

(Translated by Stephanie Schubmel, who added this note: The name of the Web site, *Laosanjie*, means "three old classes." The term refers to people in the high school graduating classes of 1966-68 whose education was interrupted by the Cultural Revolution).

HOW AN ITINERANT ARTIST* INSPIRED ME (postings from 4/17/08 – 4/30/08) [*the Chinese could also be read as "vagabond artist"]

Merry Deer (discussion leader):

[Merry Deer has posted the photo and lead paragraph from the original CS Monitor article].

Soaring Crane:

Very interesting. I guess you're telling me to work on my English, Merry Deer. That's great! I think I'm going to need a Chinese version, though. Ha.

Merry Deer:

Hadn't quite finished posting yet. You got the first reply in, buddy.

The photo and opening paragraph above are from an article in the Christian Science Monitor. The article is titled "Itinerant Artist Will Paint for a Bed and a Meal." The painter's name is Jim. Influenced by Odysseus, the hero of the Roman [sic] epic poem, he has found a unique way to live and travel in the United States. He plans to live a life free of monetary exchanges, traveling and learning by staying with ordinary people who have an appreciation for art. Jim's host provides a meal and a place to sleep, and he creates a painting in return. He repays his host's hospitality by painting a picture, creating an artistic representation of his host's surroundings for the host to enjoy on the wall of his or her own home.

I want to follow this painter's example. What I'm thinking is that I could go to people's houses and help them learn English. Think that would work? Any volunteers? Hee hee.... I want to find this kind of people, or this kind of school. The school here wanted me to teach classes, but I've resigned. I've thought about starting a completely different life. Maybe this June I'll start off in Kunming. I can support myself until I find something.

Running in Circles:

That should be doable. You're all set up if you've got a professional skill. A lot of people want their kids to study English now. Living conditions usually aren't great, though. Find a school first and then find suitable candidates through them. You're all such useful people. I feel so inadequate! I can't do anything.

Gong-chang Zhang:

Yep. The forgotten generation.

North:

So just go as a tourist. Let Merry get on with his work! So what you're really saying, Merry, is that you'll start off teaching English at Plateau Gentleman's [one of the site administrators] house. He'll give you room and board. I'll join you in Yunnan and teach Plateau Gentleman's kids English and nursery rhymes. We can discuss photography, too.

Plum:

Not a bad idea.

Merry Deer:

I know you're a painter, too, buddy!

Soaring Crane:

Hahaha, I didn't notice the discussion raging here until today. If you're coming to Yunnan, Merry Deer, let me know so I can make plans. Come and have a look. It will do you good. North mentioned my grandson. He really is a bundle of joy...

Volley:

Itinerant educator vs. itinerant artist? Haha, this rocks. That's just the kind of thing you'd come up with, Merry. You always have a unique take on things.

Merry Deer:

I bet an itinerant dancer would have no trouble getting by.

North:

I want to be a *ganma* [adopted mother], a sweet old ethnic-minority mommy. I'd give them love and find out what I'm truly capable of.

Open Field:

This itinerant artist is a genuine free spirit [*xiaosa*, "natural and unrestrained"].

Merry Deer:

No one thinks of "free spirit" as a derogatory term, but in order to truly be a free spirit you have to give something up.

North:

But you gain something in return.

[Untranslatable and not especially relevant joke that relies on punning interpretations of the Chinese words for "free spirit" and "latte"]

YZ Traveler:

[Reply to untranslatable joke: Literally translated, it goes something like: What's the difference between a free spirit and a latte? One is watering the flowers, and the other is holding barbells in a weightlifting competition].

Clad in white, adorned in red:

I want to be a free spirit too, but I can't give anything up. It's not that easy. Maybe Merry Deer can arrange things so that all of us retired teachers can travel around giving classes?

Merry Deer:

That would mean setting up a mobile school. Find a school in the mountains, teach there for one semester and then move on? Is it okay if we all live in a dorm?

North:

Find a school in the mountains, teach there for one semester and then move on?
That's been my plan from way back :) It would be beyond great if a lot of people want to get in on it :) I'm with you :)

Merry Deer:

I have a friend who's actually setting me up with a private tutoring position. Last week was pretty hectic, but now I'm in Shanghai for the May 1 holiday.

Little Bit:

Haha, someone actually wants a university professor for a private tutor?