

LA FAMILIA HAYBURG:



ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE WORLD

Beijing: The Great Wall/Great Wall Adventure Club/The Forbidden City/Tian'anmen Square/subway system/train station/international airport/other essential sites and activities; Xi'an: Terracotta Soldiers, International Train K3

(ADDITIONAL PHOTOS AT: www.juanitohayburg.com)

VOLUME TWO

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—EXCERPT: PART FOUR OF SIX—

We awoke early, around (05:00), and excitedly prepared for our trip to see the renowned Army of Terracotta Warriors. We took a taxi—not only was it incredibly inexpensive, but there was no way we could afford to be late—to the Beijing International Airport by (06:30). Our domestic flight #1203 aboard China Eastern Airlines was to depart at (07:30), and all of our previous experience with airflights had led us to believe that an hour would be sufficient.

However, it was a bit perplexing. This was the first time I'd ever seen a toll placed on all departing passengers, but we paid 50¥ (\$6USD) apiece for the index card-sized document:



This was our first hurdle to overcome when flying out, then next was the x-ray and passport check, followed by inspection gates for ourselves and baggage (of which we had none) before entering a secure concourse. The last was obtaining our boarding pass at gate 14 after showing our valid tickets. Like all passenger tickets world-wide, it was a multi-page NCR checkbook-shaped document showing vital information such as the ticket holder's name, carrier, airports of origination and destination, date, time, flight number, seller, class, various codes that have meaning only to a few people who can decipher them, and, most importantly, the price. I saw the dominance of the English language as every bit of the fine print was in both Chinese *and* English. We were soon taking three seats in row 4 aboard an Airbus 320-214 for our two-hour hop to Xi'an.

We landed at the relatively new (1991) Xi'an Xianyang International Airport, an ultra-modern facility that rivals any airport I've ever flown into or out of, in a brilliantly clear, Sunny day. We had barely emerged out of the main concourse when we were approached by a woman who made an offer we couldn't refuse.

"You are here for the Terracotta Warriors, yes?" she asked us in slightly inflected English.

All of us were a bit astonished, but Katarena responded, "Yes!"

"I have taxi for you that will take you there, anywhere else you want, all day for five hundred yuan."

Enrique spoke next, "That's a pretty good deal." Looking at me, he now said, "Let's take it. We could spend a lot of time trying to find the place, and your LP guide *is* six years old. That information may not be good now."

I was a stick in the mud about this. I told the woman that we'd meet her outside to discuss it further. When we stepped into the Sun, I saw that this airport was like so many, isolated and far from anyplace. Worse, I couldn't see any indication of public transit. I dropped my resistance and told the woman "OK."

Smiling broadly now, she told us "Just go over there by the curb. The car will be here in a moment." and disappeared back into the airport.

I started to get a bad feeling in my stomach when an unmarked compact sedan pulled up and the

door opened. My gut queasiness increased; here we were, three foreigners about to get into a car with a stranger driving us in an unknown place. It had all the earmarks of a nasty way to end one's life, which I've heard about (Mostly from Elena; you can bet I remembered her last directive to me a fortnight ago: "...bring them home safe and sound."), and the hair on the back of my neck bristled.

It took me a few moments to decide, then I saw the smile of the driver, urging us into his car. In an instantaneous decision, I capitulated, having Katarena and Enrique clamber in the back while I sat in the front passenger seat. I immediately began figuring emergency plans, how we might have to subdue this diminutive Chinaman as he gunned the car out of the airport onto an interstate-quality road. I paid attention to our route, noting that the signs, as elsewhere, were in Chinese and English, and that we did *not* turn toward Xi'an, but were looping around, alongside railroad tracks. Then he suddenly slowed down, and just over the hill we saw a highway patrolman poised with his radar gun. The driver looked at me and smiled that very familiar sign of "We *could* have been stopped for speeding..." I smiled the same knowing signal back, and relaxed. He was my kind of driver who was going to take us exactly where the woman had told us.

Within a half-hour, we had turned off the main road and entered the town of Lintong. I knew we were getting close as signs, in English, began appearing that proclaimed the proximity of the Warriors. The road narrowed, and dwellings that might have once been homes were now stores where a tourist can buy "authentic" terracotta warriors, maps of Chang'an and Xi'an, and numerous other items reflective of this area. When I saw a cable car and hot springs, I compared it to the commercial buildup located close to most attractions around the world, whether it is the Eiffel Tower, the Panama Canal, Bagnell Dam, Niagara Falls, etc. Then the car turned into a large gravel parking lot, where it stopped and the driver pointed to where we should walk. He motioned that he would be here when we had finished walking around the grounds, and so we got out, walking in the direction that he pointed.

I didn't see much initially, but as soon as we walked underneath a tarp stretched over the path, we were beset upon by sellers. There was no room to walk without running into a person holding a miniature soldier or map in our face. Somehow, we were able to emerge from from this pack, and faced a white fence and ticket booth. This is it! I shelled out 125 ¥ (\$15USD) apiece, and we passed into an area that was immaculate.

Of the four large structures before us, we were directed toward the building most downhill.. Inside, we found it dark, a museum of the museum. Not much in the way of terracotta soldiers and a bit disappointing. We went onto the next structures, pit #3, which did not have the anticipated army, but still had interesting exhibits. We were starting to fade, but pushed onto pit #2, where we had at last come upon the outstanding excavation of the army, including a non-enforcing enforcement agent.



The guard ignored the above sign, just like he ignored the tourists violating it. Enrique attempted to take a photo of the sign, with the disinterested agent yawning and looking away, which, of course, is what would have made the picture unique as well as memorable. Publishing such a photo, though, would probably have meant a re-education camp for the guard!

Katarena was quite hungry by now, and we went into the garden of stone tablets, found an impressive modern building which was serving a buffet lunch, 38 ¥ (\$4.50USD) apiece. Excellent entertainment was provided by a skilled pasta puller. Starting with a lump of dough, he would work it between his fingers, opening his arms wide, stretching it into progressively smaller strands. Once they were at the smallest diameter possible, he would plunge them into the hot oil, creating skinny pasta that looked like toy dollhead hair.

This cooked pasta would form a substrate upon which the rice, veggies, meat, cheeses, and other toppings from the buffet would be piled to create a tasty dish. Of course, there were gallons of tea to wash it down. Sufficiently refreshed, we went returned to the last of the gargantuan buildings, pit #1, and discovered why we were here.



Protection in the afterlife.

Inside, we snapped alive as we saw thousands of life-size terracotta soldiers, each one with unique face and having a specific military purpose. A sidewalk was elevated above the army for the *turistas* to view this impressive archaeological wonder. It was a challenge to walk around the pit as a large number of tourists were positioning themselves for the best picture of themselves, with the soldiers in the background. No posted sign forbidding photos here!

After absorbing as much of this intense museum as possible, we went to a 360° theater showing a film on all sides surrounding the audience. It told the story behind the Terracotta Soldiers, which was somewhat like the road signs, with a twist. The film was in English, but *subtitled in Chinese!* However, the most appealing aspect of the theater was air conditioning. I'm sure the fire code was violated because capacity was exceeded—there was little space left inside—and we were sitting on the floor as the tale unfolded.

The story of this region began during the 11th Century, when numerous nation-states were fiercely

battling over land. The kingdoms built protective walls that evolved into The Great Wall. By the 3rd Century B.C., a 13-year old youngster (Katarena's age!) became leader of the Chinese state of Qin, and he took the name of Shi Huang, meaning "First Emperor". He was essentially a bloodthirsty tyrant, who commenced upon a beneficial program of standardizing language, measurements, and unifying much of China under a centralized government for the first time. He also conscripted some 700,000 laborers and artisans over the next four decades to begin building the Terracotta Soldiers to protect him in the afterlife, just as real soldiers did then. (Apparently the Qin ruler had softened the practice of all slaves and concubines being buried alive with the head honcho when he died to just using models of the them. Maybe they died while creating the models?) What an ego!

Nepotism in its most naked form was the law, and he anointed his son to carry on the nation building. However, the son was just as oppressive, and, regardless of general improvements, the masses had had enough of the tyranny, and overthrew the dictator.

The next rulers had learned from Qin's mistakes, as a far more benevolent Han Dynasty was a bit better, incorporating Confucianism as a way of legitimizing their rule. It lasted about thirteen times as long and greatly extended the boundaries of China. This was also a time of connecting the mini-walls, enhancing and enlarging them to become the now formidable Great Wall.

Fast forward to 1974: Shaanxi province, of which Xi'an is the capitol, was experiencing a drought. Three farmers were digging a well when they shoveled into something much harder than the surrounding soil. They had found a 2,000 year old chamber containing the hard, high-heat fired terracotta, life-sized soldiers. This discovery, which is currently 7,000 figures and growing, has brought in many leaders and heads-of-state, besides multitudes of ordinary turistas such as us, all of whom marvel at this "8th wonder of the world". (former French President, Jacques Chirac)

I was tired and wanted a nap after the meal, but certainly could not lay down in the cramped theater. While I rested on my haunches, Katarena and Enrique practiced their bargaining skills, buying t-shirts, and I bought an excellent pair of Jade earrings for Elena. A sure sign of tiredness was that I didn't bargain, instead forking over the posted price. All of us had had enough, and decided that we ought to go back to the airport to avoid missing our (19:10) return flight to Beijing. It meant passing through the horde of sellers again, where Enrique once again was able to bargain for a miniature terracotta soldier.

Our conveyance was still there, the driver resting in the back seat. He seemed surprised to see us and pulled out a map of Xi'an. It had numerous tourist sites marked on it, to which he indicated areas he would happily take us. However, we were all becoming exhausted, and didn't want to miss our flight, so I pointed to the airplane. Within an hour, he had dropped us at the airport. Once all of us were out of his vehicle, he waited patiently for me to give him the payment of five 100¥ (\$60USD) notes, I peeled them off the ever-diminishing roll of fortune that I had acquired a few days ago when I thought cash only would be accepted for our train tickets to Russia. Mutually bowing heads in formal separation, he waited for the next customer while we turned and entered the crowded airport.

A clock showed that we had arrived us *three* hours in advance of the scheduled departure. We did a 180 and returned to the sedan we had just gotten out of, figuring that we *could* engage him for a bit more tour of this fascinating area. But he had already acquired new passengers, and we could see him speeding down the ramp. Disappointed, we went back inside the terminal, found an empty table and pulled up three chairs.

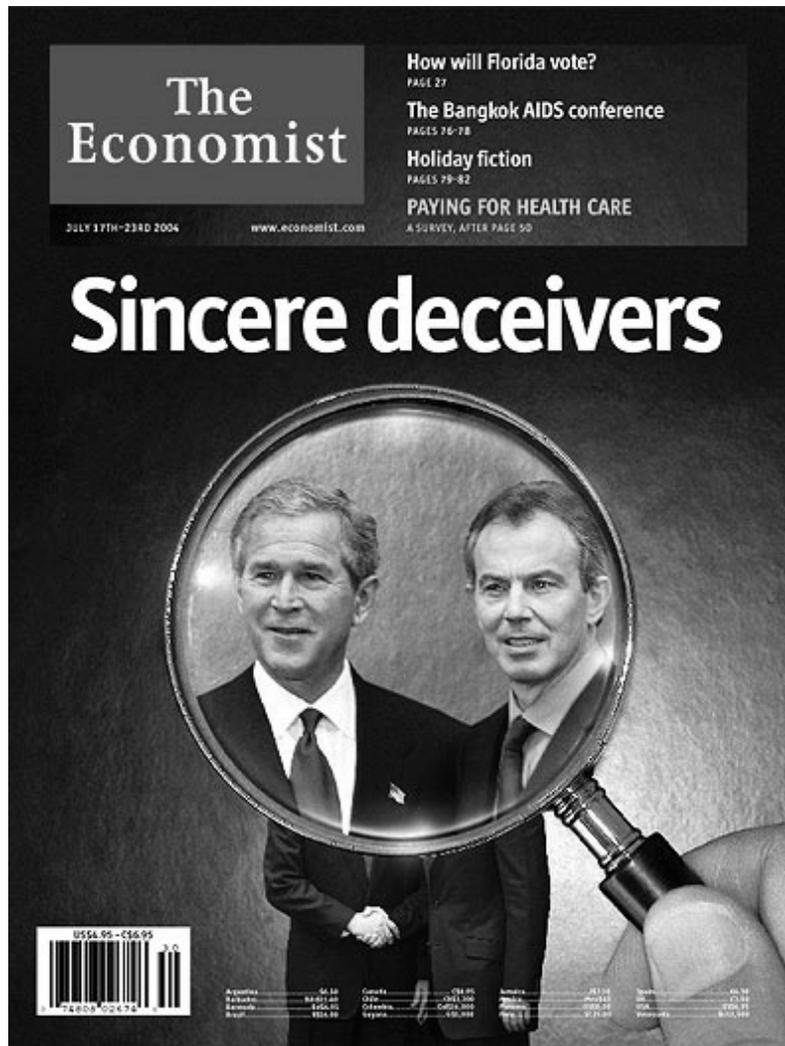
We had barely sat down when a waiter approached us, and, when we indicated we weren't interested in a purchase, he pointed to a sign, written only in English, that only paying customers could sit here. I looked around and saw lots of people occupying seats but not eating or drinking. Heck, several people were even *sleeping*, something I felt a need for. The waiter, alert to my observation, gestured that the small rack constituted a separation from his restaurant and the terminal, and, once again, pointed at the sign. Accepting the fact that we either had to buy or leave, we left. It wasn't that comfortable anyway.

Downstairs, we found a mini-hotel, with rental beds to rest upon. We knew we only had a couple hours wait, and I was too cheap to pay for what seemed an outrageous price, 20 ¥ (\$2.40USD) per hour. That seemed to outrageous, so we wandered toward a darkened hallway, found the remotest corner possible in which to posit our bodies.

Except for Katarena. She was irritated that we hadn't renewed our time with the taxisto for a luxurious tour of the mecca of Xi'an. She had learned that, many centuries ago, it was better known as Chang'an, capital of Cathay, a terminus for the famous Silk road, and, for cosmopolitan life, surpassed other great world cities such as Rome, Athens, and Istanbul, during its heyday.

“How can you possibly lay around when there is so much to explore?!” Katarena yelled, angry at us for being such sloths. She stormed down the hallway and out of sight, but certainly not out of (my) mind. We had not had any problems since my wife's directive, but I was conscious of it and soon heaved my weary body up off the floor to trail Katarena.

She hadn't gone far, and this time, I assuaged her with the purchase of iced tea for both of us. We sat in the forbidden zone, and were recognized by the same waiter who had kicked us out earlier, except now he was delighted to assist us. Katarena knew what else she needed to help her improve her attitude, and she found it at the magazine rack: the next issue of “The Economist.” Sufficiently placated, she re-focused her energy on trying to understand politics.



This could easily be a promo for the Michael Moore's movie, "9/11", which we had tried to watch yesterday. Katarena became happily engrossed with the article. She was especially cognizant about the epitome of the political cartoon on page 7: miscommunication. But was that deliberate, with intent to dupe? How low can they stoop?

Time passed quickly, and before we knew it, we needed to reboard the airplane. Already experienced, we bought the 50 ¥ (\$6USD) CAAC toll as we went through the mechanics of boarding. This time, even though we were boarding the same airline (China Eastern Airlines) we had been on to arrive here, we paid 210 ¥ (\$25USD) more per ticket. Instead of being in the Q class that we had been this morning, we were now in the H class. Walking down the boarding ramp, I noticed that we were going into the exact same kind of airplane, an Airbus 320-214. In fact, we occupied the *same* seats in row 4 that we had been in several hours ago; there was no difference.

Except one: time of day, as explained by Steven, when I had purchased the tickets three days ago at the Beijing Tourist Information Center.(Next to our favorite KFC!) "I see there is a difference in the price on the tickets, but please understand, this is one of the most popular flights in China and the demand drives up the price. A special is offered on the other flight to increase demand, but the more expensive ticket is decrease demand." It was simple supply-and-demand economics, the capitalist economy prevalent throughout our China travels.

Returning to Beijing Capital International Airport in twilight, a man saw us and offered a personal escort to the Great Dragon Hotel at only 40 ¥ (\$4.60USD) apiece. It was late, and I didn't want to mess around, so we accepted and followed him out of the terminal toward the parking lot, bypassing the central taxi stand.

“If it isn't a marked taxi,” I whispered to Katarena and Enrique, “we aren't going with him. We don't want to push our luck,” referring to our unmarked taxi in Xi'an.

The man was leading us to an increasingly darkened corner of the parking garage as my alertness level jumped, and I finally stopped us from going.

“Sir, thanks, but no thanks. I want us to take a bus.”

Not waiting for a response, I turned around, pushing Katarena and Enrique ahead of me, back to the lights of the terminal. Once there, we bought tickets at 16 ¥ (\$2USD) apiece, and took the last seats aboard a bus. This was probably just as dangerous as going into an unknown parking garage space with a stranger because we had no idea of where this bus was going into a city of 14+ million people. “OK, you two, keep your eyes open for any landmarks.” were my instructions for them.

The bus motored out of the airport, onto the smooth highway, much less congested at (23:00). We said nothing, but kept looking out for anything that help us identify our location. Outside, the scene was spooky dark for a while, then gradually brightened as we entered the city.

Soon, we were on one of the ring roads, speeding through suburbia, when Katarena grabbed my arm, shouting, “There it is, that's our hostel!”

“She's right!” agreed Enrique.

By the time I looked, I could see nothing—the bus had already sped by. I rushed up to the front of the bus, and pleaded with the driver to stop and let us off. Unfortunately, he knew about as much English as I knew Chinese, so I resorted to hand signals. Fortunately, he paid no attention to me, which is probably good because any distraction might have sent us into opposing traffic or plunging off an overpass.

Then I saw the Canon Building, its red marquee lit up, and immediately knew our location, *if* we stopped soon. Where we halted was extremely familiar, across from the Ancient Observatory, next to Chang'an Jie. I saw the road sign and remembered from the museum earlier why this road was so named. Not only did it mean “place of permanent peace”, but it also was in honorable recognition of the older, and longer-lived, former capital of China, present-day Xi'an.

Stepping out of the bus, I faced the driver and spoke “Xièxie!”, which sounds like “Shee-she”, as it was the only Chinese I knew, with a bow. The driver bowed his head in reply, and my family began walking in the sallow street light. Even in the dimness, I knew where we were and how to return to the hostel.

I suggested to Katarena and Enrique that we take a hutong to our hostel. Looking down that incredibly dark alley, they demurred, preferring that we stay out on the main roads, where there are at least street lights, albeit dim. It had been an excellent day so far, taking only a minor risk with our transport in Xi'an, and avoiding all other far-riskier situations afterwards— including this shortcut.

We walked steadily, not bothering with the subway, and eventually were at the corner of Worker's Stadium Road and Ring Road three. I looked up toward the top of the hotel and saw, lit up in green, “Great Dragon Hotel”. This is what Katarena had seen nearly an hour ago, and I was so grateful for her acuity. She has often seen and remembered things that have made this trip such a delight and bloody well impossible without. We went behind the hotel into our hostel, and sacked out in our bunks in our room, enjoying another excellent night of deserved sleep, most satisfied with the outstanding conclusion of our very full day.