

Unbuilding Walls

STARTED MY LIFE in study abroad as a CET Beijing student during the 1987–1988 academic year. I was determined to learn Chinese, but thanks to a grant from the Bowdoin College Visual Arts Department, I also had the opportunity to take and develop photographs. I took hundreds of photos, and a classmate and I produced an exhibit called “Unbuilding Walls” when we returned to campus the next year. One of the pictures from that show is this photo of three Chinese girls with hopeful faces.

I learned so much that year, but one thing I’ve carried with me ever since is that photography can break down barriers between the photographer and the subject. “May I take your picture?” can become a way to start a conversation, a reason to speak to and learn from total strangers. My images often reflected this; instead of simply recording the subjects, they captured the moments of exchange. In the end, my camera not only taught me how to see China, but it also connected me to my hosts in wonderful, unexpected ways.

Working in international education all these years has given me many more opportunities to see and learn. As CET hits its 30th anniversary, and as we all reflect on how China has changed, I am also remembering the many people, like these three girls, I met in China as a student. How has life for them changed, and how do they now see the world?

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YOU'RE INVITED! We invite you to submit your photos along with a brief (approximately 200 words) description of why these images are important in your understanding of a person, place, idea, or incident from your experiences in international education. The photos could be of a simple moment on your home campus involving international students, a major event in an exotic location, or anything in between. The editors of *International Educator* will run selections on this page throughout the year. Please contact us for submission details at elainal@nafsa.org.