

The ACFSWA Teacher Recruitment Program to China commenced in 1986 and continued to 2004.

In his report to the AGM of 2001, the then President Les Greive stated – “If there is such a thing as a ‘jewel in the crown’ in the context of ACFS activities then our Education segment is undoubtedly it.” Les paid tribute to the Education Sub-committee which consisted of Brian and Noela Hassell, assisted by Gian Wong and Dr Wally Frick.

The Society was peaking in its efforts to send teachers to work in all parts of China, teaching English to a range of age groups from primary school to university. There was a strong feeling among the ACFSWA executive that sending people to work in China was an ideal way to achieve the Society’s aim ‘to foster friendship and understanding between the peoples of China and Australia’. By 2003, well over 30 teachers had been sponsored by the Society and placed in schools in China. Their contributions in that country and later within the Society were enormous. Experiencing the overwhelming hospitality and friendship of ordinary Chinese, often in remote or distant centres, led to a lasting affection for the country and its people.

***So much hospitality- Brian Hassell:***

*We took our own bicycles to China. When it came time to prepare to return to Australia we decided that we needed bags in which to pack our cycles for protection on bus, ferry and plane. We purchased enough g to make up two bike bags.*

*Two of our female students offered to sew up the bags. This they did, using needle and a very strong twine. By the time they had finished their fingers were bleeding from the effort required to sew the strong plastic material into bike bags. We insisted on paying them for their efforts. They adamantly refused to take the money and they actually threw the money we had given them over the door to our flat. Despite the fact that their 80 yuan allowance per month was far less than we were being paid they would not accept any remuneration.*

*This was a typical incident in which, in those days, the students had so little but were unbelievably hospitable and supportive of the ‘Foreign Experts’.*

Certainly, ACFSWA grew. This was the period when there were over 130 members, many of them teachers. Society activities were boosted by the socials in which returning teachers shared their memories of their time in the Middle Kingdom. Knowledge of China was increased by their reports published in the Society’s Newsletter and talks that they gave.

Tribute needs to be made to the early teaching pioneers. This commenced almost by accident. In 1986 Joan Parker was visiting a friend at the Guangzhou Institute of Foreign Languages. While there she was invited to teach English at Hechi Teachers College for three months, thus becoming the first person to teach English in China from the Branch. Hechi Teachers College is located in Yishan County, Guangxi Province. At the time Yishan was a small remote town in rural China which was closed to foreigners.



Brian and Noela Hassell at Hechi Teachers College

Living conditions were very basic and the pay although fair by Chinese standards, was much less than Australian wages. Joan planted a 'friendship tree' in the College grounds. On her return to Perth in 1987, she encouraged the Branch to develop a program to send teachers to China thus starting a movement which led to a succession of WA teachers staffing the English faculty at the College.

Nicky Quekett, Helen Rigby and Maxine Gill followed and they contributed hugely to life at the Hechi Teachers' College, whose primary aim was to train Chinese teachers to teach English in Chinese schools. Patrick Talty established a special scholarship fund there following his teaching stint at Yishan.

With the number of teachers volunteering to go to China it became necessary for some coordination of the assignments and travel arrangements. In stepped Val Waddingham, a retired Education Department Superintendent and secondary school teacher in WA. Val assumed this co-ordination role and worked tirelessly to complete the various preparations, which included tasks such as arranging travel and visas. This was very difficult to accomplish in the 80s, and Val spend much of her own money on phone calls, postage and travel. She herself had intended teaching at Hechi College but was thwarted by the events of Tiananmen Square. That same crisis caused Nicky Quekett to leave her teaching post under these somewhat dramatic circumstances.



Students of all sizes benefitted

#### *A Teacher's Anecdote-*

*As the seasons changed, so did the timetable, specifically that for morning break. All the students were released for their morning break at the new time except in my class as I had forgotten the timetable change. When I realised that everyone was out at break and my class wasn't, I asked them, "Why didn't you remind me about the new break time?" to which the class replied, "You are the teacher! Your word is law!!"*

Brian and Noela Hassell also taught at Yishan County and the city of Liuzhou and they assumed the coordinator role after Val was unable to continue. Teachers were recruited, interviewed, given an ACFS letter of introduction and sent to other centres in China. Their anecdotes and descriptions of their experiences were featured in the ACFSWA's Newsletter and made for very entertaining reading. It also meant that the WA Branch had a significant number of members living and working in China and this certainly raised people's awareness of China and the Chinese. This was a significant factor in membership growth for the WA Branch.

### **Teacher experiences**

Arriving to teach China was full of surprises. On her first day, Helen Rigby was confronted with a class of 45 college students. She was amazed to find that many could speak reasonable English. However, there were no English books, so she had to prepare every lesson. The College was very appreciative of her efforts and organised a trip that included places where she could see both the Red Lesser Pandas and the Giant Pandas. The trip took in a voyage down the Yangtse River, taking in the Three Gorges.

*I took twenty year-three students to Beihai – a seaside tourist town – for a week's holiday. None of the students had seen the sea before. After finishing the first swim, they stared and complained in unison, "you never told us the sea was salty". Helen Rigby*



Maxine Gill and Helen Rigby and class at Hechi Teachers College, in Yishan 1992

Ann Begg was prepared for the differences in culture and living standards, but not for the radically different attitude to teaching and learning.

*"Coming from an Australian primary school background where children were encouraged to participate and express their views and ideas, the reality of my first morning with a Chinese class had the makings of a nightmare. Nothing I tried had the students reacting in a way I expected- to ask questions, respond to questions from me. PANIC!! My well made plans needed a very quick rethink. The Chinese way was to sit, listen and (hopefully) absorb and above all, be polite and respectful. My philosophy was that learning should be engaging, interesting and fun. Eventually I broke the ice and thoroughly enjoyed working with such delightful young people. Among other things, I taught them songs in English. This caused a bit of consternation to passers-by when the boys let rip with "Dayo" while singing Banana Boat Song, as they all had magnificent voices."*

*My supervisor, who was an English teacher, told me he had learnt so much about teaching from watching me in the classroom. A very satisfying moment which embodied the reason we were sending teachers to China, to help bridge the cultural divide. **Ann Begg***

**Dr Neville Green AM remembers**

*When I visited this school in 1990 the year five children had their first English text, a sort of Dick and Dora book with Mr Green as the father character. When I was introduced as "Mr Green" it was as though I had stepped out of the picture book.*

*The second semester topic was Lexicology (the study of words and their origins), this proved a challenge as the text book was written in Chinese, but all part of that course when teaching in China at that time. **Carline Kelers.***

There was, in the summer of 2003, an historic event. John Reeves, with the help of fellow teachers Garath Mouncey and Rodney Lambe, arranged for a group of Chinese educationalists from the Dragon City of Liuzhou to visit Perth. Many of them had never been out of China and their visit to schools in Perth and various tourist attractions were permanent memories for all who were involved. The Chinese Consulate in Perth, members Roz Hanley, Gian Wong, Dr Wally Frick, Isabelle Chu, Helen Bean and Madeline and Stephen Foster all combined to ensure the success of the venture. Funding came half from the teachers' schools and half from themselves. Such visits are quite commonplace nowadays but back in 2003 this was an extremely rare occurrence.



Visiting teachers from Liuzhou at the Consulate

In 2003, the Chinese Government began to insist on very qualified teachers from a younger age group and required a cut off age of 60, due in part to their perception of the possibility of health problems. The role of ACFSWA diminished as professional staffing agencies and access to the internet took over the role of recruitment and placement.

## TEACHERS FOR CHINA

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### Teacher placements arranged by ACFSWA included:

| <b>Start Year</b> | <b>Teacher</b>            | <b>College</b>                                 | <b>City/Province</b> |
|-------------------|---------------------------|--|----------------------|
| 1986              | Joan Parker               | Hechi Teachers College                         | Guangxi              |
| 1987              | Nicolette (Nikki) Quekett | Hechi Teachers College                         | Guangxi              |
| 1988              | Patrick Talty             | Hechi Teachers College                         | Guangxi              |
| 1990              | Judy & Mark Webster       | Hechi Teachers College                         | Guangxi              |
| 1992              | Maxine Gill               | Hechi Teachers College                         | Guangxi              |
| 1992              | Helen Rigby               | Hechi Teachers College                         | Guangxi              |
| 1992              | Teresa Moy                | Hechi Teachers College                         | Guangxi              |
| 1993              | Noela and Brian Hassell   | Hechi Teachers College                         | Guangxi              |
| 1994              | Kate Harcourt-Smith       | Hechi Teachers College                         | Guangxi              |
| 1995              | Hadyn Horn                | Hechi Teachers College                         | Guangxi              |
| 1996              | Rosalba Demarte           | Hechi Teachers College                         | Guangxi              |
| 1997              | Nancy Boswell             | Hechi Teachers College                         | Guangxi              |
| 1997              | Phylis Robertson          | Hechi Teachers College                         | Guangxi              |
| 1998              | Dr Jane Cousins           | Hechi Teachers College                         | Guangxi              |
| 1999              | Ann Begg                  | Hechi Teachers College                         | Guangxi              |
| 2000              | Joan Marks                | Hechi Teachers College                         | Guangxi              |
| 1998              | Chris Christie            | Liuzhou Normal School                          | Liuzhou              |
| 1999              | Trish Alexander           | Huija School                                   | Beijing              |
| 1999              | Gordon Andrews            | Hailiang Foreign Language School               | Zhejiang             |
| 1999              | Trish Doney               | University of Hangzhou                         | Zhejiang             |
| 1999              | Shamus Morton             | University of Hangzhou                         | Zhejiang             |
| 2001              | Duncan & Helen Urquhart   | Ningbo Wanli International Primary School      | Ningbo               |
| 2001              | Greg & Betty Lupton       | Youijiang Medical College                      | Guangxi              |
| 2001              | Gareth Mouncey            | Liuzhou Normal School                          | Liuzhou              |
| 2001              | John Reeves               | Liuzhou Normal School                          | Liuzhou              |
| 2001              | David & Robyn Hovell      | Zhengzhou Australia Chinese School             | Zhengzhou            |
| 2001              | Brunhilde Prince          | Xian International University                  | Xian                 |
| 2001              | Sam Murphy                | Pinyang New Era High School                    | Zhejiang             |
| 2001              | Lawrence Khoo             | Pinyang New Era Middle School                  | Zhejiang             |
| 2001              | Rodney Lambe              | Liuzhou Normal School                          | Liuzhou              |
| 2002              | Andrew Winchester         |  | Xuzhou               |
| 2002              | Chris Christie            | Australian Hospitality and Tourism School      | Shandong             |
| 2002              | Joan Marks                | Australian Hospitality and Tourism School      | Shandong             |
| 2002              | Marianne Cronin           | Wu Xian Middle School                          | Suzhou               |
| 2002              | Shirley Miller            | Guilin Institute of Technology                 | Guilin, Guangxi      |
| 2002              | Trish Alexander           | Anhui Institute of Management                  | Hefei, Anhui         |
| 2003              | David and Robyn Hovel     | Zhengzhou Institute of Aeronautical Management | Henan                |
| 2003              | Richard Pike              |  |                      |
| 2004              | Carlene & Karl Kelers     | Yulin University                               | Yulin                |