, the tendency for people who had more to use it to get what they needed or wanted, coupled nicely with the push from the top to work for self-interest. The movement was a way to get whatever had gone through the back door (in the form of bribes or favors) and into the front on the table and clear it away once it was exposed.

Although Joan's leveraging butter and ducks was not for personal gain, and even though it was open and above board, the fact was that most of the goodies she brought to the factories to get work done went to the administrative cadres. Joan knew it at the time with the difference in her gut feeling between the gauge and aeronautics factory and the radio service station. So she wrote a report about it and submitted it. During the meetings that followed, other issues with Caotan's cadres and workers surfaced. For Joan and Sid, the one that felt the worst was that the cadre who had suspected Dama might steal grain rations from them actually stole it for himself after she was gone. Through that movement, Caotan unearthed and resolved all of the issues of embezzlement or bribing or corruption internally.

By 1962, the country began its slow recovery—even while still sending whatever they could to the Chinese-Soviet border, the harvest had been better than previous fall and the exaggerations and overselling of grain to the State were largely corrected. The

general direction was again on socialist track, moving away from individualism and self-interest.

Mao made a self-criticism at the end of that time period and said that he shouldn't have stepped down as Chairman in leading the day-to-day work of running the country in 1959. They found out at a cadre meeting at the farm that he had given over the leadership to Liu Shaoqi. Mao said he needed time to think about and study the international situation, especially with what was happening with the USSR and its attempts to encircle China. But he also took responsibility for saying things like China was going to catch up with England in steel production in 15 years, which added to the pressure to exaggerate and falsify production figures. Mao's self-criticism would be part of a long process of evaluating the Difficult Times; in the end, he summed it up by saying that one third of the responsibility for the food shortages was the responsibility of the Party and the mistakes it made in leadership (in terms of setting expectations too high and the subsequent exaggeration of production figures), one third was the devastating weather patterns and one third was the sudden need to repay the Soviet debt.

The country and the farm were just beginning to engage in this process of evaluation when Joan got a call in the milk room where she was tinkering with the refrigeration system. They told her to get to the farm headquarters in a hurry; she had an international call from Moscow.

Joan rode quickly out to the office, wondering who in the world might be in Moscow who would have her phone number at Caotan. She was completely stunned to hear her mother's voice on the other side of a very scratchy and spotty telephone connection. Carmelita was in the Soviet Union on a group tour, and she was hell bent on making her way to China.

## Chapter 29

# Reconciliation

*“China did not isolate herself; the US had put in, as the Chinese say, the effort of two tigers and three oxen to keep China isolated.” Sid Engst*

Carmelita, who hadn't seen her daughter in over a decade and had never met her grandkids, decided that she wasn't going to let the US embargo, which made it illegal to travel to (or conduct any business with) China, stop her from making a trip.<sup>95</sup>

Once she got Joan on the phone, she told her that she was going to see Tang Minjiao, a Chinese leader who was in Moscow leading a Chinese delegation.<sup>96</sup> Was there anything that Joan could do to help her make the visit happen? Joan was only about 80% sure she understood what her mother was saying, but when she asked her to repeat herself, Carmelita refused. Later, she told Joan that she was standing in a very public lobby of a Moscow hotel where she was staying with a tour group from the US, and she didn't dare say it again out loud.

Joan, while happy to hear from her mother, had mixed feelings about her appearing in her life in China.

Well, suddenly I got this call, and you know I'd come to China and joined the Chinese revolution. I'd become completely immersed and gotten rid of all my bourgeois background and figured that the Putney School and all that was all bourgeois. I'd been working away to get my feet over on the side of the people of the world and suddenly my mother appeared on the scene! I was just—“God! Now how am I gonna handle this?” I just wanted to break with my whole background, because the whole environment all these years had been for intellectuals to transform themselves and put their feet on the side of the people.

But Joan was never one to refuse her mother either, and besides, Carmelita was already in Moscow on her way to see Tang Minjiao! Not sure of what else to do, Joan telegrammed Song Qingling, Madame Sun, and told her about the situation, asking if there was any way she could help her out. Joan went back to work on the refrigeration system and waited to see what was going to happen.

Madame Sun, however, went into action and let the Chinese embassy in Moscow know who Carmelita was, and asked them to issue her a visa. Still with the tour group at the hotel as they were winding up their trip, Carmelita began to talk about staying on in Moscow for a little while longer. So when it was time to go, she stayed on and

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<sup>95</sup> The US imposed a total trade embargo and travel ban on China in 1950 after China entered the Korean War. The United Nations joined the embargo but ended its official participation after the cessation of overt military conflict in Korea. The US, however, maintained its complete embargo until US President Nixon's visit to China in 1972.

<sup>96</sup> Tang Minjiao was the father of Tang Wengsheng (Nancy), who became well known as Mao's English interpreter.

went back to the Chinese embassy which got her the papers and the flight to go to China.

She was 72 years old and had broken her hip at a demonstration in Washington DC, so she walked with a limp. And she arrived in Beijing completely alone, looking for her daughter, who didn't even know she had arrived. Fortunately, someone at the airport from the Foreign Languages Institute spoke English and also coincidentally knew Bertha.

Bertha sent word to Joan and Sid and set a date that Carmelita would travel to Xian. In preparation, Joan and Sid converted Sid's office into a guest room for her, moving their two desks into their bedroom. The storage closet off the back they made into a bathroom, and because Carmelita had a bad leg and wouldn't be able to squat over the regular hole-in-the-ground variety of toilet that everyone else used, they got a Western-style toilet bowl and put it over a hole they dug in the ground. The hole led to a pot outside of the house, and they filled the tank with water so that she could flush. The kids' job was to carry water for the family—with no running water most of the kids of the farm had the job to carry it by bucket from the well to the house. (Joan and Sid once made an agreement with the kids that they would get a five-cent piece to put in a jar every time they fetched the water, so they could buy popsicles without having to beg their parents every time the guy came around. But then Joan didn't like how their kids got paid to do chores that every other kid did as part of their family responsibility, so they called a family meeting, did some "ideological work" with them, and the kids agreed to put all the five cent pieces back into the family pot.)

Soon, Bertha helped Carmelita onto a train to Xian. Joan never even considered going to Beijing to meet her; the emphasis in those days was on work and the public good, not on family; any kind of travel was considered pretty special. It wasn't like Joan actually wanted to go anyway—she was embarrassed at the idea of her mother dropping into her life and was worried about what kind of impression or waves she might make.

Joan did, however, pick her up at the Xian train station, and was, in spite of all of her inner turmoil about it, happy to see her. Jean, Joan's older sister, had three kids by that time too, and when the eldest was just learning to talk, found "grandmother" too much of a mouthful. So he called her Ganny, a name that traveled down through the family line to all the grandkids, and also up to their parents so that soon her own kids and their spouses called her Ganny too. Ganny was much easier for her Chinese-speaking grandchildren, but that was about all they could say to her. For all of her wanting to meet and get to know her grandkids, she found that she was completely unable to communicate with them.

Ganny moved into Sid's office and went out every day, walking around Caotan observing and interacting as best she could with the people she ran into. Still the fearless educator, she also decided to teach Fred English. They got special permission from the school to let Fred out an hour early every day and Ganny came up with a project to engage him; they were going make a calendar and learn the names of the months



in English. She got him paper and scissors and different colored pens so that he could make different pictures and paste them onto the calendar. Fred loved all the cutting and pasting, but when he was done with his calendar, he still didn't know the name of one month. Then she tried reading to him. She read him the story of Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad—which he also loved, at least looking at the pictures, and learned no English from. Ganny was infinitely patient, but it got so that Fred would get so sick of trying to learn something he considered totally useless, that he was squirming in his seat, asking, “Is time up yet?” every few seconds. In the end, she had to give up and accept the fact that it was hopeless, even for a veteran progressive educator like her.

Ganny's visit was the first time Joan and Sid had a chance to see any of the sights around Xian, because their leadership arranged for the family to go see some of the historical places around the city. Most of those places in 1962 had never seen a foreigner (but would later become developed tourist hotspots). The now famous terracotta warriors had not been unearthed yet, but the site of the first emperor's burial ground was being preserved, and they got to go have a look.<sup>97</sup>

One day, Joan took Ganny into the city to see the sights, and the streets were packed with a huge demonstration. People were holding signs and chanting as they marched down the streets. Ganny was relieved, because when she arrived in China, the border dispute with India was getting really heated. When she first got there, though, she was worried that not many people were talking about it or even seemed to know too much of what was going on. To her, seeing China getting squeezed through India by the Soviet Union and the US, the situation was very dangerous. That was as she said, “a lot of guns,” pointed at the People's Republic.

But Ganny was shocked when Joan told her that the people on the street were not demonstrating against the India's encroachment on the border—they were out in the streets protesting the US' involvement in Panama. Their chants were: “We want Panama, we don't want the old US!” She exclaimed to Joan, “But the Indians are coming into China! What about that?” The response from the people was that right now they were supporting the Panamanians against US imperialism. Ganny was very concerned. Here was this huge crisis situation on the international scene with the people of China in grave danger, and people were marching about US imperialism in Panama? She told her daughter that she suspected the people were being lied to about the actual situation in the world.

What was happening in India was that after some rather large aid packages and encouragement from Khrushchev beginning back in late 1959 with his visit, Nehru began to dispute the border with China. The border had been drawn on the maps of the British colonizers as a way for them to exert control over the region—they called it the McMahon Line. But the traditional border—which both China and India had drawn on their own independent maps—marked a spot further south towards India.

<sup>97</sup> The Qinshi Huangdi, the first emperor of China, had a huge army of almost 10,000 life-sized warriors and horses made out of terracotta and buried near his tomb to protect him the afterlife at his death in 210 BC.

Emboldened by the new but calculated friendliness of the Soviets and the US, Nehru amassed troops and sent them north, past the original border. The world and all of its media watched and waited to see if China could be baited.

Premier Zhou Enlai sent China's official protest, which was largely ignored. The Indian army continued its advance, until by 1962, when Ganny witnessed the protest in Xian against the US' action in Panama, it marched past the McMahon Line, making encroachment after encroachment, instigating protest after protest from the Chinese government. The content of those protests was to call for negotiations rather than military involvement. After all, why should India and China care about lines the British drew on their maps? They suggested that they just try to work it out between them. India refused. Finally, Zhou Enlai sent one last, very strongly worded protest, which was met with further encroachment. So the People's Liberation Army moved, and in four days, swept the Indian Army back over 35,000 square miles.

The PLA went right up to the traditional border, capturing many Indian soldiers and all of the equipment that fleeing troops left behind—and then stopped. Then they retreated to the McMahon Line. China spent some time to fix and clean all of the equipment, and also took the captured Indian soldiers on a tour around China, so they could see what was going on in the country. Then, they assembled all of the sparkling tanks and well-fed soldiers, and met the Indian generals at the McMahon Line, where they returned the men and had the generals sign for every piece of machinery as they turned it over.

By the time a documentary came out in China to give a visual to the news that they heard about the conflict, Ganny was completely won over to the ways of socialist China. Everything about it, the way that China refrained from any nationalistic mobilization of the Chinese people against the Indians, or any bluster or ego—the way it just took care of business in a way that clearly indicated that it had no imperialistic intentions towards India by retreating to the McMahon Line—was a revelation to Ganny. She was hooked.

By fall, the Caotan leaders floated the idea that Ganny should go to Beijing to attend the October 1<sup>st</sup> celebration of the founding of the People's Republic. Someone ended up writing the Friendship Association (responsible for relationships with foreign visitors), which not only issued her an invitation to attend but also made her an official guest of the State. Apparently, news of Ganny's arrival and request to attend the ceremonies made its way up to the very upper levels of government, all the way up to Zhou Enlai. Zhou, after finding out that the 72-year-old US activist and mother of two kids who had joined the Chinese revolution had broken the law to get through the US blockade, elevated her status to the state level. A far cry from arriving in Beijing with no one to meet her, Ganny traveled back to Beijing with Joan this time, where she was greeted and taken under the wing of the Friendship Association apparatus.

After the October 1<sup>st</sup> celebration, the whole of China opened up to the mother and daughter pair; the Friendship Association arranged a long trip all over the country, mostly to places that Joan suggested. In addition to a couple people from the Friend-

ship Association, they assigned Ganny an interpreter, and a traveling companion, an author and intellectual, who proved rather useless in that he thought it beneath him to carry anything. With Ganny an old lady with a bad leg, that left Joan and the interpreter carrying four people's luggage. And Ganny, like Joan, did not travel light.

It took Zhou Enlai to show Joan that Ganny and her visit to China was not something she should be embarrassed about. She started thinking differently about the whole situation, gaining new respect for her mother. She began to think of her not as a shameful part of her bourgeois past, but as a forward thinking woman, who at 72 disregarded the US blockade not just to see her family, but because she did not believe in US policies. Joan shook off the fog of her own interests, and saw her mother, old and limping, but forging ahead as always in her life, not only in her body but also her mind, which proved open and receptive to understanding China and socialism.

On that trip, the two of them had long talks and discussions about what Joan had been up to since she got on the boat in California in 1948. Ganny asked a lot of questions and listened intently, absorbing and analyzing what she heard from Joan and saw in their travels. But that trip was also an education for Joan; although she had traveled much more than her counterparts in Xian, she had never seen many of the places she'd heard about in stories of revolutionary history.

During their trip, the whole country was in the midst of a call to study from a revolutionary hero named Lei Feng. Lei Feng, orphaned by the oppression of feudalism (his father starved to death and his mother killed herself after being raped by a landlord), was brought up by Communists who liberated his village. He dedicated his whole adulthood to the revolutionary movement, joining the PLA and taking the mantra of "Serve the People" to heart. Killed in 1962 in an accident, his diaries, full of good deeds and selfless service to socialism and the people, were made public. A call to "Learn from Comrade Lei Feng" spread across the country, making an especially strong impact on school children. Reading Lei Feng's diaries put Joan in an extra observant and contemplative frame of mind, which inspired her to write little poems about whatever she saw.<sup>98</sup>

Their first stop was in Shanghai, where the small group visited the museum commemorating all of the Communists that Chiang Kai-shek and the Guomintang slaughtered in 1927. Then they made their way to the port, where pre-Liberation Joan had witnessed the coolies unloading inconceivably heavy loads on skeletal shoulders. The contrast on the docks was night and day, and their group got to meet with some of the workers to talk about it. Since it was just over a decade since Liberation, many of the same dockworkers were still working in the port—just in very different conditions. In addition to carrying huge loads on empty stomachs and working long and brutal

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<sup>98</sup> After the capitalist coup in 1979 and the propaganda machine began to discredit everything about China's socialist past, Lei Feng was targeted for the socialist values associated with him. He was ridiculed as simplistic and naïve and finally wiped from the history books as a character made up to fool the people. At the time of the campaign, though, there was no doubt that Lei Feng was real and most people did their best to learn from his experiences and perspective.

hours, they had been subjected to constant and arbitrary abuse and torture. They survived beatings and long stints in water prisons and were treated as less than animals. And then they were Liberated. While the work itself was still heavy, they were workers now and worked much shorter, safer hours, during which they could offer their own opinions and criticize their leadership. They had housing and food rations and morning study just like everyone else. And perhaps the biggest difference was that as workers in a socialist country, the new society belonged to them, and their work to build it was recognized and given its due respect.

One of their next stops was in Wuhan, further to the West in Hubei Province and a growing industrial center. There, they visited a mammoth steel mill, originally designed and built in part with the Soviet experts; workers met with them to tell the story of how the Soviets left crying, some secretly turning over their blueprints of the almost-completed mill. The workers proudly showed their group how they had finished the mill themselves and had recently begun operating a new blast furnace. Joan asked all kinds of questions about worker wages, trying to get a grasp of the similarities between state workers in industry and agriculture.

I remember... there was one person who had control of the lever that moved the huge blocks of red-hot iron. It went whipping down and whipping back, and that got me thinking about the wages of workers compared to their labor efficiency. At the farm, our good workers at that time were getting 45 *yuan* a month. That was the top wage at the farm; everyone else was mostly around 30 *yuan* a month... I asked how much the guy working the lever got, and he got 60 *yuan* a month. He had a much greater responsibility than the other workers, because he was dealing with much bigger things. But he got 60 *yuan* a month, compared to our top workers who got 45 *yuan* a month. Why was there a difference...? I never really understood why there was that tremendous difference between industry and agriculture.

Joan didn't understand why there was such a big difference between the wages of industrial and agricultural workers, but she had definite ideas about how China was going about socialist economic development.

People always say that in Mao's time, they squeezed the peasants too much to get the country going, and therefore the peasants didn't have enthusiasm for production. ...I just think it's a lot of crap. The accumulation for construction for new China did have to come from production, and the mass of the people in production were peasants. If you raised the price of their products, and the city people had to buy their product, the wages of the city people had to go up; it seemed to me that it wouldn't do any good... To me, the only way to build a country was on the surplus product from the people of China, workers and peasants. It was all public. If there were millionaires that would be different, but the city people were also at a very,

very low standard. The way China was able to get any accumulation was by... not raising the standard of living so fast that there wasn't any accumulation.<sup>99</sup>

So the peasants sold their grain to the State at state prices, and the workers bought the grain and cloth and everything at state prices and the housing was all done by the State. The cost of living was very low, but the cost of living in the city was higher than in the countryside, because the peasants could grow their own food. So of course the wages of the workers had to be slightly higher than the wages of the peasants. But as long as there are no millionaires created—the cadres, the management also had low wages, I don't see that that was squeezing the peasantry any more than the workers. The whole of China was squeezing excess value from their labor to go back into production to be able to raise the whole country up...

Her visit to the steel mill left a deep impression on her. Later, when during the Cultural Revolution intellectuals were sent to work with their hands in industry and agriculture, she read what a scientist who was sent to a steel mill wrote—and it reminded her of the feeling she had, as she watched the workers in the mill.

He went out and worked in the steel mill, and an intellectual never did anything like that before. He wrote about how he went out there and saw the workers writing on those ingots of iron when they came out. He just assumed they were writing their names on it, but when he went to look, he saw it was numbers. He suddenly thought, 'My god. These people create the whole world and they never think about their name being on something. And we intellectuals, everything we do we want to have our name on it so that everyone can see it. But all the things we eat and everything, it's all people's labor, and none of them have their names anywhere. The intellectuals float on top fighting about whose name is going to be on what piece of paper.' That's what I felt too, seeing all those workers working; ...all you see is the steel coming out and all the automobiles built. The labor going into them seems abstract, but in reality, it was all people and the grain that they ate that turned into that steel into an automobile.

Back in Jiangxi Province, the group made a stop at idyllic Lushan, where the British had built some houses and where Chiang Kai-shek and his wife, Song Meiling had their summer home, because it was so much cooler at the higher elevation. Ganny's tour group drove up to the top of the mountain that seemed to rise out of nowhere, instead of going up on sedan chairs like the Chiangs did. Their hosts showed them the Chiangs' former residence and the bathtub where Song Meiling took her milk baths.

Lushan was, of course, also the site of the first open struggle over ideological lines

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<sup>99</sup> In the *Ten Great Relationships*, Mao wrote that in terms of accumulation, there should be a balance—that it should not be so much that it made the standard of living of workers and peasants too low.

within the Party. No one knew too much about it at the time, because the meeting had just happened, but they did know that it was where a big meeting of the Central Committee took place. Joan and Ganny walked through the meeting rooms, and only later would they come to understand the significance of what happened there in 1959.

After Lushan was the city of Nanchang, the capital of Jiangxi Province. Joan showed Ganny where, after the Guomindang had turned against the Communists, Zhu De, the old founder of the Red Army, organized a coup. After discovering that all of the open Communists were being killed off, he and his comrades in the army executed a secret plot to capture their Guomindang leaders when they were playing chess at night. As a result of their success, that whole segment of the army went over to the communist side.

Zhu De, following the line at the time from the Soviet Union, then led a reformulated army into battle, trying to take the cities, and failing time and again, suffering massive losses. After his first failed attempt, Mao realized that head-to-head confrontations when they were seriously out-manned and outgunned was tantamount to suicide. He lost the argument in the Party and took off for Jinggangshan (Jinggang Mountains) to join the guerillas. Zhu De and what was left of the Red Army eventually followed Mao; having learned their lesson through the almost total decimation of the army, they were prepared to listen to Mao again.

So, of course the next stop for Ganny and Joan had to be Jinggangshan, the massive mountain range between Jiangxi and Hunan Province and guerilla stronghold before the Long March. Many of the locals who were there when the guerilla army set up their base and when Mao and Zhu De and the whole Red Army showed up, were still there. The stories of the battles at Jinggangshan got up and walked off the pages of the books Joan had studied, as they went around to the different sites where battles had been waged and won. They climbed to the top of a hill and saw where the Guomindang was spotted marching up and went to the spot where the Red Army fired the only cannonball it had—timed perfectly so that it scared the enemy so badly that they ran off, without knowing that the guerillas didn't have any more.

Next was a visit to Changsha in Hunan Province, where Mao went to junior high and then later high school. (He also returned to Changsha to organize after a brief stint in Beijing.) They saw where Mao poured cold water over himself every morning to train himself to be tough, and they walked along the walls of the schoolyard where Mao had organized the students to bang pots and drums to scare off an oncoming army. Inside the classroom, their guides explained that Mao was not too fond of some of his classes, especially a required art class. The famous product of that class was a straight line with a half circle over it which Mao entitled "Sunrise."

Going further south into Guangxi Province, the group moved on to picturesque Guilin, a spot riddled with limestone rock formations pointing at the sky, making scenic mazes in the calm waters of the Li River. Guilin would much later become a crowded and developed tourist magnet, but when they arrived, it was quiet with the everyday lives of the peasants who had lived there for eons. Ganny and Joan were only

the second group of foreign visitors to the area, the first being Queen Juliana of the Netherlands, who had visited in 1959 with her entourage. They stayed at the same fancy guesthouse as the Queen and took a slow steamboat ride up the Li River, observing the fishermen fishing off their small boats with Cormorant birds.<sup>100</sup>

Aside from its beauty, Guilin had its share of revolutionary stories woven into the unique geology of its landscape, like every other place they visited. The jutting limestone rocks had pores, whole networks of caves that hid the villagers from all kinds of historical incursions, from the conquering hoards, to Guomindang tax collectors and warlords. The biggest cave, which could hold over 1000 people, had a small entrance, the location kept secret for many generations. Joan climbed in with Ganny and found stalactites and stalagmites making their infinitesimal but inevitable progress towards each other from floor to ceiling.

Only after Liberation, when the people in the village really really believed in the new government, did they tell where the opening to the cave was... [O]riginally it was just a tiny, tiny hole that a person could just sort of crawl in, hidden in the bushes in a very, very unobtrusive place. The entrance was small, but the inside was tremendously big... I wrote a poem about it; ... there was one line about the stalactites and stalagmites that were dripping, dripping and dripping and becoming rock. I wrote, "The little things we do each day, accumulate in this same way." I gave that poem to Ganny.

Not too long after steaming back down the river in Guilin, it was time to go home to Caotan. Having been won over to her mother's indomitable spirit and open and sharp mind, Joan did what she could to make things fun and comfortable for her. As Christmas approached, they got a couple small evergreen trees, looking a little worse for the wear after being dug up with their roots and put in a box, to use as Christmas trees in front of their house. They invited Jane and Su in from the city with all their kids, who had never seen a Christmas tree before, and got them all together with paper and scissors making ornaments.

The farm, now hosting a guest of the State, got in touch with the chef at the People's Hotel, the place in the city where Fred had ended up when he was lost, and got him to prepare a full Western style, turkey with gravy and mashed potatoes, Christmas dinner for the two families, most of whom had never eaten anything like it in their lives. Because the neighborhood kids had already clued the Engst kids in about Santa, they opened presents after dinner.

Ganny stayed in China for a year. In the spring of 1963, she said goodbye to her daughter and her family (in Chinese because none of the kids ever learned a word of English in spite of her efforts) and got on a plane back to the US. When she got off the plane, the immigration officers asked her where she had been. When she told them,

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<sup>100</sup> Cormorant birds are birds with long necks that some Chinese fishermen used to fish in rivers and lakes. Fastening a ring around the bird's neck, the fisherman would wait for the bird to dive and catch a fish and return to its perch on the boat to remove the catch that it couldn't swallow.

they seized her passport for having traveled illegally to the People's Republic. She could have lied when they asked her—there was no stamp in her passport to give her away. But Ganny never lied, and she knew that she had not done anything wrong.

Ganny became a complete Maoist on her trip and [with] the India thing. Here she was 72 years old, but she understood then that you couldn't serve the world through Putney School. The Putney School method of learning was correct, but who did you learn for? She understood that a lot of the students that went through her school went into the US government and into the Peace Corps, doing good things. She didn't say they were part of the ruling class; she didn't use those terms but she understood that they worked for the people who were trying to control the world for their own interests.

It was amazing to us that she was able to change... I began to have to think over my concept of Ganny. I just couldn't throw my background off, and I couldn't just throw her off... She was born into a different situation and she did remarkably well using her own brain and her own background... [W]hat I just realized was that I was wrong. Just for my own selfish self I was trying to get rid of my own background, and I just tried to throw her out as a bourgeois element. I found that you have to unite everybody, as long as they're not trying to get power for themselves and knocking down other people to do it—as long as they're trying to find the truth, then you have to unite with them. And she was probably much better than I am, because in her environment she came to a lot of conclusions that I probably never would've come to if I'd been in that environment. So I appreciated her much more...

More than just appreciation, the Ganny's visit bonded Joan to her mother in a deeper way; separated for many decades, with Joan trying to leave her bourgeois roots behind her, Ganny's trip not only helped her become close with where her daughter was physically but also where she was politically. She stood with Joan on the top of Jinggang Mountain, their footsteps echoed together in the caves of Guilin. And she absorbed the Chinese revolution and its ideals by interacting with the people who had risen up in a life and death struggle—and digested what she found out with her daughter, who had joined her life with theirs.

When Ganny died in 1982 at the age of 92, Joan was in China. Not long after, she got an audiotape in the mail of the memorial service—countless friends and family remembering and celebrating Carmelita's impact on them and the world. One of her granddaughters talked about going through her things and finding a poem. She didn't know where it was from, or who had written it, but it clearly had meant something to her grandmother, who had carefully saved the well-worn piece of paper. Then suddenly Joan heard the poem she had written, inspired by the movement to learn from Lei Feng, about the stalactites and stalagmites she had seen with Ganny in Guilin:

“The little things we do each day, accumulate in this same way.”



## Chapter 30

# White Terror

*“Mao was trying to organize the people to get the bourgeoisie at the top... but those cadres also had power, and they turned it around to hit the lower cadres.” Joan Hinton*

When Ganny left, Joan went with her by train to Beijing to send her off, because the farm wanted her to buy another bull. This time she enlisted the help of Elsie, the wife of journalist Israel Epstein (or Eppy, as people called him), who together had escaped a Japanese POW (prisoner of war) camp in Hong Kong and joined the Chinese revolution. Elsie was a farm girl from England, and because she grew up around sheep and cows, Joan was happy to have her input.

They made two trips out to a farm north of the city before deciding on bull #148. In between walking around cow pens, Joan looked up Anna Louise Strong, who was living and working with the Peace Association near the Beijing Hotel. She arrived for breakfast at Anna Louise’s invitation the day of the first public acknowledgement of the split between China and the Soviet Union. In a statement that went out to all of the countries in the socialist camp, this first of what would be nine polemics describing China’s assessment of the Soviet Union and their relationship with the international communist movement. It also dealt with the issues of Albania and Yugoslavia, as well as the Great Leap Forward and the line struggle at Lushan. In the polemics, China directly articulated to the international communist movement the Soviet Union’s attempts to control China politically by trying to get it to knuckle under economically.

Joan’s conversation with Anna Louise was, like many breakfast conversations with cadres around the country, all about what the polemics put out there. The weight of what they revealed was enormous—not only were countries around the world, led by the US and now its former ally the Soviet Union, doing their damndest to surround and isolate China, internally, there was an attack on the socialist line, revealed at Lushan. In the face of all that, Anna Louise clapped her hands and exclaimed, “Nothing but the people of the world can save us now!”

The international situation for China did look quite bleak. But within China, people understood and took pride in the fact that they had *not* knuckled under to the Soviet Union; they had all tightened their belts together, as Zhou Enlai had put it, and slipped out from what looked to be a heavy and bloody yoke. Joan was blown away by the coordination of it all; China was such a massive and populous country, faced incredible hardship, and yet the people—not the police or the military—maintained social order. To her, the way that ordinary people lived their lives as part of the larger society was a reflection of the deep-seated belief in the top levels of government and where their interests lay. She thought a lot about Lao Li and what he said about the old society and the flood that killed his entire family because no one would do anything about it. In the new society, people dealt with lack of resources through rationing, and floods through building infrastructure and teamwork. In spite of the sometimes devas-

tating effects of mistakes in leadership, or twisting of policies, or struggles in line, in the new society you could expect the basic, human, fundamental rights to live and eat and work and be in a community with a larger society looking out for your interests. You could expect it, even if you were a carelessly little boy from Caotan farm going to the city.

Fred... went to the city on a bus and lost his wallet. It had five *yuan* in it, so when he came back, we said, "Gee that's a lot of money—you can't just lose it like that. You have to pay it back." So poor old Freddy—we had him cutting hay all summer. He cut it and took it to the dairy and they gave him two pennies. He cut hay all summer... to get the five *yuan* back. In the fall... I suddenly got a notice from the lost-and-found department in the city of Xian. So I went into the city to the lost and found place, and... there were umbrellas, rubbers, coats; it was just full of ordinary people's ordinary things.

I showed them the notice, and they said that they had found a wallet, and did I know what was in it? I said there was five *yuan*, and I'm not sure what else. It turned out they had hunted for three months to find out whose wallet it was, and they had traced it down to us. ...When they gave it back, the five *yuan* were still in it. And he'd lost it on a public bus.

While in Beijing, Joan also visited Isabel and David Crook (who she had met when she arrived pregnant at the Double Bridge Farm in Beijing to see her brother Bill) and their young family of three boys, who had gotten to be playmates with Fred during his stay.

The parents talked it over and decided that the following summer of 1964, the Crooks would send their son Michael to Xian to get out of the city and see what life was like in the countryside. From his chaotic visit (he was a bit wilder than the kids Joan and Sid were used to), more kids would follow; almost all other foreigners in China were city residents, mostly teaching English and not engaged in production. They sent their kids to Joan and Sid because it was a way for them to leave their intellectual environment and learn something different about how the world was put together. After Mikey, a small group came the next summer, including Carma, Fred's temporary older sister; Chris Milton, son of Nancy and David Milton—recent arrivals in the Foreign Languages Institute; and Bobby and Johnny Williams.

The Williams brothers were the sons of Robert and Mabel Williams, who had asserted the need and right for Blacks to meet violence with violence, to arm and defend themselves in the US in the face of the murderous Jim Crow South.<sup>101</sup> After Robert was framed for a kidnapping in 1959, Cuban Prime Minister Fidel Castro welcomed the family into exile in Cuba. There, they set up Radio Free Dixie, an international radio program that broadcast programs that talked about the injustices facing

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<sup>101</sup> Robert Williams wrote *Negroes With Guns* about his experiences in armed self-defense in rural North Carolina. Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale cited their reading of the book as a main influence in founding the Black Panthers Party for Self-Defense.

poor and Black people in the US and played music by Black musicians.

In 1965, China invited the family to visit. With their parents busy meeting with the top leaders in Beijing, the kids went to the farm with the other city kids that they met. Joan was happy to host.

It was a great education for the people on the farm, because they'd never seen a Black person before. They got to know those kids as ordinary people, and there was lots and lots of education at that time in China to support the movement of the Black people in the US; there were lots of warm feelings towards Black people at that time.

The youth, all in their early teens, rolled up their sleeves and got involved in the work on the farm. They chopped silage, milked cows, shoveled shit... whatever they could get their hands on. The whole crew of them, seven kids with Joan and Sid, were invited to join the agricultural work in Yanan for a couple weeks, where cadres were learning how to build terraced fields. With such a big population to feed, there were also lots of hands to work—and so China began to transform its hilly and idle countryside by building step-like structures into the slopes, making arable flatland out of soil that would otherwise be washed away with every flood. Joan and Sid relished the opportunity to be out in the fields and engaging in production with the kids.

At the end of the summer, Bobby, Johnny and Chris returned to Beijing. But Carma stayed in Xian where her mom picked her up; they were going to a little village Bertha heard about called Dazhai in neighboring Shanxi Province. The news was that a small, mountainous village, besieged for generations by poor conditions and deadly floods, was making some big changes. Joan and Sid had never heard of Dazhai before—they didn't know what significance that little village would come to have in the ensuing ideological struggle—and they did not know that they would be spending a lot of time there in coming years.

Robert and Mabel went back to Cuba, but the Williams brothers stayed on to go to school in Beijing. The family reunited in 1966, when their parents moved to China, until in 1969 Robert Williams negotiated a deal with the US government to drop the kidnapping charges that were still outstanding and go home to become a research assistant at the University of Michigan.

When the city kids left Caotan, and things settled down domestically for the Hinton/Engst clan, a new movement came knocking. It was called the Socialist Education Movement, and it would be Mao's last attempt to rectify the Party through a party-led movement. After the struggle at Lushan and the two clear ideological and political lines emerged, he and the others who believed in China's socialist development saw how previous movements had failed to root out and neutralize the forces that wanted capitalist development. Time after time, movement after movement, the highest level leadership were able to turn the people's attention downward, engaging in witch-hunts which ended up targeting and punishing the lower and mid-level cadres like the vet at Caotan.

In launching the new movement, Mao for the first time specifically identified the issue, saying that the goal was for the people to identify and target: ‘Those people of authority in the Party who were going the capitalist road.’ To direct the movement, he put out a list of ten points by which party cadres should carry it out. As a way to deal with the proven abilities of high-level leadership to save their own asses through scapegoating the people around them, the new movement sent party cadres out from their own work units in work teams that went to other units where they did not have any self-interest. The idea was that as outsiders, they could be more objective.

After the movement was launched, Liu Shaoqi, who was number two in the Party, took charge of it. One of the first things he did was send his wife, Wang Guangmei, to a village called Peach Orchard as the head of a work team to make an example of how to carry out the movement for the rest of the country. Sid would study her work later.

The work team went out there, and they worked mostly at night, very secretly. They isolated themselves from the masses of the people—in the daytime, the ordinary people couldn’t ever find them. All they knew was that there was a house where they couldn’t go in... Wang Guangmei got in good relations with all the people in the village that had grudges against the Party and with old bad elements. I would say almost any peasant at that time still had the idea that in old China you had to look after your own family and your own relatives. And they used their position to get small benefits for themselves. Well, the work team grabbed onto these base root cadres who may have taken some privileges and left the big fish unmolested. In some cases, as we found out at Caotan, the problems were invented first, and then they found people to grab onto.

Wang Guangmei summarized her work there in what was called the Peach Orchard Experience, which Liu Shaoqi consolidated into ten points of his own to give further direction to the movement. From there, the Socialist Education Movement became known in most places as the *Si Qing*—the Four Cleans—meaning each cadre had to be clean in the political, economic, organizational and ideological fields.

At Caotan, the movement started off with an internal examination that uncovered three incidences of embezzlement. Director Xie had been transferred before the movement started and the new director in charge was a guy named Bai Bingxing. Bai dealt with embezzlement and prepared Caotan for the work team that would arrive after the foreign kids left in the summer of 1965.<sup>102</sup>

When the work team finally showed up, Joan and Sid were shocked by how they were approached. The way the last movement against the “back door” came to them was already a little odd—it was the first time that anyone had ever asked them if they wanted to participate in a movement. Before that, they hadn’t felt different from any other cadre who they worked with—the movement came and they all participated in it

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<sup>102</sup> Although the Party launched the movement in 1963, it didn’t get started with the work teams in Xian until 1965—much later than in Beijing.

with the rest of the country—there wasn't even a question of choosing whether or not to join in. That small question of, "Do you want to?" proved to be a marker that they hadn't known to recognize. Because at the start of the Socialist Education Movement, they were told to their complete surprise that they would not be allowed to participate.

It became very obvious right off the bat to us at the bottom that it really was a "white terror."<sup>103</sup> These people came in and Joan and I were the first victims. The first day they came, they announced that we couldn't join the meetings, and nobody could talk to us about politics and the movement—only about work. The next day the Party Secretary, Bai Bingxing was given the works. He was stripped of all his power and he was sent out to do physical labor. Gradually, every one of the top and middle cadres at the brigade level were thrown out of their positions, and the work was taken over directly by the work team or by the people who were the pets of the work team.

Sid was set aside from his post as Vice Director of the Dairy and kept on as the Technical Director. But although people weren't supposed to talk them about what was going on, both of them still worked side by side with their comrades in production. And so although their friends didn't dare openly talk to them about it, they still heard about what was going on the sly.

The way they threw the other cadres out was by isolating them in a room and having them come one by one down to where the work team was, where they had to go through an interrogation and investigation into the four areas of "cleanliness." It turned out that everyone had *something* wrong, whether it was that they had been part of the Guomintang and come over to the Communists, or maybe their family had been rich peasants before Liberation.

Then they targeted specific people they thought they could really get, like the guy who was in charge of the farm's apple orchards, Qiu Quanguan. His first black mark was his capitalist family background: his parents had gone to Taiwan with the Guomintang, and he also had siblings in Hong Kong. He stayed behind and had gone to school; he was an intellectual who studied fruit orchard technology. Qiu was the technician responsible for the Caotan orchards and just as the work team arrived, he saw that the apple trees needed some serious pruning. In their 200+ *mu* of orchards, the trees had grown up and all of the growth was crowded around the center trunk. When the trees were immature, they depended on that center for stability, but now they were strong enough to prune out the center and get the branches to spread out, so that the whole tree could get more sunlight.

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<sup>103</sup> "White Terror" was first used in Europe, in France and then Spain, to describe extreme violence and repression used first by and then against Royalists in France. China most likely adopted the term from Russian history, where "White Terror" referred to the White Army's mass killings before their defeat in 1918. After Chiang Kai-shek took Taiwan after losing the Civil War in China, his regime also perpetrated "White Terror" against any individual or group who was against the Guomintang. In this period in China, people used the phrase when the political repression of the people resulting from a reactionary ideological line was extreme.

So Qiu got the workers together and showed them how to cut out the center part of the trees. The work team heard about it, took one look at what looked on the surface to be a lot of tree carnage, and accused him of sabotaging the orchards. They stood him up in a meeting, told everyone that he was an active counter-revolutionary, and led him away in handcuffs.

Then they went after the head accountant, Yang Xuening, the honest old cadre who had gone up to the Three Border Farm after Liberation to clean all the accounts up. The way they got him was with the watermelons. Determined to find some sort of embezzlement, the work team went to a nearby village growing watermelons and asked an old peasant in the field some questions, like how many melons grew on a vine, and how many vines there were in a *mu* of land. Then they went to Caotan to calculate how many watermelons they should have produced given the amount of land they had planted. Of course, as anyone who planted anything would know, the numbers were way off. Their conclusion was that the head accountant had embezzled the “missing” melons, sold them privately and pocketed the money. He too, was led away in cuffs.

All the cadres they went after in this way were locked up and had to line up together to go eat every day apart from everyone else. Fall fell and the place where they were being detained was cold and damp, so Yang Xuening’s son brought him his padded jacket—and was criticized for his lack of class line distinction between him and his father. They also set up a little exhibit of articles that the cadres had supposedly embezzled or sabotaged.

The general feeling on the farm was that something was seriously wrong. There were only a handful of people who went along eagerly; most of the workers and cadres thought that people were being wrongly accused and were really angry about it. Even though they were under such strict orders to keep them in the dark, Joan and Sid heard more and more.

The witch-hunt took an inevitable toll. Bai, the Director, was really put through the wringer, and he had never faced that kind of torment before. He had been a red diaper baby and part of the Yanan evacuation. When Mao went to visit his village, he was a young child and sat on his lap. But now he had been stripped of his title, sent to do manual labor and was being accused of working to sabotage the revolution and the Party. One morning, Joan happened to run into Bai looking disheveled and distracted. That afternoon, he disappeared. They found him drowned in the Wei River; under semi-house arrest, he had left to go to the bathroom but ended up jumping off the bridge.

Then it was an old worker who had been in a Guomindang army unit during the Civil War, which had gone over to the Communists. After targeting and hounding him endlessly because of his background, they found him hanging by his neck in his house.

Next, a cadre who worked in the accountant’s office was found dead, drowned in a very shallow creek. All of the back alley talk was that it seemed very unlikely that if the guy wanted to kill himself, he would do it in such a difficult way.

With the intense pressure, with people killing themselves and dying under

strange circumstances, Jian, the young guy Sid had given the family's ration book to, and bought himself some leather shoes, got very nervous. Not exactly the most principled of people, he probably had some underhanded dealings going on and freaked out about the possibility of getting caught. So he began to complain of terrible headaches; they sent him to the hospital but all kinds of tests could never find anything wrong. He finally ran away from the hospital to some relatives in a nearby village and ended up dead anyway from a severe bout of dysentery.

People were horrified—and very scared; their comrades were being hounded, literally to death. But it was, after all, a witch-hunt. So the reaction of the work team was to take each suicide as conclusive evidence of the cadres' guilt.

Caotan was not an isolated case of what was happening in the Socialist Education Movement; the "White Terror," as people called it, spread all over the country. In response to what was going on, Mao put out another 24 points, which repudiated many of the methods of Liu Shaoqi's ten points—but by that time, the work teams were already neck deep into their witch-hunts. So the saying at Caotan went that the work team studied Mao's 24 points at night and then carried out Liu Shaoqi's ten points during the day.

During the Socialist Education Movement, the Caotan cadres got called to a meeting, where they heard a direct notice from Mao and Zhou, which to many people seemed rather out of the blue. The notice said that when foreigners came to visit, people should let them take pictures. That if they wanted to take pictures of the older generation of women who still had bound feet, they should be allowed to do so. The message was: "We are who we are," and that included all of the remnants of China's long feudal history. In retrospect, for Joan and Sid, it became clear that the notice that Mao and Zhou put out was to counter the anti-foreign sentiment being fomented by the leaders of the Socialist Education Movement (and the work teams that followed their direction)—an attempt to play down class contradictions through uniting all Chinese people in a nationalistic feeling against what was foreign. It was to counter the idea that all foreigners were "out to get" China and the Chinese revolution with negative propaganda.

In their family, the first to get a taste of that nationalism was Fred, who at twelve years old got called to the Xian Public Security office. He was forced to go alone, and once he was in the room with the stern-faced public security officers, was grilled with all kinds of questions. The first question was, "Why did you come to China?" The only response that Fred could give was that he didn't have any choice because he was born there.

Billy got it next, when he found out that he would not be allowed to perform in the talent program that his elementary school put on with the other schools in the area. During the noontime siesta, Joan gave Billy and two other little boys violin lessons. After many months of practicing, Billy, who had a gift for music, was selected to play in the program—only to be de-selected when the word came down that violins were foreign instruments and therefore not allowed to be played.

In another shock to the kids, who had always been treated like the other farm kids, the three of them were not allowed to join the Young Pioneers with their schoolmates.<sup>104</sup> When the school passed out the red scarves, which their classmates tied around their necks with pride, Fred, Billy, and Karen were passed over. Of course the kids knew on some level that they were different from their friends; they all looked different, and their parents acted kind of funny sometimes. But they strove to fit into the Caotan environment, stonewalling any of their parents' attempts to teach them English because it would set them apart. (Joan had tried to teach Karen by speaking only in English to her but gave up when after several days of no response Karen turned to Dama and asked, "What is Mommy saying?") But this was a whole different kind of consciousness about their "foreignness" and what it meant for them in their growing up environment.

Joan did the only thing she felt like she could do: focus on her work on the pasteurizer, riding her bike into the city regularly to track down parts or advice. One evening, after a long shopping trip in Xian, she headed home only to find that on the way back a new sign had been put up on a pole saying, "No foreigners can go past this point without permission." She stopped there for a perplexed moment, leaning on her bike, very surprised that she was on the wrong side of a sign with her home, and work and life on the other side. Then she pushed off on her bike and rode on.

Soon after, she and Sid got a call from the Public Security with an order to appear in their office. When they arrived, they found that Jane and Su waiting for them and together the four of them were given a very stern working over and told that they had to stay within the limits of the signs. Joan, however, was not one to keep quiet.

The people in the police were really nice people, but they had an order that come down, so they had to act like we were enemies. It was incredible. They said, "You foreigners have enough freedom in here; when we Chinese go to Burma, why we're restricted even in our movements; we can't go anywhere. These signs have been put up, and you have to come and register every year to apply for a permanent residency here..."

When they got all through, I said, "Look, we live outside those signs. What am I gonna do about that?" Then... they took off those masks and became very friendly. They said, "Well, you just keep on the way you are and never mind." So from then on, I had to go into the city around the back of the signs, which were way out. Then I went back down the main road where that sign was where everybody knew that I was going home, so I wouldn't get caught somewhere... It was such a shocking change.

Jane and Su, who lived within the limits of the signs, found it hard to negotiate at times, because there was a sign just up the road from where they lived. Any travel outside the sign required a visit to the Public Security to apply for a permit.

<sup>104</sup> The Young Pioneers was formed right after Liberation as a mass-based children's organization. Elementary school children from ages 6-14 could join through their schools.



The attack on foreigners, however, was not all done by squashing people with regulations, interrogations and exclusion. In the middle of the movement, with Joan having to pedal elaborately planned routes to and from the city, Xian selected Fred to go to the top middle school, the model for the province, a boarding school in Xian. Joan was so proud—she thought that they picked her son, because of the kind of student he was and was eager for him to go. Sid, on the other hand was ambivalent. While he did not raise any objections, he felt a little bit like he did when Joan wanted to send Fred to Beijing for a year—that maybe it wouldn't be too good for him.

Before he went off to the elite school, Fred had already become increasingly selfish for reasons his parents couldn't fathom; they didn't understand why in an environment that was all about the larger good, Fred would become so consumed by his own self-interest—especially when Billy seemed so opposite. One incident that horrified Joan in its demonstration of selfishness had to do with Fred grabbing two apples meant for him and his brother, taking a long time to judge which one was bigger, and then giving Billy the smaller one. Then, after seeing Billy with his apple, he decided that the one he let go was actually bigger and snatched it back out of Billy's hands.

But all that was no comparison to the kind of Fred that came home on the weekends after he started going to Xian Middle School. After living and learning with kids that were supposed to be smarter and more special than other kids, he came back to the farm with his head and pride swollen, prone to strut around and tell people—mostly his siblings—what to do. After a weekend or two of that kind of behavior, Joan began to have some serious regrets about not keeping him with his classmates at the farm. It was too late, though, and she ended up with a conceited and arrogant kid, who she didn't know how to deal with.

For a couple years running, Joan and Sid were periodically pressured to leave their work and lives in agriculture and move to a city to teach or polish (copyedit, or make non-native English read better) English. But being removed from production was the last thing they wanted to do. That kind of work and life seemed like it would probably be terrible. A couple times, Sid ducked it by claiming that his lisp made his English nonstandard, which would be detrimental to new students of the language. They tried then to pin Joan down, who refused by saying she didn't want to leave her family, who would be on the farm. So they offered to pick her up and drop her off daily, so that she could teach at Xian University in the Foreign Languages department. Jane, by that time, had been moved from the hospital lab to the classroom, but Joan managed to shrug them off with whatever excuses she could think of. It was clear that even if the country needed English teachers, the reason behind the reason was that there were some people in the leadership that thought that for foreigners out in the countryside working in agriculture was too bitter a life.

The pressure mounted when officials from Beijing came to see them offering jobs in the capital as English polishers. They declined and thought that they might get another visit the following year. But that same year, the officials came again and then again. The third time, they wouldn't take no for an answer. Faced with what seemed

like inevitability, Joan and Sid finally relented—not by agreeing, but by saying that they would “do what the leadership asked.” But they had a few conditions.

Having spent some time in Beijing buying bulls, sending off Ganny and visiting Howard Hinton, Joan had some idea of what life was like for foreigners. Most of them lived in the grand Friendship Hotel, the elaborate Soviet designed compound with a higher standard of living and separated from the Chinese people. That kind of life was not going to be OK for the family. The foreigners installed in the lavish compound referred to it as the Golden Ghetto. So the first condition was that they would not live in the Friendship Hotel; they would live wherever the people in their work units lived. Their second demand was that their children would go to an ordinary Chinese school along with their Chinese peers. They weren't happy about leaving Xian where all of their comrades were still getting abused by the work team—and they weren't happy at all about having to leave production for the first time since Liberation. But damned if they were going to have their family isolated in what amounted to a luxurious prison set apart from the people.

Beijing agreed and sent them two English articles to polish to see where their level was so they could place them in work units. Joan was surprised when they gave her efforts a better evaluation, what with her inability to spell and lack of any formal grammar skills. Probably now that they were going to the city, the fact that she was a nuclear physicist finally meant something to someone.

Joan turned her work on the almost-completed pasteurizer over to Wang Liping, and Sid turned his technical work over the Gong Xiugui.

Karen, still pissed off that she never got to go to Beijing like her brothers, was ecstatic about the move. Billy was non-committal. And Fred, who had been in Beijing for a year, asked to stay at Xian Middle School for his last year. Joan and Sid were only too happy to agree. As bad as his attitude had gotten from being in the uppity boarding school, they imagined Beijing to be much worse.

The family had to say goodbye to Nainai, who returned to her village and family. For several years after they moved to Beijing, they continued to send her money, but didn't ever hear back until they found out indirectly that she had died not long after they moved.

They packed up all their belongings and having accumulated much more stuff than their two footlockers, they had to give some of it away. The family egg beater and oven (a rarity in fuel-poor China) went to Jane and Su, the shortwave radio to the farm and the globe that Joan had used in her study sessions with the duck workers went to the school. (All of the things they gave away Joan came to regret, because she never found good replacements for them in Beijing.)

When it finally came time to take off, the work team was still very much in control of Caotan. So their comrades and colleagues, people with whom they had worked and lived and struggled side by side, some in Yanan and Inner Mongolia, had to get special permission to come say goodbye. Leaving Caotan with it completely tied up

and ruled by “White Terror,” and knowing that they were going to be assigned desk jobs to polish English in Beijing left a bad taste and made their departure difficult. But, in the end, they still did “what the leadership asked.”

What they didn’t know then was that they were about to enter what they would later describe as the most exciting, fantastic time of their lives—that the whole country was on the brink of a new revolution.

## Section 5

# Paper Revolution

## Chapter 31

# The Superstructure

*“The difference I do have in my understanding now compared to then is... how Mao built socialism in China using high cadres who were not socialist.” Sid Engst*

Joan and Sid were absolutely, positively, not going to move their family into the Friendship Hotel. There was no way in hell that they were going to leave production, put their kids into special schools for foreigners, and be installed in the Golden Ghetto. They made it perfectly clear to the people in charge of their move. Their terms were heard, so instead, they were taken from the train station to the Xinqiao Hotel, a fancy place near an old city gate, crawling with foreign correspondents. Joan and Sid looked at each other and objected in as polite a way as the situation allowed; the response was: “Well, you said you didn’t want to live in the Friendship Hotel.”

For the first couple days, the kids were a bit giddy, what with being in the nation’s capital, sleeping on soft mattresses, water that splashed out of a faucet, and a toilet that flushed with a loud noise and swirl. (The guy from Caotan who brought them up was about to turn right around without seeing any of Beijing because he found his intestines didn’t function on a sit-down toilet. After finding out what his problem was, Joan and Sid suggested he squat on top of the rim, and everything came out all right.) Joan even caught Sid reclining in the tub, singing a remix of “The Keeper of the Eddystone Light” (*“My father was the keeper of the Eddystone light, and he slept with a mermaid one fine night, from this union there came three, a porpoise and a porgy and the other was me!”*), substituting, “Oh for the life of the bourgeoisie!” for the last phrase.

Joan, who was a lot less enamored with indoor plumbing, or at least the likely implications, didn’t find Sid’s tune very funny. They always laughed in retelling the story, but Sid said, “I was kidding but partly serious too. You know when you’ve lived in a really rough place for a long while... Joan loves roughing it, but I’m not anywhere’s near a rough it-er as she is. She’s practically uncivilized.” But the luxury and novelty of bathing in a big white tub quickly wore off as the reality of being isolated in an elite class bore in. It took about two days.

Sid was assigned to work in the Bureau for Movie Distribution and Joan to the Chinese People’s Association for Culture and Friendship with Foreign Countries (*Zhongguo Renmin Duiwai Wenhua Youhao Xiehui*). The person that showed up to talk to them about their work situation turned out to be from Joan’s organization. Joan and Sid wouldn’t have thought anything of it, except their greeter immediately apologized that there wasn’t a representative from Sid’s organization; his organization, a division under the Ministry of Culture, wasn’t as high up as Joan’s, which turned out to be under the Foreign Ministry. In Beijing, Joan and Sid were discovering, hierarchy won out even over patriarchy.

Part of the talk was about their wages. Once they were out of the production wage system of engineers and technicians and workers, they entered into a whole new

area: the Foreign Expert. They found it ludicrous that they should be made into experts of English polishing, instead of dairying or design where they might actually have some expertise—but there it was anyway and with it came a pay raise. The whole system of wages had always seemed problematic to Joan.

The main problem that I saw was... what happened after the 8<sup>th</sup> Congress, after we got wages. That was '54 or '55. The workers were getting 45 *juan*, I was getting 80 and Sid was getting 120... I was technician at seventh grade, and he was ninth grade. I think there were about three or four grades above us in the whole hierarchy. I think Mao was always against giving management more than the workers. Mao, using the Paris Commune as an example, said that cadres should not get higher wages than the highest paid workers. The fact that the workers at the farm were getting 45, while I was at 80 and Sid was at 120 shows that there was probably too much of a gap when the wages were put into effect. Mao said, "*Geng ziben zuyi ca bu duo. You ba ji gong zi zuo.*" [This eight-level wage system is just about like capitalism.]

That whole wage category was put in early studying the Soviet Union... Originally, the idea of a cadre was a person who devoted his whole life to the revolution, but it turned out that they became management. It shouldn't have been, though, and if management had basically the same living standard as workers, it wouldn't have mattered. But 45 and 80 was quite a difference.

But now that they were in what they called the superstructure doing deskwork—Sid was given a wage of 160 *juan* a month with Joan following behind at 120.<sup>105</sup> Their wages had always been different, with Sid as the farm's Vice Director and Joan as a technician or engineer. But now, with both of them being desk jockeys and doing comparable work, they didn't see any reason for the difference. So they decided that 20 *juan* should come out of Sid's wages and be tacked onto Joan's so that they got 140 a piece—and made them issue it that way.

Like all the other foreigners they knew, they were each given what everyone called a "handler"—someone who was supposed to be their only link to their organizational leadership, someone who was supposed to handle all of their problems, questions and needs. Sid's was Li Weihe. Joan's was Wang Ge. After over a decade of sitting in the same room with all the other cadres and having discussions and arguments with the farm leadership, with Sid solving problems for workers and cadres who came to him for direction, with Joan yelling at the Farm Director about which station would send the milk—with being in criticism, self-criticism meetings and arm-in-arm struggles to increase every kilo of milk—Joan and Sid found their new situation completely unfamiliar and alienating. Even though the tail end of their time in Caotan gave them

<sup>105</sup> Superstructure is a Marxist term used to describe the social, political and cultural spheres in a society. Included in the superstructure are institutions not directly related to but in support of production.

an idea of what it could be like, at least they were still living and working among long time comrades who knew them as such. In Beijing, they discovered that most of the foreigners installed in the Golden Ghetto didn't even know who the Party Secretary was in their organizations. Sid felt the difference sharply:

Here we were, people who had been in China at that time 20 years and worked at the grassroots, and we were kept out of the meetings of the organization where we worked... [W]e were excluded from political activity and study in our units. So it was just like it had been when we were in Caotan when the Socialist Education Movement came.

So we were mad as all hell, and there were a lot of other foreigners that were mad about the whole thing. We'd say, "This is not the way to treat foreign experts." If people wanted to be treated that way that was fine. But a lot of the foreign experts who came to work in China at that time were revolutionaries; they were Marxists. They came even though the pay by Western standards was low, but they came because they wanted to help China, and mainly... because it was socialist: "We'll learn something, we'll learn what socialism is in action."

Joan and Sid went from riding their bikes on dirt roads around the farm to being chauffeured in a special car to and from their office buildings; their handlers said it was "too dangerous" for them to get to work by themselves. By that time, Sid had long gotten over his idea that bikes in general were dangerous, and for the life of them, they couldn't see what danger might lurk on the city streets. They were sick with the feeling of being set apart from the revolution they so believed in. Joan just about came unglued when an office mate in her work unit tsked at the sight of her stepping out of the car and told her that *he* rode *his* bike to work every single day.

Joan found herself separated on the inside of her workplace, the department of special features and photos (which created publications for the embassies), as well; she got an office apart from the other workers and an office mate who let her know—practically as she walked in the door—that she had gotten eight credits towards her master's degree at the University of Wisconsin. In their office were some fat cushioned sofas, and Joan sat in a soft swivel desk chair. Her office mate's chair was a slightly harder seated swivel chair, and their other co-workers in the main office room just had standard straight-backed ones. All of Joan's pens nestled in a marble penholder, while everyone else had theirs in their desk drawers. Joan raised objections at every minute expression of the oppressive hierarchy but never got anywhere with it. But for both Joan and Sid, the most brutal part of their new work was polishing pages and pages of English articles without having any right to comment on the content. The transition for Joan, a hands-on engineer, an inventor and designer was particularly rough.

It was horrible being a polisher... We were just like machines. We got a very small taste of what that work was like before the Cultural Revolu-

tion swept everything away. It was incredible; you were supposed to polish something, an article about a steel mill or something, and you couldn't go to a steel mill to see what was going on. You had to sit in your office, and just change the English, whether you understood it or not.

Their introduction to life in Beijing went against all of their experiences since joining the revolution. Sid, who had evacuated Yanan with the Guomindang on his tail, saw the difference between North Shaanxi and Beijing as qualitative and profound.

The thing that we noticed when we came to Beijing was that the environment at all these organizations that we were in was just very different than what had been in Shaanxi. Shaanxi was an old Liberated Area with a lot of old revolutionary cadres there. And the working style of the old guerrilla areas was entirely different—especially in the relationship between the ordinary people and the cadres, and between the ordinary cadres and the leading cadres. [T]here were differences between different organizations, but we essentially never had any reservations about saying just what we thought about the leadership... The ordinary workers would dare talk to them and criticize them and raise hell if they didn't like the way things were going.

Beijing is altogether different. You criticize the people below you, but you don't criticize the people above you. You say, "Yes, yes" to them. ... Beijing was peacefully liberated and had a peaceful land reform. And the result was the ordinary people never really, as they say in China, *fan shen*.<sup>106</sup> The leaders were still the leaders. Before they were white [Guomindang] leaders, then they were red leaders. And that sort of thing, as far as what we saw, permeated the organizations where we worked in...

After a couple weeks of getting carted to and fro in their luxury sedan, Joan and Sid had enough. Not accustomed to not using their legs, they had taken to running up and down the eight flights of stairs at the Xinqiao Hotel for exercise. They did it until they decided it was ridiculous and then informed their driver that they were going to run to work so he shouldn't pick them up the next day. The driver was horrified of course and told them that he had to pick them up. Sid and Joan shrugged and responded that he could come if he wanted, but they weren't going to be there. And they weren't. From then on, they had a nice jog back and forth to work, until, inevitably they ended up on bikes again like the great majority of Beijing's workers.

As bad as it was for Joan and Sid, it was worse for the kids, because, for one, they were kids and so couldn't understand what the hell was going on, and two because they had to go to a boarding school where diplomats and high cadres sent their kids. Started originally as a school for kids of cadres who were on the front lines of the Civil

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<sup>106</sup> The term *fan shen* means literally "turn over" and was used to convey the idea of ideological and political transformation.



War, after Liberation the thing had morphed into the elite Congwen boarding school. Completely shut out of ordinary Chinese schools, the Crook family (David and Isabel were both teaching then at the Foreign Languages Institute) had to fight tooth and nail just to get their kids into that school—and many of the other foreign kids followed.

The handlers insisted that Billy and Karen had to ride in a special bus for those foreign kids that came down from the Friendship Hotel. When Joan and Sid pointed out the public bus stop right outside the hotel that would take them pretty close to the school, they were told that they had to ride door to door, because otherwise the neighborhood kids would throw stones at them. When they asked why, they were told that it was because the local kids couldn't go to school there; it was only for the elite. Sid thought grimly, "Well, at least the local kids have some class feelings."

The kids hated it. Billy and Karen were used to the Caotan elementary school where running around and playing in the dirt was the most glorious part of their day. They were used to sitting in class until they heard the chugging of a tractor and then running to the windows with all the other kids to watch it go by. At their new boarding school, Monday through Friday they had to sit primly, practice, and memorize, and there was absolutely no running around and playing, lest the precious children fall down and get dirty or hurt themselves. On weekends, Joan and Sid did the best they could to make things better, taking them up on the roof of the hotel to play with their toy truck, or out of the city on bikes. Monday morning found Billy in utter despair, not complaining, but with silent tears running down his face at the prospect of another week at school.

As Joan and Sid and their kids struggled to figure out what the hell was going on and how to get through the next day, the struggle at the top began to reveal itself. They were all on the hotel roof one day in early June 1966, when they heard a big commotion on the street below; a peer over the edge found a huge contingent of people, marching and carrying signs, beating drums and chanting slogans. That was one thing about the Xinqiao Hotel—it was close to the Beijing Municipal Party Headquarters. So from the roof of their foreign experts' tower, they got to bear witness to the most recently breaking news: the whole Beijing City Committee was being reorganized, and Peng Zhen, the Beijing mayor along with his whole crew of supporters was, as Sid put it, "Out on his butt."

The beginning of the fall of the Beijing mayor actually dated back a few years to when a deputy mayor, Wu Han, wrote a play based on a guy named Hai Rui, a "virtuous" official serving the emperor during the Ming Dynasty.<sup>107</sup> According to historical accounts, Hai Rui was a very decent guy and a patriot; he spoke up about what he thought the emperor was doing wrong and was dismissed for his troubles. The deputy mayor's play, *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*, seemed innocent enough on the surface. However, the symbolic package was unwrapped to reveal that the play's release and rise in popular culture was actually part of an organized attack, stemming from the ideo-

<sup>107</sup> The Ming Dynasty ruled China from 1368 to 1644. It was the last dynasty ruled by ethnic Hans (the main Chinese ethnic group) and was replaced by the Manzhou-led (Manchu) Qing Dynasty.

logical line struggle that emerged front and center during the Lushan Meeting in 1959.

At the Lushan Meeting, Peng Dehuai's (Liu Shaoqi's front man) attack on the Great Leap Forward, the communes and the socialist line had failed spectacularly. When Peng was criticized and his ideological line eventually defeated at Lushan, the struggle clarified that what was at stake was whether China should continue socialist development. The Rightist line that he and Liu Shaoqi represented did not go quietly into submission. Instead, the people in power who wanted to go towards, the Rightists, launched a bunch of different attacks in the cultural field, followed by positive arts reviews in the papers, culminating in the play about Hai Rui. They disguised their attack as a personal power struggle, with Peng playing the part of the virtuous official speaking his mind for the good of the country, and Mao as the ruthless emperor who squashed him because he dared to speak up against him.

Another tactic developed too, using Mao's prestige as a way to attack people; people who were interested in their own power found it quite useful to put Mao up on a pedestal and attribute all that was right and wrong in the world to him and how he used his personal power. At the same time the deputy mayor's play was exposed as an ideological struggle and an attack on the socialist line, others began building what would be later called a personality cult around Mao as a way to build their own power. In particular, Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, began to make the rounds wielding her status as the Chairman's wife like a club. Even though a wary Party approved their marriage back in the Yanan days on the condition that she would be barred from all political positions, in the cult-building climate she got herself put in charge of the Cultural Revolution Committee.<sup>108</sup> As Jiang Qing's power grew, she formed a clique around her composed of people who would later be known as the "Gang of Four."

Lin Biao, with a stronghold in the military and ties that would later be linked to the Soviet Union and its revisionist line, said that Mao was "a genius and everything he said was brilliant."<sup>109</sup> He was responsible for publishing the famous *Little Red Book (Quotations From Chairman Mao Zedong)* of Mao's quotes, which people liked quite a lot, and making it the "bible" of the Cultural Revolution, requiring absolute memorization of the text and lots of waving it around—which people eventually did not like as much.<sup>110</sup>

The *Hai Rui* play was criticized in an article written by Yao Wenyan, who would later be included in the "Gang of Four," and Jiang Qing. The article was at first stonewalled by the papers but finally published. Then Nie Yuanzi, a professor at Beijing

<sup>108</sup> The Cultural Revolution Committee was responsible for implementing and overseeing the day-to-day work of the Cultural Revolution. It was set up as a party body outside the Central Committee, because of the perception that the Central was in the grips of the bourgeois line, which would lead it to sabotage the Cultural Revolution for the sake of self-preservation.

<sup>109</sup> Lin Biao was made Defense Minister after Peng Dehuai was removed from his office. He joined the revolution early and became a military commander and party leader in the Anti-Japanese and Civil Wars, eventually leading the Northwest PLA.

<sup>110</sup> *Quotations From Chairman Mao Ze Dong*, popularized in the West as the *Little Red Book*, was originally 200 quotations compiled by the People's Liberation Army Daily, and then eventually revised and published for broad distribution by Lin Biao.

University, along with six other cadres, wrote a big-character poster or *dazibao* criticizing the university's administration late May 1966.<sup>111</sup> Her criticism was of the university president, who actively suppressed any kind of real or transparent debate about the *Hai Rui* play at the university, diverting the issue to academic research about the history of the actual person (Hai Rui) and his life during the Ming Dynasty. When those professors swabbed the back of their poster with rice glue and stuck it on a wall, they initiated a fierce struggle that would sweep through the university and spill over its walled compound to neighboring Qinghua University (Beijing was liberal arts and Qinghua hard sciences), igniting a fire that would end much later with the students engineering cannons to blow each other to smithereens. From the universities, the fire would fan out across the city and through the whole country.

The university president and his administration felt the heat from the *dazibao* and its response and reacted by calling a meeting to condemn the professors as counter-revolutionaries; using the tremendous respect that the overwhelming majority of the people had for the Communist Party, he accused them of attacking the Party itself, because the professors had named party members in leadership as their targets. With that tactic, he was able to mobilize lots of people to join in his condemnation and suppressed the dissent with a heavy hand in mass criticism meetings. But then the Beijing University professors' *dazibao* appeared in the *People's Daily*, along with a few lines refuting the idea that criticizing party leadership was anti-party or anti-communist. That show of support from the top caused an upsurge in the struggle, as more and more students and faculty joined with Nie Yuanzi and her group in struggling with the administration.

After the public approval in the newspaper, Liu Shaoqi, who Mao left in charge while he went south to study the current conditions, sent in work teams under the guise of "aiding" the struggle against the university administration at Beijing University and Qinghua (where his daughter was enrolled). He also sent in his wife, Wang Guangmei, undercover to lead the work teams in their work, using the same Peach Orchard techniques she had refined during the Socialist Education Movement: chanting revolutionary-sounding slogans while engaging in "white terror" tactics to make people challenging the universities' bourgeois practices shut up. Socialist Education Movement style and in defiance of Central Committee directives of isolating the few real troublemakers in power, Wang helped top party cadres maintain their power by turning the attack on the great numbers of ordinary cadres, professors and students. The struggle got hot, with the work teams doing their best to repress the dissent from below, but cooled for a period when Mao returned to Beijing, got wind of what was happening and ordered the work teams' withdrawal.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>111</sup> Big-character posters, or *dazibao*, were the form that free speech took during the Cultural Revolution; students and workers, supplied with free glue and paper, investigated their administrations and leaders and wrote up what they found on giant sheets and pasted them onto walls for public consumption. When Nie Yuanzi wrote hers, the reverberations sounded all the way to the Beijing Party Committee until the removal of the mayor, and consequently, that *dazibao* became known as a marker of the launch of the Cultural Revolution.

<sup>112</sup> The cool down was only temporary because the work team still exerted influence unofficially and the students

Subsequently, the powerful political ties between the Beijing University's administration and the Beijing City Committee were exposed—which brings us back to the rooftop of the Xinqiao Hotel, the drum beating on the streets, and Peng Zhen out on his butt.

Just because Joan and Sid saw the actual march signifying the fall of the Beijing City Committee and what was really the launching of the Cultural Revolution, didn't mean they were any less frozen out from understanding it. Kept out of political study in their work units, Joan and Sid were left to try to figure stuff out on their own with two kids who were getting really beaten down. Billy was just sad—very sad and terribly quiet. But Karen was losing it. The first time that Joan noticed anything strange about Karen was when they all went hiking with the Crooks one weekend. The Crook family was going back to England for a visit, and so they all got together to climb the hills around the Ming Tombs before they left. Karen hung back. Any time anyone looked for her, she was off by herself, unengaged and definitely not having a good time.

A few days later, Karen disappeared from their room at the hotel. Joan and Sid sent Billy to find her, and he did, by talking to the hotel doorman, who as luck would have it turned out to be from Xian. Karen had been thinking hard for a long time about how the hell she was going to get away from her family. She didn't understand why they were installed in a hotel full of foreign correspondents, mostly from Japan. The only thing she could wrap her nine-year-old head around was that her parents were probably imperialist spies, and she was going to get out of there while she still could.

Her plan was to get out to the train tracks and follow them back home to Caotan, where things made so much more sense. But the doorman happened to speak Shaanxi dialect and asked the blond headed little girl where she was going. Because they spoke the same language, she told him, and the doorman kept her talking about it until Billy appeared looking for his sister. The three of them sat and talked for a long while about Xian in their home dialect and then Billy brought Karen back up to the room.

The next few days were rough, as Karen dipped over the edge and began to unravel into a full on nervous breakdown. She began throwing uncontrollable tantrums, where she would destroy anything that was Joan and Sid's (not anything from the hotel, because she made a clear distinction between personal and state property), and accuse them of being "US imperialist spies." She couldn't sleep, she couldn't hear anything her parents tried to explain, and her parents couldn't really explain too much anyway. When school was out for the summer, it was just the four of them in the Xinqiao Hotel with no relief in sight. School was out in Xian too, but they told Fred to stay put; the situation in Beijing was crap, and they would have to send for him once things got better.

Looking to their organization for help, Joan and Sid approached Sid's handler, Li Weihe, because his organization was supposed to be in charge of their housing. They already knew he was an asshole but were still stunned when his solution was to get them another hotel room, so they "could sleep quietly while Karen went berserk" in devolved into factional fighting.

the other room. His other idea was to send Karen to the mental institution. But Joan and Sid knew exactly what was causing their daughter's emotional turmoil—it was the same cause of their own feelings of desperate alienation. It was just that they were adults who had made the conscious decision to commit to a revolution to struggle to build socialism. And even if they were a little fuzzy yet on the details, they knew whatever was happening now was a reflection of that monumental struggle. But Karen had no context for what was going on, and the only way she could make sense of it was that her parents must have done something very, very wrong—an impossible assumption to come to terms with for a little girl in a new city with no one else to turn to.

They did end up taking Karen to a doctor at the Children's Hospital to see if there was anything the doctors could offer to help the situation. Joan found a friend in the doctor who also knew exactly what was wrong with her daughter.

We told the doctor what had happened, and she gave her a complete examination; they found nothing wrong with her. That doctor was so good. That was just the time that the *Little Red Book* came out. Lin Biao made the little red book of Mao's quotations, and of course foreigners were not allowed to even see the book, much less have a copy. And against the law, she gave that little girl her own little red book. God, when I think of it now, tears come to my eyes... Karen just loved that little red book. That was the cure that the doctor gave us.

Clearly Li Weihe was going to be useless to them, so Joan and Sid took matters into their own hands. They called Bertha, told her what was happening and asked for her help. Bertha, without blinking, told them to move in with her and Carma immediately. They didn't think twice before packing up their stuff and moving into the Foreign Languages Press compound. The compound was close to the Beijing zoo as well as the train station, so during the day Joan took the kids to see the animals and watch the trains (Billy's favorite). On the streets, Karen had sudden violent fits, turning to spit in her mother's face. Passersby shook their heads, thinking she was just a spoiled kid.

At night, Karen couldn't fall asleep, so Joan held her. The minute she made a move to get up, Karen would freak out, so she had to sit very still holding her until finally she was finally deeply asleep. Joan bore the brunt of Karen's meltdown.

Sometimes I had to take Karen to work too. And in my office, she'd take her nose snot out and stick it in my mouth. She was just beside herself; she didn't know what hit her. We took her out every day, and she'd be walking along and all of a sudden she'd turn around and start hitting me... I didn't know what hit us either. I remember in the office, with Karen putting her nose goo in my mouth, being sort of teary eyed at noon when nobody was there thinking, "What in the hell is going on? What *is* this that's hit us?" I had to take that kid and what could I do, just what could I do?

Wang Ge from Joan's organization was one of the few people who seemed to

understand and care about what was going on, so they asked her to find a place for them to go in the countryside to get Karen back into a familiar environment. She went to work on it and finally found a way. The work at the Bureau for Movie Distribution and the Committee for Cultural Relations had sort of ground to a halt, as the Cultural Revolution began to put question marks and big characters (in the form of posters) in the minds of everyone working in the superstructure about their work and their leadership. So Wang Ge set it up so that they could spend two months at the Chinese-Albanian Friendship Commune, just east of the city working in agriculture for the summer. She even decided to go along, bringing her daughter with her.

So the family moved again, but this time to an environment that Karen could understand. A young woman on the farm took her under her wing and up into the trees of the orchards to pick fruit, and at night she went back to sleeping on hard bed boards just like back home. The commune workers treated them like they were a normal Chinese family with normal Chinese kids. Billy remembered how to smile again, and Karen calmed way down, gradually getting better and better until she could sleep at night. Within a few weeks, she was basically back to herself, even though she was always very high-strung.

While they were getting their hands back in the dirt and feet back on the ground, their two organizations were trying to solve the problem of where to house them in the city. Sid's co-workers all lived in a block of apartments just west of the city center, so their handlers made arrangements for them to move into a place there, but it fell through at the last minute. The next place on the list was an old landlord's courtyard right in the shadow of Tiananmen Square behind the Great Hall of the People; the place was newly vacant because the family that had been living there before had been criticized for living in such a privileged place. Thinking of what they had just been through with Karen, Sid tried to say no nicely, but Joan's face turned to stone, and she immediately put her foot down. Her daughter had just gotten back to a bit of normalcy, and there was no way in hell she was going to install her in a landlord's courtyard off the site where throngs of people gathered every day. They kept looking.

Even though the original plan was to stay and work at the Chinese-Albanian Friendship Commune for two months, about halfway through the Cultural Revolution erupted at Joan's organization, Duiwai Wenwei, the Association for Culture and Friendship with Foreign Countries. Mao was on his investigatory tour around China to see for himself what was really happening, Liu Shaoqi was in charge, and Zhou Enlai, who was in charge of the Foreign Ministry, was in Albania. While he was gone, 29 people from Duiwai Wenwei, which fell under the leadership of the Foreign Ministry, wrote a *dazibao* criticizing a cadre in the leadership, exposing some of the problems in the foreign affairs section of the State Council. Their poster drew a lot of attention because their target was so high up and deep in the Party, prompting a meeting where the signers were branded the "Twenty-nine Counter-Revolutionaries."

Zhou Enlai heard a report about it when he got back into the country and immediately put out a statement to the Foreign Ministry reiterating that criticizing party

members and party leadership was not the equivalent of being anti-party or counter-revolutionary. The verdict on the 29 was reversed. There was a lot going on at Duiwai Wenwei, and Wang Ge found she couldn't stay on the sidelines at the commune anymore.

Karen was much calmer, and Billy wasn't crying on Monday mornings any more. But there was still the question of just where their family was going to go back to. Bertha's apartment was not a permanent solution; it was pretty crowded with four additional people. In the end Wang Ge came through for them again, getting them permission to live where the rest of their work unit from Duiwai Wenwei (the Association for Culture and Friendship with Foreign Countries) lived. The area was called Sanlitun, and actually it was the place where all the embassies set up shop—but within the compound there was a Chinese section where people from Duiwai Wenwei lived. Wang Ge told them about the cafeteria and health clinic, and most importantly, the elementary school where Billy and Karen could go to school with the other Chinese kids in the compound. True, Sanlitun was a compound full of people with special privileges, high cadres who worked in the Foreign Ministry. But it seemed like it was the only place they were going to be allowed to live where their family could actually be part of a Chinese community. The deal clincher was when Joan looked on a map and saw that there was a marshy area and some fields behind the compound where the kids could play. They said OK.

When they moved back to Beijing, they bypassed the Xinqiao Hotel, picked up their stuff from Bertha's and moved into Sanlitun but only after a wait for a bathtub to be installed in one of the bathrooms; somehow people had the idea that all foreigners had to take baths. Joan raised her usual objections to no avail—but she “never ever took one bath in that bathtub.” They got two apartments, one for the kids and the new *baomu*, also called Dama, and one for Joan and Sid across the hall. Dama worked with a family whose father was the head of a musical group and had committed suicide after he was attacked during the Socialist Education Movement. No one was supposed to have a *baomu* by then, so Dama had to leave that family—but because Joan and Sid were foreigners (Foreign Experts no less), they were able to employ her.

Stoked from the fire inside Beijing University and then Qinghua, groups of young people calling themselves Red Guards began to form, ready to take up the call to make revolution, until most college and some high school aged youth belonged to one Red Guard group or another<sup>113</sup>. On August 16, the day the family returned to Beijing, Mao met them as a group for the first time on Tiananmen Square. The crowd was enormous and the energy high, as the throngs of youth listened to Mao encourage them to spark the movement.

Eight days earlier, Mao had released an article documenting 16 critical points and guidelines around which the Cultural Revolution should be waged. One focus of

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<sup>113</sup> The Red Guards originated from the children of high cadres, formed to defend their parents. Although they started out as fighting for the interests of the elite, Red Guards quickly evolved to any group of young people that participated in the struggle during the Cultural Revolution.

the 16 Points was youth and students, galvanizing them to go make revolution—to, as Mao put it, shed the country of “old ideas, old culture, old customs, [and] old habits” based on feudal ideology. Their task was to go into the villages and factories and challenge and overthrow the bureaucratic leadership that was beginning to consolidate its own power. Supporting and sending out the Red Guards was the Party’s way to spark the Cultural Revolution all over the country. Explicit in the guidelines was also that the Red Guards, provided they were not engaging in any kind of criminal activity (real criminal activity, versus perceived, like challenging authority), were not to be hassled or detained by public security; they should go freely and unmolested to conduct their investigations and struggles.

Part of the “going freely” meant that the government had to give them the means. So all Red Guards, all the youth, got a free pass on all the trains—a free pass to go off and find out what was happening in the rest of the country. Hordes and hordes of youth jammed the railways, car after car, folded and tucked in like sardines so that to get off at their stop they had to literally climb out a window. They rode the trains from the southern province of Guangzhou to Xinjiang Province in the far northwest and everywhere in between. Youth to whom traveling even to the next province had previously been unthinkable left school and set out; most people in old China rarely left their own village, much less got on a train for the far reaches.

The process may have looked sort of chaotic on the surface with kids cramming into trains and arriving suddenly to conduct their social investigations, but it was actually by necessity well organized in the important areas like food, shelter and political mobilization. Once the Red Guards decided where they wanted to stop and do their work, organizations in cities and villages spent public funds to host them, opening up their offices for bedrolls (Joan’s organization put down straw on their concrete office floors) at night and feeding them during the day. Of course many youth poured into Beijing to get a peek at the capital and on August 16 when they massed on Tiananmen Square, Mao tied on a red armband to show his support for their movement. After that first meeting, Beijing exploded with paper—to Joan, “The city sort of looked like it was snowing after that. You’ve never seen anything like it—everybody was writing *dazibao*. All over the streets were full of white paper...”

The launching of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution—made official when the *People’s Daily* published Mao’s article calling on people to “Bombard the Headquarters” because there were “Khrushchevs nestled right beside us,” and articulated by the 16 Point guideline—marked the first time that Mao went outside party channels to rectify the Party and fight for the continuation of the socialist revolution.<sup>114</sup> In 1958 Mao had stepped down from the Chairmanship of the Party leaving Liu Shaoqi in charge (who then made a planned disaster out of the Socialist Education Movement). Khrushchev’s antics after Stalin’s death, which lead to the eventual fracture between the two parties shook Mao and gave him pause—not just in terms of the international

<sup>114</sup> Mao Zedong wrote his comment on August 5, 1966 during the Eleventh Plenary Session of the Eighth Central Committee of the CPC, and the *People’s Daily* published it the same day.



context of former allies and the growing list of enemies aiming to surround and suffocate China, but also internally. What happened in the Soviet Union? And more importantly, how had the established socialist state, which had shown the way for and given so much support to many burgeoning socialist countries, struck out on the path to peaceful coexistence with imperialist countries in less than a generation of leadership?

The answer for him did not lie in the strength of Stalin's character, nor the many heavy-handed mistakes that he made while in power, but rather in the theory Mao was formulating around class relationships in socialist societies. The theory took shape and got legs through the experiences accumulated from the Anti-Rightist Movement, the Great Leap Forward, and the Socialist Education Movement, which were all led and ultimately led astray by party leaders.

What Mao articulated during his time studying the situation was that although the economic base became socialist in 1956, it took more than economics to make a socialist state, just as overthrowing the Guomindang didn't mean that the roots of feudal and capitalist class relationships had all been dug up and killed. After all, mobilizing the great masses of peasants to throw off the despotic landlords and people in power who were beholden to those landlords—and to drive out the Japanese invaders—was different from an explicitly socialist revolution. Although socialism was of course the plan, the Party's program for revolution had to be based on what was actually happening in the country, and what the great majority of the people could get behind. What they were behind and what won the revolution was the overthrow of the oppressive landlords who were exploiting the people and the imperialist invaders who coveted China as a client state.

Without continuous pressing ahead in the transformation of people's ideology, the bulk of the people in China would not be able to recognize the leaders in the Party "taking the capitalist road" and understand what it would mean for them. While many people got a taste of it from previous movements to mobilize production through individual incentives (i.e. get paid according to how many healthy ducks you raise), most people could and would be pretty easily swayed by their own interests if people at the top promoted it, which is the situation in China today.

Never one to believe that China could actually move ahead with building a socialist state without a clear understanding by and support of the masses, Mao conceived of the Cultural Revolution as a continuation of the socialist revolution, one that would continue to seek the transformation of the ideology of the great majority of the people. And, because party leaders who were "taking the capitalist road" had proven that they were capable of and willing to lead China down the path already bushwhacked by Khrushchev, the bull's-eye had to be on them. The Cultural Revolution was a movement to sharpen the people's abilities to recognize leaders on that revisionist road, zero in on that bull's-eye, and stop the "capitalist roaders," as they became known, from gaining control of the Party and the country.

With the target up high and in the Party and because of the great examples of previous movements, clearly party leaders could not be called upon again to implement

the very movement that would put them under the microscope of the masses. So the Cultural Revolution was led through news in the *People's Daily*, available and accessible to almost everyone, and carried out by the Red Guards, who, given the means, quickly fanned out across the country. Joan thought about what that might look like back home:

They... [Red Guards] went out to investigate the leadership... It happened all over the country. I was thinking that it was like if the US government had a leader that said, "OK, all you college kids and all you office workers, just stop what you're doing now. Go into the files and investigate all the leaders and see what they've been doing. Is it for the people or not for the people?" Oh boy. That was what was going on.

As part of the investigation, the Cultural Revolution called for people to take over the leadership of their organizations, from production brigades to steel plants to all the administrative offices in big cities. This was supposed to be strictly a paper revolution, the only revolution in the history of the world that was waged almost exclusively with words on paper, and one that was internal to China. There were only three exceptions to the call to take power: Radio China International, the Foreign Affairs Ministry and the People's Liberation Army. Spreading the Cultural Revolution to Radio China and the Foreign Affairs Ministry would make the country too vulnerable in its increasingly turbulent international waters. Taking it to the PLA would lead to the real possibility of armed struggle among and against the people.

As the Cultural Revolution grew wings, the "Four Great Rights of Great Democracy" (the proletarian kind, not the bourgeois kind where you have the right to vote for people who all hold the class interests of the elite) were the winds that helped it take flight: the right to speak out freely, to air one's views fully, to write big-character posters and to hold great debates. These rights were one of the 16 points later instituted into the Constitution.

Charting the direction and fighting for the survival of this fledgling bird proved to be an epic struggle in the coming years. At stake was just what kind of country China would become. Would it continue its revolutionary founding along the path of socialism, made by and for the benefit of the great majority of the people? Or would it instead be wrenched over to the other side of history, where, as in the Soviet Union, the State would raise the red flag of the people, while beating them down with the pole?

Few people in China at that time had any idea just how epic a struggle the Cultural Revolution would become, nor the enormity of what was at stake. Certainly, Joan and Sid, trying to swim in a sea churning with baits, traps and sharks—chauffeured cars, golden ghettos and attacks on their children—had a hard time seeing anything with any clarity. But of one thing they were entirely convinced from all of their time and experiences in China: they believed in socialism and they believed in their responsibility to struggle for it. Mao said that there were people in power in the Party who were taking the capitalist road. The people were being mobilized into a force to root

out who they were and deny them that road. They were damned if they weren't going to be part of that force.

## Chapter 32

# Snake Spirits

*“Mao, the ultra-Left and the Right formed a very complicated triangle; the bourgeoisie are dead enemies of each other, and the proletariat is an enemy of both.” Joan Hinton*

On the Fourth of July of 1966, before the family left for the Chinese-Albanian Friendship Commune to try to regain their footing, some of the Americans in Beijing organized a picnic at the Summer Palace, an old imperial garden. Most of the foreigners in the city gathered and socializing took the form of debating the political situation; some were old hands like Joan and Sid and the Crooks and some had just arrived—mostly communists and communist sympathizers (also known as fellow travelers) from the US or Europe who came to work and support China. Ann Tompkins was one of the more recent arrivals, and Joan found her response to the foreigners’ isolation refreshing.

Ann Tompkins was so surprised, because she had been following the Chinese revolution... and she was all excited to come to China. Then she was stuck in a hole with a typewriter, and she couldn’t understand it. And the other people were all explaining it to her, as though that was the way it had to be. But then she asked us, and of course we had just come to Beijing, and we said that we had no idea. We’d never had anything like before. Somehow we struck up an immediate friendship against the thing.

So one day late in the summer, after Joan and Sid and the kids moved into their new place and after Mao met the Red Guards on the square and the city exploded in a snowstorm of big-character posters, Ann Tompkins called Joan up and asked her to go out and read *dazibaos* with her. Ann didn’t read any Chinese and almost everything about the Cultural Revolution was being promulgated and transmitted onto the streets of the cities and countryside villages on sheets of big white paper. She wanted to see what people were talking about and uncovering. And while Joan’s Chinese, planted and raised in North Shaanxi study sessions on the farm, was not overly sophisticated, she could still more or less make out what it meant.

By then, Joan and Sid’s polishing work—stacks of articles ready for copyediting—were sent to them at their home, because almost all foreigners were given polite encouragement to stay out of the office; the climate had turned increasingly to scapegoating foreigners as a diversionary tactic which was bringing accusations of spying and the like. Joan and Sid, while not directly accused, found that their presence at work meant additional tension and unease for the rest of the workers. Joan, happy to leave her boring polishing work to another day, agreed, and the two got on their bikes and rode through the city. Stopping to read whatever caught Joan’s eye, they ended up south of Tiananmen Square in the main shopping area of Wangfujing, where they saw a *dazibao* that would change the course of their destiny in the Cultural Revolution.

Written by a group of ethnic Chinese who had come from overseas to support the Chinese revolution, the *dazibao* protested how they were being isolated from the Chinese people and treated like they were foreigners who had to be given special considerations.

Hearts palpitating a bit, Ann and Joan looked at each other and asked, “Why don’t we write one too?” Once the idea took hold, they couldn’t contain their excitement, and they sped back to Sanlitun. They burst into the apartment to tell “old conservative Sid” as he was sometimes called, about their inspiration and Sid, after some initial questions and reservations, agreed that it was a good idea. Their next stop was to call upon Bertha, who was also upset with the ways things were going in the foreigner community, and who was equally enthusiastic.

From that point forward, the four friends spent ten of the most intense, emotionally charged days of their lives battling out just what their *dazibao* should say. For the first time since they’d been frozen out during the Socialist Education Movement, Joan and Sid found a way to participate in the struggle to make their voices heard. Forced to work from home completely divorced from production with their kids in elite schools and going crazy, here, finally, was something they could do.

Every day we rode our bikes to the Foreign Languages Press [where Bertha lived] to work on it. We fought and fought, and we got into tears about just how we were going to say this and how we were going to say that. With Karen and our kids and all our problems, not knowing what it was, I felt like a female tiger having her cubs taken away from her. I was really pissed off. Karen went berserk and Billy was weeping, and the whole revolution I came to, the whole reason for being in China had disappeared.

As engaged as they were, though, there was one logistical problem: none of them were especially literate in Chinese. But Bertha and Bill’s daughter Carma, just 16 years old, worked with them to make their non-native Chinese better and more concise, and write the *dazibao* out after they finally agreed on every hard-fought word in the over-the-top language that characterized the Cultural Revolution:

*Why is it that foreigners working here in the heart of the world revolution are being pushed down the revisionist road?*

*What devils, demons, and snake spirits are behind the treatment of foreigners working in China?*

*Why is it that foreigners regardless of class or attitude toward the revolution, all get the same 5-don’t have, 2-have treatment?:*

*“5 Don’t-haves”*

- 1) Physical labor*
- 2) Ideological remolding*
- 3) Contact with workers and peasants*
- 4) Class struggle*

*5) Struggle for Production*

*“2 Haves”*

*1) Super-high living standards*

*2) Special treatment*

*What kind of thought is behind this treatment?*

*It is not Mao Zedong Thought!*

*It is Khrushchev’s Thought!*

*It is revisionist thought!*

*It is the thought of the exploiting classes!*

*What is the object, what is the result of this treatment?*

*1) To prevent foreigners who want to be revolutionaries from grasping Chairman Mao’s Thought!*

*2) To gradually soften up revolutionary foreigners living in China and push them down the revisionist road.*

*3) To prevent foreign children brought up in China from becoming revolutionaries.*

*4) To isolate foreign revolutionaries from their Chinese brothers, to break down their mutual class love, to undermine proletarian internationalism!*

*We think this is not a question of a few individuals, but a question of principle related to world revolution.*

*We resolutely oppose this kind of treatment!*

*We are determined to become real revolutionaries!*

*We are determined to become staunch fighters against revisionism!*

*We are determined to steel ourselves for an all-out struggle against US imperialism!*

*Our children must become staunch successors to the revolution! They must never be allowed to become revisionists!*

*Therefore, we request:*

*1) That we be treated not like bourgeois experts but like class brothers.*

*2) That we be permitted and encouraged to join physical labor.*

*3) That we be given every assistance in our ideological remolding.*

*4) That we be permitted and encouraged to have close contact with workers and peasants.*

*5) That we be permitted and encouraged to join the three great revolutionary movements.<sup>115</sup>*

*6) That our children be treated the same as Chinese children and have the same*

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<sup>115</sup> The three great revolutionary movements are: production, scientific experimentation and class struggle.

*strict demands made on them.*

*7) That our living standard be the same as that of Chinese personnel of the same category.*

*8) That special treatment be abolished.*

*Only in this way is there a chance for us to become revolutionaries of the kind called for by Chairman Mao Zedong!*

*Long Live the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution!*

*Long Live the Great Unity of the People of the World!*

*Long Live the Great, Invincible Thought of Mao Zedong!*

*Long Live the Great Leader of the Chinese people, the International Proletariat, the Oppressed People, and Oppressed Nations—Comrade Mao Zedong!!!*

The last emotional battle was about how to sign their work. The whole idea was thought up by Joan and Ann, but Sid and Bertha had equal contributions in the actual writing—Sid was also the one who, after Mao's first and only *dazibao* came out on August 23<sup>rd</sup> saying "Bombard the Headquarters! There are Khrushchevs nestled right beside us," thought to add in the line about "Khrushchev's Thought." Alphabetical order wasn't possible with Chinese characters. Ann suggested signing it in a circle to denote the equal partnership, but it didn't fly with the others. So they finally decided that it should be signed in the order of "arrival" to the revolution—with Sid first, because of his 1947 arrival to the Liberated Area of Yanan. That never sat right with Ann, who objected to Sid being first, because it made it look like he was the main author and because he was a man. But with no better solution, they signed it that way and called it done on August 28, 1966.

Through all of their struggles and debates long into the long hot nights in August, they had never really talked about just what they were going to do with it once they finished. Ann, Sid and Bertha all agreed that Joan's defiant idea of hanging it in front of the Friendship Hotel itself was probably not the best of tactics. But if they just handed it to someone in the hotel, they were afraid it might vanish into the abyss.<sup>116</sup> So they gathered up their document and went downstairs in Bertha's apartment building at the Foreign Languages Press to ask their friends, old China hands Eppy (Israel Epstein) and Elsie (the farm girl who had helped Joan buy bulls), for their advice. They knew they would be at home, like all the other foreigners, iced out of their organizations.

After consulting and discussing the group finally decided to try to get their message out through two different paths; they dropped one in the mailbox downstairs from the Foreign Languages Press addressed directly to the Cultural Revolution Committee. And then the four of them mounted their bikes and rode over to the Foreign Experts Bureau, where they asked to see the "person in charge." They were led to a room where they waited for a while until a person appeared who said he was the guy and handed

<sup>116</sup> They were focused on the Friendship Hotel because it was the center of all the foreigners' activities, but also because the Foreign Experts' Bureau was located in the compound.

him their *dazibao*. He accepted, said “thank you” and left. The four trickled out of the building feeling a little deflated; after ten days of intense struggle with passionate tears to articulate what they believed in and were fighting for, the actual “getting it out there” turned out to be downright anti-climactic.

The following week, Joan met some friends at the Friendship Hotel, and when they went down to the cafeteria to eat they noticed that the workers there were much more friendly to them than before, more smiley. They didn’t know what was up, but they found out later that their *dazibao* did not disappear into a vacuum as they feared. Instead, it was pasted up in a room at the Foreign Experts Bureau, already plastered with *dazibao* internal to their organization, for people within the Bureau to read. From there, Red Guards copied it and started spreading it in wider and wider circles until finally someone just copied and posted it at the Foreign Languages Press. Once it hit the streets there, there was no stopping it—their *dazibao* traveled by train in the notebooks of Red Guards all over the country.

It even made its way down to their old stomping grounds in Xian.

The Cultural Revolution had already broken out in Xian, but people on the farm were still in the grips of the Socialist Education Movement work team and kept completely in the dark about anything else that might be going on in the rest of the country. No one was allowed to go into the city without permission, and those who did go, usually because of some cadre meeting, were under strict orders not to talk about what they saw there with anyone else on the farm. Fred, still in Xian, went back to Caotan when his school was over and told some of his parents’ friends that he had seen a copy of a *dazibao* that Joan and Sid had written in Beijing—that in fact the whole city of Xian was plastered with posters. Fred’s loose lips were met by the work team’s angry criticism and an order to shut up about anything he saw going on in the city.

But keeping that kind of secret on that kind of scale was bound to fail sooner or later—especially when the people who were trying to keep the secret were as despised as the work team was. There would inevitably come that day when people’s anger and sense of justice would overcome their fear. That day for Caotan was the day the Party called its members into Xian to hear a report. It turned out to be a long meeting that ran into lunch plus siesta time, so a couple of Caotan cadres slipped out to do some poking around. They knew through back alley whispers that the leader of the work team was the director of a factory in the city, so they took the truck there to see what was happening on his home turf.

What they saw was the entire factory plastered in paper—white sheets draped from floor to ceiling stained with damning characters exposing the Director’s actions and accusing him of being a capitalist roader. For the Caotan cadres, blood already at a slow boil from all of their wronged comrades driven to suicide and humiliated and isolated from the world and the Cultural Revolution, getting that eyeful was like a shot in the arm. They were furious; the guy was terrorizing the people on the farm who had done nothing wrong at the same time he was getting criticized and exposed by the cadres and workers at his own factory for all kinds of questionable things he was



doing there!

Keeping a lid on the revelation and trying to keep their cool, the cadres participated in the rest of the meeting and rode the truck back to the farm with the others. As soon as they got back, they organized a meeting of people they knew were ready to act. Since it was the Cultural Revolution in the form of *dazibao* that broke through the “White Terror” for them, they decided to write a huge big-character poster to share what they had found to the rest of the farm. That night, the group got the biggest sheet of paper they could find and went to work. As they filled up the white sheet with their message, a member of the work team walked in on them, demanding to know what they were up to. Maybe a little shaken but steeled by their new knowledge, they responded calmly that they were writing a big-character poster. And when the guy said that they had to have permission from the work team to do such a thing, they replied that they didn’t have permission but were doing it anyway.

The *dazibao* went up the next day; they hung it up with streamers in the cafeteria so that everyone who came for breakfast would see it. The title read: “Good News!” What followed was an exposé of all of the problems that the factory workers had unearthed about the head of the Caotan work team.

The farm erupted—or, as Sid said (describing what happened as recounted by farm cadres who looked up their old friends when they came to Beijing), “All hell broke loose.” They had been living under such fear and repression for so long and so many people had died; finding out that the head of the work team was being so severely criticized in his home base ripped the lid off of their fear. They sent ten of their burliest guys out with the truck to pick him up in the city, and when they returned, workers and cadres poured out of each station. They had a lot to say to him.

[T]he main road from the East Station goes to the farm headquarters and then out to the West Station, and then out to another place farther west. They were gonna take him to the farm headquarters, but when they got to the East Station the people just blocked the road. They insisted that he had to be struggled against there before he could go to the headquarters. ...[T]here was about five days that he was passed around being struggled against.<sup>117</sup>

After everyone said their piece, they began thinking about what kind of punishment to give him.

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<sup>117</sup> “Struggling” in the Cultural Revolution took the form of criticism meetings and “struggle sessions” where the target stood in a room to hear all of the objections and problems people had with them. They had to answer to the masses and were asked to give self-criticisms. In the years after the coup in China in 1979, propaganda to repudiate the Cultural Revolution often centered around descriptions of these sessions as “public torture and humiliation.” In some cases where factionalism took hold among the masses, some people were wrongly accused and made to endure standing with hands tied with signs around their necks or hats on their heads. However, the great majority of the sessions served to expose the issues and give the accused the opportunity to face their issues openly, to genuinely struggle with the problems that the masses had with them and to accept and unite, or find common ground, with their criticism.

But then an order came down about the people who had carried out this “White Terror” in the Socialist Education Movement. The main fault was not theirs; they were carrying out a party line, which was of course Liu Shaoqi’s line [propagated by the Peach Orchard Experience], and that they should be criticized but that was all. Nothing more could be done to them. The reasoning was that they were just doing what they were being told to do by the Party.

By the time those cadres cast the first stone in the water sending waves of the Cultural Revolution washing over the farm that led to the ouster of the work team, eight people had died at Caotan, plus one more at a farm nearby. All of them, and all of the other people accused, locked up and interrogated, were completely exonerated. The orchard technician had a particularly sweet vindication when the apple orchards produced a bumper crop as the result of his “sabotage.” The only people found to be really corrupt were the three people the Caotan farm had already discovered before the Socialist Education Movement work team even got there.

The Cultural Revolution in Caotan was a mighty liberating force and because people recognized it as such, they took the movement to heart. Later, when factionalism burrowed its way into the surrounding areas, it was the Caotan people who prevented the struggle among the people from crossing the line into armed conflict.<sup>118</sup> When the neighboring farm workers dropped their milk buckets to go to Beijing in protest, Caotan workers did double duty, first feeding and milking their herds, and then heading down the road to save those cows from a painful demise. And when the milk plant workers took off as part of the Cultural Revolution struggle, the farm dealt with its inability to send the milk to the city by selling it to Caotan families. Joan was happy to hear the story debunking what she had always suspected was a myth about Chinese people not being able to digest milk.

The farm started getting rid of the milk at the various stations to the people who lived and worked there. They made the price very low, say about three cents or something, and the people went with a little cup one day—the next day they went with a *guo* [cooking pot]. They learned to drink milk so fast! Everybody learned to drink milk, and they used it to make all sorts of things. Then of course the workers at the plant came back, and when they sent the milk to the city again, the people got mad: “You just got us used to drinking milk and now you take it away!”

Through all of the intricacies of the movement, through all the struggles the Caotan workers went through, they did what they always had done—what most people in production did with consistency—they kept the work going.

So while the administrative workers and students and other people in the super-

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<sup>118</sup> Factionalism is usually a petit bourgeois expression of a contradiction (or contradictions) between people in a political group or organization that results in divisions into sides taking entrenched positions. Factionalism occurs most often when contradictions are not resolved through principled line struggle.

structure left their offices and classrooms to make revolution, the engine of the country continued to run fueled by the hands and backs of the masses of people in production. Brigade members, state farm workers and men and women on the factory floor made revolution too—in fact they were often at the forefront, uncovering and analyzing the actions of the leadership, seizing control of their own production and changing the historical landscape of workers' relationship with their work. But in general, they also worked. And that meant that all through the Cultural Revolution, everyone had food to eat, a roof over their head and all of the basic necessities of life. And with free train rides, free paper and free ink, most everyone also had the means to actively participate in the struggle. That was new for any country in the midst of a revolution.

For Joan, seeing the Cultural Revolution unfold in Beijing helped her really understand the relationship between intellectuals and workers, and the superstructure and production.

Those intellectuals never think of that, they never think, “Well how come I’m able to eat every day? And how come I get my wages every month?” ... The Cultural Revolution was in the superstructure, not in the economic base. We just happened to come to the superstructure to witness that the country can get along without the superstructure, at least for a certain period of time... [C]ritics of the Cultural Revolution always turn it around and say that we lost so much and everything was chaos. It was a sort of chaos, but it was a very strange, particular kind of chaos. Because as long as the proletariat [line] had the guns... and didn’t use them against the people, it was a paper war.

[I]t was only in certain places like Wuhan and Xian where capitalist roaders were able to whip up factions to the point of using guns to shoot each other. The fight of the proletariat was to absolutely not allow that to happen. One of the strict rules was that the PLA was not allowed to join in the Cultural Revolution; there would be no shooting of any people... It was the first time in history that the [leaders with the] proletariat [line] could allow people to rise up and write *dazibao* and criticize the whole government. Look at the difference between that and 6.4 [the Tiananmen Square Massacre].<sup>119</sup> They rose up and just said a little bit, and they all got shot. That right there is the difference between the dictatorship of the proletariat

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<sup>119</sup> The Tiananmen Square Massacre, or Liu-Si (Six-Four) in Chinese—because the massacre occurred on June 4—happened in 1989 in a decisive act by the State to put down any notion of dissent. Begun mostly by students clamoring for “Western-style” or bourgeois democracy, the State became fearful only after highly organized workers turned out the support the students and demonstrate their own opposition to the rampant corruption and injustice that spread quickly after the coup after Mao died. This slaughter of hundreds of unarmed people was the first time that many in China understood how the nature of the State had changed, as they ordered the People’s Liberation Army to open fire on the people. They had to bring in PLA units from outside of Beijing, which would believe their characterization of the demonstrations as “counter-revolutionary,” in order to demonstrate to the Chinese people and world that it would not tolerate any mass actions that would threaten its image as a safe site for cheap export production with a highly disciplined workforce.

and the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. The very people who later took power and were responsible for 6.4 were the ones who were instigating these shooting wars everywhere they could during the Cultural Revolution.

In the superstructure's home base of Beijing, Eppy and Elsie saw Sid, Joan, Bertha and Ann's *dazibao* become public and immediately wrote a supporting *dazibao*, followed by one written by a group of Japanese comrades. By early September, the foreigner community was abuzz with those three posters and what was right and what was wrong about them. More or less kicked out of their organizations, most gathered during the day to talk about what was happening all around them. The center of that activity was the Friendship Hotel, and at the hotel the foreigners met for hot debates resulting in a split into two big groups in support of and opposition to the posters.

On September 10<sup>th</sup>, Joan and Sid got a call instructing them to wait at home for a car to pick them up on official business. Soon a black limousine appeared out front, and they were driven to the office of the Foreign Affairs section of the State Council. They had a sneaking suspicion that the appearance of the limo had something to do with their *dazibao*, which was confirmed when they saw Bertha and Ann, soon followed by Eppy, Elsie and the Japanese Six. Led into a big room and seated around a big table, the instructions were to wait: Chen Yi, the Foreign Minister, had something to say to them. What he said made Joan's head spin.

He said, "Mao agrees with your *dazibao*." Oh my god. How did Mao get to see our *dazibao*? ... You can just imagine how we felt when he said that; it was just incredible. And then he said, "But why did you wait till now? We've been waiting for you foreigners to speak for a long time. Why did you only speak now?" We got criticized for not talking sooner.

Then he gave us a long spiel. He talked a little bit about the present situation and said that sometimes we had to put out a red carpet for real [political] reactionaries. Being a foreign minister, he said he had to welcome countries with all kinds of different kinds of societies and different kinds of people as their heads... Then he talked to us about the Cultural Revolution, what the purpose was and how it was the chance to unearth all the problems in the society. Then he said we [foreigners] could join the Cultural Revolution. Course we hadn't asked to join the Cultural Revolution—we'd asked to be treated the same as Chinese, that we weren't being treated the way revolutionary foreigners should be treated. But he said we could join.

Chen Yi, an old revolutionary cadre, was a bit of a character, and he told them all of this sort of mumbling, taking long drags off his cigarette. He also said that although Mao looked at their *dazibao* and agreed with it, that didn't mean he agreed with *all* of it. But the impact of those words, "Mao agrees with your *dazibao*"—after months of being accused of spying, ostracized by their co-workers, and their kids relentlessly tormented—melted away the knot that had tightened in their consciousness.

Joan walked outside, light on her feet.

When I came out of that meeting, I remember going past Tiananmen [Square] and seeing some Tibetan woman there and I had the strangest feeling... Liberation liberated the Tibetan serfs who were barely treated as animals before '49. And here I was liberated too... How did Mao know how they felt and especially how I felt? We were just such a tiny, tiny problem. He had to think about the whole world and all of China... the problems of foreigners were 0.00001%. How come Mao could understand our problem? He couldn't possibly have felt what we felt; he couldn't possibly have felt the oppression that we felt.

It was a tremendous feeling, and understanding of how a proletarian leader, a real proletarian leader has to be able to understand the oppression of all people, every kind of oppression and be able to act principled about it. You could see from the struggle that it was a question of principle how you treated foreign revolutionaries. The business had been coming down trying to build bourgeois nationalism.<sup>120</sup> So as I see it, it was a fight between the Liu/Deng line and Mao's line: bourgeois nationalism and proletarian internationalism.<sup>121</sup> That was why our *dazibao* hit a key place—we just happened to be the first to hit it.

With the go ahead from Mao via the Foreign Minister, foreigners got together to “make revolution.” Since they were still on ice as far as their own work organizations went, they sent a representative to talk to the “rebel group” at the Friendship Hotel made up of the Chinese workers.<sup>122</sup> Both groups agreed that it would be better for the foreigners to have their own group and that they would work closely together. So they formed what was known then as their own “fighting group” called the Bethune-Yanan Rebel Regiment.<sup>123</sup>

The vast majority of the sizeable foreigner population in Beijing joined in, creating a big organization in need of leadership. The first group of leaders included five people from five different countries: Eppy, who called himself “stateless” (because what would later become Warsaw, where he was born, was part of Imperial Russia at the time); Anne Perone, a French woman; Kathaswami, a Sri Lankan; someone from Chile; and Sid from the US. Bethune-Yanan members self-selected and divided ranks into different sections, mostly according to where people worked. The Foreign Lan-

<sup>120</sup> Bourgeois nationalism is a Marxist term referring to the division of people by nationality, race, ethnicity or religion, to promote disunity among people who share the same class interests

<sup>121</sup> Proletarian internationalism is a Marxist term referring to the division of people according to class interests as opposed to nation, race, ethnicity or religion.

<sup>122</sup> In the language of the Cultural Revolution, groups that got together within organizations or institutions were called “fighting groups” or “rebel groups.”

<sup>123</sup> The group was named after Norman Bethune, a Canadian surgeon who saved many lives on the front lines of the Anti-Japanese War, and died of blood poisoning in the field when he cut himself while operating on an infected soldier. He was held up as an example of the spirit of internationalism and selflessness.

guages Institute had its own section, which included the Crooks back from England, and Radio China had its own section, made up mostly of Latin Americans.

Immediately after Bethune-Yanan's formation, the rebels at the Foreign Experts Bureau made contact and pledged to work together. One of the first things they did together was to organize a big meeting of all the foreigners working in China to criticize the special treatment and xenophobia of the Experts' Bureau's line.<sup>124</sup> Everyone got up and made speeches about what had been happening to them. Joan's speech was all about what had happened to their family since they'd gotten to Beijing, the contrast to how they had lived their lives before and especially what happened to their kids.

On the heels of Mao's official approval of their *dazibao* and permission to join the Cultural Revolution, each foreigner began to demand entry into his or her organization's fighting groups. Many were met with resistance, but it was hard to counter Mao's directive, so most got in. Sid joined the main group at the Bureau for Movie Distribution, which met every morning to study the *People's Daily* together. The *People's Daily* contained the goals and general direction of the line for the Cultural Revolution and articles about specific struggles. But Sid explained, "If an outsider read it, they wouldn't understand it, because the Cultural Revolution created its own language: somebody had to be fried in deep fat, and somebody had to be bombarded." Deep frying aside, the group discussed the issues, put out their opinions and struggled with those who disagreed.<sup>125</sup>

They were a pretty good bunch—all intellectuals, of course: artists and high administrators of movies. And anyone that didn't agree with us had to be opposed and exposed and so on. The factionalism was very, very general at the time. I'm not excusing myself on this; I was right along with everybody else. What I'm saying is it was not an isolated case of a few people. The result was that it ruined the movement an awful lot at the time; it got the masses fighting the masses. Later on, Premier Zhou said that every time you found the people's organizations fighting each other—especially if you found violence—if you looked carefully you would find some big shots up above pulling the strings. And that's what they found too in our organization.

In the Movie Center's case, the top dog of the organization was the Party Secretary, Xue Li. Xue Li was all for the Cultural Revolution, as long as it meant that he could accuse people lower on the totem pole of being reactionaries or bourgeois elements rather than the other way around. One of his first targets was a young woman who was half Chinese and half Russian. Not entirely progressive to begin with, she

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<sup>124</sup> Xenophobia is a dislike and/or fear of people perceived as different from oneself. It is usually used by bourgeois States to scapegoat or blame problems in society on foreigners or foreign-born people.

<sup>125</sup> The language of the Cultural Revolution was graphic and over the top, often referring to Chinese classical figures or events and mostly misunderstood by both the Right and the Left outside China. The Right used (and continue to use) the colorful language as proof that the Cultural Revolution was extreme and violent, and the Left (or ultra-Left) used (and continue to use) it as literal examples of how to engage in political struggle.

made a convenient scapegoat for Xue Li; after China's split with the revisionist Soviets, he put her under suspicion because of her background as a way to promote his own position of power, using Peach Orchard Experience methods from the Socialist Education Movement. Then he organized a severe criticism of the center's Director and Vice Director and got them thrown out of their positions.

The newly appointed directors were Xue Li stooges, and they carried out his policies with great enthusiasm. But the rest of the people had been through enough similar struggles to see through Xue Li and his crew, and they weren't thrilled with what was going on.

Even with all of the studying and debating and struggles, there was still the work of the Bureau for Movie Distribution, though it slowed considerably. Emboldened by his experience with the *dazibao* and getting into a fighting group at work, Sid began to make some editorial comments on the movie magazine he was given to polish. In particular, he set his sights on the increasing appearance of "bourgeois" values, of movies "more Hollywood" in content—and the magazine's attraction to them. Sid's notes in the margins brought the entire magazine to a halt—they just stopped publishing it—which, in turn, landed Sid a bunch of horrible movie scripts to polish instead.

There was a short so-called documentary about Westlake, just full of crap about the scenic, seductive, beautiful little pagodas and serene waters and so on and so forth. I wrote on the bottom, "This movie should not be published." ...I essentially said it was pure crap. So they stopped it. They were really surprised because foreign experts weren't supposed to raise any opinions like that at the time. And I'm sure the powers that be were not impressed with what I wrote, but if you had somebody opposing the thing from the mass organization and you didn't listen to them, they knew it was going to come down on their heads. They'd say, "The masses, ordinary people—much less a foreigner—criticized this, and you still published it."

Joan asked the Party Secretary of Duiwai Wenwei to let her into a fighting group, but he refused. But Joan worked in the Special Features and Photos Department, the head of which was a nice guy named Xiao Te, who happened to live in the next building over in the Sanlitun compound. One day, he bumped into Joan in the office and, bypassing the larger organization, told her she could join a group. Joan approached her friend Wang Ge, who had helped them so much with Karen and was accepted into her group.

It turned out not to be the best choice, because while Joan found Wang Ge to be a very sincere person with a heart for her family's problems, her group was filled with high ranking intellectual cadres, mostly party members, whom Joan found insufferable. They didn't read the *People's Daily* to figure out what was going on like most other groups were doing. Instead, they sat around and talked about their impact as leaders and how they as the vanguard of the people would organize the masses below them.

Before long, though, Duiwai Wenwei's departmental groups linked up with each

other and in the process exposed Joan's little group and their elitism—and broke it up. Everyone in it had to find another fighting group, including Joan, who was relieved that her group had dissolved but felt abruptly on the outside again having to find another group to belong to. She sure as hell wasn't going to follow her office mate, the one who had eight credits towards her Master's Degree in Wisconsin. Joan was horrified to witness her gaze out the window and say in all seriousness: "Which group I choose now will determine my political future." She joined Liandui, a fighting group laying claim to be the Reddest of the Red. Instead, Joan approached Yi Ruchen (or Xiao Yi, as he was called), the person who had taken over the job of taking care of Joan and her family.

...Yi Ruchen and some others had formed a little Monkey King Fighting Group, *Jinhou Zhandi Dui*.<sup>126</sup> So I asked if I could join their group, and they decided they would let me in. It was so different; it was so refreshing. It was a little group of just ordinary people, and I didn't even know if they were non-Party or Party people... I just loved that Jinhou [Monkey King Fighting Group]... [W]e read the paper in the morning, got what the main object was, and then we went out together, go out to read all key *dazibaos* around the city. News traveled very fast that way. Then we went back to Wenwei to think about what was the key issue in Wenwei and what had to be done about it.

With Mao's approval as a shield and sword, Joan and Sid were thus successful getting back into their organizations and joining the Cultural Revolution. When they told their kids about it, Billy and Karen were able to stand up to local bullies who wanted to ostracize them for being children of foreigners. What Mao said gave them a way to understand what was happening to them—that what they were going through was happening all over the country, and that it was because of a distortion or manipulation in policies rather than the direction from the very top. So when the kids at the local swimming pool told Karen that foreigners weren't allowed in, she held her head high and quoted Chairman Mao's approval of her parents' *dazibao*. And when the local clinic in the Sanlitun compound refused to let their family see the doctors there, they wrote a *dazibao* in criticism. The day after it went up, the clinic leadership was taken over by the people and the family was allowed in.

After graduating from Xian Middle School, Fred went back to the farm to wait for his parents to give him the green light to join them in Beijing; he didn't have anywhere else to go and was also thinking about a project that he had done with his mom

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<sup>126</sup> The Monkey King is a character in *Journey to the West*, a 16th-century novel written by Wu Chengen. The story is about a monk's perilous journey to India to obtain the Buddhist scriptures. The Monkey King, or Song Wukong, ruler of the monkeys angered the gods when he caused "chaos in the heavens" overturning ancient relics, eating forbidden fruit and upsetting order. After many epic battles with the gods, Buddha traps him under a mountain where he is buried for 500 years, until he is released to accompany the monk and protect him on his journey. The Monkey King story was a good metaphor for the aims of the Cultural Revolution and Mao's call to "Bombard the headquarters."



a few years earlier. Stoking his fascination with all things mechanical, Joan showed him how to make a small motor and now he went back to work on it to try to make it better, scrounging for spare parts wherever he could. It was enormously engaging, but after a while he began to get a little embarrassed, what with everyone else on the farm working in production and him just goofing off. So he asked the farm leadership to put him to work. His macho identity was a little offended when they assigned him to husk corn with the women, but a day into the work he found that “women’s work” was actually pretty tough and that he had a hard time keeping up.

After Fred rejoined the family in Beijing, the kids enrolled in the schools in the compound where they lived. The time that Fred spent in snooty schools with high cadres’ kids, however, had already made an impact. Sitting down to a meal with the family, Fred turned his nose up at Dama’s food and complained, talking about her like a servant. Sid’s reaction was sharp and swift: he gave Fred his share of grain tickets (grain was still State rationed) and told him that he would have to take care of his own meals until he could understand the real value of what Dama did for their family. It only took a couple meals for Fred to come back and do a detailed self-criticism to Dama.

The school year started, but the Cultural Revolution soon broke the kids out of the classrooms. In early October 1966, Qinghua University Red Guards held a big rally on Tiananmen Square, mobilizing huge crowds to fight the “bourgeois reactionary line,” signaling an upsurge in the Cultural Revolution movement. By Fall, schools were mostly not holding classes anymore. Instead, parents helped organize their kids to go out and work—a learn-by-doing philosophy that brought Joan back to her progressive education roots. Karen went with her classmates to a light bulb factory and the workers taught them the production process. Billy went to a sewing factory, where an old *sifu* (master) taught him how to use a sewing machine. A lot of the kids started going on “Long Marches” too, as a way to go back to revolutionary practices and spread the Cultural Revolution all over the country. Because they already had a connection with the Chinese-Albanian Friendship Commune, Joan and Sid helped organize Billy and Karen’s classes to hike out there with backpacks and sleeping rolls. With just some of the older kids around to look after them, they slept on the floor and worked in the fields for a few weeks before walking back.

Bertha and Bill’s daughter Carma was in high school at that time at the elite 101, which had hooked up with Qinghua University and some of the students there. They formed a small group that decided to retrace the original Long March backwards—starting from Beijing, marching to Yanan and then heading down to the southern provinces. The whole group never did make it all the way, though, because as they traveled they discovered that a lot of the places they stopped had Socialist Education Movement or Peach Orchard type problems. Some stayed to work on the problems and some moved on. Carma ended up in a mining town not far from Yanan, because they found out that the miners there had been suffering under the people in leadership. After the youth told the excited miners about the Cultural Revolution and explained what it was about, the miners organized to expose all of the shady things that had been

going on in the mine.

When Carma returned briefly to Beijing by train with some of the other students, her 13-year-old cousin Fred asked a million questions about what she was doing in the mining town. He was so excited by what she described that finally Carma invited him to go back with her. When they rejoined the other 101 and Qinghua students, Carma told Fred to take on a different persona; they would both claim to be fair-skinned Weiwer (Uyghur) minorities from Xinjiang Province. Fred sent a letter back to his parents telling them that he was all right and from then on to refer to him in any correspondence as “Fa Erdi.”

While the students did do a lot of good by “sparking the flame,” some of their actions dissolved into factionalism, splitting miners who believed in the same basic things into different belligerent camps. Fred, who already felt unsettled about lying to the workers about where he was from, felt even uneasier as he participated in some actions he knew to be wrong, and he told his mom about it after he got back.

Fred went by train back to the mines... lighting the fire of the revolution. They were all the Beijing students, and they got into a factional struggle, and... they went and they “*cao’ed*” [ransacked] somebody’s house. Fred didn’t feel good about that; he was a little iffish about whether what they were doing was correct. I think a lot of them felt that way. There are always those sort of leaders who are sort of extreme and do things that the others are not quite sure about. When those sort of things started happening, Mao called the students back... They were eventually called back to make revolution in the schools; Mao said to leave the workers to make their own revolution. They had set the fire and that was enough...

While Fred was on his Long March, Joan was out and about with her new group at Wenwei, following them on her bike to read all of the key *dazibaos* around the city. Going around with her office mates was a little different from going with Ann Tompkins, because they could read the posters themselves and much more quickly. *Dazibaos* started originally as short succinct declarations but evolved into detailed essays. So while Xiao Yi, the head of their little fighting group, helped Joan out by reading the main points, she missed a lot of the details that got everyone else abuzz and taking notes. But there were some *dazibaos*—and one in particular—whose message came through pretty clearly.

It was in the Dizhi Xueyuan, the Geological Institute... and we went inside and there were *dazibaos* all over. The one we were looking for though, was on the back wall of a building. It exposed Wang Guangmei in the Taoyuan [Peach Orchard] Experience and how she carried out the... Socialist Education Movement. It exposed how in Taoyuan they made secret contacts with secret people and organized the disgruntled people in the village to attack the lower level cadres as though they were the targets. It told about the whole method of the Socialist Education Movement how it was carried

out.

Wang Guangmei was at Taoyuan exactly at the time we got kicked out of the movement when the work team went to Caotan. I read that *dazibao* and I thought of the farm. It was such a feeling.

That *dazibao* not only illuminated for Joan what and who had been behind the “White Terror” at Caotan, it clarified the struggle for a lot of people on a much larger scale. At Qinghua University, after Mao had ordered the work teams out of the schools in July, the students discovered that the woman behind the work team’s actions, who went by the name of Hou and arrived and departed the campus with a dark hood hiding her face, was actually Wang Guangmei. By exposing her and the work she did at the university to repress the students and turn the attack onto ordinary cadres, the people were able to trace her actions to her husband, Liu Shaoqi, and then back through the past decade starting from the first public inkling of a split in line at the 1959 Lushan Meeting.

That day in November after Joan stood before the description of Wang Guangmei’s covert activities, she continued to follow Xiao Yi on her bike through the city. They knew that Mao was going to meet the Red Guards again that afternoon and Tiananmen would be too packed for them to get a glimpse—so they headed north to try to get to the Hankong Xueyuan (the Aeronautical Institute) to see a few more *dazibaos*. They hadn’t gotten far when their path was completely blocked by rows and rows of young Red Guards sitting along the side of the road. After several meetings where so many people in the square meant that not too many people had a chance to actually see Mao, the city organized the Red Guards along the sides of the roads so that Mao could drive by in a caravan and “meet” everyone closer up.

Since they weren’t going to get anywhere anyway, they propped their bikes up against a tree by the side of the road and climbed up on the bike seats to see what they could see. As soon as they stood up, Mao drove by standing up in the back of a jeep, followed by Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai and Zhu De.

After they went by, it wasn’t very long we were standing on our bikes, when it suddenly occurred to us that something was going on. That was the last time Mao ever saw the Red Guards, and he saw them with Liu Shaoqi. He was just so sharp. The day we saw him with Liu Shaoqi was the day we saw the Tao Yuan experience *dazibao*: the first attack against Liu Shaoqi... Mao’s first *dazibao*... said “Bombard the headquarters; the Khrushchevs are nestled right beside us.”

Mao already understood that Liu Shaoqi was the leader of the Rightist line in the Party that was committed to taking China towards. He also understood that simply taking away Liu’s power would be useless unless the people, the masses, also understood the ideological struggle and called for his ouster themselves. Without emboldening the people through campaigns to raise their level of political and ideological consciousness,

the line struggle would be fought out at the upper levels of party leadership, leaving the people in the position of being manipulated in the struggle for power.

[T]he masses, through their own reaction to the oppression, discovered Liu Shaoqi. Mao never said it was Liu Shaoqi, he just said to bombard the headquarters, that it was somebody right there. He left Beijing and let Liu Shaoqi use his hand and let the people find out who it was. That method was incredible; they found Liu Shaoqi so fast.

However, when Mao issued the warning, people did discover that he was probably talking about Liu Shaoqi, but at that time most didn't realize that it went beyond Liu as an individual—that he had formed a line and that line included more than one or two people who held opposing ideologies.

At the end of December huge numbers of people's organizations, different fighting groups around the city, held another huge rally on the square, this time coming right out and naming Liu Shaoqi the President of the People's Republic (and former Deputy Chairman of the Party) as a capitalist roader and bourgeois reactionary. Once he was named, the groups at Qinghua University began demanding the opportunity to take physical custody of Liu in order to have "struggle" meetings with him. They felt, after all, that Liu had directly intervened in Qinghua's affairs through his directive to his wife (and daughter who was enrolled) to repress the revolutionary students. Now the student rebels, split into two different factions that had begun to see each other as the enemy and use the struggle to gain their own power, competed fiercely to see who could get the right to struggle with Liu Shaoqi and his wife, Wang Guangmei. The Central Committee, concerned about the underlying motives of student leaders and afraid of what might happen in such a meeting, denied their request and kept Liu and Wang under wraps at Zhongnanhai, a big compound near the city center where the government and Party was headquartered.

Undeterred, the main rebel group at Qinghua, using the language of the day, convinced Liu's youngest daughter Pin Ping to "draw a clear class line" between herself and her parents. In an intricate and underhanded plot, Pin Ping called her parents in early January to say that she had been hit by a car and was seriously injured in the hospital. When her worried parents arrived at the hospital, the Qinghua rebels seized them and took them back to the campus. Only with the direct intervention of Premier Zhou Enlai did the students return Liu to Zhongnanhai—but Zhou allowed Wang to remain in the students' custody on the condition that they give her the opportunity to make a self-criticism and then send her back to the Central Committee.

The struggle at Qinghua University devolved further into more deeply factional and increasingly unprincipled actions taken by both sides. In particular, Kuai Dafu, who had become a respected student leader by standing up resolutely against the repressive tactics of Wang Guangmei's work team, found supporters in high enough places to stoke his personal ambitions that he was sufficiently confident to openly disobey Zhou Enlai's orders. While the students did adhere to Zhou's condition that they organize a

self-criticism meeting, they dressed Wang up in a ridiculous skirt and a necklace made of ping-pong balls. They did not send her back to the Central Committee and continued to hold her at the school for some time. Later, as the Cultural Revolution got more and more manipulated by people in power keen on distracting the people from the goals of rooting out people in authority who were trying to take the capitalist road, the ambitious Kuai was easily used to fan the fire at the university, leading it from a war of words and paper to armed struggle with spears and guns and even cannons.

The Cultural Revolution, with Beijing as the epicenter, swept across the country. In early January, factory and other workers in Shanghai took over the government offices in what became known as the “January Storm.” Many of the officials and party leaders were criticized and removed from their posts, and the workers formed what they called a “Paris Commune-type” of governance.<sup>127</sup> From Beijing, Mao heard the reports and supported their actions, calling for leaders and party members to engage in criticism and self-criticism. The January Storm was in part kicked off by Wang Hongwen, a young factory worker and Korean War veteran who wrote one of the first *dazibao* in his factory exposing its leaders as capitalist roaders—but it was really organized by Zhang Chunqiao, a Shanghai writer. Both became prominent figures and together with Yao Wenyuan, who penned the article critical of the Hai Rui play (that had exposed Beijing’s mayor Peng Zhen, kicking off the Cultural Revolution), and Jiang Qing, Mao’s wife, came together in the loose formation that would later be called the “Gang of Four.”

The “Gang of Four” became notorious for their attacks from the extreme or ultra-Left. Ambitious for her own status, Jiang Qing developed her own network of power based largely among those Shanghai writers and those in their sphere. Holding Mao up along with the biggest reddest flag she could muster and wielding her status as his wife, she played whatever angle she could to boost her own power, using and manipulating and deflecting criticism onto whoever was conveniently on hand at the time. Often times that was the foreigner community.

At the end of 1966, the rebels at the Friendship Hotel sought Joan and Sid out separately. Taking them aside, the rebels told them that they found out that Mao had actually written a statement and directive on their *dazibao* in September 1966, two days before Chen Yi had sent limos for them—something the Foreign Minister had failed to mention at the time.

[Mao] wrote, “*Wo tongyi zezhang dazibao.*” [I agree with this *dazibao*.] Then he said, “*Geming de waiguo zuanjia ji qi haizimen yao tong zhongguoren wanquan yiyang. Buyao liangyang. Fan shi yuan yao yi shi tongyangban. Qing yueding.*” [Foreign revolutionaries and their children should be treated the same as Chinese. There should be no distinctions. This is for all those who want to be treated the same. Please come up with a resolution.] He

<sup>127</sup> The Paris Commune was set up after a worker-led movement took over Paris in 1871, instituting a new government based on socialist principles. It lasted for about two months before it was brutally crushed.

just made it a general principle that all revolutionary foreigners and their children, as long as they wanted to be treated that way should be treated the same as Chinese. And he asked the Foreign Ministry to come up with a plan. That was way past what Chen Yi said, and it was way past what we had demanded. It was so simple. It cut through everything. It gave us the feeling that all the masks were taken off of everything, and it just left us part of the revolution.

Armed with this new information, the four original instigators plus Eppy and Elsie as well as Doug and Ruth Lake (New Zealanders who had come to China to join the socialist movement working as language polishers) formed their own section within the Bethune-Yanan Rebel Regiment. They called it the September Eighth Fighting Group—for the date of Mao’s written directive on their *dazibao*—and their participation in the Cultural Revolution focused on criticizing the treatment of foreigners.

At the beginning of 1967, after the rebels unearthed Mao’s directive, Chen Yi called all the foreigners working in Beijing to a big meeting to talk about it. He repeated his statement from the September 1966 meeting that Mao “essentially agreed,” with their *dazibao*, however with the word-for-word notes they had from the rebels, they knew that Chen Yi was misquoting Mao. Not only that, he was completely unenthusiastic—even more so that at their first meeting, mumbling and talking so low to the interpreter that they couldn’t hear what he was saying directly.

Bethune-Yanan and the September Eighth Fighting Group left dissatisfied with Chen Yi and his attitude. So in the spirit of the Cultural Revolution and in the tradition of comradely criticism of leadership, they decided to write a letter criticizing him. At that time, a particularly visible persona in the foreigner community was Sid Rittenberg.<sup>128</sup> Rittenberg, who had been in Yanan when Sid Engst arrived in 1947 (and well before), was well connected with some of the more powerful leaders in Beijing—his number one friend at the time was Mao’s wife, Jiang Qing. He was also in the upper ranks of Radio China. Although he wasn’t in the Bethune-Yanan leadership, he wielded a lot of influence, because he took on a role of the guy on the inside giving the scoop to the rest of the foreigners. He made friends with everybody and seemed to know so much about what was really going on that the rest of the foreigners took him seriously.

So when Rittenberg pulled up in his chauffeured car one day and read Joan and Sid the riot act about criticizing Chen Yi, the other foreigners were shaken. But Joan and Sid couldn’t see what the problem was. Joan recalled:

He said that we couldn’t criticize Chen Yi, that we couldn’t write a *dazibao* criticizing the Foreign Minister of China. We just asked, “Why not?” We told him that we didn’t think he had the spirit of the thing. We never thought anything bad about him. We’d been brought up with criticism,

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<sup>128</sup> After China’s liberation in 1949, the Soviet Union unearthed an international spy network and accused Rittenberg of being an American agent. He was imprisoned in China until 1954, when he started working in Radio China International.

self-criticism as something you did every day. It didn't mean that he wasn't a comrade; it was just something you did with your comrades to help them improve. But he said, "You must read the *Three Olds*.<sup>129</sup> After you've read them, then I'll talk to you again. You are very, very wrong to do this. You cannot organize all the Bethune-Yanan to criticize Chen Yi." He was furious.

While the rest of the Bethune-Yanan Rebel Regiment froze up in response to Rittenberg's scathing criticism, the September Eighth Group took up the issue with Chen Yi anyway. In the end, though, even people in their group were too scared and the letter criticizing Chen Yi's attitude and actions ended up being vague and watered down.

In the meantime, in their work organizations, foreigners participating in the different fighting groups began to have discussions about "taking power"—that is, taking over the leadership and possession of the official seals (concrete and symbolic implements of power) of the office. The example of the January Storm in Shanghai had been set so fighting groups in other cities began to follow suit. Sid's rebel group at the Bureau for Movie Distribution decided earlier than most that they needed take power away from the Party Secretary, Xue Li. They assembled their members and made a plan.

[W]e didn't go home after work; we stayed on and had a very innocent little meeting that night. Then at about 12:00, we got in the weapons carrier, a truck-like vehicle that was developed in WWII with a canvas top and a row of seats on each side in the back. About ten of us got in and drove out to Xue Li's home... We whacked on the door and said, "Get up get up! You're under arrest." He came out and we said, "Get your clothes on. You're coming with us."

He got dressed and then we got him in the car and took him down to the organization to our little assembly hall. He had already taken the other directors out of power, but we got them too and lined them all up in the meeting room... Then we said formally that all power had been taken away from them and that they were to report to work the next day to do whatever work they were assigned to by the revolutionary masses! Those were real days!

They did exactly that; they were as meek as mice... Most of them were already out of any kind of power. We were... under the Ministry of Culture, and in the Ministry of Culture there were all kinds of problems. But all those people who hadn't been removed from power yet were very meek mice. They knew it wasn't going to be long until they would be questioned, and they were being very careful not to cross the revolutionary masses.

<sup>129</sup> Mao called three written articles the "*Lao San Pian*," literally, the *Three Olds*: *Yugong Yushan* (the Foolish Old Man Who Moved the Mountain), *Jinian Bai Qiwen* (In Memory of Norman Bethune) and *Wei Renming Fuwu* (Serve the People). The Three Olds were chosen as examples of revolutionary ideology; the characters or people in them didn't work for their own personal advancement but for liberating all people.

Many places where the “revolutionary masses” took power were eventually gripped with factional fighting, usually instigated, as Zhou Enlai said, by people above who were manipulating people below to protect and advance themselves. And while in Sid’s group there did appear another rebel group that criticized the way his group did things—saying that it was undemocratic and not cooperative—it was fairly low key. The biggest point of contention was about the old Director who Xue Li had thrown out early. Sid’s group decided that while the Director was carrying out a “bourgeois reactionary line,” he was basically a cadre just carrying out the line as it came down—his problems were not as deep as Xue Li’s, who was actively engaged in power grabbing and attacking lower cadres. Their position was that the old Director should be given a chance to do a self-criticism and be rehabilitated. The opposition disagreed and the Bureau for Movie Distribution split along those lines. But unlike some of the other places around the city and the rest of the country, that’s as far as it went. Each side did its best to discredit the other and undermine their political work. But it did not lead to any bigger or physical struggles and, the center as a whole continued to do its work.

Joan’s organization, Duiwai Wenwei (the Association for Culture and Friendship with Foreign Countries), was a little slower on the pickup. Long after Sid’s group had taken power, Wenwei cadres heard from Zhou Enlai, who criticized the office workers for moving too slowly; everyone else was taking power in their organizations—what was taking them so long?<sup>130</sup> Duiwai had basically split into two major factions by then: Liandui (The Reddest of the Red) and Jinhou (Joan’s Monkey King group).

So everybody in [Duiwai] Wenwei started thinking about how we were going to take power... Then all of a sudden, before our intellectuals had gotten around to thinking about how we were going to take power came the Erwai, the Second Foreign Languages Institute students, came and took power in Wenwei. The two factions had been trying to figure out which faction was going to take power, and how they were going to be sure that the power was in their hands and not the other faction. But then the students marched in and took power! ...So they took the chops [seals] and from then on, every document that went out had to be chopped [stamped] by those students.

The Duiwai Wenwei office workers still kept at their work, editing and polishing all of the publications that their editors sent down under the direction of the Foreign Languages Institute students, although the volume had slowed to a trickle. Pretty soon, though, Joan and her fighting group decided that they would go see what the editors were doing; since they had no input into deciding the content of the what they were polishing, they wanted to see how the editors made their decisions.

What they found out shocked the hell out of Joan. Up in the editor’s room,

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<sup>130</sup> Duiwai Wenwei (The Chinese People’s Association for Culture and Friendship with Foreign Countries) had a direct line of communication with Zhou Enlai because it was part of the Foreign Ministry, and as Premier, Zhou was responsible for all Foreign Affairs.



where none of the polishers and other office workers were allowed to go, were a bunch of people just cutting and pasting with scissors and glue, bits and pieces of different articles from piles of publications to make the special features. With that unexpected revelation, Joan and her group decided that they'd better start taking a look at the content of what they were being asked to polish. From there, they took on criticizing movies, and then finally Liu Shaoqi's masterpiece, *How to Be a Good Communist*, written during the Anti-Japanese War, a study that Joan really got into.

Liu Shaoqi was supposed to be the great theoretician of the Party. Now Mao and Lenin, they wrote what was necessary at the time to mobilize people for whatever the task was at the time. But here you had the Japanese invading China, and Liu Shaoqi's writings had nothing to do with the Japanese invasion at all; it was how to be a good communist and nothing to do with the external struggle. I read all the different editions that there were in English and... really gained a tremendous amount of insight into Liu's thinking. It was completely opportunist; the most precious thing you possibly have was your party membership. If you were good to the Party, the Party would be good to you. That was the message through the whole thing.

In contrast, Mao's whole writings said that the most precious thing you had was serving the people. That if the Party went against the people, then what did you want a party membership for? The first thing was to serve the people, and the Party was second. Liu started out with serve the people and serve the Party and pretty soon he sort of slithered over so that actually you began to think that serving the Party was the same as serving the people.

One step behind the students and suddenly left out of power, both Duiwai Wenwei fighting groups also went out to investigate their leadership, splitting quickly over supporting one or another. As they lined up on either side, the whole city broke in two between the *Tian* (Heaven) and *Di* (Earth) factions. Heaven and Earth referred to two institutes: the Aeronautical and the Geological, where Joan and Xiao Yi read the *dazibao* about Wang Guangmei. Each institute took a different side in the Qinghua University factional struggle, not based on common principles but on political power and links upwards to the very heart of the Party leadership. As a consequence, ordinary workers and cadres in different fighting groups ended up on different sides, even though they didn't have any fundamental differences; Mao said as much, after a long trip south to investigate the situation. But the city split anyway, and Joan and Sid came home one day to find that they were on different sides of the great divide between Heaven and Earth. The ridiculousness of their situation helped them understand the superficial nature of the differences in the factionalism that was creating sworn enemies out of people were on the same side of the fight against revisionism in Beijing and all over the country.

As more and more organizations were taken over by the revolutionary masses, the call was to form "3 in 1" revolutionary committees to provide new leadership. These

committees had to be composed of a combination of mass (popular) leaders, senior cadres and PLA members. Once established, these new governing bodies would be recognized by the Party and the State with the authority to continue to carry out the aims of the Cultural Revolution.

But taking power became another avenue for some people ambitious for their own power, and others intent on wrecking the goals of the Cultural Revolution. In Spring 1967, Sid Rittenberg and two others took power at Radio China International with the support of Jiang Qing—even though Radio was one of the three organizations expressly off limits to the Cultural Revolution. Regardless, Rittenberg became one of a three-man committee running Radio, and his stature grew with his assumption of power—so much so that after an article finally came out in the *People's Daily* in April exposing Liu Shaoqi and Wang Guangmei as capitalist roaders, and the Central Committee turned over Wang Guangmei to the Qinghua students as demanded for another struggle session, Rittenberg was on the podium at the meeting speaking on behalf of Radio China and all foreign comrades.

That summer, egged on by people up above and shouting Jiang Qing's new slogan: "*Yao wendou yao wuwei*" (fight an ideological battle and use physical force to defend yourself)—a slight but qualitative deviation from Mao's directive: "Fight an ideological battle, do not use physical violence," armed struggle broke out in a handful of cities. Each outbreak was countered by (most of) the Central Committee's efforts to keep the revolution in the field of ideas rather than physical force. One of the most serious conflicts erupted in Wuhan, when a PLA general took up guns in a factional dispute between workers and students and Red Guard organizations. In response, the Central Committee sent the head of Public Security, Xie Fuzhi, and Wang Li, a member of the Cultural Revolution Committee, to resolve the fighting. Disobeying direct orders, the general ordered the two arrested and continued consolidating his power. It took a trip from Premier Zhou Enlai to face down the crisis—but even he had to retreat at first, as his plane circled the airport landing strip lined with armored tanks and troops at the ready. Finally landing outside the city, Zhou Enlai had to carefully negotiate his way in and eventually got Xie and Wang released, followed by the ousting of the wayward general.

Wang Li returned to Beijing a hero but then seized the opportunity in the limelight to begin organizing an attack backed by the Earth Faction against Foreign Minister Chen Yi, as a way to get a foothold in the Ministry. Joan and Sid got a first glance at the impending power grab when Sid Rittenberg rolled up one day in his limo to a gathering of foreigners, slapped Sid Engst on the back and exclaimed, "Oh Sid! Guess what I've been doing today? I've been doing something that will really please you. I've been criticizing Chen Yi!"

Joan got a direct view of the struggle that emerged through her rebel group at Wenwei. And when at the Earth Faction's insistence, Zhou Enlai arranged for a criticism, self-criticism meeting for Chen Yi through the State Council, Joan was in the audience. At that meeting, Joan heard Zhou Enlai make a self-criticism for the first

time.

He got up and said that in leading the foreign affairs he had made mistakes. One of the big mistakes he made was in Algeria. He said that he had gone there and supported a government there that the people did not like, and the people overturned the government just after he supported it. He said that had not understood the situation in Algeria.

Chen Yi followed Zhou Enlai in a self-criticism. The meeting lasted a few hours, and all was well and good except that Heaven and Earth continued to use Chen Yi as an opportunity to battle it out on the streets, each demonstrating and calling for his ouster. The Earth Faction wanted to *dadao* or knock him down, and the Heaven Faction qualified it with *dadao*, but only if he didn't surrender and admit all his misdeeds—but they wanted their chance to have at him too to prove their revolutionary worth. Under pressure from the Heaven Faction, Zhou Enlai agreed to organize another mass criticism meeting of Chen Yi and to hold it at the Great Hall of the People; the Heaven Faction had to match the Earth Faction toe-to-toe to prove that they weren't conservative.<sup>131</sup> Zhou Enlai's condition was that the meeting's goal was not to "Knock Chen Yi Down," but to criticize him and let him do self-criticism. Joan explained:

The estimate of the Central of Chen Yi was that he was not a bad comrade, so he should be criticized and not overthrown. The group who organized it agreed. Zhou Enlai went into the Great Hall and looked to make sure there was no posters or anything. Then when they had their meeting and the kids unrolled scrolls right from the balcony down to the bottom saying, "*Dadao Chen Yi.*" ... Those kids just took it as funny. They were so fast and so tricky, and they weren't serious. The masses were good people, but the leaders did those tricky things. The kids laughed and thought it was funny that they tricked Zhou Enlai...

At that meeting, both Joan and Bertha were on the executive committees of their respective opposing factions. If one side had a foreigner on their committee, then the other did too and so the foreigners went around making speeches for each side. Joan never did remember the content too much but found it funny to bump into Eppy and Bertha and other Bethune-Yanan members making speeches for the "other side" all over town.

To match the Earth Faction and prove its equal, not only did the Heaven Faction want their mass criticism meeting at the Great Hall, they insisted that they have the same attention from the Central Committee in the form of Zhou Enlai's participation. They got his promise to attend, but on the morning of the meeting everyone arrived eagerly at the Great Hall only to wait for hours and hours with no sign of Chen Yi or

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<sup>131</sup> The other names for the Heaven and Earth Factions were: *Baohuang* or Protect the Emperor and *Zaofan* or rebels, signifying a supposed difference in the factions with Heaven being conservative and Earth being radical.

Zhou Enlai.

It turned out that several very bad things went on... The first thing they did was puncture the tire of Chen Yi's jeep, so that he couldn't get to the meeting. Then they surrounded him, and finally he was able to get out a back door and into another car through some other Red Guards. So he got to the meeting, but there was no Zhou Enlai. Those people, in order to stop the meeting from taking place, they questioned Zhou Enlai for 24 hours... We were there waiting for Zhou Enlai and finally they said they'd been questioning him, and that he had to rest. We said we'd wait for him to get through resting, so we all stayed in the Great Hall of the People; we didn't have anything to eat all noon and all afternoon and all into the evening. Finally about dark, word came... that Zhou Enlai was too tired and wouldn't be able to come; they were giving him oxygen. If Zhou Enlai had to have oxygen, we weren't about to wear him out anymore, so finally after waiting from nine in the morning until dark, our side agreed that we would have somebody from the Central Cultural Group to come.

The person the Central Cultural Revolution Committee sent was Chen Boda, who first criticized the group for demanding Zhou Enlai's presence at the meeting and then finally started the meeting.<sup>132</sup>

...I remember Chen Yi's [self] criticism. He was a real actor. He was one of these people who would make jokes without cracking a smile. [One] time he was being criticized, Chen Yi said for people to open up their little red books to page something something. So everybody opened up their books, and it turned out that it was the page after the last page. He read, "*Mao Zuxi suo Chen Yi shi yige hao tongzhi*" [Chairman Mao says that Chen Yi is a good comrade]. [H]e would crack a joke and everybody would laugh... Then somebody would remember that we were supposed to be criticizing him and say the slogan, "*Chen Yi bu touxiang jianjue dadao ta.*" [Knock Down Chen Yi if he doesn't surrender!"] And then the whole hall would repeat it. Everybody loved Chen Yi, but they had to sound revolutionary.

[H]e was doing a self-criticism, and the masses put a tall dunce cap on him. Then the Foreign Ministry had some foreign guests, so they called him to go right away to receive them. He started going, but he kept the dunce cap on him. They said, "Gee, you can't take that to see the foreign guests!" He said, "Oh! But the masses put it on; I can't take it off!"

Chen Yi may have won over a lot of people with his humor and his honest self-criticisms, but Cultural Revolution Committee member Wang Li continued his assault on the Foreign Ministry until a few weeks later, he finally got Chen Yi knocked

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<sup>132</sup> Chen Boda was the editor for the Party Paper, *Red Flag* and was made head of the Cultural Revolution Committee.

out of his position and installed his own man, Yao Dengshan, as Foreign Minister.<sup>133</sup>

But first, before Yao Dengshan moved into Chen Yi's office, news came through that Hong Kong workers were on strike, and the British colonialists were trying to keep them down. Different organizations in Beijing turned out in big numbers to demonstrate and march to the British Liaison (there was no embassy at the time) in the Sanlitun compound. Bethune-Yanan organized buses for everyone, but since Joan and Sid lived there in another part of the compound, they rode their bikes to where thousands of people were lining up and joined in. The line of soldiers that stood in front of the British building didn't deter Bethune-Yanan and they surrounded the place, marching and chanting slogans, demanding that the Liaison Officer come down to receive a petition demanding justice for the Hong Kong workers. The crowd began to take action when he wouldn't come out, and Joan felt a little sheepish on the sidelines.

I guess the poor guy was scared to death and didn't come down. ...[We] said, "You gotta come down; we want to read this petition to you." They started banging on the door and couldn't get it open, so finally they threw flowerpots and broke the windows. Then they finally got the door down and on the wall opposite the door, there was a great big picture of the queen, and she had a big splotch of flowerpot mud on her face. The beautiful carpets inside were all covered with flowerpot dirt. [We] were sort of watching everything. We were thinking how chicken we were, because we never threw flowerpots and weren't all that "revolutionary"; we were sort of peaceful. Finally the poor guy did come down. [They] handed him the petition, and that was all they wanted so we left.

On the way out, the crowd decided to take the Union Jack down from the flagpole outside the Liaison Building. A group of people began yanking on the rope to try to get it to come down until the pole started to get a dangerous bend in it. Thinking that the pole was going to break in two and crush the people underneath, Sid pulled out his knife and cut the rope. The flag flopped to the ground and was seized upon. Someone lit a match—but the farsighted British, no doubt experienced with angry crowds handling their flag, had made their flag flame retardant. Undeterred, the group led the protesting crowds carrying the flag to a different part of the compound where they found some gasoline and sent it up in flames.

A few days later in August 1967, Wang Li made his move and with Yao Dengshan taking charge as Foreign Minister, the two organized the burning of the British Liaison office. That action was followed by their call to Chinese embassies all over the world to "export the Cultural Revolution to other countries." For four days, with Yao Dengshan at the helm of the Foreign Ministry, Chinese officials and ambassadors began to follow their orders—until Huang Hua, China's ambassador to Egypt, considered the implications and called up Zhou Enlai to check in. Zhou Enlai put a stop to it

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<sup>133</sup> Yao Dengshan was a Chinese official working in Indonesia who stood up to the Indonesian government on a political issue and returned home a hero.

immediately, ending Yao Dengshan's very brief stay atop the Foreign Ministry.

In the midst of the tumultuous wrangling at the highest levels of the government, with the struggle seeping out abroad, Joan got a call from her brother, who was at the Chinese embassy in France trying to find a way into Beijing. After finally getting through all the roadblocks the US threw up to prevent his leaving, he was eventually able to make it through England to France. Bill thought all his difficulties would be over once he made it through the Chinese embassy doors. To his surprise, Chinese officials wouldn't issue him a visa, so he called up his sister to see if there was anything she could do about it. Joan had to tell him that "things were pretty rough right now," and there was probably a good reason why they weren't issuing visas at the moment. A very disappointed Bill returned to the US to wait for another opportunity.

It turned out the reason was legitimate—it looked at the time like things were getting out of control. With people above manipulating others to take power in the three areas expressly forbidden—the Foreign Ministry, the PLA and Radio China International—China was beginning to lose its ability to contain the effects of revolution within its borders—and with the PLA getting involved, the situation was headed toward more and more armed violence. In Wuhan the general in charge had disobeyed direct orders from the Central Committee, and other spots looked like they could be heading in that direction.

In Beijing, the Heaven and Earth Factions spiraled downward into more and more intense factionalism, and the different rebel groups at the Friendship Hotel couldn't help but be sucked in. In early September, the Bethune-Yanan Rebel Regiment planned a big meeting in commemoration of Mao's September Eighth directive. As the appointed liaison between the two groups, Joan called up the Friendship Hotel Rebel (or Earth) Group to figure out how they were going to participate in the meeting. The rebel on the other end of the phone asked her to come by at a certain time to a certain building to talk about it.

I found the building and went in the door that they told me to go in and, my god, there were huge beams about eight inches across blocking the stairs. I sort of climbed over them and started going up the stairs. Pretty soon Feng Yuluo, the woman leader... came down the stairs, shook my hand and said, "Can you help us?" I said sure, and when I went upstairs, I saw they had the place blocked in. They had bottles of acid or something in *qishui* [soda pop] bottles, and it looked as though they had been there a long, long time. They were all crouched below the windows.

The group of them was hunkered down trying to prevent a wholesale eruption of violence by barricading themselves inside the building. The night before, the groups had amassed and in the midst of arguing and peaceful struggle, a guy shouted something very provocative at someone on the other side. The Friendship Hotel Rebel responded by hitting with his fists, which were immediately met with knives and clubs. He was slashed repeatedly and had to be rushed to the hospital. Sobered and deter-

mined not to let things go any further, the rebels retreated to that building, lying on the floors as thugs cursed them outside through the night and tried to throw Molotov cocktails (bottles filled with flammable liquid and lit of fire with a cloth or paper wick) through the windows. Staying as alert as they could, they kept quiet and kept repeating to themselves: “Do not react.”

Feng Yuluo told Joan that they needed her, because although the Friendship Hotel drivers were in their faction, the people who controlled which cars got through the gate were from the other side. Their group was desperate to get out to send a message to the Central Committee about what was going on in the Friendship Hotel compound—that armed struggle could very well break out and cut through the place. They didn’t dare call on the Friendship Hotel phones because they were all tapped. So Joan got in a car, and when she showed her face, the guards let the car through.

The car drove them to Radio China, because there was a telephone line there that went directly to the Central Committee. But when they got there, they were refused entry; the best they could do was go to Sid Rittenberg’s apartment to see if he could do anything for them; he was still one of the guys on the three man committee heading up Radio. But Rittenberg’s place was empty, and when they called up to ask where he was, they were told that he was in a meeting that he couldn’t leave.

While they waited on into the early hours of the next morning, Feng asked Joan to call upon Bethune-Yanan to organize a march at the Friendship Hotel against any kind of armed struggle or violence. Joan called Eppy and Sid, who sent word out and immediately turned out members to march on the compound. Rittenberg showed up at around 3:00AM and agreed to put in the call. Unfortunately for the rebels and the situation at the Friendship Hotel, however, the meeting that Rittenberg had been unable to get out of was the one that removed him from his post. It was never quite clear if Rittenberg was able to communicate with the Central Committee—or if he had, if his words carried any weight—but in the end, the Central Committee did put out a directive to halt the progression of armed struggle at the Hotel.

When Bethune-Yanan finally held their meeting commemorating Mao’s directive on their *dazibao*, there were a couple posters up criticizing Rittenberg—the first public signs that there might be something funny going on with him. Shortly thereafter, he was put under house arrest. Later, when Rittenberg was arrested for a second time, again on charges of being a US spy, many people in the rebel group at the Friendship Hotel, including Feng, also were arrested because of their connection to him. Joan wrote a letter about that evening and Feng’s single-minded efforts to stop the violence from erupting at the Friendship Hotel. When Feng was released not too much later, she shook Joan’s hand and implied that her letter had helped her.

Rittenberg’s former ally, Mao’s wife, Jiang Qing, felt the heat on her (she was, after all, the one who supported him to take over Radio) and deflected it smoothly by naming him as a spy and saying, “Not all foreigners are bad.” The “...just most of them” trailer was left unspoken but clearly implied. The convenience of making foreigners walking bulls-eyes more than they already were prompted Zhou Enlai to come

out immediately with a response saying, “Most foreigners are good.” The damage, however, was hard to undo.

By mid-September Mao put out a call for the fighting factions to undergo a “*Da Lian He*” or “Great Unity”—that all sides needed to come together to fight the common enemy of revisionism and the bourgeois reactionary line. All over the country, different factions with varying degrees of earnestness took up the challenge. Smaller incidences of factional struggle where puppet masters were not pulling strings from above proved easier to resolve. But in the bigger splits, the people’s efforts were thwarted time and again. At Joan’s work organization, Duiwai Wenwei, the Heaven and Earth factions, Liandui and the Monkey Kings, beat drums and called a big meeting where all of the leadership stood up before the masses, slated to make speeches supporting the Great Unity. It was all going well, until Duiwai’s top leader (the guy who had originally refused Joan entry into any of the fighting groups) stood up and said, “I think that Liandui is a good organization.” Just like that, with those simple words, spoken by someone who knew what he was doing by supporting one side of the factional struggle, Duiwai found itself dug in even deeper in the split. In its company was the rest of Beijing, clinging even more tightly to their Heaven and Earth affiliations.

With Jiang Qing’s pronouncement about foreigners and Sid Rittenberg being named a spy, the climate for foreigners working and living in Beijing turned from a slow thaw to a bitter freeze. After the new year turned, some Bethune-Yanan members began disappearing, arrested by different factions in their organizations.

The first ones to get nicked were David and Isabel Crook; they were just picked up and disappeared into makeshift prisons of the opposing factions in their organizations. Without their parents and with their *baomu* sent away, the three young Crook boys found themselves suddenly alone. Ann Tompkins, brought up on a sailboat and so always good in a storm, leaped into action to take care of them. Then the kids moved in with Marcelia Ye, whose husband, Ye Qupei, also got taken because Liu Shaoqi, now named one of the capitalist roaders in power, had appointed him to his position as the head of a Metallurgical Institute. Marcelia had three kids of her own who had suddenly if temporarily lost their father, but she housed them all.

The arrests of the Crooks and Ye Qupei were followed by Ione Kramer (also in the September Eighth group), and then Eppy and Elsie. Late one night, Bertha, who lived upstairs from them, heard some scuffling in the middle of the night, and the next morning they were gone. It got so, as Joan said, you had to call people up and see if they still answered the phone to figure out if they had been grabbed or not. Joan and Sid weren’t touched, probably because they had been in agriculture pretty much from the time they had arrived and therefore lacked any suspicious handles for anyone to grab onto (would the US send spies to go hang out with dairy cows?). They were also the original authors of the Mao approved *dazibao*—and neither Bertha nor Ann Tompkins were locked up either.

As the free foreigner population began to shrink in numbers, many Bethune-Yanan and September Eighth members lost their nerve for revolution. But some of



the people who weren't arrested stayed active—Joan and Sid, Lucille Pu, Marcelia Ye, and Ann Tompkins—still got together at their apartment in Sanlitun, writing letters and *dazibaos*. They felt defiant and resolute—just because some foreigners were getting snatched from their beds in the wee hours didn't mean that the rest of them could be easily cowed. Eventually, though, they were left only with the September Eighth Group—their work organizations, although some in them may have been sympathetic, found it too difficult to have them in the office and at meetings. Most of their office mates were also leaving their desks to attend “cadre schools” in the suburbs and outlying areas to study and get their hands in the dirt.<sup>134</sup> Joan raised a stink about not being able to go with her office mates but found out later that actually Zhou Enlai was the culprit; with all of the foreigners getting nabbed from their apartments late at night, he felt it safer to leave them at home than at the schools. So with varying degrees of politeness (Sid faded out gracefully, saving them the trouble of giving him the boot), all of the Bethune-Yananers and the rest of the foreigner community were kicked out—sent home and set aside. They were still, however, paid all their wages, even though on payday the office always sent two people to deliver the money for fear that if they went alone, they might be accused of having “illicit relations” with foreigners.

Thus began the period of about three years from the end of 1967 through 1970, when Joan and Sid and their friends who were not locked up had nothing to do. But for the two of them, their hands already antsy from months and months of deskwork, it was obvious that they had to find something to useful to do. Since Sid stepped out of his work first, he headed out to the Chinese-Albanian Friendship Commune with Norman Schulman, a young American student who had come to China during the Vietnam War. Recently forced out of his organization and living quarters, he showed up at their apartment, asked if he could stay awhile and ended up living with them for a couple years. Sid and Norman biked out to the commune every day to work with the vegetable workers.

By the time the last vegetables were harvested and all the preparations for spring planting were made, it was cold enough in Beijing that the peasants started to harvest ice from the ponds just east of the Sanlitun compound. Cut into big blocks, the ice was stored in insulated houses to sell the following summer. Joan, still a Vermonter and winter sport Olympian in her heart, saw the ice and got her family on skates—only to take a spill showing off a one legged figure eight and break her arm. So Joan had to stay behind when Sid and Norman went to ask the peasants if they could help with the ice cutting.

[T]hose peasants out there... for the most part, they didn't get in factional struggles or anything. They didn't care if you were a foreigner or a Chinese; if you went out and worked that was fine. You were a *laodong renmin*, a working person.

<sup>134</sup> May 1<sup>st</sup> cadre schools were places where intellectuals in the city who were divorced from production were sent to engage in agricultural work as well as ideological study, in order to combat the separation between those working in the superstructure and in production.

Sid loved the work. He was in his 50s by then, so he couldn't quite keep up with the heaviest work like scoring the ice with the pick and pounding on it to get it to break along the scratch, but he took great pleasure in poling the huge ice barges down to the icehouse on shore. It was, he said, "a lot of fun—much more fun than polishing stupid movie magazines!"

Sid's lack of experience, however, got him into trouble. One day in the dead of winter he was standing on the ice but didn't realize it was a thin second freezing. So when he pushed down with his pole, the ice gave way and he ended up in the freezing water. Wearing the standard issue at the time, thick cotton padded clothes, saved him as it buoyed him up enough so that he got his elbows onto the ice and hauled himself out.

The other workers were way down at the other end of the pond and oblivious to his predicament, so he had to think fast if he didn't want to turn into a block of ice himself and freeze to death on the banks. He and Norman always rode their bikes to work, but Sid knew that if he got on that bike, he would never make it home, because he couldn't keep warm enough. So he started out swinging his arms at a dead sprint and made it back to the apartment. Dama had to pour boiling water down the front of his cotton padded shirt to unbutton it, but eventually he got out of all his clothes, into some dry ones and filled his gullet with a couple swigs of a hard liquor that the Chinese called *erguotou*, and Sid called "white lightning." After warming up a bit, he walked back to the icehouse where the peasants had no clue what had happened to him. They laughed and said they were just wondering why that last barge didn't ever come down the shore.

Not one to sit at home, after she got the boot from her organization, Joan went out behind Sanlitun to talk to the brigade there to see if there was anything she could do with one arm.

A guy who was maybe a team leader told me that before Liberation he was a rickshaw puller in Beijing.<sup>135</sup> He said that the Americans would come and get in the rickshaw and then just beat the rickshaw pullers. Then when they got to wherever they were going, they wouldn't pay. He also said that the foreign soldiers used to beat people up. He told me that I was the first foreigner who ever asked to work down there. So he let me work with him.

At first they had her feeding the fire with brush, which Joan could manage with her one good arm. But as she got better, they put her with the older women workers. Just as Fred had been before at Caotan, Joan was not all that thrilled with the prospect of being stuck with the older women workers. She saw the work that they were doing as not quite vigorous enough, and in her mind she was not really ready to be put out to pasture in that way just yet; having run with the most active of active men and women

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<sup>135</sup> A rickshaw is a wheeled cart pulled by human labor to carry other humans for transport. In feudal China rickshaw pullers were often abused and treated like draft animals. Socialist China replaced the brutally exploitative form of private transport with public buses and bicycles.

all her life, she just didn't see herself as being in the same category. So she fought to work with the younger women, transporting water on carrying poles and doing heavier work. It was the one time she felt like the peasants didn't welcome her into their team.

Because she worked with them, it wasn't a question that Joan would study with them as well. So she sat with them on their breaks from fieldwork to read the paper and participate in discussions. The study itself was a being manipulated then by Lin Biao, who had long since begun to build Mao's cult of personality and was now trying to maneuver into a stronger position to succeed him through making Mao a god and placing himself as his number one disciple. Joan was more impressed with the fact that she was allowed into the study than with the content.

By that time in Spring '68, the schools had all reopened, and the kids were subjected to the rules of Mao worship as well. Both Billy and Fred were faced every morning with having to chant "Long Live Chairman Mao" a bunch of times before they were let in the gate. Billy thought it was a bunch of nonsense, so he climbed the fence in the back and met his classmates inside.

After ice-cutting season was over, Sid and Joan opened up a repair shop of sorts, fixing all kinds of things that their foreign friends needed fixing. Sid's specialty was Ming Dynasty furniture, which he loved for the simple and graceful lines and ingenious engineering; there were no nails or screws holding the pieces together—they were mostly put together purely by "contradictions" (opposing forces make pieces stay together, like stones cut and fit into an arch for bridges—the more pressure from the top, the tighter the stones get). But sometimes a few hundred years in arid Beijing, many of the contradictions worked things out and began collaborations that made the furniture come apart. So Sid, no carpenter by training, learned by doing and repaired a lot of furniture.

After the busy season working with the peasants, Joan began repairing all kinds of mechanical and electrical goods such as sewing machines and irons. She bought herself a sewing machine, even though she wasn't too interested in sewing. But she did design and build a beautiful cabinet for the new machine, reminiscent in craftsmanship of the piece she made for her Wilson cloud chamber that got her a Master's degree from the University of Wisconsin. With this work, they had a lot of different big bulky things to move all over the city—which they did by balancing them on their bikes late at night when the city finally stilled. As the Cultural Revolution was still very much coursing through the city, there were probably stranger sights than that of two foreigners wheeling beds and chairs on their bikes into the embassy compound at midnight.

In the summer of '68 the city heated up again and the struggle in the universities reached a climax. Word was that the Qinghua students were barricaded in different buildings on campus, each side fighting the other with spears, knives and clubs, and eventually guns and even canons that the engineering students made themselves. Several students had been killed, many were imprisoned along with different faculty and staff and many more had been injured. Most of the Qinghua University residents—students, faculty and staff—had long deserted the campus, turned off by the feverish

factionalism and the real physical violence that it represented. Less than 1000 were left. They were deeply entrenched, led by leaders with big, swollen heads, as Mao later said to and about them, who thought that by leading their side into armed struggle, they would end up with power in the upper reaches of the Central Committee.<sup>136</sup>

Word got around, and finally a PLA detachment assigned to a Beijing factory got together with the workers and decided they had to do something about increasingly volatile situation at the university.<sup>137</sup> Having been through a severe factional struggle themselves where they too almost took up weapons against each other, they could see that the students really needed help. They started demonstrating on the streets and up to the Qinghua campus gates against the student factionalism and against their move to try to kill one another with their makeshift arms. As the days passed, other factories decided to join until by the end of July thousands of workers and a small stand of PLA members amassed at the Qinghua campus gates. Armed only with two Central Committee directives written originally to stop the armed violence in cities to the south, and a copy of their little red book of Mao's quotations, they burst into the campus in formation and peacefully surrounded the warring students.

The students were not easily subdued. They attacked the unarmed workers and PLA members, whose only defense was their chant of, "Use reason, not violence," to implore the students to lay down their weapons. And even though the workers were attacked, they buried the PLA members in the middle of their ranks to protect them, because the students had learned that the PLA might have been the original instigators of the peaceful surrounding. In spite of being beaten and stabbed with spears and knives, the peaceful but militant group did not respond when provoked. By the time it was over, five were dead and 751 were wounded, some bearing the marks of permanent disability. Their actions and absolute disciplined restraint won over the majority of the students and isolated the rebel leaders until they lost all of their support.

At the end of the summer 1968, Mao and people in the Central Committee supporting the proletarian line wrested back control of the military and called for the dissolution of the Red Guards and the countless fighting groups—preventing the possible deterioration of factional fighting into an armed civil war. Then in December began the program to send intellectuals from the city to the countryside as another strategy to break the feudal culture of privileging desk work over fieldwork. Though many of the intellectuals didn't like it much at first, the great majority of them eventually gained a deeper understanding of and connection with the peasants and the kinds of production that kept the country afloat and food on their table.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Student leader Kuai Dafu was so emboldened by the support he got from up high that he believed he was going to end up with a seat on the Central Committee.

<sup>137</sup> By that time, the PLA had been called in by the Central in an effort to bring a measure of control back into the system; their presence was meant to prevent armed struggle and support oppressed and repressed representatives of the proletarian line.

<sup>138</sup> After the Cultural Revolution was lost many of those intellectuals with high-level connections were able to leverage their influence to return to the cities and were encouraged to write about the "horrors" they experienced having to live with common peasants and work for the first and only times in their lives with their hands.

As some foreigners reemerged from captivity and they occupied themselves with whatever work they could find, the September Eighth Fighting Group continued chipping away at the Foreign Experts Bureau policies and practices and advocating for comrades in the foreigner community who were being unfairly targeted. The call of the Cultural Revolution was to “Do widespread criticism,” and one of the issues Joan and Sid’s fighting group decided to criticize was the signs that appeared all around the perimeter of the city, stating that foreigners who wanted to travel beyond the signs had to have special permission. This time it wasn’t that Joan lived beyond the limits of the sign, but the blatant xenophobia (and bourgeois nationalism) got under her skin, and she volunteered to ride her bike out to get the exact text from the sign so they could quote it in their criticism.

The sign nearest to their apartment was on the eastern border of the city. Joan got off her bike and copied down the characters on the front of the sign and then stuck her head around the back to see if there was anything written there. As soon as her crown broke through the line of demarcation, two soldiers suddenly appeared barking, “What are you doing and what organization are you with??”

I said, “I’m in Duiwai Wenwei,” and told them the address and... said, “I’m *da pipan*” [doing big criticisms]. I told them that I thought the signs were non-proletarian signs, and that they taught the Chinese people to be afraid of foreigners, as though all foreigners were bad. I said that I thought that it was wrong, and that I was writing a criticism of it.

Not knowing quite what else to do, they wrote down her information and her story and let her go.

The next day Joan was called to her office for the first time since she had been forced out. When she arrived, she found that they had been sent a notice that their wayward office worker had been out “looking at signs” the day before. Her explanation was met with the warning to “Be careful.” Joan had no idea what she was supposed to be careful of but said OK and went home.

The September Eighth Fighting Group’s criticism, sent as always to the Cultural Revolution Committee, elicited a surprising response; not long after they dropped it in the mailbox, they noticed that the language of the signs changed. Now instead of singling out foreigners, it read, “Every person traveling beyond this sign must have special permission.” It was sort of a strange concession, because it was ludicrous to think that every Chinese citizen riding his or her bike or taking the bus just outside of the city limits would get special permission (who they were supposed to get that special permission from was unclear anyway), but September Eighth claimed it as one small victory.

In early 1969 Huang Hua, who had blown the whistle on Yao Dengshan in the Foreign Ministry, paid a visit to the Sanlitun compound. Huang Hua was sent specifically by Zhou Enlai, to talk to the foreigners to find out what their conditions were and help them understand what the hell was happening. He was their first “official” contact with the leadership since being booted out of their organizations. Joan and Sid

grabbed opportunity and gave him an earful.

They started first talking about Rose Smith, a founding member of the British Party, who had come to China after the British Party decided at the fork in the road to follow the Soviets. Hounded out of the Xin Hua News Agency where she had been working, Rose eventually gave up and went back to England—she was already in her 70s at the time. They talked about the Crooks and their three young boys left without their parents, and how the kids got work in factories but were ostracized by their co-workers who called their parents spies. Then there were Harry and Eva Lloyd teaching at a foreign language school in the Northeast, who got into hot water because Harry contended that the Red Guards' claim of the absolute righteousness of Mao Zedong Thought was un-dialectical. When Joan and Sid went to visit them at the Friendship Hotel after they had to move back to Beijing, Eva offered them tea but had nothing to eat, because they were without wages or grain tickets. Joan and Sid had to leave them some money so they could feed themselves. And Lucille Pu had married a Chinese man and therefore was not classed as a "foreign expert." When her husband got picked up and disappeared, and she lost her job teaching English, she and her son were left with nothing—like the Lloyds they had no income and no grain rations.

Huang Hua listened and commented and asked about their own situations. Opening that door gave Joan and Sid the opportunity to talk about what it had been like for their family to come into the maelstrom of Beijing in the time of revolution after having worked in agricultural production for almost two decades. And they took the chance to let Huang Hua and whoever he was going to be reporting back to know that they would like to get transferred back into agriculture as soon as possible.

After Huang Hua's visit the September Eighth crew decided to approach their work to engage in "big criticisms" on a larger scale to frame the treatment of each of the foreigners their group had been fighting for—again in the context of proletarian internationalism vs. bourgeois nationalism. So they began to write what they called a *Wan Yuan Shu*—or a 10,000-character book, detailing all of what had been happening to the foreign comrades they were in contact with. It was extremely specific and meticulous and took them a long, long time to write—especially because they wrote it in English and had to have it translated into Chinese. But they finished it and mailed it in. Joan and Sid also followed up with a short letter addressed to Chairman Mao Zedong about the general situation and citing especially egregious examples.

After Huang Hua's visit and after all of the documentation and the letter to Mao, the September Eighth group saw some concrete effects, although because they had no official response, they were never quite sure just how much of it they could take credit for. But Zhou Enlai sent for Rose Smith, who came back to China from England to work for the Xinhua News Agency. The Lloyds got taken care of so they were not afraid of going hungry. Lucille, though, was a different story.

Joan and Sid were especially concerned for Lucille, because she was in a more desperate situation with her young son. They wrote to her organization, they wrote to the Foreign Experts Bureau and they told Lin Gang about it. Lin Gang was the person in

the Foreign Experts' Bureau who was officially "in charge of" the two of them during that time. He was a decent guy who listened and tried to do what he could but didn't have much headroom because of his hard-nosed and idiot superior.

But one day Lin Gang arrived at their apartment with good news: Lucille had gotten her job back. They were feeling rather pleased with themselves for all their efforts until Lin Gang told them how it happened. Lucille, he said, had been clever enough to go protest in front of the very fancy National Minorities Hotel by walking back and forth and picking up cigarette butts. It took a minute, but Joan and Sid burst out laughing when they realized what happened. A few weeks before, Lucille had come to Sid for advice about her houseplants; he was the resident green thumb in the foreigner community, and she had little red aphids on her plants. He told her to bust apart some cigarettes, soak the tobacco in water and spray the juice on the plants. Lucille, who was a little like Joan in her obliviousness to etiquette, didn't have any qualms about hunting for discarded cigarette butts in front of one of the nicest hotels in town. Chinese officials thought she was protesting her lack of wages by picking up butts to smoke, and that was what got her back to work—not the countless letters and appeals on her behalf.

For Joan and Sid, the attack on their kids, their friends and foreign comrades—and all of their work and struggle to fight against it—was an integral part of the larger revolution. While they fought for their kids' right to use the swimming pool and for Rose Smith to be able to come back from England, if that was all there was, they probably would have just left China. But instead, their clarity about what the struggle was about and what was at stake with the Cultural Revolution kept them in China and kept them firm in their commitment. Years later, when visitors asked the inevitable "foreigners were attacked during the Cultural Revolution did you ever want to leave China question," Sid's response was always impassioned.

No, my goodness, we were right in the middle of the biggest struggle of the century! We certainly didn't wanna get out of it! No, it was wonderful. Well, there was a period in the roaring sixties, the last half of the 60s, when the movement was going on so much in the West... there was talk between us about the possibility of me going back. Joan couldn't go back, with the way she left, she'd have been harassed...

We were perhaps over-impressed by the students' movement and the Black movement in the US, and there was very little we could do in the US. We just discussed the thing. By that time I'd been in China so long that I didn't know anything about the student movement and the Black movement, except what I read in the paper. But it would've been like when I came to China—dropped in the middle of a scene that I was completely unfamiliar with. I was going to say, "aside from the fact that I knew the language," but even a lot of the language I wouldn't have understood!

And even with all of the "snake demons" and "boiling in oil" terminology, which

was sometimes hard to get a handle on, he did understand what was going on in Beijing in the late '60s.

So many people don't realize that the fundamental relations were class relations and not national relations. There were plenty of people that did get in trouble at those times, but most of them weren't foreigners—they were Chinese—some of them correctly and some of them incorrectly. But we were still treated as revolutionaries, even when we were, as we say, put in the deep freezer, even when the people in my organization sent me my monthly wages with two people for fear that they'd be accused of having illegitimate relations with a foreigner. Joan and I had no doubt at all about what was going on. That was the deviation from the revolution, from Mao and party policy. There never was any doubt in our minds about that.

While those deviations were being countered and reasserted on the tumultuous stage of the Cultural Revolution, the international situation also heated up. With Khrushchev making nice with the US, and the US keeping its fingers wrapped tight around its embargo, China was being pushed further and further into isolation. So China began to make some subtle moves to begin to try to break the new kinship being forged between the other two major world powers. Then, as the country began preparations to celebrate National Day on October 1, 1970, China sent its first public signal: an invitation Edgar Snow, the "honest journalist," who had written *Red Star Over China*, to attend the celebrations on Tiananmen Square. He graciously accepted and images of him on the podium circulated around the world on October 2. But the US missed the cue.<sup>139</sup>

So in April 1971, China initiated what would later become known as Ping Pong Diplomacy. What began at a seemingly innocent sports tournament between rounds of table tennis would launch China into a new era internationally, paving the way for the first US president's visit since Liberation—and also Bill Hinton's, who, having been spurned at the Chinese embassy in France in 1967, was impatient after the long delay to return to Longbow to find out what had transpired in his absence.

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<sup>139</sup> Nixon later reflected on the opening of relations with China and admitted to missing that first signal with Snow.



## Chapter 33

# Breakthrough

*“When Mao went to Moscow, he met with all the Chinese students [and] somebody said something about how the Chairman shouldn’t work so hard. Mao said, ‘Oh, I don’t work hard. En Lai is the guy who works hard.’” Sid Engst*

For most people all over the world, the flurry over the US ping-pong team receiving an invitation to the People’s Republic in the spring of 1971 was out of the blue—and it was played very innocently, as though lovers of the sport broke open the massive glacier that was the Cold War through a simple invitation. In fact, negotiations and communiqués between the China and the US had been going on for at least two or three years prior to the table tennis tournament in Japan where the teams met.

China’s interest was to address the growing coziness between Washington and Moscow, as Khrushchev became increasingly aggressive in his policies towards Beijing. And US President Richard Nixon saw the importance of bringing China into the diplomatic arena as it kept getting beaten in Asia—first in Korea and then in Vietnam. Plus, the USSR and the PRC vying for a bigger thaw in their relationship with the US was in its strategic interests.

So when the opportunity presented itself—when one of the Chinese table tennis players extended a collegial invitation to his US opponent, word shot straight back to Zhou Enlai and then to Mao about the possibility of a bolder signal to the US. The leadership bounced a message back indicating that the Chinese team could make their invitation official. After consulting with their handlers, the US team accepted and just like that, the first “official” and sanctioned visitors from the US since 1949 (Peace Conference delegates, mothers of foreign revolutionaries, and other US citizens who reached China via other more friendly countries did not count in the official “1<sup>st</sup> Americans in China” category) crossed the bridge from British-held Hong Kong into Guangzhou.

Joan and Sid, along with many of the foreigner community, attended the match when the teams reached Beijing in June. The only two things they remembered about it were: 1. China won, and 2. Jiang Qing was in attendance, and they did not appreciate her long and ornate Victorian gown fashion sense.

On June 14, the day Zhou Enlai received the US team in the Great Hall of the People, the US announced plans to end its 20-year embargo on the People’s Republic. The visit set the stage for a more direct relationship, which was negotiated in secret mostly with Henry Kissinger, Nixon’s National Security Advisor, through mutual friend Pakistan.

Ping Pong Diplomacy also opened a route for Bill Hinton into China. After years of being hounded and blacklisted and standing toe-to-toe with the Eastland Committee at the height of the McCarthy Era in order to get the real story of the Chinese revolution to the American people, he felt somewhat vindicated with the official state

invitation to return to China.<sup>140</sup> Once Bill understood that just how chaotic the situation had been during the Cultural Revolution, he was able to get over feeling dejected about the wait. After he arrived, he also asked Zhou Enlai why Edgar Snow had gotten an invite first, and Zhou explained that they were trying to send a signal to DC and inviting him would have sent a distinctly different signal than Snow.

Bill's arrival with Joanne (his second wife) and their three young kids was announced in the *People's Daily*, along with a list of the people who would be there to meet them when they came in. The list included: Sid, Frank Coe, Saul Adler, and their wives, and then Huang Hua and He Liliang. Joan was not pleased. Here it was her brother visiting, and she was reduced, along with all of the other women aside from He Liliang, to being just the "wife of!" As they awaited Bill's return in the Peace Compound where Joan had attended the Peace Conference all those years ago and where the Coes and the Adlers lived, the "wives" commiserated with each other about being treated like baggage. Joan sought out the person in charge of the team of people put together for Bill's visit to lodge a complaint—or in her words, "Give them hell."

When Bill stepped off the plane in May, it had been 18 years since he left to write *Fanshen*, his book about Land Reform in China, and Carma, the toddler who he had swung up over his head, had grown up into a young adult, eager to reconnect with her father and tell him stories about the Red Guards.

The State arranged for Bill, Joanne and their three kids, Mikey, Lissie and Cathy, to stay in Beijing for a spell, sending Bill all over the city to talk to people about all of their experiences during the Cultural Revolution. After the PLA had come back under the full control of the Central under Mao and Zhou, the soldiers were deployed to different work units around the country to model the peaceful dissolution of factionalism. They took Bill to the February 7<sup>th</sup> Iron Factory where the policy was in full swing, and he worked for a while building railroad cars before going to Shougang, a big iron and steel mill west of the city, and then a sawmill. Bill also went to assess the situation at Qinghua University. There, he learned about the Cultural Revolution through the lens of the factionally minded students, who by then had been surrounded physically and ideologically by the factory workers intervening to stop the armed violence and were in the process of reforming China's elite education system. Qinghua gave Bill free and unlimited access, and he conducted enough comprehensive interviews through the long hot Beijing summer to write a book about it called *Hundred Day War*.

Joan and Sid got to tag along wherever Bill went but took a day off occasionally to run their own errands. On a shopping trip to Wangfujing after picking up what they needed, they walked back to their bikes where an excited woman ran up to them. It was Zhao Fengfeng—one of the members of the small group in charge of Bill's visit

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<sup>140</sup> Senator James Eastland headed the US Judiciary Committee and called many Left and progressive US citizens to testify before it during the McCarthy Era. Bill beat the committee by challenging each senator accusing him of being un-American with questions prepared by his lawyer about inappropriate or sordid details in their political and private lives. Bill's hearing was quickly moved to a private room with no media, where he succeeded in winning the return of all of his previously confiscated notes and materials from China.

(who had also been Anna Louis Strong's secretary for decades). She grabbed them and told them: "Hurry up! The Premier's invited you to dinner!" They were surprised that she knew where to find them: she had called their home and found out a general locale before scouring the lots for their bikes. There was no time to go home and change or do anything except get in the car and proceed to the Peace Compound and from there immediately to the Great Hall of the People. Joan felt lucky that she had put on some cleaner, neater clothes to go shopping; ordinarily she might not look so tidy. Carma, who was brought directly from the factory where she was working, had to go to dinner with Zhou Enlai in patched work pants. Fred got an invitation too, but the other kids were deemed too young.

The meal was intimate with just two small tables. Although they were long divorced, Bill's ex-wife, Bertha, (one of the authors of the famous *dazibao* with Joan, Sid and Ann) was always invited to the functions with the Premier as long as Bill and Joanne were there. Saul and Pat Adler and Frank and Ruth Coe rounded out the group. When the food got on the table Zhou Enlai spoke to Joanne about how China had to be sensitive about dealing with other people's customs, even if they were bourgeois customs—for instance, in the US and Europe people were called by Mr. and Mrs. and that reflected the nuclear family. Joanne listened earnestly but had no idea why the Premier was telling her all that until Joan spoke up and admitted that it had been she who raised the ruckus about being named Sid's "wife" in the *People's Daily*.

On the way out, Joan shook Zhou Enlai's hand and said, "Thank you for your criticism."

Then I went home and thought, "To hell with that. I don't thank him for his criticism. The criticism was wrong; why should I thank him for a wrong criticism? I have to be honest with the Premier." It just weighed on me, so I wrote a little note to the Premier saying that there must've been some misunderstanding. I said that the women's movement goes off on tangents, but that we should be in the forefront supporting the correct things. I said that the basic aspect of women is that they're oppressed, and that we should support the correct demands of women; they certainly shouldn't be treated as their husbands' baggage. The idea that they should have their own identity is a correct thing, and it should be supported.

Most everyone was mortified and thought that Joan should definitely not send the note to the Premier. But never one to bend to the will of others based on politeness or protocol when she was pretty sure she was right, Joan gave her note to the leader of Bill's group and asked him to pass it along to Zhou Enlai.

Including that first impromptu dinner, altogether Bill was granted five face-to-face talks and interviews with Zhou Enlai. Getting the special attention from Zhou Enlai showed that the Premier understood the significance and impact of Bill's work in the US—but it was also a rare opportunity. With that first white plastic ball hit over the net the month before, the prospect of a visit from Nixon was becoming more and

more of a reality. So Zhou Enlai used the opportunity to engage in real dialogue and discussion with Bill and the other Americans in China in order to get their perspective on what was happening in the US, and how they interpreted China establishing talks with the US government.

During the second talk, the Hinton/Engst clan along with a few other invited guests sat around some big tables and got a taste of what dialoguing with the Premier meant. Instead of standing at a lectern telling people what they should know and taking questions from the group, Zhou instead engaged in lively conversation with people around the room, periodically swooping over to different guests with the microphone and asking pointed questions. Carma, who was busy talking to someone else, was the first to be caught off guard on a question about who Nixon was referring to when he said that establishing talks with China would not injure their relationship with other friends. She froze on the answer (he was referring to Chiang Kai-shek and Taiwan), which Fred managed to get right.

Then Sid biffed it when the Premier asked him a question about the relationship between the USSR and China and the US, which Joan got to answer correctly, only because Sid read the newspaper every day and told her all the news that was in it. Instead of continuing to sit back and soak it all up, enjoying immensely the fact that he had been invited to these talks with the Premier, Sid, a bit red faced, sat up along with the other guests and paid a little closer attention. This was not, after all, a time for socializing.

Zhou had a way of getting everything out. He got a whole group of people together who were interested in whatever the discussion was going to be that night. Then he'd just open up the subject, start asking everyone questions and get everybody talking. It was like a conference. They were all these very profound questions actually, and before long you'd forgotten entirely that it was the Premier. He was just like everybody else. Everyone was talking and throwing in two bits, and someone would interrupt him and he—actually he didn't interrupt very much. But he was an extremely human person in that respect.

During that talk, Bill told Zhou Enlai that many people in the US were interested in coming to China. Zhou asked how many and frowned when Bill told him several million. He told Bill to be serious—he wanted to know how many people might want to come. Bill was serious. The Premier took a minute to digest the information and then told him to contact his mother, who had since gotten her passport back after it was seized when she returned to the US visiting Joan and Sid and her grandkids in 1962, and ask her to organize a group of around 20 youth to come on a work and study trip. After dinner, Bill called Ganny and set the wheels in motion.

Even with all of the interviews with the Premier, learning about the Cultural Revolution and investigating the situation at Qinghua University, Bill still itched to go back to Longbow. It had been a long time both in terms of years and also in terms of

what his main characters had experienced since the conclusion of *Fanshen*. But every time he indicated his intentions, Zhou Enlai brought up the idea of going instead to the village of Dazhai—the country’s agricultural model. Bill was not deterred. He made plans and got on a train south and he walked into the town from the same direction that he had left it 18 years before.

Bill’s wife Joanne wanted a little break, opting to stay in Beijing, and Joan and Sid offered to take their three kids. Their only request was that they could take them somewhere out in the countryside, because the embassy compound at Sanlitun was not all that suitable for little ones in general, much less six farm kids (their three, plus Bill and Joanne’s who were growing up on a small farm in Pennsylvania). Their original idea was to take them all out to the Chinese-Albanian Friendship Commune, but then He Liliang, Huang Hua’s wife, paid them a visit and asked if they would like to go to Dazhai instead. They were thrilled.

Since the time that Bertha picked up Carma at Caotan to visit the village that Joan and Sid had never heard of in 1965, Dazhai had flooded into the country’s consciousness. In 1964, Mao named two examples of socialist development of production and productive forces: Daqing for industry and Dazhai for agriculture.

Mao’s identification of Dazhai as the nation’s model stemmed from the growing struggle in the upper levels of party leadership (which had in the end prompted Mao to launch the Cultural Revolution). It was a tiny village tucked away in the folds of yellow loess hills in Shanxi Province, a place, as Sid’s friends back home would say, where “a crow flying by would do well to carry its lunch.” The soil was poor, dry and stacked precariously on brittle slopes, and when the rains did come, the earth and everything planted in it would splash down into the gullies to the village below.

And yet, after Land Reform and after the movements to collectivize agriculture, that barren village managed to raise its production levels to feed itself, sell surplus to the State and invest in new small industries building factories for fertilizers and food processing. But what made Dazhai so critical was that the way they did it—through mobilizing people collectively to fight for the interests of the whole—was a testament to the belief that China, in its most backward, tucked away unfertile countryside hamlets, could develop and even flourish with socialist ideology and economic policies. Since Lushan in 1956, when Liu Shaoqi and his allies began the open assault on the socialist line, and through the different hijacking of movements and institution of material incentives and piecework wages, the assault had not subsided. Whenever the opportunity presented itself, policies filtered down from the top with a message that China would develop faster and more efficiently if there was a little free market where people with a bit of cash could buy some more luxuries, if individuals were given a little extra boost with some competition and bonuses to do better. When those policies failed and were thrown out, the message came instead in whispers and grumbling complaints, coupled with carrying out party movements to extremes using “white terror” tactics.

Dazhai was concrete proof that through promoting cooperation and self-reliance,

through transparent and principled leadership, ordinary people could and would come together and overcome monumental barriers.

The call was for the whole country to learn from Dazhai. Joan and Sid gathered the kids and got ready to leave for the village in Shanxi Province, prepared to answer the call.

## Chapter 34

# Turning Over

*“It was the Dazhai people themselves, led by Chen Yonggui that developed Dazhai with self-reliance.” Joan Hinton*

Dazhai was a lot to take in. Everywhere you looked, from the peak of Tigerhead Mountain, to the deeply creased gullies that cracked beneath, the area was teeming with activity. When Joan and Sid and their crew of kids arrived, the work of carving out flatland on mountains was done by shovels and pickaxes, cutting stones by chisel and hammer, transporting the cut stones up the slopes by carrying pole, placed and set into terrace walls by four rough hands, and soil to make the cropland heaved up by buckets. But what struck Joan and Sid was that the enormity of the backbreaking work at hand was dwarfed by the immensity of the spirit that lit the place up.

The cadre who led the efforts was Chen Yonggui—a broad-shouldered man with a leathery face creased like the gullies of his village. Orphaned at a young age, he was taken in and raised by a family of widows. The widows were more interested in how the young man could help them work their land than really adopting him, so pre-Liberation Chen Yonggui was basically a landless peasant, always working for room and board with the widows, and then hiring himself out to the rich landlord families.

By the time of Land Reform and then the call from the new government for peasants to begin pooling their labor and resources in the form of mutual aid teams, Chen Yonggui had become known as a strong and hard worker whose mind could turn sharp corners quickly. So when villagers began to organize into teams, they all wanted him to join theirs. Chen Yonggui, faced with the choice of joining a team of strong, able-bodied adults, or one with those who were either past or not yet in their prime—chose to join the latter. It was with this group of elderly grandparents and young kids that Chen Yonggui first proved what he somehow knew in his heart—that the key component to production was not brute strength, but leadership, ideology and mobilization. Utilizing their resources of experience and enthusiasm, Chen’s “Feeble” group as they were called, out produced the others and laid the groundwork for the cooperative that they would build.

Thinking outside the box both in terms of what was at the heart of people’s enthusiasm for work, as well as just what it was possible for human labor to accomplish, Chen Yonggui eventually led the Dazhai villagers down a path that challenged and transformed entrenched feudal ideas about human relationships with every rock that was overturned to remake the mountains into cropland.

Confronted time and again with the old society’s landlord self-defense articulated in the refrain, “We’re all one family,” Chen Yonggui gathered the villagers at the local cemetery and did the unthinkable—he dug up a bunch of dead people.<sup>141</sup> First, he

<sup>141</sup> “We’re all one family” meant in feudal China that you belonged to the landlord’s family, along with your loyalty and interests.

took a spade and unearthed the grave of the patriarch of one of the landlord families, then crossed over to dig up another old rich guy. In both tombs were riches of silk and gold, ornately embossed to ensure them a luxurious afterlife. Everyone took a good long look. Then he dug up the grave of one of the serfs of each family. In them there was nothing but bones and a bamboo mat.

“Who,” Chen asked, “is from the same family?!”

In this way, the knots of old feudal relationships began to unravel, revealing their class relationships and the barriers to working together across families gradually untangled. One by one, the natural barriers to planting and growing healthy productive crops were unknotted too. Without enough flat land to plant food to subsist, they began to remake the hills, carving out terraces like so many steps to the tops of the peaks. For eons, flash floods in the normally arid region would wash out the meager crops on the sloped loess hills and gush into the village itself, drowning people caught off guard. After a flash flood wiped out the terraces they had been building, they turned the arches the other way and built them like their cave homes, so that they butted against the hills, and the stones became tighter as the water pushed against them. They cut irrigation and drainage ditches, so that floodwater no longer tumbled unexpectedly into the village, instead flowing harmlessly away.

The soil, infertile in nature and from years of production was remade too; Chen Yonggui, understanding the concept of replenishing the earth with organic matter, initiated a mammoth compost project. With every corn harvest, all of the stalks were carried to a site where they were chopped finely, mixed with water and then allowed to ferment. After the stalks became compost, the loose black earth was shoveled back into buckets and carried up to the fields, where it was mixed by hand, spade by spade into the loess. By the time the next harvesting season rolled back around, from pre-Liberation to post-compost, corn production increased eight-fold.

With its pioneering methodology in social relationships as well as agricultural technique, Dazhai prospered. Chen Yonggui was asked to take on the leadership in the region and then in the province. Surrounding villages began to go through a similar transformation. Chen was elected to the Central Committee and then to take part in a peasant, worker, soldier and youth study in Beijing. Central took notice. By 1973, Chen Yonggui was elected to the Political Bureau, and two years later, during the Fourth National People’s Congress, he was appointed Vice Chairman of the Party, one of eleven altogether.

And so Chen Yonggui, rarely seen without his head wrapped in a white towel in the style of Shanxi peasants even when performing his state duties, a guy who was mostly illiterate but through dogged perseverance managed to learn how to read most of the commonly used characters, became Vice Chairman of the People’s Republic.

At the time Sid and Joan arrived in 1971 with their six kids in tow, fresh off the bus, Chen Yonggui was still based in the village and head of the county and was able to turn many of the pages of his complicated story for them himself throughout the course of that first visit, and then in the many more that would follow. He also gath-



ered the other villagers together and asked them to recount Dazhai's history, including the Anti-Japanese War when the Japanese massacred all of the able-bodied men, leaving just old people, women and children.

With Dama left in Beijing, Joan and Sid got some assistance in the form of a cook named Guo from the village and Fengfeng from Bill's group. The Dazhai villagers, however, had a much more appropriate way to make Bill's kids, who didn't speak any Chinese and had never been anywhere that remotely resembled the Chinese countryside, feel at home; they assigned each of them a same age playmate. And the minute they got there, their playmates grabbed their hands and ran off to show them wild baby bunnies that they captured.

Mike melted right in, picking up not only Chinese but Shanxi dialect Chinese, and got along with his buddy so well that he would often spend the night at his family's instead of coming home. (He melted in so much that when his dad came to visit later in the summer, he got swept out of the way with the other kids in the village to make way for the "foreign visitor.") Lissie got along all right, but was beside herself when the wild bunnies died one by one. And Cathy, who was just beginning to really communicate in English, got suddenly thrown into a whole new language project and did not appreciate it. The three of them went to school with the local kids, but Joan miscalculated Cathy's age because of the lunar/solar calendar discrepancy, and she ended up a five-year-old in a class of three-year-olds.<sup>142</sup>

Even though there was a guesthouse built for the ever-increasing stream of visitors, which started after Mao named Dazhai the agricultural model, Joan and Sid were happy that no one made any fuss when they requested to stay in the village instead. A couple rows of new residential caves were just being dried out when they arrived. Caves, like *kangs*, needed to be baked dry with hot fires before they were inhabitable, so the family moved in along with Fengfeng in the meantime. Fengfeng, who was given the responsibility of the safety and well being of Bill Hinton's kids, found herself constantly clashing with Joan, who had extremely different ideas about how to raise children. Mike, Lissie and Cathy, unused to the food, climate and conditions were prone to getting the sniffles—so Joan thought the best thing to do was to toughen them up and get them adapted to Dazhai living. She took them hiking all over Tiger-head Mountain in all different kinds of weather, while Fengfeng despaired at sight of the kids drenched in rain or dirty and windblown.

While the little ones went to school, the rest of them were assigned work. Karen, now a teenager, joined the famous Dazhai Iron Girls team, a group of young women who earned the reputation of being able to tackle any project, breaking with the old feudal tradition of keeping girls at home to train to do housework. Billy and Fred went off with the Iron Boys, and Joan and Sid were placed with the "Old People." Sid remembered that they worked together separating and replanting rice seedlings—but

<sup>142</sup> In China traditional age is calculated on the lunar calendar and at birth a person is considered one year old. As soon as the Lunar New Year passes, another year is added. Even if someone was born in January, the person's traditional age would be two after the Lunar New Year, even if it was in February.

Joan remembered that Sid got assigned work with the men climbing trees in the mountains picking walnuts. And she got stuck with the old ladies in their caves doing work around the village. Just like the time she worked with the peasants behind Sanlitun after she broke her arm, Joan did not feel compelled to stick with the women her age and took off for the mountains with Sid. And just like the peasants in Beijing, the peasants in Dazhai did not really appreciate Joan's self-styled feminism.

I never quite fit into the leftover feudal hierarchy. Dazhai was much less that way compared to other villages, because they had the Iron Girls, and the women went in the fields and did everything. But still there was still a division where the women did much more of the housework, and their work in the fields is much closer to the home...

If I had been a real good communist, I would've just done whatever they did and gotten to know them... But that's not in my nature, so I always went out with Sid and the men and the Iron Girls... So I sort of imagine that of all of our family, I was the least appreciated.

Perhaps the person who appreciated her the least, even less than Fengfeng, was Wang Yuwen, the chief of police and head of security in the village. Standing obliviously on a hill with the family, explaining seriously that there were certain things that women just couldn't do, he suddenly found himself grabbed by the ankles and thrown to the ground. The enormity of the loss of face that Joan caused the chief of police with her Shady Hill style wrestling technique is difficult to measure. Suffice to say that some 20 years later, when Joan and Sid returned to Dazhai to visit old friends, Wang Yuwen was still completely stone faced when the story was recounted to the great amusement of everyone else in the room.

In addition to picking walnuts, building terraces, separating seedlings (and not doing housework), and all of the other work the villagers were busy with, Joan and Sid and their three kids were invited to take part in the village militia practice.<sup>143</sup> Chen Yonggui's militia practice was the first and only time that Joan, who had wielded a bat to fight bandits, ever shot a gun. Of the lot, Billy was the best shot. Sid's shot they couldn't find on the target, so he claimed that he was aiming for Billy's and that it went through the same hole.

When Chen Yonggui had a moment, he got a minivan and took them to visit the surrounding villages, historical sites and various infrastructure projects. (When he didn't have the time, he would send Wang Yuwen, and sometimes Bill would come up from Longbow and take part.) What they saw was that lots of places had really taken their study of Dazhai to heart, and the whole county was blossoming from it. In addition to learning about huge projects of land reclamation, irrigation and drainage projects for water conservation, and roads and bridges and small factories, they also learned how Xiyang County fared during the Great Leap Forward, the "white terror"

<sup>143</sup> Until 1980, when Deng Xiaoping dissolved the People's Militias and confiscated all weapons, every village was organized for armed resistance.

days of the Socialist Education Movement, the beginning of the Cultural Revolution and later the factional fighting.

Joan recalled how Chen Yonggui told the story of what happened when he was made a model worker in Shanxi and opportunists began over-reporting their production during the Great Leap.

They had gotten 500 catties per *mu* at Dazhai, which was a terrific figure at that time, but when he went to a model worker meeting he was told, “Why don’t you just up it to 2000? Because you’re the lowest of anybody around.” And they said, “We’ll give you a truck and a trip to Beijing to see Chairman Mao. Just say you got 2000.” So Chen Yonggui thought about it. He thought about it, and it was very tempting to be able to go see Chairman Mao and go to Beijing and get a truck for his brigade. Then he thought, “Well if I say we got 2000 and we only got 500, how could I repay everybody? Where am I gonna get the grain from?” He didn’t have the grain and couldn’t repay them, so finally he refused.<sup>144</sup>

So he was at the bottom of the list of model workers. He didn’t go to Beijing and he didn’t get a truck. He went back to Dazhai where they had a competition of production between all the different villages. They had won the competition, so they had a red flag, but when he got back, he told the people in the village, “You just take this red flag and go to the next village and hand it over to them.” He described... them marching off to the next village with the red flag and just giving it to the people who said they had 2000 catties per *mu*, when they really didn’t. So it wasn’t just our place; it was all over the country.

During the Socialist Education Movement, that area had been particularly hard hit by Peach Orchard type work teams who wreaked a lot of havoc with their methodology. The village that left the biggest impression on them was a place called Nannao, where pre-Liberation famine refugees had migrated trying to eke out a living on the fragile loess slopes above a village, land that no one had ever worked before. Through their intensive work and attention, the land began to produce—and as soon as green shoots began to make their appearance, the landlords of the village below laid claim to the land as their own and took half of whatever was harvested as tax.

Post Liberation, Nannao’s leaders filled the shoes of the old landlords. When the Socialist Education Movement work teams came, the brigade leader sweet-talked the work team head and together they attacked the lower cadres, accusing people of embezzlement, driving some to suicide. Their story struck a sore chord with Joan and Sid and their Caotan experiences. The most serious accusation was leveled at the guy

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<sup>144</sup> Repayment here refers to the amount of grain that each agricultural unit turned over to the State after the harvest based on a certain percentage of their production figures. If Chen had over-reported his production figures like many opportunistic leaders did during the Socialist Education Movement, his people would have been left without enough food stores to last until the next harvest.

in charge of the storehouse, Li Shuoxiu, who denied stealing from the brigade but was criticized and arrested anyway.

The start of the Cultural Revolution led to the ousting of the work team, but the head of the brigade remained, and the people in Nannao didn't dare challenge him. When Chen Yonggui took leadership in the county in 1966, he visited every village and set up processes by which people could speak up about what had been happening to them under the work teams. In Nannao it took a long time, but when people began gradually to open up, all sorts of things were unearthed, including the fact that the brigade leader was the one stealing in the form of selling pigs on the black market, and the accusation against Li Shuoxiu was actually his way of deflecting any unwanted scrutiny.

By the time all was said and done, the villagers appointed the guy in charge of the storehouse their new brigade leader—and that's when things really took off. His first task was to organize the villagers to build a road so that donkey carts could make their way in and out. They built that road in just 19 days. Then, he brought in stock animals, donkeys and mules, which liberated the women in Nannao from generations of grain grinding at the stone. With the addition of half the potential labor force in the fields, they began to remake the landscape with terraces. There wasn't a whole lot of dirt on the hill that was suited to making terraces, so they got the ear of some engineers who helped them set dynamite up on a neighboring hill to direct a blast that showered their terraces with loess. New fields were made. Joan was amazed.

Every year they did something new and worth doing, and the production of grain went up and up. Every year their income was more and more, and every year they invested more. The grain production went from 150 catties per *mu* to 900 catties per *mu* in four years... That to me was the essence of, "The change in the relations of production will release a tremendous productive force." That old head of the village had just been thinking of his own benefit and hadn't gotten production going. And Li Shuoxiu used whatever energy they had together with the people and whooo! changed Nannao into a very profitable village.

In contrast, the village of Shi Ping used a different method—they equipped their able-bodied adults with carts and sent them out to work for wages. They did make a significant amount of money, but with all of the labor power working outside, the village remained untransformed. When Chen Yonggui met with them, he pointed out that sending workers out to work for wages when you couldn't support yourself at home wasn't a very sustainable method of development. The leadership took his comments to heart and called back their workers. One of the first projects they tackled was carving a tunnel out of the great mass of rock that stood between their crops and the nearby river. Building the irrigation system and the increased attention on their fields raised their production exponentially and brought in more money than the men had with their with carts—and they were able to feed themselves with plenty of extra

socked away in the storehouse to boot.

After so many years in Beijing in various stages of thaw from being frozen out of their organizations, and locked in by the city streets, swimming around the superstructure—living and working in production in agriculture came as a great relief to Sid and Joan. And witnessing firsthand the incredible feats that changing the “relations of production” could accomplish confirmed what they knew already to be true: that all the complicated mess of factionalism and xenophobia and all the twists and turns and backlash of the previous few years were manifestations of a fierce struggle of political line—not evidence of socialism’s failures.

Altogether, the family stayed for three months. In the US during those three months, Ganny organized her youth group as per Zhou Enlai’s instructions: about 20 youth of various races who were close to her. In preparation, Ganny took a trip to Ottawa and had a sit down with Huang Hua about what the trip might look like.<sup>145</sup> What they agreed on was that it should be a combination of work and study; the group would work for a month in the factories, a month in communes and then travel the country for a month.

So though Joan and Sid had to say goodbye to their new friends in Dazhai, they knew that with luck, this small village was where the youth group would end up (if they had anything to say about it). And if Joan and Sid were equally lucky, they might just get to tag along with them.

It was early September when the police chief loaded them into the van for the ride to the train station. After climbing in Wang Yuwen told them some startling news: all of the planes in China had been grounded. There wasn’t much other information, but it was clear that something serious had happened, and that it probably wasn’t good.

Only after they got back to their Beijing apartment did they begin to pick up on what might have transpired. Carma was the first to notice that the subtle but distinct change in the slogan being floated at the time. It changed from “The people should learn from the People’s Liberation Army” to “The people should learn from the People’s Liberation Army and the People’s Liberation Army should learn from the people.” The people implied then that probably whatever was happening had to do with someone in the PLA.

An announcement came on September 30, 1971, saying that National Day celebrations were being cancelled. The rumor was that it was Lin Biao—not just someone from the PLA, but the #1 in charge of the PLA. And in fact the grounding of all planes on September 13<sup>th</sup> was due to the fact that Lin Biao had taken his family aboard a small plane to flee to the USSR after organizing a failed coup in Shanghai, an assassination attempt on Mao three days before. They were making a beeline for the Soviet Union, but the plane went down and burst into flames on the Inner Mongolian steppe.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>145</sup> In 1971, Huang Hua was appointed China’s first ambassador to Canada and worked there for a few months before returning to China.

<sup>146</sup> The official story is that the plane ran out of gas and was actually turning around to try to make it back when it crashed. There have always been rumors, so far unfounded, that the plane was shot down, either by China or

The eventual announcement of Lin Biao's flight and untimely death took most people by surprise at the time. Lin Biao, after all, was the cultivator of the cult of personality that had everyone all over the country deifying Mao and making a bible out of the *Little Red Book*. Many assumed that he was in line to succeed Mao, and with his prestige as the commander of the PLA, Lin looked well poised to take power after Mao's death. But Lin Biao was impatient, and in hindsight the signs of his growing ambitions were there. Back in 1969 at the 9<sup>th</sup> Party Congress Lin made some moves, outwardly fighting for more power. When he didn't succeed, he had Chen Boda act as his front man at the 2<sup>nd</sup> plenary of the 9<sup>th</sup> Congress in August 1970, challenging the Party to create new positions of power, which Lin would then fill. As a result of the struggle in 1970, Chen was criticized and removed, and Lin Biao was left in the same position, waiting to see if Mao would name him as his successor.

Not a lot of information was given as the Party itself tried to sort out just what happened and why, and so rumors were what most people chewed on. And, when in place of the usual National Day, Zhou Enlai called together all of the Americans in China to the Great Hall of the People to talk about the impending visit, he did not bring up the subject.

That meeting was attended, Sid remembered, by a group of Americans that would have had a very hard time coming together in the meeting, if it wasn't for the fact that it was Premier Zhou Enlai doing the inviting.

[W]e had everybody from the Left and you might even say the ultra-Left of the US to the very Right: a State Department guy who had been in Yanan. He'd been here in China during the Japanese war, and he suggested to the State Department that they support the Communists to fight the Japanese because Chiang Kai-shek was not doing it... There was Huey Newton of the Black Panthers, the head of the Revolutionary Communist Party, and there was a communist league—everybody and his brother... Zhou Enlai, toward the end of his talk about why we were getting relations, he sort of implied, "If you don't understand now, I think you will, because we're not selling out the people of Vietnam or China or any place." And he ended up saying that, "You can be sure that the Chinese Communist Party led by Chairman Mao will never compromise the interests of the people of the world."

During that talk, Zhou "made a self-criticism," the second time that Joan heard him talk about serious mistakes that he had made. This time, it was around the backdrop of Ping Pong Diplomacy. He explained that actually China and the US had been engaging in behind the door talks for 20 years—but that the talks always stalled around the question of whether the US would continue to identify Chiang Kai-shek's island stronghold in Taiwan as "China," and who, if anyone, would withdraw from Vietnam.

By the time the two ping-pong teams met at the Japanese tournament, things

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the USSR because Khrushchev didn't want any part of that volatile situation.

weren't looking all that promising. So when the Chinese team sent a telegram asking whether they could issue an official invitation to the American team, Zhou Enlai looked at it and sent word back down through the channels saying that it probably wasn't the best time. Then later, when he was meeting with Mao, he mentioned what happened to the telegram and his response. Apparently, Mao agreed at the time but then late that night, he had second thoughts, ruminated on it half asleep from sleeping pills for a long time, and then sent word to Zhou to send a telegram saying to invite the Americans. That second telegram and the US team's subsequent visit to China were what set up the current situation where Kissinger and then Nixon came in person to negotiate, and eventually led to the recognition of mainland China and the US pullout of Vietnam.

Zhou Enlai's point was that if left up to him, the stage might not have been set up at just the right moment. "That's why," he said, "We are we, and the Chairman is the Chairman."

At least for those in attendance, some fears were assuaged, even if people still had a lot of questions. It was hard, from the perspective of progressive people in the US, to understand how China would want to hold talks, after the US had been committing atrocities in Vietnam, as well as perpetrating countless other crimes against sovereign peoples. It was even harder to understand for Vietnam. What China was able to communicate to Vietnam is unclear. But for the hundred-plus Americans in China at that time, most agreed that if Zhou Enlai sometimes had a hard time seeing as far ahead as the Chairman, then maybe they could give the situation the benefit of a doubt.

Joan and Sid could tell that the intense and complicated wrangling at the state level would lead China into a different position on the international stage. But for the time being, the more immediate activity of interest was the arrival of a different crew of Americans with the reappearance of Carmelita, who came with her new US passport and 15 youth in tow.

## Chapter 35

# Unite and Conquer

*"[It] became clear to us was that they needed foreigners to go to Dazhai and know what it was all about—and that the other side didn't want any foreigners to know what that story was. So here we were... and suddenly a huge struggle from the Central landed on our heads!" Joan Hinton*

Carmelita Hinton's youth group arrived in late 1971, with lots of enthusiasm, ready to get to work and soak up every drop of their rare experience. What they heard about Dazhai and Xiyang County was enough to convince them to take Joan, Sid and Bill's advice—that for their month in agriculture, they should spend two weeks in the model village and two weeks in its neighbor Xi Gou. The youth group elected Rita, a friend of the many Hinton relatives in the group, as a representative to speak on their behalf and communicated their wishes to Zhu Liang, the Chinese bureaucrat in charge of their trip. They had several meetings at the Beijing Hotel where they were put up, but to the group's puzzlement, Zhu Liang kept talking about all of the spectacular scenery of Westlake—subject of the documentary Sid axed at the Bureau for Movie Distribution—in Hangzhou. Every time they pushed to leave for Xiyang County, he waxed poetic about the blossoming trees near the lake.

Finally, after deliberating with the rest of the group, at the next encounter Rita cut him off and told him that they were a work group, not on a tourist train, and were determined to go work and live with the villagers in Dazhai. Zhu Liang relented, and the group set off by train, accompanied by Sid and Joan, their kids and also Mike, who in his three months there that summer had picked up enough of the local dialect to act as an interpreter. Their arrival coincided with the corn and millet harvest, and the youth dove in, shouldering carrying poles and gripping spades. Even group members bitten by the malaise attributed to a certain class of US teenagers in the throes of adolescent angst became bright eyed and eager for hard work. Within a couple of days, the group decided to extend their stay in Dazhai instead of moving onto Xi Gou—they felt like they could get a richer experience by staying in one place for longer.

Chen Yonggui arranged to be home for the beginning part of their visit to welcome the excited group and help situate them. One day as they carried the corn they picked on carrying poles down the mountain, they heard his voice bellowing and approached to find him standing in the middle of a recently harvested millet field. Around him were some young women quietly cleaning millet from the field that had been left in the villagers' hasty efforts to get the field plowed for the next planting.

That night, Chen Yonggui called a village meeting and invited the youth group to attend. There he asked the young women from the millet field just how much millet they picked—how much had been left to be plowed under. It was four baskets. Then he asked the villagers to recount stories of the past, of what life was like before Liberation, and how many of their parents and siblings died because they didn't get enough to eat.



After the older generation told their stories, Joan waited transfixed with the rest of the Americans to see how Chen would address the young women.

He said, “With this four baskets of millet, your grandfather wouldn’t have died. Here you are just leaving it in the fields like this. You’ve got pretty headscarves and pretty socks and with all these things you have today, you think these four baskets of millet mean nothing to you.” The meeting lasted until well after midnight. He... [said] that just because they’d gotten tremendous grain production, they shouldn’t just think that they could just waste. He said, “We shouldn’t waste anything. China’s still poor, and we have to work hard; we can’t become lax.”

The US youth were so moved by the experience that they wrote an article about it for Madame Sun’s magazine, *China Reconstructs*.

In spite of the successful immersion of the youth group into the village, Zhu Liang, along with the other bureaucrats from the Friendship Association in Beijing, continued to try to wear away at the group, telling them that they should travel to other places in China. He chided them and said that staying their entire time in Dazhai was the equivalent of going to the US and staying at Bill’s farm. He didn’t gain any traction, but the chief of police, Wang Yuwen, who found Zhu Liang insufferable, overheard him talking to his superiors on the only phone in the village which happened to be in an office neighboring his. What he heard was the person in Beijing instructing Zhu Liang to do “thorough ideological work” in order to convince the group to leave Dazhai.

Concerned that the struggle might turn ugly, they gathered the youth group together for a meeting and asked them again if they really wanted to stay in Dazhai. The answer was a resounding yes. And so Zhu Liang decided to take a different tack. He approached the four African American youth in the group and told them that “the Chinese” did not want the youth group to stay in Dazhai. So even though China is and was one of the most racially and ethnically homogenous populations on the planet, they played the race card with great effect. The group broke apart. Sid was astonished.

Zhu Liang... got to them and told them that this idea of working at Dazhai was not the Chinese idea; it was the idea of Bill Hinton and Joan Hinton and Sid Engst, and the Chinese didn’t agree to it. Well, all of them to a certain extent, but especially one of them just about blew her top. She said, “These goddamn whites—in the US they bully us all around, and they tell us what to do, and here they come to China and tell the Chinese people what to do!” So right off the bat, they said they’d do what the Chinese said. They split the group just like that.

The African Americans in the group decided that they were going to leave Dazhai with or without the rest of the group, but would wait until the next day to have a final vote to see if the rest would follow them. Chen Yonggui had left to attend to other

matters in the province. So Sid, Joan and Bill sat in their cave with Wang Yuwen and Song Liying, the Vice Party Secretary and head of the Women's Federation, explaining the seriousness of the situation. The group splitting was serious enough—but to split along racial lines in Dazhai was a whole different degree of gravity.

Wang Yuwen shook his head and said that the only thing they could do was wait for Chen Yonggui to return. But Song Liying stood up in excitement, her eyes flashing furiously and gave it to the chief of police: 'Wait till old Chen comes back? Are you kidding? If he comes back and finds out we let this group get split along racial lines, he's gonna give us holy hell!!!'

There was no way to expose Zhu Liang to the youth group; fresh from the US, they would have no context for understanding that the legitimacy of what was going on in Dazhai had its roots in a monumental struggle over ideological lines.<sup>147</sup> And they couldn't leave Wang Yuwen vulnerable to being exposed for listening in on a private telephone call. Instead, they all went to looking for Zhu Liang, and with Wang Yuwen towering over them and Song Liying yelling in her high-pitched Shanxi dialect, they threatened him. They let him know that they knew exactly what he was up to and why, and that if he persisted, there was going to be hell to pay.

The next day at the last meeting for the last vote to stay or go, before the meeting even started, Zhu Liang, apparently persuaded, raised his hand and jumped up to say, "I think we should stay in Dazhai." After a brief discussion, the group voted, and it was unanimous to stay on.

When Chen Yonggui got back to the village and found out what went down, he called a group meeting. Throwing a barb at Zhu Liang and his buddies, one of the youth asked him, as a labor hero, what he thought the best way was to understand the situation in agriculture—was it better to travel all around or to stay in one place? Joan thought Chen handled the question deftly by saying it was important to do both and explained his system for understanding conditions around the country.

He said, "You know when I go out, I stay in one place for quite a while. Otherwise I can't know what's going on there. If you just go ride a horse and look at the flowers, you really don't get to know everything that's going on."<sup>148</sup> So I have a Three-Three System. I spend one third of the time in Beijing, one third of the time looking around the country and one third of the time I stay in places for a month at a time to see what's going on."

Then he took the bull by the horns and led our group himself to visit

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<sup>147</sup> The struggle in Dazhai with the youth group was part of the same two-line struggle between the Left and the Right waged throughout the Cultural Revolution. Because Mao had identified Dazhai as the "model in agriculture," an example of how socialist "relations of production" could transform the land and the people while raising production exponentially—the Right sought any means to discredit it. A positive experience for the US youth group in Dazhai would be a stumbling block in the Right's claims of the illegitimacy of the small village and its accomplishments.

<sup>148</sup> "Riding a horse and looking at flowers" is a Chinese saying that describes someone who is only looking at a situation superficially.

places that no foreigners had ever been before. The place that I remember most was the place where something like five rivers came together into one big river that went through the Taihang Mountains and out to the plains. Where it went through the Taihang Mountains, there were cliffs that just went straight up, and the river has dug its way around it. There was one place where they were digging a tunnel out of pure rock through a bend in the river. They didn't have any electric hammers, and they were digging by hand a huge tunnel to change the course of the river. They were making that bend into flat cropland, because that place had no flatland whatsoever. They were also building a big dam so that when the river went through the tunnel, they would generate electricity.

After we looked into the tunnel, Chen Yonggui said that the way to learn from Dazhai was to learn the spirit of Dazhai. He told the youth to go back and fight US imperialism the way those people were digging that rock.

After the group made its way around Xiyang County with Chen Yonggui as their tour guide and back to Dazhai, their month was up. What they saw and experienced melted away all of the charged emotions stirred up by the Friendship Association leaders. Their unity and newborn perspective of just what building socialism in China was about put the determination to dig away at that rock in their handshakes and goodbyes to Chen Yonggui and the other Dazhai villagers.

Since Bill was in Longbow—he had come and gone once the impending fracture of the youth group had been knitted back together—the group made its way south to spend some time meeting and working with the Longbow villagers, a time which helped the characters of Bill's book walk off the pages. Bill's second book, *Shenfan*, emerged from his notes from that time, documenting what happened in Longbow from where *Fanshen* left off, post Land Reform and through the Cultural Revolution.<sup>149</sup>

The youth group stayed for a spell, but Joan, Sid, Bill and Ganny got word almost immediately to beat it back to Beijing because the Premier wanted to see them. So they left the youth behind and made fast tracks back to the capital. Ganny had high blood pressure issues, and if she stayed still too long it crept up. So whenever the car stopped she got out and walked around, much to the horror of her Chinese caretakers. They implored her to stay inside to rest until Ganny turned to them and said sternly, "You know how I got to be 81 years old? By exercising—not by resting."

Once back in Beijing, the family, with just Ganny, Bill, Joanne, Bertha, Carma, Sid, Joan and Fred, collected in the Peace Compound, waiting for word that Zhou Enlai was ready for them. They waited most of the day and then into the evening until night fell and they found some beds to rest.

At 1:30 in the morning, word finally came—the Premier had finished his official state business and could now turn his attention to their family. Rushed out of bed and

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<sup>149</sup> While the Cultural Revolution was not officially over, the movement had lost much of its momentum by 1971 after Lin Biao's coup attempt.

into cars, they were driven to the Great Hall of the People and arrived slightly unkempt and foggy eyed to find just a handful of people: Zhou, Zhu Liang (their “friend” from the showdown in Dazhai), Hu Hongfan (who had called from Beijing instructing him to do whatever was necessary to get the group out of the model village), and the small group who was in charge of Bill’s visit.

Around 20 people sat informally in a small room with armchairs in the middle of the night; this last talk that the family got with the Premier was the most intimate of the five. Zhou Enlai was well known to stay up until all hours of the night working when the quiet allowed him long uninterrupted stretches of time—during the day he worked and grabbed 10-minute naps whenever he could. Even speaking in Chinese with English translation, and though it was well into the early morning hours, the Premier covered a lot of topics.

Zhou talked about the history of the Chinese Revolution, about ten different line struggles that happened during that time. He talked about China’s old feudal customs and traditions that were very difficult to eliminate; that while some practices like child-brides were wiped out pretty efficiently, feudal relations between people—men, women, mothers-in-law and sons—were harder to wipe out.<sup>150</sup> He talked about building the socialist economic base, about how the comprador capitalists’ assets were seized, but that the national capitalists were paid a fixed dividend for their estimated assets until the Cultural Revolution.<sup>151</sup>

Reflecting on her own continuing transformation, Joan remembered what the Premier said about proletarian ideology.

He said as far as the worker-peasant alliance is concerned, the majority won over the minority. That is, in the whole revolution the workers and peasants defeated the Guomindang. But as far as ideology went, proletarian ideology was the minority. The main ideology in society was petit bourgeois, which was part of bourgeois ideology. Of course after thirty years it looked like people had changed a little bit, but underneath the bourgeois ideology was still there.

The Premier then talked about the struggle at Lushan in 1959, when Peng Dehuai

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<sup>150</sup> The practice of child brides was the selling of young girls to other families, who would raise the child along with their son until they were old enough to marry. The girl’s parents would then be relieved of the burden of raising a child who would go to another family, and the boy’s parents could get a wife for their son at a much lower price than as adults and get many years of labor out of her—and train her as they saw fit.

The feudal relationship between mothers and their sons’ wives was usually one of brutal repression. Once the son married and his wife came into the home, the mother had absolute power over her. Emotional and physical abuse was common, and the young woman’s role was to take it and serve the family, until the lucky day when she had a son and became the mother-in-law.

With the collectivization of agriculture family relations began to change. Married women went into the fields and earned work points, which contributed to the family income. Mothers-in-law began to value their roles differently, and many responded by helping with childcare and household chores.

<sup>151</sup> After the beginning of Deng Xiaoping’s “Reform” in 1979, capitalists were paid additional dividends the then capitalist-minded State decided it “owed” to them from the previous 12 years.

came out swinging against the Great Leap Forward and the People's Communes. He described Peng as an emotional and intuitive person, who acted more out of reaction than strategic thinking. Referring to a couple massive military defeats—one during the Civil War at Yulin and one in North Korea, both of which resulted in huge losses of life and in the case of the latter, his removal from leadership—Zhou implied that Peng sometimes acted rashly and blindly. All this marked Peng as a nice target for manipulation; at the Lushan Meeting, Liu Shaoqi had an easy time sending Peng charging out in front to criticize the socialist line in order to test the waters.

What Zhou did not talk about, however, was Lin Biao and his flight out of Dodge. At that time the official word had not come out yet, although most people knew that Lin had taken off for the USSR and crashed in Inner Mongolia. Anxious to find out what really happened, Bill asked him directly, but Zhou politely declined to answer. Instead, he turned to Carma saying, “You have your discipline and I have mine,” as a way to tell Bill that even though Carma could tell him everything she knew, he, because of his high leveled party discipline, couldn't do the same.

He did mention Lin Biao in the context of the cult of personality, however, and how Lin and Mao had words about all his elaborate efforts to deify him.

He said that... Mao said, “Look at all the statues of me. There I am standing out there alone in the cold and the rain.” So Zhou Enlai had to go around and get rid of Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four's “Long long live Chairman Mao” stuff, the loyalty dance... Poor Zhou was left to sort of calm it all down. He told us how Lin Biao said that one word of Mao's was worth 10,000 words. And that Mao's response to him was, “Yeah, but you don't even listen to one word, so that's 10,000 words you didn't listen to.”

In the midst of framing out the history of modern China and analyzing the current situation, Zhou took the time to offer Bill a little criticism. Zhou chided Bill, saying that Bill should've taken the time to listen to what the youth in the group wanted instead of telling them what to do.

The combination of the explosive reactions of Bill, Joan and Sid might have made a mushroom cloud over Zhongnanhai that night. Fighting over each other's voices at first to tell the real story of what happened in Dazhai, they soon spilled everything they knew about what had happened—minus the eavesdropping on the telephone. Even Ganny got all riled up, saying how Zhu Liang and his crew never even talked to her about it, even though she was the leader of the group.

Zhou listened calmly and intently. After the maelstrom subsided, Joan marveled at his methods.

Oh boy, we just blew our tops. It came completely out of the blue; it was Zhou Enlai's way of finding out what happened. He just told us what he had been told and then saw the reaction that we had. There we were sitting there listening to this great leader Zhou Enlai, and all of a sudden wham! We forgot completely that he was the Premier.

Zhou took it all in and then had to excuse himself to use the restroom. On his way out, he asked Zhu Liang if what they were saying was true. Faced with the outrage of the key players in front of the Premier, Zhu Liang had no choice but to admit what happened, albeit quietly and with lots of rationalizations.

The talk lasted until 7:00 in the morning. As the family made ready to leave, first light was already slipping into the sleepy capital. The Premier got up to shake hands with everyone. When he got to Joan, he grasped her hand warmly and thanked her for her criticism—the note she wrote after she decided it was wrong to thank him for his criticism had evidently made it to his desk and made an impression.

He said, “*Xiexie ni de piping. Wo hai hui fan cowu; ni hai yao gai wo ti. Sheme shi buo ni duo shi gai wo tide.*” [Thank you for your criticism. I will make more mistakes in the future, and you will have to keep on raising these issues with me. Whatever it is regarding, don’t hesitate to bring it up with me.] What was I supposed to say? “Oh yes, it’s good that I criticize you?” So what did I do? I shook hands with him and said, “*Wo ye fan cowu*” [I make mistakes too]. Then I thought, “Oh god, that’s not the right thing to say.” I don’t know what I should have said, but it certainly wasn’t the right thing. I looked at the rug down below me and wished that the rug would open up so I could just sink down below the floor and disappear.

Joan may have been horrified at her own lack of tact regarding the Premier of the People’s Republic’s mistakes compared to her own, but she eventually got over it as she reflected on her experiences with the very highest levels of power in the Party.

The great thing about him was that he was just completely honest; that was why he was a great proletarian revolutionary. When I was writing that note to him, everyone told me not to do it. It was probably very hard for him to get a little simple letter like that with just something about what somebody thought. Because he was the Premier, people didn’t dare... With Liu and the Rightist Movement, it got so if you criticized people you got slammed and made into a Rightist. So it became very difficult.

I think they really appreciated the things we sent to them, like the *Wan Yuan Shu*, the long paper describing all the things that happened to the foreigners, and the little letter we wrote to Mao... Our *dazibao* Mao saw and approved of it. There was no personal connection, it was just our ideas about being oppressed, and he approved of it. Then we sent the letter to Mao and the *Wan Yuan Shu*... and after I sent up a little tiny letter to Zhou Enlai, when he shook my hand he sounded really grateful.

That is a proletarian leader... There is no other purpose, no personal interest. Their interest is serving the Chinese people and the people of the world. Imagine all the people who don’t realize that. People use their own world outlook to judge other people; they don’t like to get criticized, so they fig-

ure if they criticize people who have more power than them, they're going to get slapped on the head.

Instead of a slap on the head from China's #2, she took the warm handshake, felt deeply the depths of the Premier's warmth as he grasped her hand, and would remember always that in all of her experiences with Zhou and Mao, they always welcomed criticism and always stood on principle.

By the time the older generation of the Hinton/Engst clan caught up with their sleep and with the youth group, they were ready to head to Shanghai for their month's work in a factory. Bill stayed on in Longbow to continue gathering materials for his new book, and Joan and Sid followed the rest into Wang Hongwen's (of "Gang of Four" fame) old textile factory, one of the original thunderclouds of the January Storm back in 1967. At the factory the women, trained to be defter in the hands, took up the spinning, while the men worked on the machines. Joan, as always, was not pleased with her assignment and jumped ship to work with the men, happy with her hands in the grease and grabbing wrenches out of the hands of others.

At the end of their stint in the factory, 1971 closed out and most of the youth group wrapped up what they could of their experiences and headed back to the US. Fred, now 19 years old, went back to his work unit at a Beijing plywood factory, and Billy and Karen went back to school.

Just as they settled back into place at Sanlitun, Joan and Sid were paid another unexpected visit by Huang Hua, who had returned from his embassy post in Canada. Zhou Enlai had read their 10,000-word book about all that had transpired in the foreign revolutionary community during the high tide of the Cultural Revolution and asked him to come out to talk to them. Zhou Enlai sent his approval, but as most of the issues in their little booklet had been resolved, he also sent Huang Hua to specifically ask just what work they would like to do after being frozen out of the superstructure for so long.

Their answer, of course, was that they wanted to get back into production, and the production they knew best and could be of the most use was agriculture—milk cows specifically. Their time in Beijing just at the high tide of when patriotism and nationalism were used to divert people's attention from the line struggle had not left them with a strong desire to stay in the capital city. So they requested that they be dispatched somewhere far north and west, hopefully to Xinjiang Province, where their kids would look more like the local Weiwer (Uyghur) people, many of whom had light hair and eyes, and have an easier time of it.

Huang Hua listened to their request and told them he would try to make it happen. They didn't have to wait very long before they were notified that they would be transferred back into the state farm sector as requested. But instead of going north and west, they were sent just south and east of the city, as Sid described, "A stone's throw from Tiananmen Square." It was about a half hour's bicycle ride into the city proper.

Where the stone fell was the Red Star Commune, one of the bigger, more mech-

anized and technologically advanced communes in the country, with several dairies and fields all around—and their new digs were in the North Dairy. The whole family was not exactly on board for the move. Dama, in particular, was a city person, and asked them to let her keep an apartment in the Sanlitun complex. Joan and Sid refused and got her packing along with the rest of the family. And Karen, who had developed a tight circle of friends at her school, did not think it was fair that she should have to move again. Her fears about moving were confirmed when she found herself at the commune school with girls from the countryside with very different customs and interests than the sons and daughters of the Foreign Ministry cadres. Even though the two schools were only a stone's throw apart, the differences between the two proved insurmountable; the whole time she was there, Karen never made any real friends.

So the beginning of 1972 saw the Hinton/Engst family's move back to farming. The family's new place in the North Dairy was made up of a row of single rooms that opened into a hallway. The family had four rooms altogether, with Dama living in the small room off of the kitchen, Joan and Sid in one, the kids in another, and another small room for the rest of their belongings.

In February as they settled in, a plane with the first US president to visit the People's Republic landed in Beijing. But Sid's memory of his visit was not of the presidential visit—but rather of their visit to a local factory.

The fear... was that there were going to be American incidents or demonstrations against Nixon. The US had been rubbing the people in China's noses in it for quite a while, and many Americans in China were unhappy about it. So the order came down that you had to watch all the Americans during that period and make sure that they didn't run up and throw a hand grenade at Richard Nixon! It was so funny cause these poor cusses at the commune, they knew perfectly well that we were not of that caliber, but they still had to carry out the line. So we had to go and visit some factory on that day. We all went and they served us tea and talked about nonsense. We used to call it B.I.: Brief Introduction. You'd go in and sit down and they'd pour you all tea and then they give you a brief introduction of the factory. Then you go in and look around. So that's how we had to spend the day when Richard Nixon was around.

After the move, Billy's new classmates were sent to different parts of the countryside. This time, unlike Fred's attempt to follow the students which landed him in a factory in the city, Billy's request was approved. He didn't get to go where his classmates went, but at least was approved to go live and work on a tea farm in Anhui Province. The site selected was very specific—it was a farm run by the People's Liberation Army, an example of the military engaging in production. And after the outbreaks of violence during the Cultural Revolution's most factional times, the PLA's political prestige and ability to maintain order and dispel any violence made the Anhui farm a good choice to receive a Chinese kid with a foreign face. While in terms of politics and safety their



selection made sense, the geography turned out to be a little problematic; in the south, the diet consisted mostly of white rice and hot peppers, food that Billy's European-ancestry digestive system had a hard time extracting proper nutrients from. He was about to get really skinny, really fast.

When a representative from the tea farm came up to the Red Star to fetch Billy, his parents made him promise to write them a letter once he'd arrived safely. A few days later they received the only letter he ever wrote to them: "*Yi qie duo hao. Bu duo luosuo. Zaijian* (Everything is good. I won't go on and on. Goodbye.)."

With only Karen left at home the place might've felt a little empty if it weren't for the sudden influx of kids from Beijing who appeared to spend their time in the countryside, a stone's throw from Tiananmen Square. The push to send city kids, especially young girls, out into the countryside was met with tremendous resistance from their parents—and the furthest some of them could fathom to allow them was the North Dairy. A bunch of teenagers took up residence in one of the rooms adjacent to their family's row of four and learned from rolling up their sleeves and using their hands for a change.

Not too long after, Joan's sister Jean, the only immediate Hinton family member who hadn't made the trip, announced that she was coming with Ganny and bringing back all four of her kids, who had been on the first trip with Ganny's youth group, plus their cousin. They decided that having come all that way, Jean had to see Dazhai too, so they took the familiar train ride to the bus station outside the village and lived and worked in there for two weeks.

On the way back to Beijing, Ganny's blood pressure began to rise and by the time the family made it back to the Red Star, her condition got so bad that they admitted her into the big hospital in Beijing, what was known as the Peking Union Medical College, or PUMC. There, Ganny told Joan that she had a really good and long life and thought that it was probably going to end. But after a while, she improved enough to move to the Friendship Hotel after the Red Star was deemed unsuitable for her rehabilitation.

Ganny hated the Friendship Hotel just as Joan and Sid did. She hated the fancy trappings, the stuffy surroundings and the fact that there was nothing to do but lie back and convalesce. And Joan, who had to stay with her, administer her medicine and take care of all of her other needs, had a rough time trying to attend to her unhappy mother while she had her own feelings of loathing about being trapped in the Golden Ghetto.

After a few weeks of careful care, though, both were liberated from their luxurious confines and returned to the North Dairy. In fact Ganny got well enough that when Jean's kids, who had all been working in different units of the Red Star, wanted to take a trip around China to historical revolutionary sites like Jinggang Mountain, she wanted to go along. While Sid managed the rest of the group, trying to negotiate traveling with family members who had a great respect and admiration for modern China at the same time as they had a hard time letting go of their American habits—like cof-

fee in the morning—Joan had her full attention on Ganny. In the middle of the trip, they decided that Joan should take Ganny to Wuxi in nearby Jiangsu Province to rest.

Right after they arrived at the small guesthouse on the lake, Ganny had a stroke. News of her condition shot straight through all of the handlers and bureaucrats to Zhou Enlai, who immediately dispatched nine top doctors from Shanghai, ten from Wuxi, and George Haitem who rushed down from Beijing. Overnight, the guesthouse was transformed into a hospital wing complete with tanked oxygen and IV drips.

Every morning, the team of 20 doctors held a meeting, analyzed Ganny's current condition, and decided the next course of action. They determined that the problem was a kink that had formed in a blood vessel to her brain, and that they had to decrease the blood pressure enough for the kink to resolve itself before trying to get the blood flow going again. They pulled Ganny back from the brink and worked to get her to a place where she could travel back to Beijing and eventually home to the US.

The main nursing duties were put on Joan, and when she got so she couldn't take the constant pressure and went out for daily walks a couple hours a day, she was roundly criticized. But Joan understood her own limitations and round-the-clock care for her sick mother was not something she was well trained to do emotionally. So every day she put her foot down and explored all around the lake area. There, she met a twelve-year-old girl from a family who lived and worked on the lake in their boat. She was the first young person Joan had met since Liberation who hadn't ever attended school.

By the time Sid arrived with Jean and the kids, Ganny was much better. She wasn't out of the woods yet, so the doctors asked that she be kept in the dark about their presence so she wouldn't get unduly excited. So when Jean's daughter made Ganny her favorite sandwich, a Putney Special with peanut butter and tomato sauce on toast, Joan had to lie and say that she'd made it. Ganny, delighted at the change of pace from her meals of stir-fried vegetables and steamed bread or rice exclaimed, "My daughter can do anything!"

Once they managed to get Ganny stabilized and well enough for travel back to Beijing, they installed her in the Peace Compound, which both she and Joan found much more agreeable than the Friendship Hotel. That summer turned out to be the hottest summer that anyone in Beijing could remember, and they opened up Ganny's room and brought in giant blocks of ice to try to cool it off. It was marginally effective, which was better than nothing, and Ganny tried to recoup enough to get back to the US. Jean and her children had to leave first without her.

Joan turned her full attention to nursing Ganny back to health. When Ganny finally got so the doctors thought she could make the trip, though, it was difficult to find anyone to take her. Of the 20 doctors from Shanghai and Wuxi, only one volunteered to accompany Ganny to Nova Scotia where Jean's family spent their summers. All of the other doctors, while they did what they could for Ganny in Wuxi, were too afraid of what might happen if they took that responsibility and she died on their watch. Joan thought for a minute about whether she should try to renew her pass-

port, which was 27 years expired, but in the end they asked Bertha, who had already renewed her passport (without the worry of having been accused of being an atomic spy) and was a nurse by training.

Joan and Sid didn't take the trip to Hong Kong to send the trio off, but they heard all about it when Bertha and the doctor returned. The doctor, good-natured with a wry sense of humor, recounted walking across the bridge with Bertha holding an umbrella over Ganny's head to keep the sun off and him having to struggle with the armloads of junk that Ganny always traveled with. (This kitchen sink phenomenon was passed on to the two daughters.) Then, when they got to Vancouver, the doctor measured Ganny's blood pressure and found that it was 280—dangerously high after sitting still for such a long period. Completely expressionless, he suggested that they get a hotel room in Vancouver and spend the night before going on to Nova Scotia. Ganny protested but finally agreed and when they got to the hotel, took the doctor's arm and let him lead her all around the grounds at a slow walk. After walking for a long while, he measured her blood pressure again—when Ganny asked and heard it was 180, she got a little excited about how high it was. But the unflappable doctor assured her it was going to be all right.

They spent the night, did some more walking the next day, and finally got to Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, where Jean ran a summer camp. There the doctor trained Jean's two daughters in the manner of barefoot doctors to take care of their grandmother—what to pay attention to, how to address the most basic problems, and how to know if it was a serious issue. In return, the kids asked him if he wanted to go horseback riding. As proven by his willingness to take an 81-year-old guest of the State who had just had a stroke and had extremely high blood pressure halfway around the world, he was not one to say no to a challenge—but was thrown into doubt when he saw that the horse they led to him had no saddle. But the doctor learned how to ride bareback in Cape Breton before leaving his patient to return home and give his report about high pressure, long walks and bumpy rides.

Ganny lived another eleven years.

## Chapter 36

# Red Star

*“They tried to pretend Hua Guofeng was still Chairman of the Party, but they didn’t allow him to do any work; they tried to pretend it was all done through democracy in the Central Committee... that it was not a coup d’état...”* Joan Hinton

With all the comings and goings of the family, the Red Star Commune didn’t see much of their new additions in action until the fall of 1972 after Ganny left with Bertha and the doctor. When Joan and Sid did finally settle in at the Red Star, they found a much different climate in production than when they had left Xian during the “white terror” days at Caotan in 1966 and certainly in all the time they’d spent in China before then. Part of it was just being in such close proximity to the peacefully liberated capital. But partly, as Sid described, it had to do with the times.

At that time the revolutionary committees were already set up in many places, but they were not really functioning.<sup>152</sup> It was sort of a period of calm, you know, like when a ship’s at sea and sometimes it’ll get into a calm and just sit there. And that was what it was like that in that period in the Cultural Revolution. Each side, it seemed was waiting for the other side to act. And people were still confused about a lot of things. During that period the “Gang of Four” were riding very high... The people were very much confused by the “Gang of Four” during this period, because they were the reddest of the red so to speak... Lin Biao had gone on his ride... but the “Gang of Four” on the whole... managed to stay more or less clear of him. At the Right, the Deng people were all keeping their heads pretty low and... the proletarian headquarters was, well the way I would analyze it, waiting for the people to catch on and see what was going on before they could do anything further.

At the North Dairy Sid was appointed the Vice Chairman of the Revolutionary Committee—it was a big position in a very, very little pond, well picked for its high-sounding name and emptiness in actual meaning. As Sid said, “It takes thirteen of them to make a dozen.” Joan was assigned in her usual technician role, and they started out together trying to make some small innovations with mechanization.

In Beijing and throughout the country, there was a big push for faster mechanization of the dairy industry fueled by a steadily increasing demand for milk. Like in Xian, the first priority was for new mothers who were going back to work—then to the sick and the elderly. Supply could not keep up and as the Cultural Revolution wound down into a period of relative quiet, Beijing began to spend a lot of resources to try to mechanize all aspects of the industry. Joan’s skills were quickly identified and transferred over

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<sup>152</sup> Revolutionary committees were based on a “three-way alliance” of the revolutionary masses—Red Guards, party cadres and PLA—set up to replace the original political structures that had existed until then.

to the agricultural machinery factory where some of those mechanization efforts were taking place. And the first thing Joan saw was that they were still manufacturing the 1953 Soviet model of the silage chopper.

As her first project Joan sent immediately for the designs from Caotan and drew it out. They made three to test in the fields and apart from an embarrassing but easily corrected mishap involving blades turning the wrong direction, the chopper proved what Joan knew to be true already—it chopped a hell of a lot more silage far more effectively than the Soviet model. Their three choppers, however, never made it into production, because after all those years, after Caotan won the competition in the fields, they still were not the approved design. 1972 at the North Dairy was not the place for the kind of showdown they had in Xian where the bureaucrats were forced to admit defeat and the Caotan people had enough power and principle to stand toe to toe. Joan couldn't make a dent. When people approached them about making a better chopper, the best they could do was tell them to go buy the better version from Caotan. The Red Star continued making the 1953 model into the 1990s.

It was not the first nor the last time that Joan and Sid would run headfirst into what they found was a contradiction between the drive for continuous technical innovation and the need for mass production. With a little bureaucratism and feudal division between intellectual and physical labor thrown into the mix, the situation often resulted in the long-term production of machines in the fields (the factories were a little better because there was a shorter line between production and use) that were clumsy and impractical.<sup>153</sup>

At the time Mao was still putting out the call to increase the level of technical innovation in production, and the Angang Constitution became part of the vernacular of the political study then.<sup>154</sup> The Angang Constitution was not at first a constitution, but rather a set of regulations—or deregulations—that a giant steel factory in Anshan, Liaoning Province put into practice in 1960. Back then, even before the launch of the Cultural Revolution, the factory workers deconstructed all of the management practices of their factory through the practice of politics—not economics—in command. The essence was that rather than emphasizing only production and the management of workers only to produce more and more rapidly, they promoted several main socialist ideas by which they believed they could reach their potential, not just in production, but also in revolution.

The main ideas that came out of their experience were that workers had to participate in management, management had to participate in production, and technical

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<sup>153</sup> A bureaucracy is made up of government officials and administrators who make decisions for the population. Marx said, “the universal spirit of bureaucracy is secrecy, the mystery, which it secures internally by hierarchy, and against external groups by its character as a closed corporation.” Bureaucratism is the tendency and outward expression of those making administrative decisions towards bureaucracy.

<sup>154</sup> The five principles of the Angang Constitution were: 1. Put politics in command; 2. Strengthen party leadership; 3. Launch vigorous mass movement; 4. Promote the participation of cadres in productive labor and of workers in management; and 5. Reform any unreasonable rules, assure close cooperation among workers, cadres and technicians, and promote technical revolution.

innovation brought about by worker creativity and understanding of what the technology was being used for was fostered and encouraged. And the other regulations, written and implemented to try to get workers to toe the line in the name of economic efficiency—were thrown out.

In 1960 when this all came about after a lot of struggle, Mao learned of what happened and made it a model by which state industries should operate their factories and plants. But it wasn't until the Cultural Revolution that workers in other cities really were able to follow the Anshan steel factory's example by grasping the spirit of what they accomplished and empowered by the call for workers to "take over" their factories.<sup>155</sup> Their example and the guidelines that came out of it began to be referred to as a constitution and it became for people a concrete experience that showed how proletarian politics could actually increase the quality and production of a factory with much more efficacy than bonuses and other material incentives.

But in the rest of the country, and specifically Beijing and the Red Star Commune, while they studied the Angang Constitution and everyone knew of the enormous increase the steel workers in the north had achieved after they worked out the kinks to their new socialist-style plant operations, the barriers to its implementation elsewhere were huge. As a technician, Joan ran headlong and often into the bureaucracy that foiled any attempt to really engage in the kind of creativity that the Angang Constitution called for.

[W]hat we found was a unity of opposites[;] ...the question was one of *gexing* and *dingxing*: fixed design and innovation. If you don't have a fixed design, you can't have mass production. But if you just take a fixed design and never change it, you never make advancements. When you have a unity of opposites, it has to be solved in a way in which both sides get due support. But what happened in China was the bureaucracy was built up through the line struggle, and the bureaucracy just loved the fixed. It had a lot to do with the fact that they had to approve the design.

It was a terrible hampering of Chinese industry, because once the design was fixed, you couldn't change it. But what happened in the factories was that the design was fixed but how you made it wasn't. So the workers in factories made tremendous technical innovations as to how to produce the product, but they had no input at all into whether the design of the product was effective because they didn't use it. Whatever tools the workers used, they could immediately see how to change to increase labor efficiency and increase the efficiency of the whole factory.

So for agricultural machinery, there was a huge gap between production and use. It was studied from the Soviet example of putting money into a

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<sup>155</sup> At the railroad factory where Bill was working while in Beijing, the workers first answered the call to follow the model of the Angang Constitution by weighing their written regulations: it came out to 21 *jin* (about 23 lbs. or a little over 10 kg.) of paper.

big academy, a huge thing that tried to mechanize agriculture by the year 1980. But all the engineers sat up in their rooms, and because they weren't in production, they designed things, went out and field tested them for about two minutes, and went back thinking their design was fine. But the thing is the only way you can get an improved design is by the people who use it; production is always different from what you imagine.

At the same time workers and cadres studied the Angang Constitution, the Right led by the newly reinstated Deng Xiaoping began touting the technological marvels of the West.<sup>156</sup> China, far behind in its science and engineering, had to learn from foreign countries. The timing hit the Red Star just when the dairy industry was being pressured to mechanize more quickly. In the North Dairy Sid began to design milking machines, which were being produced at the factory where Joan worked as a technician. Even though their efforts were not all that advanced, it was a giant improvement from the hand milking into pails that the workers were still doing then. But the project ground to a halt when a bureaucrat from the Red Star made a trip to Australia and got a glimpse of a rotolactor.

Sid couldn't believe it when he heard that they were going to build a rotolactor at the North Dairy to mechanize their milking. In fact, there were three rotolactors going up around the city. He'd seen one that the big Borden milk company had made for show in New Jersey in the US before he left for China in the '40s. Gentlemen farmers appreciated the grandiosity of the machine, and they shelled out the cash just to show that they had a loss on their farm for the year and got a big tax write off. The rotolactor was in essence a merry-go-round milker for cows. The thing had to be massive, which made it very expensive, and full of moving parts—because the cow just stepped up, had the milker attached and then went around full circle before to cow got off again. Extremely complicated and prone to all sorts of mishaps, the rotolactor never got past the showrooms of the major US companies that wanted to tout them as the next big thing that farmers should buy. When the farmers in the US didn't buy it—and didn't buy it, the concept got shopped around the rest of the world and apparently at least one took hold in Australia.

Sid and Joan thought it was completely ridiculous, a tremendous waste of resources and would not in the end mechanize the milking. Sid said:

In mechanizing, our object is not to find something that we can do with a certain piece of equipment, but the other way around. You have a job to do and you have to figure out what piece of equipment can do the job. In China we had a lot of the first kind of thinking. For instance, if you're going to mechanize a dairy, you ask, "What are the main labor-consuming and money-consuming things that have got to be improved?" And then step-by-step, you find the simplest most efficient way of doing it. The other way

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<sup>156</sup> Deng Xiaoping was targeted and taken out of power in 1966 along with Liu Shaoqi and then rehabilitated and allowed to work again in early 1973.

you see what you have in the line of equipment or what you can make that can do some sort of a job. And when you get all through, you still haven't mechanized your dairy very much. We ran up against it very much and the rotolactor was a good example of it.

Even though they were not even asked for their opinions, they had a lot of them to give. Their objections went unheeded. They raised a fuss, which was ignored. Red Star bureaucrats patted them on the shoulders and told them they'd been in China too long, that they didn't know what was modern in the West anymore.

Undaunted, Sid and Joan did what they'd learned to do from the Cultural Revolution—they sat down and wrote a critique and sent copies to the Red Star leadership, to the Beijing City Committee and to Chen Yonggui, who by that time was Vice Premier.

Those letters, as they made their way to various desks across the city, brought, as Sid said, "the wrath of hell" down on them. But they stopped the construction of the rotolactor, albeit temporarily. With all of their complete confidence in the modern efficiency of the merry-go-round milker, no one was willing to stick their neck out and take responsibility when their own "foreign experts" had come out against it. The way the leadership got around it was to call a meeting to which Sid and Joan were expressly not invited, to make an "objective" decision about whether or not to proceed. After much deliberation, those present agreed, and the project jerked to a start again.

Sid had to watch from the sidelines as the rotolactor went up piece-by-piece and count all the money that got sunk into trying to make it work right. The main problem was that the rotolactor wasn't designed to be washed properly, and when they tried to run water through the lines to flush it out, they got big chunks of cheese. The one they were working on in the western part of the city was also having trouble, and a worker who was trying to fix something got squashed as the wheel rotated and they couldn't get him out. That fatal accident put a final stop to their efforts. The one north of the city actually became sort of operational—but the running joke was that the farm leaders put it on display for visitors, but by the time the spectators got back in their cars, the workers switched back to their old system.

In the North Dairy, one problem after another cropped up, requiring more and more funds requested from the leadership. Finally after asking for another 500,000 *yuan*, the leadership put their foot down and told them they would approve the money if they signed a statement saying that they would absolutely be able to make the thing operational with it. The North Dairy hemmed a little before declining. Their way out, then, was that they just couldn't get the funds they needed to make their rotolactor work.

After two spectacular failures and one lukewarm success, the hot fad for rotolactors petered away. The head of the Red Star, who remained a friend of Sid and Joan's in spite of their disagreements, and the guy who actually advocated for the merry-go-round at the commune to begin with, in the end admitted to Sid that they should've



taken their advice. It didn't help with the money and time wasted, but it made Sid feel a little better.

Even though Joan and Sid were still sort of iced out at the Red Star as demonstrated by shoulder patting during the rotolactor fiasco, foreigners in general were being allowed to go back into their work units. Then in March 1973 on International Working Women's Day, Zhou Enlai called together all of the foreigners in Beijing for a big meeting. Joan and Sid got the invitation for the whole family to show up at the Great Hall of the People, so they took Fred and Karen. That day, they were surprised and elated to find old friends who had disappeared over the years in lockups. Dave Crook, who spent five years in solitary confinement over a factional battle at the Foreign Languages Institute, was there, as were Mike Shapiro and Eppy. Ione Kramer who had gotten out a couple years earlier, Frank Coe, and though Ye Qupei had passed, Marcella and their kids were there along with Jane and Su. There were about 60 big round tables and around them sat most of the foreigners who had gotten hit during Cultural Revolution—with the notable exception of Sid Rittenberg.

When the Premier started to speak, the first thing he did was praise Joan and Sid for sending Mao the letter they wrote and submitted with the 10,000 word book about the treatment of foreigners.

My private little ego was hurt because he said Sid's name in Chinese and he said mine in English. Then when they printed out the meeting notes that were circulated later on, they left my name out and only Sid's was there. So I felt like it was the only time in my life I ever got praised by the Premier, and it was all Sid and not me. I felt so crushed!

Most everyone was caught off guard—they had no idea that Zhou Enlai was going to personally and publicly apologize for how foreigners were mistreated during the Cultural Revolution. Joan and Sid looked around for some paper to write notes, but all they could find was an old napkin, and they delegated Fred the task to write down what the Premier said. Fred, however, was completely distracted by the spread of rich treats laid out before him, and did the best he could to jot down what he could in between stuffing his face with all the delicacies at the table.

What the Premier said was, "We've all been through this struggle together, and we've all been trained together. This is a complicated struggle, and I'm responsible for what happened to you." He went on to address almost all of the concerns of the September Eighth Fighting Group's concerns: Rose Smith was invited back to China, Harry Lloyd was given his job back. He said that the Chinese were too conservative, that even when they died abroad they wanted their bodies shipped back to China to be buried, and that if they worked in foreign countries, they would always come back to China to marry Chinese women, even if it meant that they would hardly see each other. To the people who sat attentively in the audience who had been targeted because they had mixed marriages, Zhou Enlai's description of them as positive and progressive brought feelings of relief and vindication.

After he finished speaking, the Premier went to every single table, shook hands with every person sitting around them, and talked to them specifically about their situation and what was being done to address it. Joan and Sid already had their situation addressed—they were back in production as requested, and while it was still a far cry from their complete acceptance as just one of the cadres, it was a vast improvement. So they just grasped the Premier's hand with a lot of warmth as he came around.

Joan described the atmosphere afterwards as electric.

[E]verybody was so excited. It was such a feeling of liberation. Those people had really had it: Dave Crook had five years in prison, solitary confinement. Then to get out and have the Premier apologize and say that it was a test for all of us was just like a huge rock being lifted off everybody's shoulders.

The rock was off, but it was still hard at times, especially for the kids. Now 20, Fred was accepted at the factory where he worked making plywood, but he was not allowed to participate in the worker study. He spent the time alone reading Marx's *Capital* even though it didn't really make up for his isolation.<sup>157</sup> Carma had gone to the US with Bill and come back again (with a present for her aunt: the first calculator that Joan had ever seen). And there was a lot of positive news and calls to support the Black Nationalist and student movements in the US since the 1960s. So Fred got to thinking that he wanted to go to the US to check things out.

Both Mao and Zhou were sick by then—Zhou more than Mao and visibly so at the March 8<sup>th</sup> meeting for the foreigners. Joan told Fred that maybe he should wait until after Mao died to go—she had an inkling that things were going to be harder and quite different after he passed. But Fred was never one to wait on his ideas, so his parents began the long process of figuring out how to get him his US passport.

Sid's sister Lorna came for a short visit around then in late 1973, and after some time with the family and a trip to Yanan and Dazhai, she got ready to leave through Hong Kong. So Sid and Joan decided to send her off and try to get their passports renewed at the embassy there. Once they got theirs renewed, Fred could apply for his as a child of two US citizens, which would be infinitely easier than attempting to get a visa as a Chinese national.

First, though, they had to come up with their marriage certificate to prove that they were married and Fred's legal parents. Each accused the other of throwing out their original papers drawn up back at the caves in Yanan when they couldn't find them, even after digging through all their junk in their old army footlockers. The only thing they could think to do was to go down to the Beijing Municipal Government offices and try to convince them that they were in fact married and see if they would issue them another certificate. To their surprise, the guy there asked what date they were married and wrote out April 2, 1949, Yanan on a big white sheet, stamped it with his big seal, rolled it up and tied it off with a big red ribbon and rose. Their experience did not exactly fall in line with rest of their encounters with Beijing bureaucracy, so

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<sup>157</sup> *Capital*, or *Das Kapital* in German, is Marx's foundational text on political economy.

they figured that he had been told to expedite the unraveling of the red tape and just give it to them quickly.

At the end of the year, Joan, Sid and Fred accompanied Lorna to Shenzhen, the Chinese border town on the other side of the bridge to Hong Kong. They went to the British Consulate to get a visa to enter its colony, but because they didn't know any better and applied for a week-long visit, their application was put on hold while the British tried to figure out just what the three of them were planning on doing there. (The regular transit visa was just three days.) They ended up having to send Lorna off the traditional way—with a hug and a wave and watch her walk across the bridge instead and returned to Beijing to wait out the British decision.

It took three months during which they had to make another trip to the British Consulate and raise some hell, threatening to publicize the stonewalling. Not long after they made a scene their visas were approved, and in early 1974, the three made their way south again, this time walking across the bridge themselves. It was a strange feeling. Sid and Joan hadn't been outside of China for almost 30 years. Hong Kong wouldn't allow any communist organizations there, so the Chinese government did what it needed to do through the Xinhua News Agency. One of their staff people was right at the other side of the bridge waiting for them. Everyone was a little on edge, unsure of what might happen given the whole McCarthy Era atom spy incident that was a lot of nonsense and really funny when they laughed about it in their bedroom at the Red Star, but maybe not quite so funny with one foot into a British colony.

Their guy from Xinhua understood the situation and apparently had his orders to stick closely to them, because he never let them out of his sight. He put them up in a nice little hotel and then accompanied them right to the door of the US embassy, where he said he would be waiting (if and) when they came out.

Joan and Sid got in line and got a stack of forms to fill out and then had to answer a bunch of tricky questions, all of which were in the category of: "Have you stopped beating your wife?"—questions trying to trap them into treasonous admission like, "Have you ever taken advantage of your foreign citizenship?" and "Did you ever work for a foreign government?" They were trying, as Sid described, to grab them by the "tender parts." But as soon as they asked, "Which citizenship are you talking about?" and stated, "Of course I worked for the Chinese government—it's a socialist country so there isn't anyone in the country that doesn't work for the government"—the embassy staff backed down.

The last sticking point was that the US embassy guy did not want to give Joan her passport with her maiden name.

They said I had to prove that I used my maiden name. I said I'd never used anything else; I'd been in China for 29 years, and in China they used Han Chun. The Han came from Hinton. I said, "It certainly doesn't sound like Engst does it?" And the Chun was from Joan. He asked about outside of China, and I said I never had any contact outside of China... God, I was

afraid of atom bombs and spies and everything, and all it was, was that stupid thing!

The guy finally said that the only way he could issue it to her that way was if she had two witnesses swear that she had always gone by that name. Stumped for a minute, imagining that they would have to go hire a lawyer, it suddenly occurred to Sid that he and Fred made two, even if the embassy guy was not eager to point it out. They swore on it, and then the three had to go before a US flag and swear that the rest of the information on their applications were all true, before they were issued their temporary passports by which they could all go, conceivably, to the US without a visa.

On their way out someone stopped them and said that someone upstairs from the CIA (it was implied) would like to speak with them and would they mind stopping in? They politely declined because they were very, very busy and didn't have it scheduled in their itinerary and picked up their pace. The guy walked them all right to the door where they were all very happy to see their Xinhua bodyguard waiting as promised at the entrance.

With their official business out of the way, they let their keeper show them around Hong Kong a bit. After being in socialist china for almost three decades, the sights of the British colony caught them a bit off guard. Not since pre-Liberation had they seen such a stark contrast in society between the rich and the poor. Not since Guomindang days had they seen slums. Hong Kong was littered with them—with people living in cardboard boxes and beggars and petty thieves on crowded streets below shiny buildings. They found it to be an all around sleazy place and were glad to get back on the other side of the border.

Fred bought his plane ticket in Beijing and then took a train to Shenzhen and walked across the bridge again to Hong Kong. Standing in line to buy something at a store, he suddenly felt something brushing against his leg and was surprised to find his money belt dangling from his waist with a slash through it and emptied of everything but his new US passport. That, however, was not the end of his mishaps.

Back at the Red Star Joan and Sid dug into their work. When Sid was struggling against the construction of the rotolactor, Joan had set her sights on a designing and producing China's first combine, a gigantic harvesting machine that could, if put into production across the country, pull millions of hands off the fields and into other work like building infrastructure or reclaiming land. They began by looking through brochures of combines from different companies, which they got Bill to send from the US. They had a team assembled to make one with Joan and another designer and two guys named Liu Weifu and Lao Dong.

Joan was on her way to a team meeting when she got word that there was an international telephone call for her. It was Carma, who had moved to the US by then, calling to ask where Fred was. Surprised, Joan told her that as far as they knew, he had taken off from Hong Kong and was flying over the Pacific somewhere. Carma, however, had gone to meet him at the Philadelphia airport and found that his name was on

the list but his body was not in his assigned seat.

A little disconcerted, Joan hung up and called the foreign affairs division of the Beijing City Committee, which was the agency responsible for them then and asked them to find Fred. About five days later, they got a call from the Beijing City Committee asking them if they had received a telegram. Joan rode her bike down to the commune administrative offices and asked if they'd gotten a telegram for her, and they hadn't. But after digging around in their desks, they found it—it was in English, and they didn't know what it said or what to do with it, so someone just stuck it in a drawer. What it said in English was that Fred had arrived in Philadelphia.

What happened to Fred was that he did not get lost over the Pacific, but rather in San Francisco. Once the plane landed, he was so excited to be in the US that he jumped off the plane and rushed to the gate for his connecting flight to Chicago—without realizing that it was leaving from Los Angeles. With almost no English speaking or reading skills (the joke in the family was that the only English phrases Fred knew in English were “Long live Chairman Mao!” and “Revolutionary Committees are Fine!”), he mistook San Francisco's three short letters in front and “a whole bunch in the back” for Los Angeles. He should have stayed on the plane. Instead, he waited at the gate until it emptied out and found himself quite alone. An airline employee tried to help him, but he didn't trust her—so he found a telephone to try to call Carma. He managed to convey to the operator that he wanted to make a collect call, but when she told him to go ahead, he didn't know what to do so he hung up.

Eventually, Fred made it to Chicago where he did end up getting on the phone with Carma, unleashing a barrage of pent up conversation in Chinese, and then to Philadelphia, where they picked him up. He worked at his uncle Bill's farm in rural Pennsylvania, spending lonely nights listening to his shortwave radio for anything in Chinese, and trying to figure out what the word “impeach” meant. It was 1974, and Nixon was about to resign. Fred stayed on the farm a year before going back to the city and moving in with Carma and her housemates. That first year, all Joan and Sid got were lots of pictures of highways and bridges, the things that impressed him the most about the US.

Then Karen graduated from high school and asked to go to the tea farm where Billy was still living and working. They sent her off and were left without their kids but with the challenge of building a combine from photographs in a catalog.

The combine that Joan chose was an Alice Chamber, and the reason why she chose it was probably the reason why it later went out of production in the US—it was low to the ground and required four big wheels instead of two. Joan had never been involved in crop farming apart from the seed selecting she did by hand in the fields of Inner Mongolia. Sid wasn't much help either, having left the US when horses were pulling wagons in the fields. Having no experience, Joan approached the designing of the combine the way she approached any other work she did, from gears for a windmill to the incentive bonuses for pig raising: with minute detail, a lot of stubbornness and physical logic. It drove her fellow designer crazy, and soon, because he wanted to start

designing the outside of the combine before the parts that went inside it, and because he said that her wheel design would not turn a corner—and Joan adamantly disagreed, he disappeared from the project.

Unfazed, Joan started on the knives, and then knife cylinder and so on. She finished drawing a part in the morning, rode her bike over the factory in the afternoon, explained it to Liu Weifu and Lao Dong and then they would get to work on making it with the other workers. Joan rode home and started drawing the next part for the next day. They got the system rolling and with some eating and sleeping in between, they were pretty sure that they could get the combine done by the fall harvest.

One day, though, Joan rode her bike out to the factory with her next set up drawing rolled up under her arm and arrived to find the room where they all worked completely empty. No workers.

Perplexed, Joan poked around asking anyone she could find where all the workers had gone, and finally someone told her that they had all been transferred to make a rice seedling transplanter. Joan was incredulous. How could all of the combine workers who were already knee deep in drawings and parts be pulled off to start a new project? She got back on her bike and pedaled to the commune offices where she found the guy in charge, Lao Xing, and gave him an earful. Then she sat down on the front stoop and told him that she was going to wait there until she got the workers back.

With Joan refusing to budge on his stoop Lao Xing didn't take long to make it happen. In short order the workers appeared back at the factory and got back into making the combine. It wasn't until Joan went to the city to order a part, though, that she started to understand what the hell was going on. The part they needed was a gear, which was a little too complicated for them to make in their shop. So Joan rode her bike to a factory, where a worker there told her that all factories making farm machinery were ordered to prioritize parts for the seedling transplanter. The real story behind the transplanter, which took Joan several trips and also some pressure put on those in the know at the Red Star to find out, was that the rice seedling transplanter was a pet project of Jiang Qing. To show how Red (revolutionary) she was, she held it up as an example of following Mao's call for technical innovation. She also said it was a native invention of the Red Star Commune, even though the drawings came from Shanghai and the work was being done all over the city.

Zhou Enlai was in the hospital and Mao was getting sicker. Liu Shaoqi was dead but Deng Xiaoping, his like-minded number two, was reinstated and working. And the "Gang of Four" was, it seemed, all over the place. The battle between the capitalist roaders on the Right and those on the ultra-Left clashed on many fronts as the Premier got more and more sick, and the Chairman became more and more isolated.<sup>158</sup> At

<sup>158</sup> In China, since the Right took power in 1979, there has been an ongoing debate among the Left about the role that Jiang Qing and the "Gang of Four" played in socialist China. Many argue that while there are many instances where the "Gang of Four" exerted their power, their ambition did not form an ideological line, nor did it have the clout of the Right, which bore out with the ease in which they were taken down in the end. Others believe that the "Gang of Four" members were true champions of the Left and of Mao's line. Still others believe that their practice/action belied an ultra-Left, or Left opportunist life: Left in appearance, Right in essence.

the Red Star Commune, it played out in big, foreign and expensive rotolactors and supposed natively invented seedling transplanters, neither of which amounted to any useful mechanization for the people in the fields.

As part of their attempt to show their pure communist spirit, the “Gang of Four” did more than carefully engineer and dictate “original and creative” technological innovations. Joan and Sid actually appreciated some of the projects they did take on. In education, Jiang Qing took on the entrenched issue of the ridiculous university entrance exams that weeded out any student who didn’t have an enormous capacity to memorize minute facts.

At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution the exam was abolished. Instead of students graduating from high school and then taking the exam to go to college, after graduation all students went to work in the factories or communes or collectives. From there, their work units decided who should be selected to attend college based on their skills and talents, but also their political perspective of just why it was that higher education was needed. College graduates were expected to return to their factories and farms and use what they learned to raise the level of the work and lives of the people who made it possible for them to go. The face of the university student changed dramatically.

However, entrenched academics’ continued advocacy for the reinstatement of the entrance exam perpetuated the strong feudal ideology that still persisted post-Liberation; university was for students who came from families that worked with their minds, not with their hands. They were cultured and believed themselves to be the inheritors of the nation, with all of the responsibilities and riches that came with it. Even after the revolution, even after transforming the economic base to socialism—and even after many attempts during the Cultural Revolution to tear that system down and the thinking that went along with it—the ideology persisted.

Jiang Qing and her crew sent out a notice to all of the university professors in Beijing, instructing them to show up at a lecture hall at a certain time on a certain day. When the professors arrived, they found a group of students telling them where to sit and passing out entrance exams. The student proctors patrolled the aisles, making sure there weren’t any eyes straying to neighboring papers, and when time was up collected all of the exams.

The highest score was an 80%, scored by a math professor from Qinghua University. The average was around 30%. Some of the professors felt a little humiliated, but most could appreciate the exercise and how it proved that the entrance exam was not based on real knowledge but on the memorization of facts.<sup>159</sup>

Another feudal practice that Jiang Qing took on that Joan especially appreci-

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While history has yet to sort itself out—a process which has been clouded by the extreme propaganda of the Right to demonize the “Gang of Four” and tie Mao to it—what has emerged is that the arrest of the “Gang of Four” in 1976 provided the Right with a timely opportunity to neutralize the opposition, firing millions of people and arresting tens of thousands of others, some of whom were locked up for over two decades.

<sup>159</sup> In spite of this demonstration, those calling for elitist education practices succeeded in reestablishing the exam in 1977. That year 5.7 million candidates competed for 220,000 college slots.

ated was the custom of women leaving their villages when they got married. After the Sino-Soviet split, China stopped doggedly following the practices of its Soviet big brother and revised its policies about birth control, instituting a call for family planning. The plan was to limit children to two per family. The problem was that because women married and became part of their husbands' villages, people had a hard time seeing their girls as anything but a burden to be married off. They weren't being trained to do any kind of meaningful work aside from housework so that they could get married more quickly and easily. And family planning, people found, was difficult if no one wanted girls.

The assessment was that in order for family planning to work, the status of women in society had to be raised. One big push was a call for men to leave their homes when they got married and go live in their wives' villages. Many young couples answered that call, and when it came time for the men to go to their new homes, the collectives had big celebrations.

Another push came from an incident in a collective where a woman who was earning eight work points had them cut down to six after she married.<sup>160</sup> She raised a ruckus and was accused of being selfish. Her protest was heard all the way to the Beijing City Committee, which told the collective that they didn't think that the problem was a question of selfishness. From that initial spark the rest of the women in the collective lit up, demanding to know why it was that they were given only eight work points while the men were given ten.

The men argued that they were stronger physically, so they were able to do more work. The women agreed, but asked them to count how many days in the year required that kind of hard manual labor. It turned out to be just a handful. Then they asked them who was better at planting rice seedlings, and when the men refused to admit that the women were quicker, they held a contest and the women won. They also won their right to ten work points.

Women all over began debating questions of division of labor.<sup>161</sup> In one village, they protested that in the family, both the man and woman went out to work—but when they got home, the men sat back and smoked their pipes, while the women had to cook dinner and do the housekeeping. Finally, the head of the village announced his support of the women's demands over the loudspeaker system, saying that he believed that women and men should be equal in doing housework, and that he would be an example in his home by doing all the chores except changing the babies' diapers and emptying the chamber pot. His announcement caused a tidal wave of reproach, and he had to retract his statement and say that, actually, changing diapers and emptying piss pots were not inherently women's work.

<sup>160</sup> The work point system in the communes allotted points to each worker depending on the kind and amount of work that they did. At the end of a season the accumulated work points were converted to wages.

<sup>161</sup> "Division of labor" is a Marxist concept describing how work is delegated to whom. In feudalism and capitalism, the division of labor was relegated according to the class and gender, in terms of mental vs. manual labor and work in production or the superstructure. Socialist society sought to liberate men and women from those divisions defined by class and gender.



After the Gang of Four's demise in late 1976, these changes proved fleeting and the sum of Jiang Qing's work was dismissed as an attempt to gain power through using women. To Joan, it was the first real effort since Liberation by women to fight for their rights themselves, albeit with support from above. When Jiang Qing and her cohorts finally went down, Joan was pretty pleased along with the great majority of the rest of the country—but the resulting unrestricted resurgence of the Right meant the end of any tolerance of struggling for women's rights.

But that was later.

In the meantime, Joan got the workers back, and they made fast progress with the combine. Just as they were getting close, though, they got a call from Nanjing from a hospital there telling them they'd better come quick: Billy was sick.

Sid and Joan hadn't paid much attention to Billy and Karen once they left for the tea farm. Karen was a little more communicative than Billy, but they didn't get much in the line of correspondence. What they found out after they got down to the military hospital though was that the diet of white rice and hot peppers did not have enough nutrition for their kids. Karen was very skinny, and the reason why Billy was in the hospital was because he got a case of diarrhea that wouldn't quit because he wasn't getting the kinds of food he needed. He was in pretty bad shape, so they sent him to the hospital to recoup.<sup>162</sup> What precipitated the call to Beijing was a late night gasp that his roommate heard from the next bed over. His roommate happened to also be a doctor of some kind and knew enough to be alarmed, so he rushed into the hallway in his hospital gown and bare feet to get help.

It turned out that the muscle tissue in Billy's heart was infected and got off its beat and into palpitations (myocarditis), probably brought on by malnutrition. Without that immediate attention, he would have died quickly. Instead, the doctor saved his life and called his parents. He also hung a tin can outside his hospital room window from a branch and got Billy a gun so he could practice shooting—both he and Karen were in the militia on the farm and Billy loved target practice.

Joan and Sid were impressed. The most dangerous time was over by the time they arrived, but Billy was still not entirely stable. And the way that his doctor took such careful care of his heart and of his psyche was enough to make them feel all right about the situation.

They stayed a month and the hospital staff told them that they might as well get whatever they needed treated since they were going to be there anyway. Sid was pretty healthy, but Joan had a painful anal fissure, something that happened when she went on her many trips eating different kinds of food, which affected her bowels. The hospital told her they would operate on it, but she needed to soak her butt in a pan of warm water with peroxide every morning for a few days before the surgery.

Always one to get into a disciplined routine, Joan squatted in her basin every morning and then went running around the hospital grounds. Because it was a place for long-term care and convalescence, the hospital was built in a park of sorts with

<sup>162</sup> Chinese hospitals were places to convalesce and rest, not just to treat acute illnesses.

some wilder green areas where Joan could get her exercise. One morning, a nurse came in after Joan got back and asked her if she had gone for her run that day already. Or, rather, that's what Joan thought she asked. So she enthusiastically answered that yes, she had gone for her run, and that the next morning the nurse should run with her.

Joan couldn't figure out why the nurse got such a strange look on her face and didn't seem to be able to respond—until Karen, who was there visiting her brother burst out laughing. It took a few minutes for Karen to be able to form words but when she could she explained that her mother, with her American North Shaanxi accent, got the tones to the word “run” wrong. Actually the nurse had asked her if she had soaked her bottom yet (*pao*, in the fourth tone, instead of *pao*, in the third tone), and Joan had excitedly *responded* that she had and that she hoped the next morning the nurse would join her in soaking her bottom. Decades later, Joan still laughed to the point of tears recounting the nurse's reaction.

Another funny incident brought on by the medical setting of their family reunion happened when Karen brought a young woman named Kao Jianhua to visit Billy. Xiao Kao (Little Kao), as they called her, was the person in charge of looking after Billy and Karen at the farm and the three had become close friends. When she came in, Billy happened to be hooked up to a heart monitor, and Joan and Sid having a clear view of the screen, saw that his heartbeat quickened at the sight of her. That was the only way that they found out that Billy had a crush on Xiao Kao, who he later ended up marrying.

After the month was up, Billy seemed well enough that they could return to Beijing and get back to work on the combine, which was, as planned, done in time to test out on the fall harvest. They drove it out to the fields and started it up—it was the first time that any of them had seen a combine in action. All the crops people showed up in the field to watch in amazement as one guy drove the machine and the combine, as Joan described, “Ate corn like holy hell.”

Having never designed that kind of heavy machinery before, Joan didn't have a grasp on the strength of materials—so the combine ended up being much heavier than it needed to be. And they had to use a track tractor to pull it, which made it hard to steer, so Sid suggested putting a steering mechanism on top of the combine so that the tractor wouldn't have to move so much. But the steering mechanism wasn't strong enough, so eventually it busted. But the combine tore through the corn harvest at the Red Star and made such an impression on the surrounding villages and communes that they got requests from all over to go harvest their crops.

On one of those runs out at the Red West Gate Commune, a horseshoe got sucked up into the blade, and, with a loud boom, broke them. It took a while for them to fix it; even though there were thousands and thousands of *yuan* available for the rotolactor projects, the combine was not as well funded. China had come a long way since Joan's windmill blew up for lack of a hand brake, but unless it was a pet project of the top leadership, there still wasn't a lot of extra padding in the budget to fix what was broken. When they finally did fix it though, it swept through the hay at the Red

Star like a tornado.

After the harvest season was over in the fall of 1975, Joan went back to the drawing board, redesigning different parts, trying to make it better. She had been pushing hard for about a year, taking new drawings to the workers in the factory every day, trying to keep one step ahead of them. As she was finishing up the last modifications, she caught a bad cold, which got worse and worse until she began coughing up blood. Finally, Joan got on her bike and rode to the hospital, where they gave her a big dose of antibiotics. The drugs knocked it back, and after several follow up doses, her lungs were all clear and there was no more blood. On the way back from her last trip, she pedaled away from the hospital feeling fine, but by the time she got home was completely stripped on any energy and got a horrible feeling in her chest.

Just as Joan started to feel progressively dismal, her sister Jean arrived at her doorstep with another study group from the US. They traveled to Yanan and Dazhai and all the well-beaten paths to revolutionary sites and communes and factories. When they arrived back in Beijing, Chen Yonggui received them in the Great Hall of the People. Joan and Sid sat in on the meeting, but Joan suddenly found that she couldn't position her arm to write. She told Sid about it, and he helped her move her right arm, but as soon as he did, she began to feel like she was going to pass out. They had to half carry her out and eventually she ended up in the hospital.

No one could find out what was wrong. Some of the doctors actually asked the Red Star guys who came in to consult if Joan might just be pretending to be sick, but they assured them that she wasn't that type of person. So they kept her in the hospital doing brain scans and blood tests, but without much result. Joan made the best of her sorry situation by continuing to work out of her hospital bed, first completing the rest of the drawings, specifically the blade sharpener, then catching up on her reading, specifically volume five of Mao's *Selected Works* in Chinese. In between, she called up Billy, who, having stabilized enough to travel back to Beijing, took up residence at a military hospital across town. Jean's group came and went.

Joan didn't get much better, and the doctors never really found out what was wrong, but they finally just had to release her. She still couldn't move one her right arm when she got out.

The silage combine with all of its adjustments was basically done, and it was nominated to be shown at an exhibition about China and self-reliance. All of the workers were excited that something they had built with their own minds and hands was being recognized, which made it all the more crushing when they found out that Jiang Qing blocked their entry; once she found out that Joan worked on the combine, she dismissed the whole thing because a foreigner's work was not a good example of Chinese self-reliance.

Joan was pretty upset. But what was way worse was that the workers turned their disappointment and anger towards her. Liu Weifu, in particular, found the situation so unacceptable that he tried to delete Joan from the whole project, claiming that she had nothing to do with it, and that he was the one who made it from scratch. His response,

when she was in pain and sick with something the doctors couldn't identify, weighed heavily on her. And to top it off, in the middle of all this, they got a letter from Bill.

Actually Joan and Sid were both always happy to get a letter from Bill. But in this one he asked if Sid would come on the invitation of the US-China People's Friendship Association, of which Bill was the head.<sup>163</sup> It was 1975, and people in the US were still extremely interested in what was happening in China. The Cultural Revolution had inspired a lot of activism, especially with young people and in the Asian American population. More work and study groups were slated to travel on a more regular basis now with the Friendship Association as a vehicle—but they felt that having Sid come and speak in person about his experiences in China since before Liberation would have a tremendous impact.

Sid and Joan thought this was probably true, and Joan who by her own description was “sick as a dog” felt rather “heroic” about telling Sid that she wasn't going to die, and that he should go. Since the Nixon visit, a lot of the US-perpetuated propaganda about the “Communist Menace” in the east had become less virulent. On the tail end of the Anti-War Movement and the Civil Rights Movement, the US government was, relatively speaking, much more on the defensive than, say, during the McCarthy period. In fact, if Joan had been well, maybe she would have risked going then too.

So later that year, Sid left China for the second time since 1946, this time traveling much further than Hong Kong. What he found was pretty astonishing to him, both in terms of what had changed and what had not. On the surface, the US presented an incredibly modern face. When he went to visit his brother Wes in his old stomping grounds in upstate New York, he found that the farms were full of heavy machinery where there used to be horses and laborers. The rolling hills were crisscrossed with paved roads that led to the superhighways that Fred had been so impressed with, and cars crowded city streets.

But the basic economic relationships in society were pretty much the same, even if they were manifested in different ways. Small farmers were still getting squeezed. With the advent of new technology, the pressure to produce more increased, and those who could not afford the machines got left behind. Lots of smaller farms looked to be in disrepair, and many more had already been bought out by surrounding farms that had more money. The trend then already was toward bigger business-oriented farms—agribusiness as it became known—as opposed to self-sufficient family-run places.

Fred accompanied Sid on the speaking tour when it kicked off, and altogether they visited 25 different cities. The entire logistical operation was run by the US-China People's Friendship Association, which Sid found to be full of youth and energy and also led mostly by young women. In China a lot of gains had been made since feudal

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<sup>163</sup> The US-China People's Friendship Association was founded in 1974 as a national organization with local chapters in order to engage in “people to people diplomacy” between the two countries. Membership included anyone who had positive feelings for China and wanted to promote a relationship between the two countries on a people-to-people basis and varied from people who were interested in Chinese culture to those who supported China politically.

times in terms of women and leadership roles. But it didn't come near what they saw on their trip in the Friendship Association.

Once... we asked why it was that there were more women than men in the leadership. And to begin with they just sort of laughed and said, "Well, we women are just more progressive than the men are." But then we got talking more seriously about it and they said well in US society in the first place women are an oppressed and exploited gender, and to that extent you'd expect that they'd be on the whole more progressive.

Also the point was brought up that in US society, in male chauvinist society, the young men as they grow up have to be macho to a certain extent. They have to be the person who thinks he's responsible for the family—the main money earner who has a job that's high enough to give him enough prestige—more prestige than his wife or his girlfriend. And that puts an unseen pressure on the men to get into the system and "make something" of themselves. Whereas the women don't have that pressure—they have to fight to get into that position. The women in the US—their capital is their looks, their sexiness and that sort of thing. Men are supposed to be handsome, but their capital is their position in society.

At each stop, the pair was whisked from the airport to their Friendship Association hosts' homes (almost every major city had a local chapter) to a meeting or live radio interview, or a question-and-answer discussion, followed by another meeting, another interview, a dinner with lots of guests eager with questions and then onto more meetings and interviews until far into the night. The next morning would usually mean a trip to the airport and a new city with the same grueling schedule.

With a few exceptions, they were enthusiastically received. When Sid spoke, people listened intently and asked interested questions about his life in China working in agriculture, about the Cultural Revolution and about his perspective of where China was going. When Fred spoke, he brought down the house. Just in the US barely two years, Fred spoke a unique form of English with a heavy Chinese accent. Sid described it as cutting off all the extraneous parts of the English language, like conjugation. And this from a guy who you would have no problem identifying as Chinese person if you closed your eyes, but with eyes open, might get confused for an Eastern European or Russian immigrant.

Most of the few exceptions to the warm reception had to do with Chinese people from Taiwan. In the US, supporters of the Guomindang from Taiwan were still stinging from the Nixon visit to the People's Republic and the subsequent warming trend between the two countries. The US-China People's Friendship Association in general, and a speaking tour about the many positive experiences that an American had in socialist China specifically, was a thorn in their side, and they were bent on making it as difficult as possible for them. They showed up sometimes trying to bait them with questions and comments implying that they were foreigners meddling in

Chinese affairs or with anti-communist barbs. Far outnumbering that group from Taiwan, however, were Americans interested in China and socialism, as well as progressive immigrants from Taiwan who had become supportive of China both in a nationalistic and political sense.<sup>164</sup>

At one event, Sid was slated to give a talk about the dairy industry in China. He was interrupted repeatedly by a guy who turned out to be the head of the local Democratic Party. He was all full of the standard ‘freedom and democracy’ rhetoric, until finally Sid had to cut him off and tell him that even the former Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Sam Rayburn, said that the US should stop blockading China and normalize relations. That shut him up. Even though Sid had been gone most of 30 years, he still knew plenty about how to stand toe to toe with American dairymen—and their party bosses.

After his whirlwind tour, Sid stayed with Bill on his farm in Fleetwood, Pennsylvania through the fall harvest. He had eaten his share of steak and potatoes, and he and Fred went on a tear, each eating a half-gallon of ice cream at one time. (His hosts, however, somehow always thought it would be appropriate to take him out for Chinese food at restaurants.) He’d been all over the US speaking about his experiences in China. He’d visited his family and made a stop in Gooseville Corners for old times sake. And so after about six weeks all told in the US, he helped Bill take in his crops and then made his way back home.

What Sid found at home was Joan still pretty sick, but out of the hospital, and Mao pretty sick and in the hospital.

In the beginning of 1975, since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution about ten years earlier, the National People’s Congress held a meeting. The Fourth Meeting of the People’s Congress ratified a lot of decisions that had been made at an earlier Central Committee meeting. Even though he was being worn down by cancer and had been in the hospital since the previous year, Zhou Enlai attended and was reconfirmed as the Premier. Ye Jianying, an old army general, filled Lin Biao’s post as the military head, which had been left vacant for five years.<sup>165</sup> During the Cultural Revolution, Ye aligned himself with the Right, protecting Deng. And Deng Xiaoping, who had gone down as the number two capitalist roader after Liu Shaoqi during the height of the Cultural Revolution, rehabilitated and taken down a couple more times since then—was named first Vice Premier and one of five Vice Chairmen of the Party.

Mao did not attend. He stayed in Hunan either because he was already so sick, or

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<sup>164</sup>As minorities in the US many ethnic Chinese people there felt proud of China’s accomplishments and ability to stand as peers with the USSR and the US.

<sup>165</sup>Ye Jianying had a lot of prestige because of his critical role in the revolution. After the Long March, he broke with Zhang Guotou, the leader of the Fourth Front Army, after Zhang and Mao disagreed about next steps. Zhang wanted to march south and organize among the Minority Nationalities, and Mao wanted to proceed to Shaanxi Province. Ye sided with Mao and took off with Zhang’s codebooks and maps, which cut him off from contact with the Comintern (shorthand for the Third Communist International). Subsequently, Mao was able to establish radio communications with the Soviets who were forced to recognize his leadership. Zhang split and went south as he had advocated and lost over three quarters of his soldiers.

he knew that with his illness his presence in the assembly would not mean too much. Zhou Enlai returned to the hospital after the meeting. That fall, from his hospital bed, Mao wrote the last poem he would ever write, addressed to his old comrade Zhou Enlai lying in another hospital bed across town:

*Loyal parents who sacrificed so much for the nation  
 Never feared the ultimate fate  
 Now that the country has become Red,  
 Who will be its guardians?  
 Our mission, unfinished, may take a thousand years.  
 The struggle tires us, and our hair is gray.  
 You and I, old friend, can we just watch our efforts  
 Being washed away?*

Mao's poem may have foretold what lay ahead for China in a broad ideological sense. But Deng Xiaoping began right away to lay out the concrete steps to get there. The first time Joan and Sid really got a clear idea of what Deng was about was the report they got at their cadre study from the Learn From Dazhai's Example in Agriculture Meeting in Shanxi Province. His speech was all about the failings of the work point system and how it dampened people's enthusiasm. He called it "*Da Guo Fan*" a catchphrase that would be used later to dismantle the collective system. The literal translation was Big Rice Pot (also translated as the Iron Rice Bowl), and the implication was that people had no incentive to work hard because everyone was guaranteed a share of the rice in the pot no matter what. People who did work hard and were talented or smart had to eat out of the same pot as lazy, dumb people.

This struck Joan and Sid immediately because having lived and worked in Dazhai for many months, the speech had nothing to do with learning from Dazhai. In fact, it seemed to have everything to do with discrediting it.

By the end of the year, Joan felt much better. She had run the gamut in terms of diagnosis, from menopause to neurological degeneration—many also believed that the relentless pain in her chest probably had something to do with her time in Los Alamos handling beryllium bricks with her bare hands. But no one could say for sure and no one could even successfully treat her symptoms. Finally with all of the best Western-trained doctors completely flummoxed by what was ailing her, an old Chinese medicine doctor working near the big Peking Union Medical College Hospital took her pulse and told her that her *qi* and blood were stagnated. It was a big relief to Joan that someone could tell that she actually had something definitively and medically wrong with her. And by drinking his herbal medicine, she gradually got better.

The Premier did not fare as well. He died in the hospital in early January 1976.

It's not an oversimplification to say that the people, in the broadest most general sense, loved Zhou Enlai. That's not to say he didn't have his detractors or critics. And in

the thick of the fierce ideological line struggle, both the Right and the ultra-Left tried to use him. But the masses of people, who under his deft leadership had navigated the twenty some tumultuous years since Liberation, had grown accustomed to the skill he had in leading the everyday work of the mammoth country and were warmed by the deep sense of humanness that it is almost always impossible for a leader of his status in any country to convey.

When Premier Zhou died, people all over the country poured into the streets in mourning and memorial. In Beijing the memorial site became Joan said, “white with flowers” for him. Wreaths upon wreaths were heaped onto Tiananmen Square, as people appeared at all hours, many in tears, in an outpouring of emotion to pay their respect. Joan and Sid went too and circled the large portrait that was put out on the big square.

The country was still reeling from the loss of their Premier when April rolled around and with it the Qingming Festival, a traditional time to pay your respects to your ancestors. The “Gang of Four” attacking from the far Left ordered that there be no commemoration of Zhou Enlai during the festival. Their tactics all throughout the Cultural Revolution were to try to and separate Zhou from Mao—to claim Mao as the true proletariat leader and accuse Zhou of being conservative and on the Right—and then to hold themselves up as the only loyal Maoists.

The Right also tried its damndest to separate Mao from Zhou by claiming Zhou Enlai as their own, even if they didn’t dare to openly attack Mao. So when the April 5<sup>th</sup> Qingming Festival arrived the two lines squared off, with the Right organizing people to amass in Tiananmen Square to lay wreaths, and the “Gang of Four” at the ready to disperse them. The Right claimed that the people were trying to show their unrestrained and spontaneous love for their Premier. But Joan and Sid saw a stark contrast between the crowds during Qingming and the masses of people who appeared on the square in January right after Zhou’s death; it was hard to say it was spontaneous when people went down to the square work unit by work unit.

Both sides tried to divide and conquer, but when they were alive, neither Mao nor Zhou would ever allow one atom’s width of a crack between them.

Qingming was a planned disaster. The “Gang of Four” cleared the square of all of the wreaths overnight and the next morning saw a huge organized protest. Announcers came over the loudspeakers to plead with people who were “not involved” to clear the square, and many of them did. But others—brawlers clearly looking for a fight—stayed. When it became clear that the thugs were organizing to take buildings, unarmed police linked hands and formed a line around the Great Hall of the People. A lot of them were beat up, but they managed to hold the line, so the thugs set fire to a smaller building on the south side of the square.

Eventually, the police managed to break it up and clear the square. That incident became known as the Tiananmen Square Incident (not to be confused with the Tiananmen Square Massacre, or Liu-Si in Chinese—Six-Four, because the massacre occurred on June 4—that took place a decade later), and the Right spun it as the peo-



ple's natural feelings for Zhou Enlai being ruthlessly suppressed by the "Gang of Four." They claimed at first that dozens of people were killed, then hundreds, then thousands, all slaughtered on the square. But very much unlike the events that would take place in 1989 at the very same site, no one saw or heard anyone getting shot at or killed. No one knew anyone who had been killed. And there was no blood on the square.

From his hospital bed, Mao came out with a statement that the thugs who had tried to take the Great Hall of the People were counterrevolutionaries. He was dismissed as sick and senile.

Later that month, Hua Guofeng, the Minister of Public Security (appointed in the previous People's Congress) was named as Zhou Enlai's successor and also the first Vice Chairman of the Party. Not much was known about him—he was a provincial leader involved in agricultural machinery, had served under Zhu De's Eighth Route Army pre-Liberation, and had been part of the Central Committee and the Politburo since 1973. But he didn't have much prestige in the Party, nor a lot of power. Deng Xiaoping, who was lined up and ready to take Zhou's place, was removed from his position again at that time and so never got named. Not only was he taken out, Mao initiated a "Criticize Deng against Rightist tendencies to overturn the verdict of the Cultural Revolution" Movement.

Joan and Sid and their fellow cadres thought the movement seemed hastily put together. Nonetheless, they studied the *"Three Poisonous Weeds of Deng Xiaoping"* in their cadre study and read a lot of Deng's writings, in which Joan could "immediately see the pragmatism, the non-reliance on the people and the belief in the few." But she and Sid could also see that the movement came so fast that people weren't ready for it—they read the stuff, but were not able to discuss it in a concrete context.

July took Zhu De, the old founder of the Red Army, followed by the felling of another mountain by the Tang Shan earthquake. Sid woke everyone when he felt the shaking and they ran outside to see strange lights in the southeast. When Joan heard the boom and crack! she felt at first that it was an atomic bomb going off, but the after-shocks of one of the most disastrous earthquakes in human history felt different from the radiating waves she'd felt in the New Mexico desert. Billy was out of the hospital and recuperating at home and there were some other guests—so altogether 13 people slept outside their house all squeezed under one mosquito net in the pouring rain with the rest of Beijing.

Tang Shan—the whole mountain—disappeared. Around 250,000 people died. Then a meteor struck in the north.

The only person in the upper reaches of leadership left who had fought in the revolution from the very beginning, from the time before the Guomindang slaughtered the Communists and the Reds had to take to the hills, was Mao.

He died in early September 1976. The line to view his body stretched for days.

Before Mao died, he had named Hua Guofeng as his successor by making him the first Vice Chairman. But Hua's succession did not fill the vacuum that formed at Mao's passing. Unbridled jockeying for position ensued, with the "Gang of Four" on

one side and Deng Xiaoping's allies on the other moving in with sharp elbows and sharp tongues. Hua Guofeng felt the pressure; he was not powerful in the Party, and perhaps even more importantly, did not have much influence in the military. Ye Jianying, on the other hand, the old general who had taken Lin Biao's post, had both. He and other military heavies began to consort with Deng, who was still on the outs at that time.

October 1, National Day and the first formal state ceremonies after Mao's death brought most of Beijing out into the streets, including Joan and Sid with Sid's sister Verda, who came for a visit just when Mao died and attended his funeral, into the stands in Tiananmen. Joan remembered looking at Hua and wondering who the hell he was exactly and just what he might do.

What he did was something that both surprised and pleased the general population immensely—he arrested the “Gang of Four” a few days after National Day along with a handful of their closest allies, followed by Rightest forces' sweeping arrests of thousands of people active on the Left.<sup>166</sup> Verda's visit had taken Sid and Joan south to Yanan. Every time they went to Yanan with guests, they always took them to the revolutionary museum, which showed old footage from 1947 when the Central Committee was surrounded and had to be self-reliant in all of its needs. There were old videos of Mao and Zhou spinning cotton to make cloth with Liu Shaoqi and Lin Biao.

Joan and Sid found the old documentary informative about the current political situation. When they had watched it with Ganny during the Cultural Revolution, Liu Shaoqi had been edited out of the film and Lin Biao was prominent. Then, when they went with in 1973, Lin Biao had disappeared. This time with Verda, they stood in the museum joking and wondering aloud who might get taken out next—when they saw that an old photo of Mao riding a horse and Jiang Qing on a donkey had been altered so that Jiang Qing and her steed were gone. They were then supposed to go onto Dazhai and stay for a spell, but Lao Xing, the head of the Red Star called them saying that there was a complicated situation, and that they should come home.

When they got back to Beijing they found massive demonstrations, the streets filled with jubilant people celebrating. The “Gang of Four” and their methods of repression through “red terror” tactics made them easily some of the most hated people in power. Their arrests lifted spirits, heavy and demoralized after the wiping out of the top tier of revolutionary leaders and the entire city and mountain of Tang Shan. Joan and Sid could almost feel the capital city exhale, like a muscle relaxing a little after being clenched too long.

As soon as the four—Jiang Qing, Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyuan—walked into a meeting with Hua and Ye Jianying that they never walked out of, the

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<sup>166</sup> The Gang of Four got a show trial; Jiang Qing and Zhang Chunqiao received commuted death sentences, Wang Hongwen got life and Yao Wenyuan got 20 years. Using the opportunity to clean house and remove any obstacles to their path for power, the Right, led by Deng locked up as many people as it could and removed millions of others from their posts. Many speculated that the ease with which the Right swept in was the reason why Mao had refrained from moving against the ultra-Left.

anti-foreigner sentiment, which had eased a bit but was still very palpable, dissipated. Joan and Sid felt the thaw almost immediately. The foreigner community, already happy with the turn of events, felt the arrests like a release valve finally triggered on a long simmering pressure cooker.

With the “Gang of Four’s” ousting came also the official dissolution of the Cultural Revolution. By then, most of the fire had been tamped down anyway, and Hua Guofeng’s announcement felt a little anti-climactic. But the implications of what was won and what was ultimately lost on the battlegrounds of that revolution were not yet apparent and would not be for some time. Sid and Joan had an inkling; even as they basked in the aftermath of the neutralizing of Jiang Qing and her cohorts, they knew that with Zhou Enlai dead almost a year, and Mao barely cold and interned in the mausoleum, the struggle for power was not over. The road ahead was not terribly clear—but it certainly seemed likely that the yet-unknown Hua Guofeng would have more than his share of obstacles and pitfalls, not the least of which would probably involve Deng Xiaoping.

## Section 6

# Dissolution

## Chapter 37

# Wind<sup>167</sup>

*“I don’t think Joan and I ever had any illusions about the “Reform,” because as the saying goes, if you know its past and you can understand its present, you know its past and its present and you can predict its future; that’s true of Deng...” Sid Engst*

Beijing looked to the anniversary of Zhou Enlai’s death in January 1977 with trepidation. Even though the massacre that had supposedly happened the previous April in Tiananmen Square didn’t really happen, no one knew what to expect with a new unproven Chairman, and the “Gang of Four” behind bars. Joan thought that Hua Guofeng handled the situation deftly:

He let everybody say everything they wanted about Zhou Enlai in the papers, telephone, radio and everything. All the love for Zhou Enlai came out in the press, encouraged by Hua Guofeng. Then in April, the next Qingming [festival to commemorate ancestors], those thugs were up there trying to start a huge thing to remember the “revolutionary” act of the year before. This time people sent wreaths to the square, and Hua Guofeng didn’t do anything about it. They were all left there.

I remember going by Tiananmen and seeing a soapbox with a guy standing up there trying to whip something up. Nobody was interested. They had already said what they wanted to say about Zhou Enlai. Finally the wreaths began to look a little bit drab and after a long time the city said in the paper, “You know we can’t leave this like this forever. Will you please take your wreaths back? We have to clean up the square.” They did it very gently and very nicely, and the people took their wreaths and cleaned out the square... Hua Guofeng handled it so well. It was such a complicated situation.

By February, it seemed that Hua had an idea of the intentions that lay behind the more powerful players in the Party. Through the *People’s Daily*, the Party and the military papers, he communicated his policy in what became known as the “Two Whatever’s”: “We will resolutely uphold whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao made and unswervingly follow whatever instructions Chairman Mao gave.” But the rumblings were not quieted, and underhanded attacks on Mao, aligning him in his last few years of life with the “Gang of Four” confused a lot of people.<sup>168</sup> Hua’s policy did not make any visible dent in the armor that was quietly forming around a Rightist power base

<sup>167</sup> “Wind” is a term used in China to denote a sudden and sweeping event or campaign that most everyone gets caught up in, more fervent than a “fad” and more dramatic than the commonly used English phrase “the winds of change.”

<sup>168</sup> In China, the Right attacked Mao by lumping him in with the Gang of Four because of the widespread sentiment against them and their “red terror” tactics. Outside of China, many on the Left popularized the phrase coined by the Revolutionary Communist Party-USA (RCP-USA): “And Mao makes Five,” insisting that Mao shared an ideological line with the Gang of Four.

in the Party.

It was in this uneasy if seemingly calm political climate that Joan received her invitation from the US-China People's Friendship Association to go on a speaking tour in the US, much like Sid had done. She was not feeling 100% and was a little nervous about relapsing into chest pain and paralysis of her arm. But after discussing it with Sid, they decided that she should do it—the response to Sid's visit had been resoundingly positive, and Joan felt like she too should contribute to strengthening the relationship between the American and Chinese people. Because the US government was still taking the make-nice-with-China tact, any fears she might have had about McCarthy-style persecution for her Los Alamos involvement were greatly diminished.

She accepted. Fred asked if Billy might want to come along. Skinny and weak, Billy was in no condition to work or do anything really except lie around. His brother thought it might be better for him in the US, where he could at least learn some English and get a chance to see something aside from the four walls of his room at the Red Star Commune. Billy thought it sounded infinitely more interesting than what he had been doing, and so Joan fretted about their collective poor health but got the two of them ready to go.

Billy couldn't do much aside from get on the plane, so when their flight was late and they missed their connection in Japan, he could only lie near their bags as Joan went to find help. The airline staff promised to notify the US-China Friendship Association to meet the next plane, and Joan and Billy spent the night sprawled out on their bags in the Tokyo airport. When they arrived in San Francisco the next day, no one was there to meet them. So Joan left Billy lying weakly on their luggage while she went to find a phone and a ride to their first stop. Outside the US for 29 years, she felt a little bewildered at the pay phone bolted to the wall and finally figured out that she needed change to make a call. She was even more bewildered to find that no one would give her any change unless she bought something—and buying something just for the sake of breaking a dollar to get some coins was utterly foreign to her.

After much deliberation, she finally plunked down her money and got enough change to make her call. She got back to Billy just in time to stop airport security from dragging him off and arresting him for vagrancy. They looked like they weren't too sure they believed her when Joan told them he was just sick and didn't speak any English, but they let them go anyway.

During the two years between Sid's departure and Joan's arrival, the US-China People's Friendship Association had gotten bigger, reflecting the broader interest in and support of China among the American people. Sid's tour with Fred had fomented enough interest that when Joan showed up in Philadelphia to exchange Billy for Fred and begin her tour, her itinerary included 53 cities around the country (and one in Canada) and over 250 events.

Joan started in Atlanta at the national convention for the Friendship Association, where she gave the keynote speech, and from there, began her whirlwind tour in the same fashion Sid and Fred had traveled before. Airplane ride, pickup from airport,

straight to a meeting, followed by an interview followed by another meeting and lecture, to bed, get up in the morning, repeat, until the next plane ride. Her health was still not great, so she took a lot of sleeping pills to make sure she got enough rest at night.

She also tried to keep up with her exercise by running every morning wherever she was. One morning she took off without looking back and realized halfway through her jog that she didn't know the address where she was staying, the name of her host or any phone number that could reconnect her with her people. Completely taken care of in all logistical aspects since she made the first call at the San Francisco airport, she found herself feeling all alone in what had become a foreign country. Anxiously retracing her steps, Joan stood in front of what she hoped was the right door, wondering what she would say if it wasn't the right one ("My name is Joan Hinton, and I'm from China?"). It was the right door, though, and from then on she made sure that wherever she landed she got the name and number of her hosts before venturing out on her own.

Joan and Fred's reception from the crowds that gathered to hear them speak was similar to what Sid had found on his tour. A couple spots, like at Brown University in Rhode Island, produced some federal agents trying to provoke with questions like, "What do you consider your homeland?"—but the bulk of the people looking to cause trouble at the events were still Guomindang members or supporters from Taiwan looking to disrupt meetings and cause trouble.

Traveling south accentuated Joan's feelings of foreignness, having spent her twenty-odd years in the US mostly in New England. The south in the mid-70s, post-Civil Rights Movement, was overtly segregated even among Left leaning folks who wanted to learn about socialist China.

We spent two days in some place in the Deep South, Memphis maybe. These fancy southern people met me at the airport, and they took me to their estate. I had breakfast with them in the morning, and then I was supposed to go with another family who was also in the US/China People's Friendship Association the next night. That family was supposed to pick me up at the estate... The other family was Black and when they came to the door and knocked, our host who was a white lady went out and the Black lady said, "May I go to the toilet?" That was the way she got in the house. She told me that it was the only way that a white lady could let a Black lady into her house. I was just shocked. Both the white and the Black had to do it. The white lady might have just loved for her to come in, but the custom was so strong that if she let her in without her asking to use the bathroom, she would be ostracized in the white community. So she came in and waited until I finished breakfast, and then I thanked the white lady and left with the Black couple... I spent the next night in their house, which was about 1/8 the size of the estate... I spent the night and talked with them a lot about those customs that I had never known before.

Also in the south, Joan visited in the Twin Oaks Commune in Virginia, where a group of people was trying to make a go of communal living. The year before they had decided that collectivizing the children wasn't working so well (the goal was to have all the kids not know who their birth parents were), but they still had collective ownership of most material items including clothes. Their one big barrier was that they could not live completely off the grid; they still needed to pay taxes on the land and had to have some money to buy things they couldn't produce themselves.<sup>169</sup> Joan found their experiment in "communist" living in the midst of a capitalist system interesting if not in the same vein as "liberating all mankind."

In addition to talking about China—and Joan talked and talked about China, about all of her different experiences, about Land Reform and Liberation, about how socialism worked with workers and peasants in factories and communes, about the Chinese dairy industry, about the Cultural Revolution—Joan also got a chance to reconnect with some old friends from her Los Alamos days. After the US dropped the bomb (and the physicists fought for and essentially lost the fight for civilian control of atomic energy) and they all dispersed to their various institutions, Joan had struggled to keep up with her classmates at Fermi's Institute in Chicago before deciding to get on a boat for China. While she had been churning butter in Mongolia, raising satellite ducks in Xian and writing letters to Mao in Beijing, her friends had also moved on. Of the small group that Fermi had named in his living room as probable future Nobel Prize recipients, Frank Yang (Yang Zhenning), Lee Tsungdao and Owen Chamberlain had all proven him right. Those who had become Nobel Laureates, along with the others who had sat in Fermi's living room tackling questions that were just emerging in the field, were still floating at the top of the scientific community, just as they had on the top of the mesa in the New Mexico desert. Now they were directors of the most prestigious physics laboratories all across the country, and they were all eager to catch up with Joan and show her what they had been up to.

Her first contact was with Frank Yang, who still had no memory of almost electrocuting her years before, but told the others that she was in the US. They then invited her to a meeting in Chicago about high-energy nuclear physics. Joan got the Friendship Association to wrangle it into her schedule and attended along with Nagle, Anderson and Bob Wilson. To her surprise, Harold Agnew, the doctoral student who Joan had shared an office with at the Institute, had become the head of Los Alamos laboratories. Joan still carried around with her (and would for the rest of her life) the uneasy suspicion that unlike Agnew, she wouldn't have been able to finish her studies and pass her test to get her Ph.D. But Agnew had, and he invited her out to visit and give a talk about China, since she was going to be in Albuquerque anyway with the Friendship Association.

Thus began Joan's parallel tour of the US—one in the Left-leaning circles of the US-China People's Friendship Association and another in high-energy physics laboratories. Her second stop in her physics tour was the Fermi National Accelerator Labora-

<sup>169</sup> Later, Twin Oaks started small business ventures making hammocks and soy products to sell for income.



tory, named for Fermi, run then by Bob Wilson, who had helped design it. He left his mark through all sorts of creative architecture.

It's this huge building that's wide at the bottom and goes woووو up to the top. There's an opening in the middle with big trees and modern sculptures of all kinds inside. I went with Frank and Fred, and we went up up up in the elevator; it was dark by the time we got up there. Bob asked, "Would you like to see the donut?" (The donut is the accelerator.) I said sure.

I thought we were going to go up and look down onto something in a room, because the one we had was about an arm's length big. And he said, "Oh no, it's out there." So we looked out the window and saw the accelerator, which was something like a kilometer across. I just had no idea that the thing was so big. From our little thing, they made them bigger and bigger. It made a huge circle, and he put American bison in the middle.<sup>170</sup> He made it perfectly.

At the University of Illinois, Al Hanson showed them around, and in Long island Frank took them to see an accelerator running at extremely cold temperatures, which eliminated the resistance of the electrons. On the west coast Owen Chamberlain showed them the Berkeley lab, the same lab that Joan stopped in on in 1948 before she boarded the steamer for China, which was run then by Segré with his hands in a cyclotron. Now it was Chamberlain and, like the rest of his colleagues, his interests lay in accelerators.

Joan hadn't forgotten about her invitation to Los Alamos, and when she got to Albuquerque, she contacted Harold Agnew and with Fred took a shuttle plane to the mesa where there appeared, among many, many new buildings, an airstrip. They stayed with Darragh Nagle, who was working on a long accelerator of heavy particles, looking for a way to treat cancer.

It was a strange but happy homecoming.

Los Alamos had spread out like anything since I'd been there. They had a whole living quarters on the next mesa over, and all these roads going up to it and around it. Old Starner, one of the two GI's, was still there. And he went to a drawer and pulled out the original chart that we had all signed our names on of where it was going to go critical. All our names were on that old, old chart. He had it in the bottom of a drawer, and he said nobody knew it was there...

Then the most incredible thing to me was that they invited me to go down to the canyon... They took me down in a car to see our old water boiler and the one they made there. The first water boiler that we made was low power, and then there was the high powered one that I worked on while the others all went on to the plutonium one where two people got killed.

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<sup>170</sup> The bison were for Fermi, signifying the frontier.

The huge cement block from the high-powered one was still there, and they built another one, which was even bigger and had a different construction next to it. It was about two stories high. I asked why the old one was still there, and they said, “It just takes too much dynamite to blow it up.”

We went up on top of the thing, and I’ll never forget looking down into it. The reactor produces a certain amount of power and made a kind of a light... It has something to do with quantum mechanics, some strange phenomenon that produces a light that the human eye can see. It was the most beautiful sight; I just kept looking and looking. The water that these rods were spaced out in was absolutely clear. And there was that sort of a blue light so that everything showed up... I was so amazed. That’s why I feel so small, because I can’t figure any of these things out because my mathematics is so poor. How could they figure out that there was going to be that light?

When it was time to give her talk, her old physicist friends took her to the lecture hall, where a seminar was in session about particle physics. She sat and listened until the seminar ended and someone got up and said, “Well, Joan Hinton’s here to give us a talk about China.”

Joan got up and got started, framed by slides on a screen of all of the best pictures she’d taken since she arrived in Shanghai in 1948 right up until 1977. Her talk was well received, and the scientists seemed interested—but the best moment for Joan was when she was all finished and Harold Argo raised his hand and said, “You know, I’m so glad to see these pictures, because I was the one who selected that camera for you when you left!”

The feeling of openness, of family and comradeship that existed way back on the mesa, when scientists wore one badge that allowed them all the same access so that they could put their most creative energies into fighting fascism, still lingered in the atmosphere. And Joan, it seemed, was still considered part of the family, in spite of her long and permanent detour into agriculture in China. She and Fred made the rounds, invited into countless people’s homes and visited with old friends with new families.

When it was finally time to leave, Stanislaw Ulam took them to the airstrip to wait for the shuttle. There, he told her that he had been one of the professors in the room at the University of Wisconsin when Joan strode in and sat down on the floor to take her exam. Then she disappeared. He got his letter asking him if he would join a secret war project shortly after Joan passed her exam, and he too made his way to the library to try to research the area where he would be going. The librarian added his name to the long list of physicists who had checked out the book to read up on New Mexico and then vanished from campus; his name was after one Joan Hinton.

Nearing the end of her trip, Joan headed back to the east coast where she spent a big chunk of money on bull semen to bring back with her to the Red Star. They were already using artificial insemination by then and the chance to improve the herd with

prized Holstein studs from Canada and US was rare. So as she got ready to fly from Philadelphia to Seattle (she had one stop there, another in Vancouver, and a last one in Hawaii before crossing the Pacific), she brought with her a big tank of liquid nitrogen with little straws of bull semen suspended in the cold.

She got approval from the airline, but then when she was getting ready to board, they called her name and told her that the pilot was refusing to fly with it. They were very sorry, but the last word was up to him, and he was feeling uneasy about it. Joan wasn't going anywhere without her luggage (she was known to travel with hand tools like screwdrivers and pliers "just in case") and politely but stubbornly demanded that they remove her bags from the plane before it took off. She watched as the airline personnel talked anxiously back and forth on radios until finally they told her that the pilot had reluctantly agreed to allow her fly with the tank.

When I got in the plane, I wrote a little note to the pilot saying that the liquid nitrogen was -196 degrees, and there was nothing dangerous about it. And I said that it had bull semen in it that would increase the dairy cows in China. I said that I was sorry that I caused him so much trouble, but that I thanked him very much for finally letting it go on the plane. I gave it to a stewardess, and she passed my little note up to the pilot. Pretty soon after that, a little note came back saying, "I'm sorry I caused you trouble, and I'm so glad I have a chance to bring this semen to China."

On the west coast Joan did her talks and in Hawaii wrapped up her whole tour. Just as she was getting ready to fly back via Japan, she got a call from Fred, who told her that Sid was in the hospital with a bad heart condition. He'd been hospitalized much earlier but in his stoic manner didn't want anyone, including and especially Joan, to know about it. Word leaked out, though, and Joan was relieved that she wouldn't be blindly returning home to find Sid bedridden and sickly.

When she arrived at the Beijing airport, Joan was waiting patiently with the other passengers to go through customs and immigration when an airport employee with a look of complete terror on his face, ran up to her, grabbed her arm and pulled her through the security barriers at a run, ignoring the protests of the guards. They tried to grab her, but he pulled her through to the baggage claim area, where she saw Sid in a wheelchair and in a crowd of other people who were watching with great interest—huge billows of white smoke pour out of the liquid nitrogen tank. Even though the tank had a hazmat sign on the side and instructions to keep it upright, the baggage handlers had just put the tank on the belt with the suitcases and duffels, where it promptly rolled over onto its side and began spewing vapors.

Joan calmly instructed them to put the tank upright and then told the guy who had grabbed her to go outside and find a stick. She dropped it in the tank and pulled it out with about half an inch of frost on it, so she let him off the hook. If it had come up dry, the thousands of dollars of bull semen would have defrosted, the sperm would have died off and there would have been hell to pay.

Instead of demanding payment for hell, Joan loaded up her luggage, the bull semen and the kitchen sink and headed back to the hospital with Sid, who had gotten a pass to come meet her. What had happened was that at the Red Star after Joan had left, he had caught a bad cold and asked the barefoot doctor to come take a look at him. She listened to his chest and told him that she heard something that she didn't understand and so he'd better get to the hospital right away. A commune jeep took him in the middle of the night, and at the PUMC (Peking Union Medical College), a doctor put his ear to the scope and told him it sounded like a steam engine. Apparently, one of the valves in his heart wasn't working right, and the blood couldn't get in and out the way it should. His heart was enlarged and only through bed rest (and the occasional trip to the airport in a wheelchair) with no exertion for three months, did his heart get back down to its normal size again.

Before Sid came out of the hospital with his regular sized heart, the Central Committee held a meeting on the question of science and technology. In 1977, after a lot of pressure from his allies on high and cloaked in the call to let old cadres out to work, Deng Xiaoping had been reinstated again. He asked to be put in a position of state power, and by July 1977, he was number two in the power structure of the Party. Joan and Sid read the documents that came out of the next Central Committee meeting in 1978, and were able to discern for the first time that there was a difference of opinion between Deng and Hua Guofeng. The difference was distinct; Hua talked about education in the sciences serving the majority of the people, and Deng talked about making it for a select few. The difference was between popularization and the elite. They sat in the hospital and discussed this difference and did not know how to prepare themselves for what was ahead.

Sid was discharged from the PUMC in early 1978. That year, Karen, one of the few youth still left at the tea farm, was selected to go to college. She was the oldest of the youth who were sent to the countryside, but it didn't hurt that she was the child of foreign experts, which probably was the reason she was sent to prestigious Beijing University rather than to Fuzhou, where she was originally supposed to go. Also, because she was of "foreign" descent, she was not allowed to study geology as she hoped and instead entered the field of biochemistry.<sup>171</sup>

When Sid came back to the Red Star, they moved to the Naifenchang, or the Milk Powder Factory, where Sid could convalesce more easily. He was doing all right, but Su Hongxi, who was still pushing the cutting edge in terms of cardiac surgery at that time in China, told him that what he really needed was a valve replacement, a transplant from a pig to be precise, and that he had to go to the US to get it; the technology and skill in China were not up to performing that kind of surgery yet.

Sid listened politely and said no; he had come to China to live and work, and if he got sick in China and China couldn't cure him, he would die in China.

Su tried another tactic. He approached everyone else in the family—Joan, the

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<sup>171</sup> As a field, geology was probably considered too sensitive for a foreigner because of its implications on national security regarding natural resources.

kids and then old friends like Norman and Liu Deying and convinced them one by one that they had to encircle Sid and get him to go to the US and have the valve replacement surgery. He explained that while Sid's heart was no longer enlarged, it was not well. And if he exerted himself a little bit and his heart swelled up again, it would not return to its normal size again, and he would be crippled for a couple years before he died.

The group was convinced. Within a few short discussions/arguments, some not as polite as others, Sid was too. They called up Joan's sister Jean, who happened to have been working with a world-renowned cardiologist named Bernard Lown, because they were both in the Boston area fighting against nukes. He became a Nobel Peace Prize recipient and Jean became his friend. She helped them set up an appointment.

Before they left China, the Experts Bureau asked them how much money they would need for the surgery. Joan thought it would be very, very expensive and so asked for \$6,000. They gave them \$10,000 to cover the surgery and living and travel expenses. When it turned out that the surgery itself was \$17,000, Joan called the embassy in Washington and told them they needed a little bit more money—\$10,000 more. Without missing a beat, they told her to come down to DC, and when she showed up gave her a check for \$10,000.

At what was at that time called Peter Brigham Hospital near Boston, the hospital staff sat the two of them down to fill out all the forms and prepare them both for the surgery. Joan was particularly impressed with the woman they sent to talk about what would happen psychologically after the surgery.

She said to Sid, "Look. You're gonna come out of this thing, and you're gonna feel so happy because you're still alive. You're going to have a big tube in your mouth, but you're gonna feel so happy. Then we'll take the tube out and the after a while all the anesthetic will wear off and then you're just gonna feel so lousy. They're gonna make you get up and walk when you feel awful, because you've got to get up and get your lungs good. You'll get a temper and be mad at everything—nothing is going to satisfy you." And she said to me, right in front of him, "Whatever he says for you to do, just do it and don't yell back." And Sid thought, "Well I'm not going to be like that."

They wheeled him in eventually and left Joan to wait for hours, alone. Finally, after a long time broken up only by observing and talking to some of the other anxiety stricken families, the doctor came to tell her that Sid had made it out of surgery. There were some complications with bleeding, and more waiting, and then Joan got to peek in and see Sid buried under cables and tubes and machines—she counted 29 in total—white faced and unconscious. The next day, she arrived as they were taking the tube out of his throat, and he couldn't have been more pleased—the fact that he was alive and awake made him immensely cheerful.

Just on schedule, when they downgraded him from urgent care and moved him

to another room, he started to feel pretty terrible and began ordering Joan around and telling her about everything she was doing wrong. Joan quietly gritted her teeth, thankful to the nurse who had given her a chance to prepare mentally, and just did what she had told her to do—put up with it. It was not in her nature, but she did it anyway. In China, after any kind of major surgery, patients usually stayed a month or two to recover. But in the US, after a few days of cursing out the nurses who made him get out of bed and walk down the halls and calling the doctors dirty fascists, Sid was discharged.

Jean, who was at her summer camp for youth in Nova Scotia, left Joan the run of her house in the suburbs of Boston. Included in the huge and lovely Victorian house was Jean's grumpy husband Steve, who was not fond of traveling to Canada every summer, and Ganny, getting quite ancient and under the "care" of a day nurse who did not treat her with a lot of gentleness or respect. Billy was still sickly but came up from Philadelphia to be with Sid. And Sid was so feeble when they first got to the house that he could barely make it up the porch steps to the living room, where Joan set up a little bed for him and a little mat on the floor where she slept beside him.

Sid had a lot of nursing needs. Joan had to take his temperature, measure his breathing and weigh him in order to administer the right amounts of medication. She had to monitor his every ache and pain and page the doctors and ask all the questions. But while that was very stressful, Joan handled it the way she did most every task she took up willingly: with rigorous scientific accuracy and persistent obsession. She logged every single event, paged the surgeons and doctors with every new discomfort and watched Sid under a microscopic gaze. All this was nothing compared to the other task she was given, mostly by default: cooking for the household.

Billy had to have lots of potatoes and heavy meals. Ganny couldn't have any high cholesterol stuff, but she was supposed to eat a lot of beef for her red blood cells or something. Steve didn't want any high cholesterol stuff, so he had to have fish. Steve was off at work, and he came back and wanted his meal ready on time... When Sid came home he had to have meat too, but he had trouble with his bowel movements. With the operation they gave him all that stuff that killed all the bacteria in his bowels, so he had to keep going all the time. So he had to have stuff that would dry him up... They all had a different diet and I was there in the kitchen with a Fanny Farmer cookbook. I started out with hamburgers—that was easy—and then I had different things every day. Every supper had to be big... That went on for about a month, with me keeping the whole household together by cooking... You can imagine.

Joan, at age 57, was for the first time put in the role that most women of her generation in the US and in China had long been relegated to: a housewife. All did not go smoothly.

The local grocery store was practically in Jean's backyard, so at least it was con-

venient to food shop. One day, Joan decided to branch out from her hamburger/fish/salad repertoire and roast a whole chicken, something that would feed the whole household. She brought the bird back from the store and prepared it exactly according to Fanny Farmer's directions. The smell of roasting poultry filled Joan with confidence, and when she peeked in the oven, the skin was browning satisfactorily. She called everyone for dinner. Before Ganny made it down the stairs, though, Joan found something had gone wrong: the chicken, moist and delicious on the outside, was still frozen solid through the middle. Fanny Farmer had not mentioned anything about defrosting.

Joan sent word out that the chicken was not quite ready and that dinner would be a few minutes. Billy had the brilliant idea that the thing would cook faster if it were cut in half, so the two of them went at it with a big butcher knife in a hammer. In the middle of this struggle, Ganny wandered in inquiring about the timeline. Joan told her it would be a while and asked if she might like to have a hamburger in the meantime to tide her over.

"What? Hamburger again? I just had hamburger for lunch! I want chicken!"

In spite of her many years in a Chinese society that put a lot of emphasis on how to speak politely, especially to elders, and also her real respect for her mother, Joan told Ganny to shut up and turned her efforts back to the cold bird.

Sid told her later that a horrified Ganny reported to him that his wife had told her to shut up.

Eventually the hacked up chicken got on the table and everyone ate—but it was not the shining glory of Joan's intentions.

Finally, much to Joan's relief, Sid recovered enough to travel, and they beat it up to upstate New York, where Sid's brother Wes still owned and operated a dairy farm, which neighbored his nephew's place. (Wes' wife Dorothy was also an efficient and experienced cook.) It was the end of the summer and corn harvesting time. Wes and his nephew both owned their own combines and helped each other out with the harvest. Joan and Sid offered to drive their combines for them and took in all the corn; they laughed and marveled watching deer leap out from the rows of tall stalks and waved to each other when they crossed paths. It was a task they preferred infinitely to cooking and convalescence in the Boston suburbs.

Joan and Sid made their way home near the end of the year. Changes were afoot in China. Hua Guofeng was making a lot of self-criticisms to the Party of all of the mistakes he'd made in thinking and policy. And Deng was planting seeds. They got a glimpse of the first seedlings at an end of the year banquet that the Beijing mayor invited them to along with Xiang Nan, a guy in charge of agricultural mechanization, who knew them through Joan's brother Bill. The theme at their table was: "We have to go through capitalism in order to get to socialism." Joan and Sid disagreed but the resulting argument had a different tone to it, as if this old line was new and innovative and Sid and Joan's assertion that it was an old line recycled by the usual suspects was actually behind the times.

In December 1978, the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Congress of the Chinese Communist Party wrapped up. One of its conclusions was that Deng Xiaoping, who had been reinstated and quietly consolidating his power, would head up the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. While he was not forced to resign his post, Hua Guofeng was sidelined as the first in power and put for the most part under house arrest. The two crimes he was accused of were that when he took over the Chairmanship in the midst of the Study about the *Three Poisonous Weeks of Deng Xiaoping*, he had said, "Continue to criticize Deng," and that he had propagated the directive to basically follow everything that Mao said. (Hua officially gave up his position as Party Chairman in 1980 but didn't really hold any power from the end of 1978 on.)

In the beginning of 1979, just around Chinese New Year, Deng decided to take a trip to the US. He was received by Jimmy Carter, and in addition to many fruitful talks that resulted in the US transferring all diplomatic relations from Taiwan to the People's Republic, was shown a good time. One of Deng's first media images to the people of the US was of a very short man in a grey Chinese suit wearing a huge ten-gallon cowboy hat, grinning at a rodeo in Texas.

Hua Guofeng took the opportunity that Deng's absence presented to make a barely announced visit to the Red Star Commune. Joan and Sid had already invited Xiang Nan and Lao Xing to their place to eat dumplings and continue their argument about capitalism. But Lao Xing called them the night before and told them that they were bringing a guest and would arrange for the dumplings to be made by the Red Star's cafeteria.

Hua Guofeng arrived in their courtyard in a little minibus with one other car and not a lot of fanfare. He was interested in what was going on at the Red Star, so they took him on a little tour. At the chicken coops, he criticized Lao Xing and told him that the chickens should be raised up in the hills to leave the flatland for crops. Just a few days before, their old friend Li Shuoxiu—the storehouse manager turned leader of Nannao, and then the head of the county—had gotten a short article published in the *People's Daily* about the lessons of Dazhai and about the roots of factional struggles leading upward. He would be soon vilified and denounced, but Hua Guofeng that day at the chicken coops chastised Lao Xing saying, "If Li Shuoxiu can do it, why can't you do it?"

They ended up back at Joan and Sid's where they brought out big oval plates of steaming dumplings and little bowls of soy sauce, vinegar and chilies for dunking. The news crew showed up to film Hua Guofeng digging in and laughing with Joan and Sid, who until that day had never met the guy nor knew very much about him. They showed the brief spot of footage almost every day on the television in the month following the New Year. After he left and after he was disappeared from any public life—and after it was not politically or socially prudent to even mention his name—people at the Red Star, friends and family and people who had seen them on the news referred to this last visit by what most people consider China's last socialist-minded leader simply as: "Eating dumplings."



Deng returned from the US with his cowboy hat and a new proclamation to set the tone for the next several decades: “Poverty is not socialism. To be rich is glorious!” It was the first of many catchy and effective phrases that Deng unleashed: “It doesn’t matter if a cat is black or white, so long as it catches mice” (a plug for his pragmatic approach to policy and practice), “*Da Guo Fan*” or big rice pot (to promote the idea that the socialist principle of providing basic necessities for everyone was actually lazy, stupid people dragging down the smart motivated ones), and “Let some people get rich first” (never really specifying who those first few might be and if others could really expect to follow).

Deng was going to lead China down the path of “Reform”, and on this path would be material wealth and a new coziness with the West that would give China access to bright new science and technology. There were only a few minor matters that had to be dealt with first.

The first was Vietnam, or rather, the Soviet Union. At the end of 1978, Vietnam signed a treaty with the Soviet Union and then promptly invaded Cambodia, which was allied with China. Deng’s response was immediate antagonism and a call to “Teach Vietnam a lesson.” After a cursory vote (on which Hua Guofeng abstained), Deng amassed hundreds of thousands of troops on the border and in mid-February shelled the hell out of the Vietnamese side. Then he sent the PLA in a massive full frontal assault, which was almost completely wiped out—not by Vietnamese troops, which were for the most part staying put in Cambodia, but by people’s militias. For the next three months, the PLA got their asses beat, fighting door to door, village by village and blowing up whatever infrastructure they could along the way. It seemed only vaguely familiar on the other side of the gun.

In the end they learned the lesson that China had schooled the Guomindang and the Japanese on not too long before: if the people are fighting for their nation and the people are armed, your prognosis as the invading country is not good for the long term. After suffering massive losses, the PLA hurriedly “took” a few cities, proclaimed victory and hurried back across the border. Even though it was messier than anticipated, the invasion sent the message intended to the rest of the world: China was taking on a more aggressive role in the region and was not above invading sovereign nations, even without direct provocation. The PLA’s thrashing also provided Deng with the justification for plying the military with more money and resources in order to “modernize” it.

What followed was the dissolution of the Chinese People’s Militias. All of the local militias, born out of the guerilla war that won liberation and trained as the people’s defense against whatever enemy, were disarmed to prevent any of the guns from being turned against the State.

Borrowing a page from his old compatriot Liu Shaoqi, Deng then divorced the Party and Party membership from communist or socialist ideology; he demanded absolute party loyalty and obedience and squelched any mechanism for criticizing the Party. The practice of criticism—self-criticism, already grinding feebly to a halt, stopped altogether. Joan, who had studied Liu Shaoqi’s *How to Be a Good Communist*, understood

how Deng intended to wield the call for party discipline.

You could see it clearly after Deng came in power; the first thing he demanded when he came to power was absolute obedience to the Central. Every party member had to have absolute obedience to the Central, no matter what ideas they had about him. Through enforcing that “party discipline,” he led the whole beautiful Party of China to the capitalist road. It was the same as Liu Shaoqi’s *How to be a Good Communist*. He said your first allegiance was to the Party. Mao always said that your first allegiance was to the people, what was right and wrong in their interest.

It’s very dialectical, because of course you had to have party discipline. But the thing is that everybody had to use their own head to decide whether the discipline was in the interest of the people. When Deng came to power, it was obvious it wasn’t in the interest of the people, and yet he used it to make all those party members go along in the interest of their party membership. The order to shoot the people in Tiananmen was fascist, but if they went against the Party line, then not only them, but their family, their children, would be ostracized. It’s very, very hard to stand up against that kind of party discipline.

Once all the guns were secured and party discipline newly defined, Deng began to dig into the backbone, the bread and butter of the socialist economic base: collectivized agriculture. Before he took power, Deng had already begun trying to discredit Dazhai as China’s agricultural model, claiming it was a collection of lies—that the Dazhai villagers had not built up their terraces and exponentially increased their production with their own hands—but rather that they had relied on state aid. Now with the whole state apparatus in his hands, Deng began a full on assault on the collectivization, revising and breathing new life into old standards about how the socialist economic line based in cooperation bred laziness and rewarded poor workers while punishing the good ones. In the years that followed he dismantled the communes, split up the land to individual families, and relegated another generation of peasants to tilling the ground with a hoe.<sup>172</sup> Chinese-made machines that could harvest and plant to scale were too big to run on each individual plot and so lay idle and rusted away.

People bought it. One way or another, most everyone bought it. Those who felt like they were smarter or stronger or quicker and had been kept from realizing their full potential as individuals flocked to the idea. Some just parroted the rationalization and others were really convinced that you had to go through capitalism to develop China first in order to then get to socialism. Some people were worn out and confused

<sup>172</sup> The dividing up of land to individual families lasted less than one generation; as China changed its development priorities to build up the big cities on the coast, millions of peasants began to migrate to urban slums to make money, often renting out their land to neighbors. In other cases, those who had a little more began buying up other people’s land and using foreign-made equipment, hiring labor as needed. In some areas in the country after the communes were dissolved the workers refused to divide the land and kept it together in big plots. Nowadays much of the land has been appropriated in speculation or development schemes.

from the Cultural Revolution and the arrest of the “Gang of Four”.<sup>173</sup> Many believed the propaganda that China had been stymied in its economic advances because of all of its tumultuous political movements. Lurking behind all of the justifications for the capitalist road ahead was the quiet but real threat of what might happen if you didn’t buy it and wanted to speak up about it, which exploded publicly for the first time in the bloodbath of 1989 on Tiananmen Square.<sup>174</sup> All in all, it was a comprehensively persuasive program for acquiescence. And besides, Deng Xiaoping had said himself that it was glorious to be rich—and who didn’t think they should and would be among the first few to get rich? The first proof was the wholesale transfer of formerly collectivized enterprises and factories to individuals with connections and their lightning reassembly of a bourgeois class—although it was not named as such.

But Joan and Sid had seen capitalism—had lived it, lived through it, as a poor tenant dairy farmer, as a member of the intellectual elite. They had seen it firsthand and left it behind, rejected it for the idea that socialism served a larger good. And in China they had glued themselves the best they could to the nitty gritty of production. They’d experienced firsthand how political movements and the struggle over opposing ideologies played out concretely with workers who had to make sure milk got to hungry babies. Maybe that made them more attuned to what all the changes creeping up around them like warm bath water actually meant.

Whatever the case, they didn’t buy it. And eventually, Sid and Joan found themselves quite alone.

[I]n ‘76, Joan and I realized right off the bat that we were going to be in for hard times. Zhou Enlai died, Zhu De died, Mao died all in ‘76... Hua Guofeng didn’t have the prestige that Deng had... When Deng came back into power, we knew that was the end of socialism. At the time he was saying we were going to continue socialism, just like... now: Chinese style socialism—socialism with Chinese characteristics etc., etc. So we were prepared. At that time, we lost an awful lot of our friends... We lost them politically... It got so we couldn’t even talk with people about politics anymore, because they had a completely different view, that we were going to have a reform, socialism without all the mistakes that we had before. So we just said, “Well, wait and see.”

While they waited politically, they did not stand still productively. In 1979, Xiang Nan, a strong advocate for agricultural mechanization, gave them big titles with more clout in order to try to get projects going toward that end. He made them advisors to

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<sup>173</sup> The “Gang of Four” had attacked and vilified a lot of honest cadres and intellectuals, who maybe had made some mistakes, but were not the counter-revolutionaries they were made out to be. This population created a base for Deng.

<sup>174</sup> In 1989, Deng Xiaoping gave the orders for the People’s Liberation Army to open fire on a peaceful mass protest in the square. Unofficial figures put the toll at over 3000 with many more injured. After the massacre, Beijing public security officials were given arrest quotas to fill, which resulted in a witch-hunt for anyone remotely involved with the protests.

the Ministry of Farm Machinery and also Vice Directors of the Institute of Livestock and Poultry Mechanization at the Academy of Agricultural Mechanization Sciences. With their new clout, and a powerful ally in Xiang Nan, the two proposed that they organize and lead a trip of dairy people to the US, to tour the dairy industry there and see what they could learn and bring back to use in China.

They did organize that trip, albeit with a 13:2 bureaucrat-to-worker ratio. But they traveled the US dairy farm circuit with their group, organized on the ground by the US China People's Friendship Association. On that trip the Chinese delegation learned to eat clams in Texas and thought they would expire on foreign soil after getting locked down into metal cars and defying gravity in a thing called a rollercoaster in a land called Disney. They also learned enough about dairy parlors that when they got back, in addition to being probably the first and only Chinese delegation to return over half of the money they were allotted for their trip (lowering that standard really pissed a lot of people off), the two workers on the trip erected the first mechanized milking parlors in China. Their old Caotan friend Liu Guojin made one in Xian, and Li Bing, a young woman tractor driver put one up at the Red Star. From what she learned on that trip, Joan also put together a team that designed and manufactured the first refrigerated bulk milk tanks.

In 1980, Joan and Sid moved from the Red Star to set up an Agricultural Machinery Experiment Station under the direction of the Academy in Beijing's northern suburbs. They named it Xiao (Little) Wang Zhuang, after the big Wang Zhuang village nearby. Their goal was to make, run and model a completely mechanized dairy, from the feeding to the milking to the cleaning of the cow yards—and they did. They made silage mixers that spilled feed out of chutes into the feeding troughs, set up a chain-link manure cleaning system that would send the shit out to the fields once it was scraped away by skidloaders. Joan drew and oversaw the construction of the milking parlor, and they made all their milking machines. The vacuum system sucked all the milk from the machines into the bulk milk tanks they designed and made in Xian that kept the milk cold until it was transferred to a truck and then to the pasteurizing plant.

Through the 1980s and 1990s Joan and Sid also initiated and modeled the most successful embryo transfer program for Holsteins in China. They raised their herd's production exponentially through fertilizing multiple eggs in their best cows and implanting the resulting embryos into cows that were poorer producers but still fertile. Quickly, the Xiao Wang Zhuang Dairy became known throughout the country for its highly mechanized, high production, high fat and protein content and clean quality milk.

They did a lot of work, and they accomplished much of what they envisioned.

Production wise, there was always a new project, a better way to go about it, some new technology that they could try to make work, the new hot bulls from Canada whose semen they could import to improve their herd. Politically speaking, they did wait, and they did see. And in the period of a few short years, they saw almost everything that they had struggled for, from the evacuation of Yanan to the mighty battles

of the Cultural Revolution, systematically dismantled.

Joan said:

The top capitalist roaders were trying in every way they could to get people to use guns to fight each other, to turn the Cultural Revolution into a mess, so they could say “Look what Mao did,” and save their own necks. It was just... thirty years of wrecking in different ways and this was the most intense. Capitalist roaders at the top were threatened, and they went right down to try to wreck the thing. It became very clear with the Socialist Education Movement, because it was a direct confrontation with Mao and Liu. It was Mao’s 10 points and then Liu’s 10 points and then Mao’s 23 points.

The Cultural Revolution failed because of the ability of the capitalist roaders to whip up factionalism among the people. And in fact, the people are so easily whipped into factionalism. It’s the petit bourgeois ideology, which is so strong in all of us: our Achilles’ heel. We can’t join together to fight the main enemy, because of our own petit bourgeois tendency to become factional. To me, if we can’t get over this, it’s the one thing that’s gonna keep ordinary people from ever being able to develop socialism...

In the US it’s against the foreign born, it’s whites against blacks and so on— all done to divide the working people. The working people fall for it all the time, because we do not have proletarian ideology. We don’t think that the working people are one family; we just look at somebody from the other village and think, “they’re not our village...” There’s no reason on earth for them to hate each other. All working people get their living from working.

As China took more and more obvious turns, the nature of their political discussions and the company with whom they could debate changed too. Some people came around to their point of view. Many would ask why they continued to stay in China to witness the commoditization of a saturated society. In response, they would say that there was never a dull moment. Whatever was happening, it was always very interesting. And as to their response to how they felt personally, emotionally, about the utter devastation of what their generation of cadres had devoted their lives to?

In China, they’d say, you have to have a sense of history, a sense of struggle and a sense of humor.

Their brief summation, it turns out, more accurately captures what volumes attempt to describe about these two Americans who lived the better part their lives on the other side of the planet from Gooseville Corners and Cambridge: They rarely ran from a fight, they knew that fighting battles during a revolution was different from the ones you could fight when you were on the defensive—and their homes, from the one-room cave in Wayaobao, to the cold storage room on the Mongolian plains, to the second-floor apartment in the embassy compound in Beijing—were always, irrefutably, filled with gales of laughter.

## Epilogue

*“We didn’t think that China was going to change color that fast, but Mao had said that it would. So when it happened, we realized what Mao was thinking about when he started the Cultural Revolution.” Sid Engst*

Sid was fond of quoting the saying that Chinese people are like Chinese herbal medicine set on a flame in earthen pots; it takes a long time for it to come to a boil, but once it does, it’s hard to get it to stop.

People are coming to realize that the riches for the few and flooding of material goods came at the cost of gutting the country’s infrastructure, infrastructure that had been laid down pipe by pipe, stone by stone, and machine by machine over the course of 30 years of socialism so that everyone would have a good chance at a better future. That infrastructure, the bridges, the irrigation systems, the schools, the clinics, the factories—all that seemed so sturdy and timeless, was torn apart like crepe paper and blown from the countryside villages and city work units, whispered out of history books and swept from the *People’s Daily* by the hot breath of well-studied leaders with minds for a different path for China.

Joan and Sid, and actually, many, many people in China still had a lot of fight all through the transition, through the pillaging of the state sector, through the People’s Liberation Army turning guns on the people on Tiananmen Square. But the foundation of the country, the society that they fought so hard to build together with their comrades was systematically dismantled—and everything that depended on it crumbled easily, including old comrades. So Joan and Sid turned their struggle to production, to increasing the dairy production in China, still to get more milk, more nutrition to more people in the country.

But struggle for production without struggle in politics leads to all kinds of weird—if expected—conflicts. Once workers lose their status and become exploited, how do you expect them to work for the “larger good” of the dairy? If the dairy will be shut down if it doesn’t show big profits, how do you make decisions about what is right for the people who work there? Even in the construction of the dairy itself, the contradictions were breathtaking. Construction workers, who were promised the bricks from buildings they took apart to make way for new structures, went on strike when their boss reneged on the deal. The whole project ground to a halt. Joan and Sid, on a tight deadline and anxious to get production online, were beside themselves. In charge of overseeing the whole thing, Joan went to talk to the workers and found out what the problem was. Finally one worker broke ranks and agreed to do the work needed to move the project ahead.

Was that worker, who became a close friend of Sid and Joan’s but was despised by the other workers, a strikebreaker? Or was he someone who sincerely wanted to get production going? Was he being opportunistic in trying to get in the good graces of more powerful people? Or was he being principled in trying to do the work to get the

dairy up and running? Joan and Sid often saw situations like this much differently than the people around them, workers and bureaucrats alike.

Through their years at the Xiao Wang Zhuang Dairy, they saw it all; in a way, it was a perfect microcosm of larger society. The infrastructure was neglected, state money was used by bureaucrats for private projects, which inevitably failed (from fishing ponds to pine tree saplings—another story for another time) but somehow the projects still made money to line leaders' pockets. Temporary workers were hired permanently on the cheap with no benefits. Full-time state workers saw their benefits get whittled away and fought to keep the temporary workers down.

Everyone got a refrigerator. Everyone got a TV. Everyone got a private telephone line in their home.

Everyone lost free education. Everyone lost low cost health care. Everyone put money into retirement benefits three times only to see it disappear three times.

The state-owned milk plant where they sent the milk to get pasteurized and processed was privatized. Then it was bought by Kraft. The Kraft manager cheerfully told Joan that they anticipated losing money for the first ten years they were in China, but that they had a long-term vision to overtake the Chinese market. (Kraft actually had to back out eventually because of some gross miscalculations. One was that they could get into the market by giving small businesses and vendors expensive Kraft refrigerators to stock their products. But the Chinese owners simply took the refrigerators and stocked cheaper better-selling products.)

Most of the old revolutionaries who lived to struggle for socialism are dead. Mao, Zhou, Zhu. Sid died in 2002. His death was neither easy nor kind and came over him after lying in a high cadre's room at the PUMC for two years, most of that time unable to talk, or eat or breathe on his own. But it was nothing if not a testament of the will of an old dairy farmer who never got the shit off of his shoes to see what might happen the next day.

Joan's life after Sid passed has held a different kind of difficulty. Alienation from a society is much harder when you have to endure loneliness on an individual level. Without her partner in crime of over 50 years to bounce off ideas, debate and argue science, and root her to a different class, Joan has decided to do the one thing she feels she can manage in order to be useful: stay alive to try to prevent the Academy (of Agricultural Mechanization Sciences) from selling the land out from under the dairy at Xiao Wang Zhuang. The land has become increasingly valuable as Beijing has grown up around it, and local bureaucrats see the shortsighted path of land speculation as something extremely lucrative for themselves. While she is still interested in what is going on in the world, how people are struggling for what she and several million Chinese people struggled for, she is not entirely engaged. The scope of her single-mindedness in task—staying alive to keep the land from being sold—has narrowed as her capacity to be active in the world has.

The beauty of that pot of Chinese herbs, though, is that the boiling action was set in motion a long time ago, over flames that Joan and Sid and all the old revolutionary

comrades helped stoke. And if there's anything that has proven consistent in the wide breadth of Chinese history, pried wider in 1949 by the hands of the poor and landless peasants—it's that heaven will not help those at the top once the steam starts to rise.





## Index

### A

Academy of Agricultural Mechanization Sciences 359

Addams, Jane 4

Adler, Pat 294

Adler, Saul 294

Aeronautical Institute (Beijing Hankong Xueyuan/Beijing Aeronautical Institute) 270, 276

Agnew, Harold 35, 68, 69, 347

Agricultural Machinery Experiment Station 359

Agriculture and Forestry Administration 137, 142, 156, 184

Albania 150, 207-208, 228, 249

Alice Chamber 328

All-China Women's Federation 183

Alley, Rewi 75, 156, 212

Allison, Sam (Samuel) 37, 41, 43-45, 68, 70

Anbian (North Shaanxi Province) 114-116

Anderson, Herb (Herbert) 31, 37, 41, 69, 347

Angang Constitution 320-322

Anhui Province 209, 315

Anshan steel factory 320-321

Anshan (Liaoning Province) 320

Anti-Japanese War 84, 147, 156, 191, 264, 300

Anti-Rightist Movement 170-171, 183-184, 202, 252

Argonne (*see also Met Lab/Metallurgical Laboratory*) 29, 68

Asian and Pacific Peace Conference (*see also Peace Conference*) 130-131

Association of Los Alamos Scientists 37, 40

### B

Bacher, Robert 13, 26, 30

Bai Bingxing 231-233

Bai Jianguang (Lao Bai) 143, 146, 155

Bai Renshen 61

Bandung Conference 207

Baohuang Pai (*See also Protect the Emperor Faction/Tian Faction/Heaven Faction*) 278  
*baomu* 139, 153-154, 160, 215

Beihai (Northern Sea) 77

Beijing 50-51, 75-82, 85, 93, 128, 130-131, 234-238

Beijing City Committee 244, 250, 323, 328, 331  
Institute)

Beijing Hotel 75, 77, 135, 212, 228, 307

Beijing Municipal Party 244

Beijing University (Peking University) 81, 245-247, 250, 351

Bennington College 9, 12, 26, 28-29

Bethune-Yanan Rebel Regiment 264-265, 273-274, 278, 280-283

Bethune, Norman 264

big-character poster (*see also dazibao*) 246, 260, 263, 269-270, 272-273

Black Panthers (Party For Self Defense) 229, 305

bombard the headquarters 251, 258, 267, 270-271

Boole, Alice 3

Boole, Ethyl 3

Boole, George 3

Boole, Mary Everest 3

Boolean algebra 3

Border Region Government 60-62, 65, 89, 91-92, 97-98

bourgeois ideology 311

bourgeois nationalism 22, 264, 288-289

bourgeoisie 22, 127, 159, 167, 169-170, 202, 228, 255, 263

Boxer Rebellion 103, 115

Bright China Farm (*see also Guanghua Nong-chang*) 54, 56-57, 60-61 95

Bryn Mawr 2-3, 8, 70

Bureau for Movie Distribution (and the

- Committee for Cultural Relations) 240, 249, 265-266, 274-275  
 Bureaucrat capital 166  
 Bureaucratism 320  
 Burton, Bob 51
- C**
- cadre (ganbu) 65  
 Cambodia 356  
 Cambridge 5, 360  
 Canada 10, 304, 314  
 Caotan (State Farm/Grassy Plains State Farm) 143-144, 152, 154, 241-242, 247, 257-261, 319-320  
 Cape Breton 318  
 Capital (Marx's) 325  
 capitalism 7, 22, 64, 169, 207, 215, 241, 245, 270, 331, 354, 357  
 capitalist road(er) 231, 252-253, 262, 271-272, 329, 337, 357, 360  
 Carter, Gracy 10  
 Carter, Robert (Bob) 30, 33-34, 37-38, 70  
 Castro, Fidel 229  
 CCP (*see also Chinese Communist Party*) 63, 99, 140  
 Central Committee (of the Chinese Communist Party) 22, 56, 58-59, 61, 63, 80, 140, 168, 201, 225, 245, 277, 281-282, 287, 319, 340-341, 351  
 Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) 70  
 Chamberlain, Owen 43-44, 347-348  
 Changsha (Hunan Province) 48, 50, 65, 225  
 Chase, Clement 2  
 Chen (Vice Director of the Department of Agriculture) 196-199, 201  
 Chen Boda 278, 305  
 Chen Yi 263, 272-274, 277-280  
 Chen Yonggui 298-303, 307-310, 323  
 Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) 23, 48, 56, 93, 232, 295, 305  
 China Liberated Areas Relief Administration (CLARA) 51  
*China Reconstructs* 131, 308  
*China Review* 75, 131  
 China Welfare Fund 47, 62, 69, 72-75  
 Chinese Communist Party (*see also CCP*) 158, 206, 305, 355  
 Chinese People's Political Consultative 355  
 Chinese People's Association for Culture and Friendship with Foreign Countries (*see also Zhongguo Renmin Duiwai Wenhua Youhao Xiehui/Duiwai Wenwei*) 240, 275  
 Chinese-Albanian Friendship Commune 249, 268, 284  
 Christy, Robert 36, 69  
 Chunchuan 102-105, 120-121  
 Churchill, Winston 18, 41  
 Civil Rights Movement (US) 335, 346  
 Civil War 24, 46, 51, 55, 62, 69, 74-75, 93, 99, 125, 206, 232, 243-244  
 Clancy 13, 26  
 Clark, Joy 6  
 Cochran Farm 15-16  
 Coe, Bob (Robert) 22  
 Coe, Frank 293-294, 324  
 Coe, Ruth 293-294  
 Cold War 41, 292  
 collective (in agriculture) 64, 146, 167, 196, 338, 330  
 communes (People's Communes) 167, 202, 245, 315, 330-331, 357  
 communist wind 205, 217  
 comprador 166-167, 311  
 Coolidge, Liba 7  
 Cornell University 12-15, 19-23, 26, 28  
 criticism, self-criticism (self-criticism) 163-164, 175-177, 217, 268, 272, 274, 277-279, 305, 356  
 Crook, David and Isabel 64, 135, 229, 247, 283, 324-325  
 Cuba 229-230  
 Cultural Revolution (*see also Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution*) 170, 245-247, 249-253, 255-291, 293, 295-296, 309-

310, 319, 321, 330, 337, 342, 358, 360  
 Cultural Revolution Committee 245,  
 258, 277, 279, 288

## D

Daghlian, Harry 30, 33-34, 43  
 Daihao 77-80  
 Dalai Lama 108, 208  
 Dalian (Liaoning Province) 208-210  
 Dama 154, 162, 215-216, 250, 268, 315  
 Daqing (Heilongjiang Province) 296  
 Date Garden (North Shaanxi Province) 57  
 Dazhai (Shanxi Province) 230, 296-310,  
 338, 357  
*dazibao (see also Big-character poster)* 246,  
 249, 251, 255-260, 262-265, 270, 272-  
 274, 285-283, 313  
 Deharjee 104, 110, 116  
 Deng Xiaoping 64, 169-170, 201-202,  
 215, 264, 301, 311, 319, 322, 329, 337-  
 338, 340-344, 351, 354-358  
 Dewey, John 2, 4-5  
 dictatorship of the bourgeoisie 169, 263  
 dictatorship of the proletariat 169, 262  
 Difficult Times 210- 211, 214-215, 217  
 Dingbian (North Shaanxi Province) 116,  
 122, 126, 128  
 division of labor 139, 331  
 Dongdan 77  
 Double Bridge Farm 130, 158, 229  
 dui lian 92  
 Duiwai Wenwei (*see also Chinese People's  
 Association for Culture and Friendship with  
 Foreign Countries/Zhongguo Renmin Dui-  
 wai Wenhua Youhao Xiehui*) 249-250, 266,  
 275-276, 283, 288  
 Duiziliang (North Shaanxi Province) 115

## E

Earth Faction (Di/Zaofan Faction/Rebel  
 Faction) 276-77, 281, 283  
 Eastland Committee 292  
 Eastland, James 205, 293  
 economic base 139, 146, 167, 252, 262,

311, 330, 357  
 Egypt 161, 280  
 Eighth Route Army 62, 240  
 Einstein, Albert 13, 40, 182  
 Eisenhower, Dwight 142, 207  
 England 34, 41, 82, 161, 183, 199, 211,  
 217, 281  
 English Surveyor of India 3  
 Engst, Billy (Yang Jianping) 153-154,  
 159, 161, 211-212, 234-237, 244, 247,  
 249-250, 267-268, 286, 315-316, 332-  
 333, 345  
 Engst, Bud (Orville) 15, 17, 19-20, 24  
 Engst, Edna 15-18, 21, 23-24  
 Engst, Fred (Sid Engst and Joan Hinton's  
 son/Yang Heping) 136-139, 159, 160-  
 163, 205, 219-220, 229, 234-237, 259,  
 267-269, 314, 324-328, 335-336, 345-  
 346  
 Engst, Fred (Sid Engst's father) 15-17  
 Engst, Helen 20  
 Engst, Karen (Yang Jiping) 161, 163, 211-  
 212, 215-216, 235, 247-250, 315, 328,  
 332-333, 351  
 Engst, Lorna 15-16, 21, 325-326  
 Engst, Olive 15, 21  
 Engst, Una 15, 21  
 Engst, Verda 15, 21, 341  
 Engst, Wesley (Wes) 15, 21, 23-24, 335,  
 354  
 Epstein, Israel (Eppy) 228, 258, 263-264,  
 273, 278, 282-283, 324  
 Er Gadan 103, 113  
 Everest, George 3  
 Everett Massacre 53

## F

factionalism 260-261, 265, 269, 276,  
 281, 286, 293, 304, 360  
 Fairfax-Cholmeley, Elsie 228, 258, 263,  
 273, 283  
 famine 48, 50, 54, 65, 209, 302  
*Fanshen* 65, 205, 293, 296, 310

- February 7<sup>th</sup> Iron Factory 293  
 Federal Bureau Of Investigation (FBI) 133  
 Feng Yiqi 190  
 Feng Yuluo 281-282  
 Fengzi 75-80  
 Fermi, Enrico 29-33, 37, 40-41, 43-45, 69-70, 347-348  
 feudal ideology 95, 137, 203, 251, 330  
 feudalism 139, 206, 215, 222, 331  
 Five Antis Movement (*see also Wufan Movement*) 126-127, 169  
 foot-binding 55  
 Foreign Experts Bureau 258-259, 265, 288-289  
 Foreign Languages Institute 205, 219, 229, 244, 264-265, 324  
 Fourth Front Army 337  
 Fourth Meeting of the People's Congress 337  
 France 161, 232, 281, 291  
 Friendship Hotel (Golden Ghetto) 237, 240, 258-259, 263-264, 272, 281-282  
 Frisch, David (Dave) 27-28  
 Fu Zuoyi 85  
 Fulton, Missouri 41
- G**
- Gala 104, 110-112, 119  
*Gadfly, The* 3  
 Gang Of Four 245, 272, 312, 319, 329-330, 339-342, 344, 358  
 Ganny (*also see Carmelita Hinton*) 219-222, 224-227, 304, 312, 316-318, 353-354  
 Gansu Province 60, 147, 209  
 Gaochao Valley 57  
 Gates, Taylor 6  
 Geiger counter 31  
 Geological Institute (Beijing Dizhi Xueyuan/Beijing Geological Institute) 269, 276  
 Germany 7-8, 15, 22, 26, 33  
 Glacier National Park 6  
 Gong Xugui 155, 171  
 Gooseville Corners 20, 337  
 Grand Canyon 38  
 Great Depression 7-8, 17-19, 21, 210  
 Great Hall of the People 249, 278-279, 292, 294, 305, 311, 324, 334, 339, 340  
 Great Leap Forward 190, 193, 196, 198-199, 201-203, 207, 228, 245, 252, 312  
 Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (*see also Cultural Revolution*) 251, 258  
 Great Unity (Da Lian He) 283  
 Great Wall (of China) 63, 101  
 Green, Bill 29, 39  
 Guanghua Nongchang (*see also Bright China Farm*) 54  
 Guangxi Province 225  
 Guangzhou Province 251, 292  
 Guilin (Guangxi Province) 225-227  
 Guomindang (*see also KMT/Nationalist Party*) 23, 46, 48, 54, 56-63, 65-67, 73-75, 77-82, 85, 92-93, 99, 126-127, 167, 191, 202, 243
- H**
- Hai Rui (Dismissed from Office) 243-246  
 Haitem, George 56, 62-63, 317  
 Hammel, Edward 30, 33-34  
 Han (Chinese) 55, 101, 103-105, 108-112, 117-119, 224  
 Han Dynasty 148-149, 154  
 Hangzhou (Zhejiang Province) 73, 183, 307  
 Hanson, Al 27-28, 348  
 He Liliang 293, 296  
 He Zixi (Director) 155, 170-171, 197, 210  
 Heaven Faction (Tian Faction/Baohuang Pai/Protect the Emperor Faction) 276, 278-279, 281, 283  
 Hebei Province 56, 63-65, 86  
 Heigeda (North Shaanxi Province) (Black Bump) 121  
 Henan Province 59, 73  
 Highbridge 17

Hinton, Bill (William) 2, 4-5, 8-9, 11, 14-15, 21-24, 47, 64-65, 86, 96, 128, 130, 158, 205, 281, 291-296, 310, 312, 314, 321, 335

Hinton, Carma 130, 205, 256, 268-269, 294-295, 304, 312, 327-328

Hinton, Carmelita (*see also Ganny*) 2-11, 13, 204, 217-219, 227, 306

Hinton, Cathy 293, 300

Hinton, Charles 3

Hinton, Howard 211

Hinton, Jean (Jean Rosner) 2, 8-9, 22, 29, 34, 39, 69, 316-318, 352-353

Hinton, Joanne 293-294

Hinton, Lissie 293, 300

Hinton, Mike (Mikey) 293, 300, 307

Hinton, Ted (Sebastian) 2-6

Hiroshima, Japan 25, 36, 43, 68, 132-133

Hitler, Adolph 7-8

Holloway, Marshall 13, 26, 28, 30

Hong Kong 128, 228, 280, 292, 318, 325-327

Horse Hoof Gully 95, 98

*How To Be A Good Communist* 276, 356

Hu Hongfan 311

Hu Zongnan 54, 56, 62, 66

Hua Guofeng 319, 340-342, 344, 351, 354-356, 358

Huaihai Battle 75

Huang Hua 51, 280, 288-289, 304, 314

Hubei Province 224

Hull House 4

Hunan Province 48, 50, 65, 225, 337

*Hundred Day War* 293

Hundred Flowers Campaign ("Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom and a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend.") 169-170  
*hutong* 77

## I

ideology (*see also bourgeois ideology, feudal ideology, Marxist ideology, petit bourgeois ideology, proletarian ideology socialist*

*ideology*) 22, 55, 108, 125, 169, 252, 274, 298, 311, 330

imperialism (*see also US imperialism*) 207-208

India 108, 158, 207-208, 220-221

Inner Mongolia Province 54, 55, 61, 97, 103, 120, 125, 312, 326

Institute of Livestock and Poultry 359

Institute of Nuclear Studies 37, 43, 133

International Workers of the World 22

Iron Boys 300

Iron Curtain 41

Iron Girls 300-301

Italy 22, 29

## J

James, William 2

January Storm 272, 274

Japanese Six 263

Jian Shouyi (Jian Vet) 190

Jiang Kunhuai 192, 195

Jiang Qing 245, 272-273, 277, 282-283, 286, 329-330, 332, 334, 338, 341-342

Jiang Xiaodiar 147

Jiangxi Province 63, 169, 224-225

Jim Crow 229

jin (Chinese pound or catty) 65, 184, 321

Jinggangshan (Jinggang Mountain) 225, 227

Jinhou Zhandou Dui (*see also Monkey King Fighting Group*) 267, 275

Jiu Chun (Inner Mongolia Province) (Old City) 103

Journey to the West 267

## K

Kaifeng (Henan Province) 74

kang 55, 105, 110-111, 193

Kang Di 54-55, 63-65, 88, 92, 119

Kerst, Donald 30, 33-34, 37-38

Khrushchev, Nikita 108, 206-209, 220, 251-252, 257-258, 270, 291-292, 305

King, Lionel Detlev Percival (Percy) 30, 33-34

- Kissinger, Henry 292, 306  
 KMT (*see also Guomindang/Nationalist Party*) 23, 85  
 Koblenz, Germany 7  
 Kokura, Japan 36  
 Korea (*see also Korean War North Korea*) 41, 125, 131, 206, 210, 292  
 Korean War (*see also Korea, North Korea*) 125, 131, 158, 206, 208, 218, 272  
 Kramer, Ione 189, 283, 324  
 Kuai Dafu 271, 287
- L**
- Lake Placid 10  
 Land Grant Colleges 20  
 Land Reform 55, 63-64, 80, 109, 168, 243, 293, 296, 298  
 landlord 55, 63-64, 99, 109, 127, 139, 252, 298  
 Lao Bai (Bai Jianguang) 143, 146, 155  
 Lao Dong 327, 329  
 Lao Huang 100, 102, 126  
 Lao Li 171-173, 175-176, 179-180, 186-188  
 Lao Meng 190  
 Lao San Pian (*See also the Three Olds*) 274  
 Lao Wang (Big Vet) 122  
 Lao Xing 329, 341, 355  
 Lao Zhang 171-172, 174-180, 186-188  
 Lao Zhao 213-214  
 Lee Tsungdao 45-46  
 Lei Feng 222, 227  
 Lenin, Vladimir 207, 276  
*li* 57  
 Li Bing 259  
 Li Kui 186, 199  
 Li River 225-226  
 Li Shuoxiu 303, 355  
 Li Weihe 241, 247-248  
 Liandui 267, 275, 283  
 Liberated Area 22, 39, 47, 51, 61-64, 74-75, 77, 91, 243  
 Lin Beiqu 65, 92, 203  
 Lin Biao 78, 245, 248, 286, 304-305, 312, 319  
 Lin Gang 289-290  
 line struggle 169, 202, 228, 245, 261, 271, 309, 311, 314, 321, 339  
 Lippa, Dr. 74  
*Little Red Book* 245, 248  
 Liu Deying 54-55, 95-96, 102, 113, 121-122  
 Liu Guojin 191, 259  
 Liu Shaoqi 56, 63-64, 169, 201, 217, 231, 234, 245-246, 249, 251, 261, 270-272, 276-277, 329, 356-357  
 Liu Weifu 327, 329, 334  
 Liu Xiansheng 197  
 Lloyd, Eva and Harry 289, 324  
 Long March 63, 80, 225, 268-269  
 Longbow Village (Zhangzhuangcun) 205, 291, 295, 310  
 Longshoremen 72  
 Los Alamos (New Mexico) 25, 29-37  
 Lown, Bernard 352  
 Luo River 59-60  
 Luo River Valley 59-60  
 Lushan (Lu Mountain) 169, 201, 224, 228  
 Lushan Meeting 202, 207, 224-225, 245, 270, 296, 311-312  
 Lysenko, Trofim 183
- M**
- Ma Hunkui 60  
 Ma Xuankun 197  
 Ma, Father 106, 117-118, 127-128  
 Majiang (Mahjong) 78  
 Manzouli 210  
 Mao's Selected Works 334  
 Mao Zedong (Chairman Mao/Mao) 22, 47, 53, 56, 63, 80, 166, 169-170, 183, 201-203, 207-210, 217, 225, 230-231, 234, 241, 245, 250-253, 263-264, 269-274, 276, 283, 286-289, 296, 304-306, 312, 313, 337-342

Mao Zedong Thought 257, 289  
 Marshall, George 50  
 Marshall, Leona 43  
 Marx, Karl 84, 166, 320  
 Marxist ideology (Marxism) 166, 207  
 material incentive 157-158, 196, 202, 296, 321  
 Matigou 95  
 May 1<sup>st</sup> Cadre School 284  
 McCarthy Era (*see also McCarthyism*) 133, 205, 292-293, 326  
 McCarthyism (*see also McCarthy Era*) 41, 45  
 McCarthy, Joseph (Joe) 41, 345  
 McMahan Act 41  
 McMahan Line 220-221  
 means of production 127, 146, 159, 167  
 mechanization 86, 157, 193, 319-320, 358-359  
 Met Lab (Metallurgical Laboratory) 29, 31, 37  
 Metallurgical Institute 283  
 Miao Dianzi 57  
 militia (*see also People's Militias*) 99, 102, 127, 301, 332, 356  
 Milton, Chris, David and Nancy 229  
 Ming Dynasty 244, 246, 286  
 Ming Tombs 247  
 Minority Nationalities (Policy) 108-109, 117, 127, 337  
 Monkey King (Song Wukong) 267  
 Monkey King Fighting Group (Jinhou Zhandi Dui) 267, 275, 283  
 Morrill Act 20  
 Moscow (USSR) 135-136, 206, 208, 217-218, 292  
 Mosel River, Germany 7

## N

Nagasaki, Japan 25, 36, 43, 68, 132-133  
 Nagle, Darragh 31, 37, 347-348  
 Nainai 216, 237  
 Nanchang (Jiangxi Province) 225

Nanjing (Jiangsu Province) 332  
 Nannao (Shanxi Province) 302-303, 355  
 national bourgeoisie 167  
 National People's Congress 299, 337  
 Nationalist Party (*see also Guomindang/KMT*) 23  
 Nazi 7-8  
*Negroes with Guns* 229  
 Nehru, Jawaharlal 108, 207, 220-221  
 New Fourth Route Army 62  
 New Hampshire 10, 24, 29  
 Newton, Huey 229, 305  
 Nie Yuanzi 245  
 Ningtiaoliang (North Shaanxi Province) 102  
 Ningxia Province 60, 103  
 Nixon, Richard 218, 291-292, 294-295, 306, 315, 328  
 North China Bandit Suppression Headquarters 127  
 North Dairy 315-316, 319-320, 322-323  
 North Korea (*see also Korea, Korean War*) 125, 131, 136, 312  
 North Shaanxi Province 46, 51, 54, 56, 58, 66, 91, 95, 98, 112-113, 137, 189, 191, 243, 255  
 Northwest Agricultural University 54, 57, 64  
 Northwest Animal Husbandry Bureau 109  
 Northwest Campaign 56, 66  
 Northwestern University 119

## O

Office of War Information (OWI) 24, 47  
 opium 117  
 Oppenheimer, Robert 29-30, 33-34 40  
 Osborne, Mac 6

## P

Pakistan 292  
 Panama 220-221  
 Paris Commune 241, 272  
 Party Secretary 128, 242



- Peace Association 228  
 Peace Compound 131, 134, 293-294, 310, 317  
 Peace Conference (*see also Asian and Pacific Peace Conference*) 130-131, 133-136, 138, 293  
 peaceful coexistence 207-208, 252  
 Peach Orchard (Tao Yuan) 231, 246, 261, 266, 268-269, 302  
 Pearl Harbor 13, 23-24  
 Peking ducks 192-193, 212-213  
 Peking Union Medical College (PUMC) 316, 338, 351, 362  
 Peng Dehuai 62, 201, 207, 245, 311  
 Peng Zhen 208, 244, 247, 272  
 Penis Beard (Chu Baiar/Chu Huzi) 123-125, 129  
*People's Daily* 201, 246, 251, 253, 265-266, 347, 361  
 People's Liberation Army (PLA) 62, 75, 80-82, 85, 97, 99, 108, 189, 193, 206, 221, 253, 262, 270, 281, 287, 293, 304-305, 315, 319, 356  
 People's Militias (*see also militias*) 99, 301, 356  
 people's war 67  
 People's Republic of China (People's Republic/PRC) 41, 51, 105, 131, 133-134, 147, 203, 220-221, 292, 299, 315, 336, 355  
 petit bourgeois ideology 151, 159, 360  
 Pin Ping 271  
 Ping Pong Diplomacy 291-292, 305  
 polemics 207, 228  
 Political Bureau 201, 299  
 post-Liberation 169, 330  
 Powell, Bill and Sylvia 75, 131  
 privatization 156, 215-216  
 proletarian ideology 311, 360  
 proletarian internationalism 257, 264, 289  
 proletariat 22, 159, 166, 202, 255, 262, 339  
 Pu, Lucille 284, 289-290  
 Putney School 8-11, 13, 23, 218, 227
- ## Q
- Qing Dynasty 103, 244  
 Qinghai Province 198  
 Qinghua University 246, 250, 268-271, 276-277, 286-287, 293  
 Qingming (Festival) 339, 344  
 Qinling Mountains (Shaanxi Province) 155  
 Qinshi Huangdi 220  
 Qiu Quanguan 232  
 Queen Juliana of the Netherlands 226
- ## R
- Radio China International 253, 260, 273, 277, 281-282  
 Radio Free Dixie 229  
 Rayburn, Sam 337  
 Red Army 23, 54-55, 61-63, 66, 80, 225, 340  
 Red Guards 250-251, 253, 255, 259, 268, 270, 287  
 Red Star Commune 314, 320-324, 327, 329, 355  
*Red Star Over China* 22-23, 29, 63, 291  
 Red West Gate Commune 333  
 relations of production 201-202, 303-304, 309  
 Ren Bishi 56  
 revisionism (revisionist) 169, 208-209, 245, 252, 256-257, 266, 276, 283  
 Revolutionary Committee 319  
 rickshaw 282  
 Rittenberg, Sidney (Sid) 53, 56, 27-274, 277, 282-283, 324  
 Roosevelt, Franklin Delano 8, 13, 21, 33  
 Royal Free Hospital 3
- ## S
- Saar Valley 7  
 Sanbian Muchang (*see also Three Border Farm/Three Border Pasture Farm*) 103

- Sanfan Movement (*see also Three Antis Movement*) 126, 146
- Sangre de Cristo mountain range 38
- Sanjiao Chun (Three Cornered Village) 109
- Sanlitun 250, 267, 280
- Santa Fe (New Mexico) 29, 34
- Schalter 27
- Schreiber, Raemer 30, 33
- Schulman, Norman 284-285, 352
- Seale, Bobby 229
- Segré, Emilio 70, 348
- September Eighth Fighting Group 273-274, 283-284, 288-289, 324
- Seventh Party Congress 168
- Shady Hill School 5-7, 301
- Shandong Province 58
- Shanghai 42, 47, 70, 72-75, 149-150, 156, 222, 272, 274, 304
- Shanxi Province 62-63, 230, 296, 297, 299
- Shapiro, Mike 324
- Shapiro, Sidney (Sid) 75-81, 85, 189
- Shaw, Marilyn 10
- Shenzhen (Guangzhou Province) 326-327
- Shi Lan 77-78
- Shi Ping (Shaanxi Province) 303
- Shijiazhuang (Hebei Province) 86
- Shuaba Haizi (North Shaanxi Province) 102
- Shulman, Julian 75
- Si Qing (Four Cleans) (*see also Socialist Education Movement*) 231
- Sichuan Province 152
- silage 120, 140, 148, 149, 161, 210, 230
- silage chopper 142, 149, 152, 154, 320
- Sino-Soviet Split 331
- Skeets 30, 34
- Slotin, Louis 33, 43,
- Sneck, Bertha 33, 70-71, 73-75, 86, 130, 136, 205, 219, 230, 248, 256, 258, 278, 283, 294, 318
- Snow, Edgar 22, 23, 62, 291, 293
- socialism 64-65, 146, 152, 157-158, 163-164, 169, 197, 202, 207-208, 210, 222 240, 252-253, 330, 354, 356-358, 360-362
- socialist ideology 152, 164, 296, 356
- Socialist Education Movement (*see also Si Qing*) 230-232, 234, 246, 250-252, 256, 259, 261, 266, 268-269, 302, 360
- Solvay Process 19
- Song Ailing 48
- Song Liying 309
- Song Meiling 48, 224
- Song Qingling (Madame Sun Yat-sen) (*see also Madame Sun*) 47-48, 218
- Song Yaoju 48
- Song Ziwen 50
- Soviet Union (*see also USSR*) 37, 45, 69-70, 80, 125, 133, 135, 140, 150, 157-158, 193, 206-210, 212, 228, 252-253, 356
- Spanish Civil War 64
- Special Features and Photos Department 242, 266
- Spock, Benjamin 135, 137
- Spring Festival (Chinese New Year/Lunar New Year) 106, 123
- Stalin, Joseph 140, 157, 206-208, 251-252
- Starabin 131-132
- State Council 249, 263, 277
- Storage Room Hill 120-122, 126
- Strong, Anna Louise 53, 56, 209, 228
- struggle session 260
- Su Hongxi 189, 210, 215, 235, 324, 351
- Su, Jane 189, 192, 215, 235
- Suez Canal (Egypt) 161
- Suide (Shaanxi Province) 60-62, 65, 87
- Summer Palace (Beijing) 255
- Sun Yat-sen 23, 48, 65, 73
- Sun, Madame (The Madame/Madame Sun Yat-sen) (*see also Song Qingling*) 47-48, 62, 69, 72-73, 75, 130-131, 135-136, 218, 308
- superstructure 159, 240-241, 249, 261-

- 263, 284  
 Syracuse (New York) 15-17  
 Szilárd, Leo 13, 40
- T**
- Taihang Mountains 86, 310  
 Taiwan 74, 127, 232, 295, 305, 336-337, 346, 355  
 Tang Minjiao 218  
 Tang Shan 340-341  
 Tang Wengsheng (Nancy) 218  
 Tannenbaum, Gerry 47, 69, 75, 81, 131, 135  
 Teller, Edward 30, 43, 45-46, 70, 133  
*"Ten Great Relationships"* (*"Shi Da Guanxi"*) 166, 224  
 Three Widows (San Guafu) 103-104, 110, 119-120  
 Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Congress 355  
 Three Antis Movement (*see also Sanfan Movement*) 126-127, 168  
 Three Border Farm (Three Border Pasture Farm/Sanbian Muchang) 103, 105-106, 109, 112, 116-117, 119, 140, 155, 233  
*Three Kingdoms (Romance of the Three Kingdoms)* 149  
*Three Olds (see also Lao San Pian)* 274  
*"Three Poisonous Weeds of Deng Xiaoping"* 340  
 Tiananmen Square 249-251, 255, 264, 268, 270, 291, 314, 339, 341, 344  
 Tiananmen Square Incident 339  
 Tiananmen Square Massacre 262, 339, 357, 361  
 Tianjin 79  
 Tibet 108, 198, 208  
 Tigerhead Mountain 298, 300  
 Tile Cave Town (*see also Wayaobao*) 65, 83  
 Tompkins, Ann 255-256, 258, 283-284, 294  
 trade embargo 218  
 transition to socialism 146, 167, 202
- Trinity 33-37, 41  
 Truchas Peak (New Mexico) 38  
 Tubman, Harriet 220  
 Tuckerman's Ravine 10  
 Twenty-nine Counter-revolutionaries 249-250  
 Twin Oaks Commune 347  
 "Two Whatever's" 344
- U**
- Ulam, Stanislaw 29, 36, 349  
 ultra-Left 63-64, 255, 265, 272, 305, 329, 339, 341  
 United Mine Workers 15  
 University of Chicago 27, 29, 37, 70, 133  
 University of Illinois 19-20, 70, 348  
 University of Michigan 230  
 University of Wisconsin 26, 29, 242, 286, 349  
 UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) 39-41, 47-51, 54, 114  
 US Imperialism 53, 220, 257, 310  
 US-China People's Friendship Association 335-336, 345, 347  
 USSR (*Soviet Union*) 3, 41, 53, 63, 108, 131, 133, 183, 206-208, 217, 292, 295, 304-305, 312  
 Uygher (*see also Weiwer*) 162
- V**
- Van de Graaff generator 27-28  
 Vancouver 318, 350  
 Vermont 8, 39, 284  
 Vietnam 158, 206, 292, 305-306, 356  
 Vietnam War 284
- W**
- WAC (Women's Army Corps) 29  
 wage system 154, 240-241  
 Wan Yuan Shu 289, 313  
 Wang Fuping 107, 108, 110, 121, 123  
 Wang Ge 241, 248-250, 266  
 Wang Guangmei 231, 246, 269-271, 276-

- 277  
 Wang Hongwen 272, 314, 341  
 Wang Li 277, 279-280  
 Wang Liping 144, 147-149, 155, 197, 237  
 Wang Peilung 147  
 Wang Yuwen 301, 304, 308-309  
 Wang Zhen 191-192, 194, 196-197, 213  
 Wang Zhuang 359  
 Wang, Anna 72  
 Wang, Master 213  
 Wangfujing 75, 212, 255, 293  
 Warren Farm 23  
 Watt, Donald 7  
 Wayaobao (*see also Tile Cave Town*) 65, 83, 91-92, 95, 97, 360  
 Wei River 143-144, 162, 190-192, 199, 233  
 Weiwer (*see also Uygher*) 162  
 Wen, Father 115, 128  
 Wenshui (Shanxi Province) 86  
 Wenwei (*see also Duiwai Wenwei/Chinese People's Association for Culture and Friendship with Foreign Countries/Zhongguo Renmin Duiwai Wenhua Youhao Xiehui*) 267, 269, 275, 277  
 West Station 173-174, 192, 194, 212, 260  
 Westlake (Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province) 183, 266, 307  
 Westminster College 41  
 Whampoa Military Academy 54  
 White Areas 92  
 White Terror 228, 232, 234, 238, 246, 260-261, 270, 296, 301, 319  
 Williams, Bobby and Johnny 229-230  
 Williams, Mabel and Robert 229-230  
 Wilson, Bob 36, 347-348  
 Wilson Cloud Chamber 9, 12, 26, 29, 286  
 Winnetka (Illinois) 4  
 Wright, Archie 22  
 Wu Chengen 267  
 Wu Han 244  
 Wufan Movement (*see also Five Antis Movement*) 126, 146  
 Wuhan (Hubei Province) 48, 223, 262, 277, 281  
 Wutong Fenmianfa (No Pain Birthing Method) 130  
 Wuxi (Jiangsu Province) 317
- X**  
 xenophobia 22, 265, 288, 304  
 Xi Gou (Shanxi Province) 307  
 Xian Agricultural Department 112  
 Xian Middle School 236-237, 267  
 Xian University 236  
 Xian (Shaanxi Province) 83, 88, 97-98, 118-119, 135-136, 137-138, 140-141, 237, 247, 259  
 Xiang Nan 354-355, 358-359  
 Xiao Kao 333  
 Xiao Te 266  
 Xiao Wang Zhuang 359, 362  
 Xiao Yi (Yi Ruchen) 267, 269-270, 276  
*xiaogui* (little devils) 54  
*xiaomi* 106  
 Xie Fuzhi 277  
 Xie Tianming (Farm Director/Manager Xie) 155, 157, 170-171, 176-180, 182, 184, 200, 210, 214  
*xifan* 106  
 Xinhua News Agency 289, 326-327  
 Xinjiang (Province) 102, 121, 140, 162-163, 210, 269, 314  
 Xinqiao Hotel 240, 243-244, 247, 250  
 Xiyang Country (Shanxi Province) 301, 307, 310  
 Xizimen (Beijing) (Straight Western Gate) 81, 85  
 Xue Li 265-266, 274-275  
 Xuzhou (Jiangsu Province) 75
- Y**  
 Yan Rubi 143-144, 157, 159  
 Yan Xishan 60, 84, 87, 127  
 Yanan 50-51, 53-54, 56-60, 63, 66, 77,

- 80, 83, 85, 87-93, 97-100, 189, 230, 237, 245, 258, 268, 305, 325
- Yanan evacuation (evacuation of Yanan) 56-57, 66, 83, 88, 164, 191, 233, 243, 359
- Yang Chunhai 102, 118-119, 126
- Yang Gang 78
- Yang Shangkun 53
- Yang Xuening 233
- Yang Zao (Chinese revolutionary) 55, 78
- Yang Zao (the bull) 57-58
- Yang, Frank (Yang Cheng-ning) 43-45, 70, 72, 347-348
- Yangtze River (Changjiang) 48, 87
- Yanjing University 81-82, 85
- Yanzhuang (Dairy) (Shaanxi Province) 142, 147-148, 153-154
- Yao Dengshan 280-281, 288
- Yao Wenyuan 245, 272, 341
- Ye Jianying 337, 341
- Ye Qupei 283, 324
- Ye, Marcelia 283-284, 324
- Yellow River 56, 59, 62, 65-66, 87, 194, 206
- Yokohama (Japan) 72
- Young Pioneers 235
- Yu Manqing 99
- yuan* (renminbi) 112, 155, 223, 229, 241
- Yucui School (Develop Talent School) 73
- Yue Shensi 121
- Yugoslavia 41, 207, 228
- Yulin (North Shaanxi Province) 61-62, 66, 141, 312
- Z**
- Zaofan Pai (*see also Rebel Faction/Di Faction/Earth Faction*) 278
- Zhang Chunqiao 272, 341
- Zhang Genye 57-59, 61, 65, 83, 88
- Zhang Guotou 337
- Zhao, Director 198, 200, 202
- Zhao Fengfeng 293
- Zhejiang Province 73
- Zhongguo Renmin Duiwai Wenhua You-  
hao Xiehui (*see also Duiwai Wenwei/Chinese People's Association for Culture and Friendship with Foreign Countries*) 340
- Zhongmu (Henan Province) 73-75
- Zhongnanhai 271, 312
- Zhou Enlai (Premier) 46, 50, 56, 169, 191, 207-210, 221-222, 234, 249, 265, 270-271, 275, 277-280, 282, 284, 288-289, 292-296, 304-306, 310-314, 317, 324-325, 329, 337-342, 344
- Zhu De 56, 62-63, 225, 270, 340
- Zhu Geliang (Committee) 149
- Zhu Liang 307-309, 311-313



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