

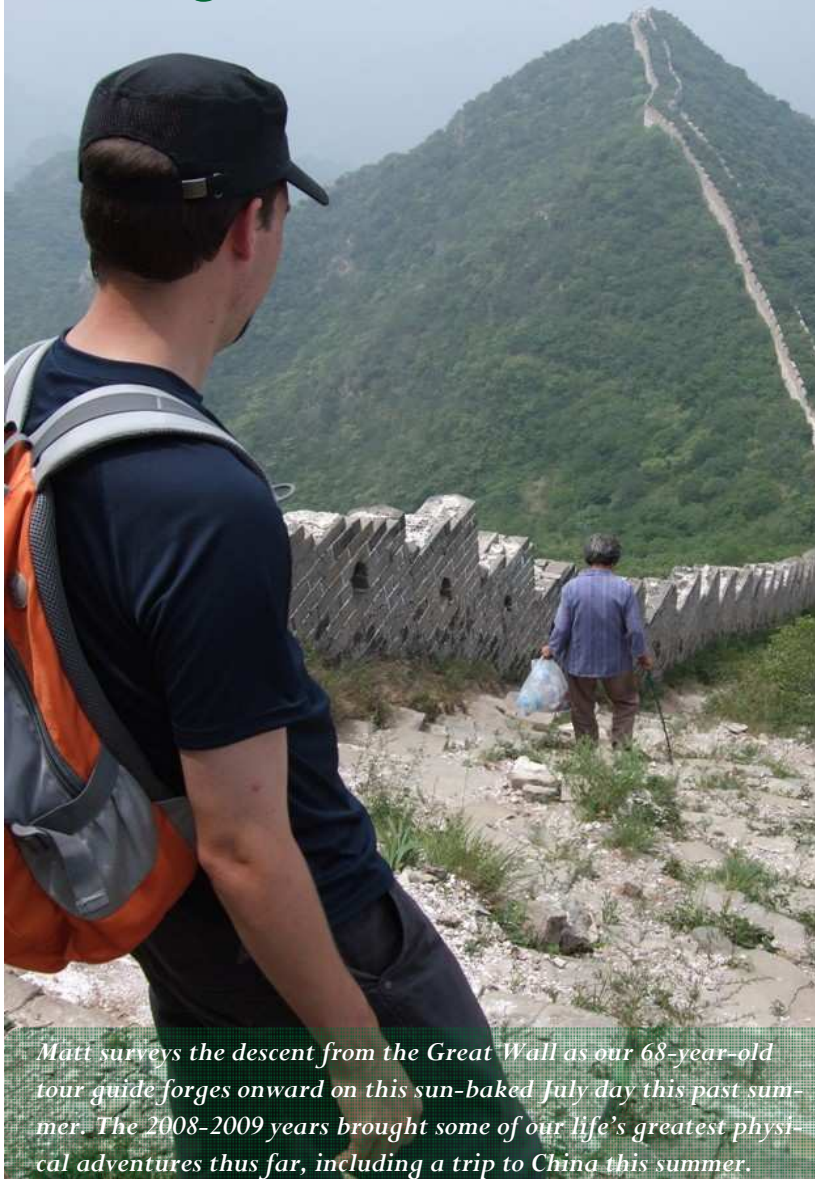
Taiwan passage

Newsletter update for Matt & Holly Smucker

September 12, 2009

"Once they were told, 'You are not my people.' But . . . they will be called children of the living God." –Romans 9:26 (CEV)

Living life on cruise control



Matt surveys the descent from the Great Wall as our 68-year-old tour guide forges onward on this sun-baked July day this past summer. The 2008-2009 years brought some of our life's greatest physical adventures thus far, including a trip to China this summer.

I shook my head as I ate a bowl cereal over a copy of the morning *Register Guard* at my parents' house this summer: a traffic accident on Beltline, people critically injured. It seemed as though each day of our brief two-week visit to Oregon contained yet another story of a fatality or critical injury due to a car accident, whether we learned of it by reading in the newspaper or observing it on our trips on the I-5 corridor. How could it be that, in a country with such high safety standards for both drivers and vehicles, there could possibly be news of this many accidents in such a limited period of time?

Each morning on our commute to work in Taiwan, we weave either our 1992 Ford Laser or our bicycles through the constant flow of people driving and walking past our village's morning market. With the number of near-collisions we've had in three years with people turning and crossing traffic without as much as a tap on the brakes, our brakes have become our close friends on the road. (Praise God we haven't yet had an accident during these times!) Still, there's a question on my mind that always begs to be answered: How is it that drivers in Taiwan avoid these accidents in a seemingly congested, confused and overwhelmed traffic situation when drivers in Oregon, greeted by long stretches of road with absolutely no one else for several miles at times, can be involved in such fatal accidents?

Familiarity. Sameness. Comfortableness. Mile after mile of territory that looks just the same as it

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did the day before. That is, until something catches us off guard one day, only to turn out to be a grave accident.

Familiarity can be life-threatening. Taiwan's southern residents were caught unprepared in mid-August when Typhoon Morakot ravaged the area, burying several mountain villages in mud and destroying the homes and lives of hundreds of others. As typhoons regularly hit Taiwan in the summer, little was done to prepare for the impact of the worst one in 50 years.

The danger behind familiarity, though, is not limited to our physical lives. How often does it, too, affect our walk with God? Our relationships with friends, family, spouses? We cannot let this familiarity slowly creep into our lives like a parasite until it threatens the most central aspects of our relationships.

During the 2008-2009 school year, our evangelistic English Bible study started with the same sense of sameness and comfortableness as the beef steak I eat every Tuesday night at one of our regular restaurants. It was the start of the third year of Bible study and since things had moved rather slowly in seeing people turn to Christ during the first two years, I suppose you could say we just settled in to our regular routine, hoping but not expecting something magnificent to happen.

Thankfully, though, God knew we would be headed for an accident if this routine took a dangerous hold on our lives. In the

Familiarity can be life-threatening.

fall, He brought several students from China to study at a local Taiwan university. These students were invited by their biology professor, a woman who attends our church and Bible study, to come practice English at our Bible study.

God used this opportunity to transform their lives and to help them build a life-changing relationship with Him. Not only did three students from China seize an opportunity to follow Christ, but two of their Taiwanese friends followed suit, including students who had been with us for two years already. God's timing is always perfect; only He could have known of our plans to travel in China during this summer of 2009. We ended up travelling to more cities in China that we had originally planned, finding opportunities to encourage our new friends there. We also had a chance to see the Church at work in China and to witness God's use of local people in helping others walk with Jesus.

So as we begin our last planned school year in Taiwan for now, we ask God to always keep us expecting the unexpected and to look for the wonderful things He alone can do this year. A quarantine in China, a detrimental typhoon, a 5.6 earthquake, and H1N1 breakouts in our community (all of which has happened in the past three months alone) remind us that God is in control and only He can bring us through the unexpected. It is the unexpected we should await because sameness can be all too dangerous. ~Holly

Typhoon Morakot

DESTRUCTION: Typhoon Morakot devastated southern Taiwan in mid-August. Predicted to be a relatively low-impact typhoon primarily affecting northern Taiwan, many southern residents were caught off guard as the rain (nearly two meters) and wind beat ceaselessly over a three-day period. Billions of dollars (USD) are needed to reconstruct bridges (like the one below), roads, and assist the numerous families who lost property and loved ones in the destruction.



Worldwide Adventures:

Top right: We spent six weeks in China, Hong Kong, and Macau this summer and traveled from Haerbin in the north as far south as Shanghai and as far west as Xi'an. These travels gave us an opportunity to visit an exchange student from Dalian who once stayed with us and to see three students who had studied briefly in Taiwan, including our friend in Jinan pictured here with Matt at some of Jinan's famous springs. See Holly's blog at www.hollysberries.blogspot.com for more stories and photos of our time in China.

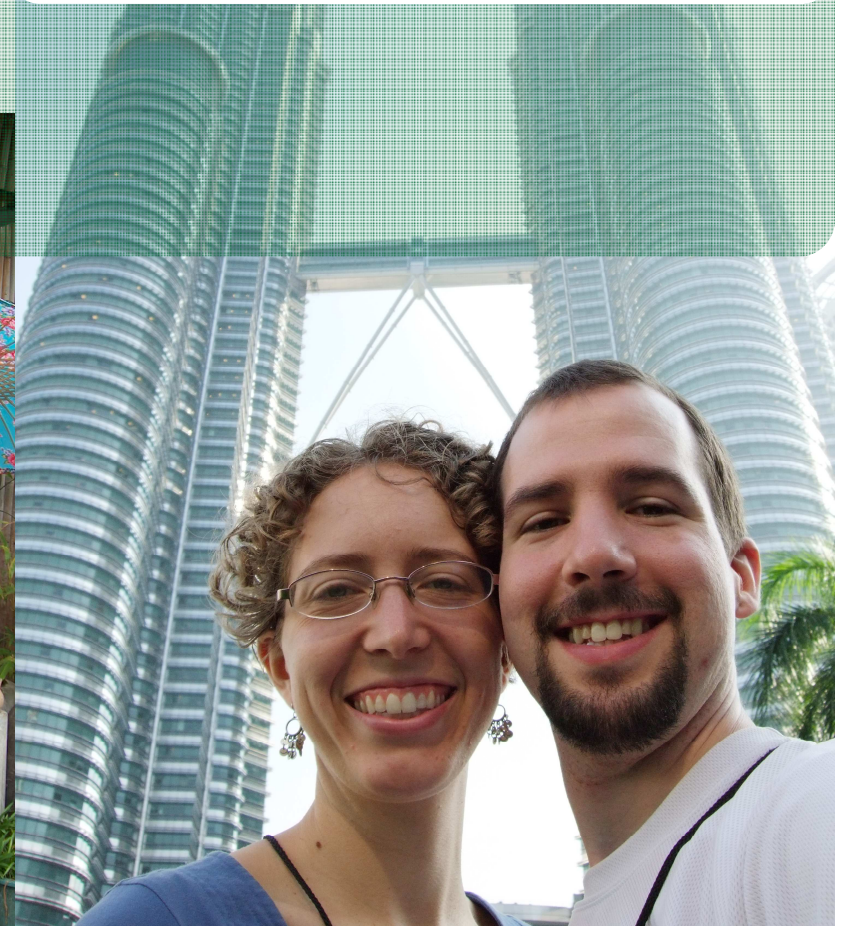
Bottom right: Spring break in April found us in Singapore and Malaysia, where we enjoyed a plethora of new and delicious foods, as well as the highlight of our trip in Melacca. This photo is in Kuala Lumpur, capitol city of Malaysia, near the Petronas Towers.

Bottom left: Matt's parents visited us for Christmas 2008 and New Year's. We had a great time circling the island, visiting favorite places like Hualien and Taitung on the east coast and Meinong, a local Hakka town. The family picture is at a tea-making tourist restaurant in Meinong.

More photos of this year's adventures, including our teaching experiences at Morrison Christian Academy, can be found online at <http://picasaweb.google.com/hollysmucker>.



Bald Matt: Matt shaved his head last year along with most of the male staff at our school to show support for Ian Ullstrom, middle school son of OMF missionaries David and Ruth, who has been battling cancer for over a year. Please pray for Ian's physical and spiritual strength during this time.





Trusting a powerful God

Lights to lead ghosts home, burnt paper money to appease ghosts and food offerings to feed hungry haunters: it's all a part of Taiwanese folk religious practices.

"Ghost month" recently passed, where many fiery furnaces burned away in the soaking heat of summer as people try to keep away/appease the spirits. Pray that the Taiwanese people would know that the creator God is much more powerful than the spirits they try to appease. Pray that they can trust in God for protection from these scary things.

Consider receiving brief prayer updates from missionaries in Taiwan at <http://www.taiwanteam.org/taiwanten/>.

Prayer & Praise

- **Praise God** we can both work at **Morrison Academy**, where Holly teaches **3rd grade** full-time and Matt teaches **middle school Bible** half-time. We are also thankful that God has provided for Matt to study his seminary courses 20 hours per week at the same time.
- Our **English Bible study** will start soon. Pray that God will help the students who come to connect with Taiwanese Christians in their own language.
- Pray for a **leader for a college & career Bible study in Mandarin** to emerge from our church community and for our college & career retreat on September 25-27.

Website change: We've moved!

Check out our new site at

<http://smuckerfamily.wordpress.com/>



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