

A Fantastic School in Maine!

By Wang Zhiming

My first sight of my high school in the USA was at midnight on Feb 12, 2008. I landed in Boston, and the school principal, together with my host family and an American teacher, was already there waiting for me. I was very happy to see them again. They had visited my school in China several times and we had already been friends. But this time we met in America! And I was to work in their school for a period of four months! We were all very excited and gave each other big hugs.



My principal was very considerate. He talked to me all the way to Maine and asked me if I needed a cup of coffee or if I needed to relax. It was beginning to snow when we left Boston and for the first time in my life I saw the trucks were spraying salt onto the road. My principal told me when we arrived in Maine, there would be snow banks! I hadn't seen snow banks before, so I just imagined.

The snow banks were piling up! When we arrived in a town in the middle west of Maine, the snow was more than two feet high!

I went to school the next morning. It was a snow day so the students had to stay home. My principal and his wife came to school on purpose in order to show me around the school. To my great surprise, the whole school was in a grand building! I later understood that the whole school was in a building so that they can keep warm.

Everything was different to me for the first days. You know, in China each class usually holds about 50 students. The students stay at the same classroom all day long. Teachers of different subjects would come to the classroom in turn to give the students lessons. In my school in the USA, each class had only 10 to 30 students. The teachers stay at the same classroom all day long while the students have to change classrooms after each class. So it was impossible for the teacher to give extra lesson after class, as students were eager to go to the next classroom for another class.

Safety first! I think this is a very important idea of the schools there. On snow days, students have to stay at home just for safety. It was slippery and there were many heavy trucks with heavy instrument distributing snow on the road. This was why the students stay home. Almost every one or two months there would be a fire alarm. When there was a fire alarm, everyone, teachers or students, would go out of the school building as quickly as possible. They came out of the school building and waited in line. And each teacher in the classroom would bring out with



them a steel box, inside which there was a name list of the students in the classroom. The teacher would check to make sure that every student in his or her classroom had come out safely.



I observed many classes there and appreciate their teaching methods, which in America was quite different from that in China. The teachers were quite friendly and equal to their students. In the morning they often greeted their students before their students did. At the school gate they could open the door for the students if they approached the school gate earlier than the students. They did these very willingly and in a very cheerful mood. In class the students raised their hands to answer their teacher's questions very actively. Their answers showed different ways of thinking. I like this way of education because it can cultivate the students' intelligence. And in this way the students' knowledge would not be limited to the textbooks.

The third day I arrived at was a school carnival day of the year. Students could choose whatever to play with. I chose to go outside to go ice fishing. When I returned to school in the afternoon, I was surprised to find that that whole school had been turned into a Disneyland! Everyone was happy playing with different items. Seems like a good way to relax. When somebody asked me what I would like to play, I said ping pong. I was right. I had no rival in ping pong in this school.

The school gives the students a lot of chance to enjoy sports! In winter the students can enjoy ice fishing, skiing. When the snow melts in spring, they students can enjoy basketball, baseball, football, soccer and so on. What is worth mentioning is their women's basketball team. The women's basketball team was the champion in the Eastern Class A girls' basketball tournament in Maine in 2008 and they got the second place in the final of Maine. I went to watch the final game and I think everyone, both the players and audience, were as crazy as those in the NBA!



Other popular sports in Maine were hockey and baseball. I was very lucky to have chances to watch them. A few days after I went to Maine, my host and his family took me to watch a hockey game between an American and Canadian team. This was my first time of watching a hockey game and it was exciting! I didn't know the rules of the game very much, so I just kept shouting: fight!

I still remember the day when the superintendent of the School District and his wife brought me to Portland, the biggest city in Maine, to watch a baseball game. They were very noble and distinguished. Whatever they did was so well-considered that I thought I found the reason why the teachers and students had such good manners! And they were very humorous too. When the baseball flew to the audience and dropped into

somebody's cake, he smiled and said: "Soft landing."



I was very lucky to have the chance to visit all the elementary schools and the middle school and give the students lessons. Different from those of China, the elementary schools were tiny. Some schools only had two hundred students. What impressed me most was that the school principals knew their kids' names very well and treated them like friends. I never saw teachers and principals scold their pupils. I think that was why I could feel how deeply the schoolteachers and principals were loved by their pupils. I was very happy to find my Chinese lessons were very popular among them. Some schools invited me to give lessons again and again. They even held a Chinese kite-flying festival for me just a few days before my return

to China. I appreciated this very much.

No matter what school I was in, high school, middle school or elementary school, my lovely students always asked me many questions. The most common among them were:

"Do you have pets?"

"Do you eat dogs or cats?"

"Why do parents in China can have only one kid?"

"Do pandas in China starve just because people cut down the bamboos and use them to build houses?"

I can judge from these questions that students in America are interested in China. Meanwhile I can also conclude that American students do not learn as much about China as Chinese students do about America.

What the teachers and students did after the May 12 Sichuan earthquake moved me so much. Just after the earthquake the school principal came to me and asked me if my family members and my school in China were safe. He told me that the superintendent was also very concerned and had telephoned to ask earlier. I explained the location of my hometown and told them they were safe, and my principal was very happy to know this.

And then so many teachers and students came to ask me about the same questions. They were all glad to know that my family members and school were safe! I was deeply moved. What moved me more was that the school even organized a donation and collected \$850 for me to bring to China to pass the money to those who badly needed it.

