

Nihao!

I'll never forget that day in October of my senior year at Thiel when I got my nomination to serve in the Peace Corps. I was in the 24-hour lab in the Howard Miller Student Center. I hadn't expected to hear back so soon after my interview in Pittsburgh. I remember sitting there and seeing the e-mail in my inbox. I clicked it and saw that I had been nominated to serve in the Peace Corps somewhere in Asia. My first reaction was to burst into tears. I then called my mother. I remember there being a lot of other people in the lab who looked scared because I was screaming on the phone and crying all at the same time. I finally pulled myself together enough to say "I'm going to Asia!"

Since that day, my life has been a whirlwind ride. Between the medical appointments and the paperwork, my senior year was busy and stressful, but also the most fun I'd ever had. I couldn't have done it by myself. I had great support from my group of friends, teachers, my bosses at the Office of Admissions and Anita Lillie in the Thiel Post Office. She always understood how important all of my mail that was going to Washington was to me.

I finally received my invitation to serve right before finals week of the second semester of senior year. It said that I would be serving in China and that I would leave July 1 for Chengdu, where I lived for two months. Those two months were some of the hardest months of my life. All of the sudden the fact that I was an actual adult, a college graduate, hit me like a ton of bricks. Most of the other volunteers had been out of school for a year or two and had already had "grown-up" experiences. I felt like I was two years old and on top of that I was in China.

Luckily, I had a great host family that helped keep me busy during training. I met a lot of great people and I



Zoller poses with a Buddhist monk she met while visiting the Buddhist temples at Mati Si.

am confident in saying that the Chinese are some of the nicest people that I have ever met. Even when I made awful language mistakes, my host family never made me feel stupid. One such encounter happened my first

week in China. I had asked my language teacher how to say "stepmother" in Chinese. I thought she said "jiniu." So for the next couple of weeks whenever I showed pictures of my family, I would point out my jinu. Well, it turns out that jinu means prostitute in Chinese and jimou is stepmother. Once I figured out my mistake, it explained why people always looked at me in shock when I said it. My host parents just laughed and told me not to worry about it.

Other than learning language in Chengdu, I also studied culture and teaching and even had a two-week model school with Chinese students. The two months went by quickly and I learned a lot of useful tools to help me with my Peace Corps service. I'm now living in Zhangye, China, which is in the north of the country, teaching at Hexi University. I absolutely love it here. The people are all so friendly and my students are fantastic. They love to learn and they try so hard to improve their English. I still miss my friends and family in America, but I'm happy with where I am right now and I am really looking forward to spending the next two years in China.

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