

緬因州華美聯誼會

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GWEN MOORE VISITS LUODIAN

By Craig Dietrich



Readers will remember that CAFAM member Gwen Moore maintains a foundation, which supports education and literacy for poor children and rural women in a county called Luodian in southern Guizhou Province.

Despite her own difficulties in walking without pain, Gwen has visited Luodian several times over the 13 years of the fund's existence. She decided that in 2009 she really must go again. For help and companionship she recruited Jennifer Xu and Craig Dietrich. Jennifer, whose father Xu Gan was briefly CAFAM's president in the 1990s, was born and spent her early years in Guizhou, and thus is a native speaker who easily understands the Guizhou brogue and Guizhou dialect. Craig speaks Chinese, although with less fluency, and has studied written Chinese for years.

Thus armed with two assistants and companions, and her own determination, Gwen, set out in late May for this remote region of southwest China. The few details described below only scratch the surface of all that transpired. More on the trip and on the fund's history and scope can be found at www.childrenofchina.org.

During our week in Luodian the following scene played out several times at primary and middle schools. The sounds and sight are extraordinary. Several hundred primary school children stand shoulder to shoulder on either side of the road, shouting, “HUAN! YING! HUAN! YING! HUAN! YING! (WELL! COME! WELL! COME!)...” Amid this continuous, joyous din, Gwen Moore slowly makes her way between the lines toward the school. Her walking is supported by a couple of adults, and she stops occasionally to bend and greet some of the students. It continues for many minutes.

These raucous greetings are a sign of Luodian's affection and respect for *Mo-er Furen* (Mrs. Moore). Her good works are legendary. Our entourage includes county education officials, representatives of the Women's Federation, and others. Despite China's one-party system, which is unenthusiastic about private organizations, Luodian officials welcome the help that Gwen has provided to hundreds of needy children, mostly girls, so they can attend school, as well as support for women's literacy classes.

Once inside the school, Gwen and entourage visit several classes, where she speaks brightly to the respectful students in rudimentary Chinese. “Do you know where America is? (Drawing on the blackboard) This is the world. This is China. In China, it's morning here, in Meiguo it's yesterday evening!”

At one point, seven middle school students, six girls and a boy, are ushered into a meeting room and surround Gwen. They are her beneficiaries. Two girls read letters of thanks. They choke with emotion, pause in their reading, and continue haltingly. Gwen embraces them, equally affected. The noisy room of onlookers grows quiet. This simple exchange seems to embody the essence of Gwen's efforts.



HUAN! YING! HUAN! YING! Gwen Moore being welcomed at a primary school in Luodian County.

There are also visits to households that have received Gwen's help. One is a home where, several years ago, Gwen's visit resulted in arranging for a successful operation to repair the daughter's cleft palate. The family, while still poor, is now doing better in an improved dwelling.

Another poignant moment occurs at a visit to Qin Longxiang, a sixth-grade girl. She greets Gwen at her humble home. The two sit face-to-face on tiny stools in the cluttered front yard. People in the entourage are walking around, taking pictures, inspecting the primitive house. With Jen translating, Gwen asks about her family. The exchange becomes emotional, as Longxiang says that her mother is dead and her father is permanently away in Guangzhou working. The only adult is a grandmother who is presently working in the fields. Longxiang, an excellent student, tells Gwen that her older brother is not attending school and asks if Gwen will speak to him. Later Gwen and others do berate and encourage the disheveled and embarrassed boy, and he asks if he can attend Luodian vocational high school. Its principal, You Gaoping, happens to be in the group, and replies, "First you have to get your hair cut." Upon leaving the home, the group encounters a vigorous and cheerful grandmother, returning home with her ox.

Many other extraordinary events took place during these few days. They are too many to describe in a brief article. More can be found at www.childrenofchina.org.



A middle-school student reads her emotional letter of thanks for Gwen's past support.



Above: The Fund also supports literacy classes for poor peasant women. Here a class is in progress for women of the Buyi minority.



Left: Jennifer Xu translates as Gwen encourages Qin Longxiang, whose mother has died, whose father works in Guangzhou, but who nevertheless excels in school.