

Dear Friends and Family,

Hi! How are you? I hope that this past year has treated you well and that you are enjoying the beautiful summer weather that California has to offer. As for me, I'm back in the land of sunny days and warm weather after having left Korea a few weeks ago. I apologize for the delay in this email. I never thought reverse Culture Shock would affect me so much, but it definitely has been a worthy opponent. Surprisingly, jet lag is still permeating the majority of my days, but on the plus side, reminiscing and gratefulness have been filling the rest.

(Warning: this will be long! So pick a time when you can take a break and hopefully, Enjoy!)

The past year has been a whirlwind and I'm still finding it hard to believe that my grant year has come to a close. For some of you, I realize that you haven't heard from me since last November. For others, sporadic phone calls, Skype conversations, and my blog have been a surprising well of information regarding the adventures/misadventures that I always manage to get myself into. ^^ (If you want to read about them or my other ramblings www.xanga.com/ichristinei just remember to skip over the boring emo ones =)!))

To catch everyone up, here is a rundown of what I've been doing since we've last spoken. Sorry this might be a little long; it has been since November when I last updated you. Sorry, sorry, sorry!! I apologize again for the delay in this letter and my horrible inability to send emails more frequently, but the last few months have definitely been busy busy! Anyway, here goes...



In December, amidst celebrating yet another birthday (yikes! I'm old!) and adjusting to my first real winter, I came home to the US to spend a few days with my family both in California and in Washington. Afterwards, with my vacation running from mid-December to mid-February, I endeavored to fill my free time with as many different opportunities and moments for laughter as possible. I returned to Korea before the start of the New Year to discover a new sport (skiing), learn more about Korean Pop music (through a 6 hour New Years concert that ran from midnight to 6am with a plethora of music acts to fill the time), and spend some quality time with friends on the mainland. I explored different parts of Seoul and did my best to stay warm with 6-7 layers of clothes although this more often than not did not work. I am still a Californian. Hahaha Quite interestingly enough, my constant reference to and complaints about the weather led to an article of mine being published in the Fulbright Review. To read it and others like it, please check here:

http://www.fulbright.or.kr/en/fulbright/down/Fulbright_Review_2008.pdf

Anyway, after a week and a half of unstructured exploring around Korea in January, I went from my island home at the southern most part of Korea to a city in the most northern part of Korea, Hwacheon. It is a city that most closely borders the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and North Korea. It's also famous for the fact that of its 50,000 residents, the soldiers outnumber the civilians 30,000 to 20,000 respectively. There, I taught a winter English camp to local middle school children while adapting to the peace and serenity that both winter and a rural place brings to one's life. It was an interesting and fun 2 weeks and I learned that 1. Children can and do bring joy to your lives 2. Snow really is magical. and 3. Snowball fights are so much fun when you play with others. =)

(L to R: 1.Me enjoying the better parts of winter- Ice Festivals! 2.My middle school divas and the eventual starters of said snowball fight 3.My kids ganged up on me!! 4.Later they showed me some love)



After the camp ended in February, I took the opportunity to explore some of Korea's neighboring countries with a few friends and enjoy some warmer weather. I traveled with different friends to the Philippines (to see family and friends), Hong Kong (for Lunar New Year), Taiwan (Lunar New Year and to explore), and Thailand (for the beach! ^^). It was a blast and my passport got some well-deserved new entries. Surprisingly enough, Taiwan and Taipei more specifically was the city that struck the strongest chord in me. My former Fulbright roommate Rebecca has moved there now to improve her Chinese on a one-year government scholarship. It's another option I am seriously considering. I've always wanted to learn Chinese. ^^ I'll keep you posted!

(L-R: 1.Philippines-Old friends meeting new friends 2.Hong Kong-goofing off down by the harbor with Bruce Lee 3.Taiwan-making new friends 4.Thailand-learning to cook yummy Thai food 5. Showing Korean love for our elephant Tukta 6. Taipei night markets are famous)



After my trip, I came back to Korea to the presence of my sister, April who somehow managed to find the time and money to visit. =) I'm so glad she did because I know it helped her and by default myself, better understand the experience that I was going through. There are just some things that can't be explained through a phone call or email?? I also taught my two-week intensive winter camp at my school. Although I was sick for the better part of two months, it was a great time in my life in Korea.

(L to R: 1. The busy lights of Seoul 2. My sister April learning to cook Korean style 3. My Host Mom and my sister making yubuchobab 4. Her & I at the beach in winter in Korea? Why? I Don't Know!)



I started the new semester early March and refined my teaching and the methods that I was using. After much evaluation and reflection, I did my best to be a better teacher to my new students. The first semester I had a little over 400 students and 10 classes. With the new school year (Korean school years run from March to December) I found myself with 500 students and 12 classes that I saw about twice a week. Definitely interesting and busy! During my first semester, I learned through trial and error new ways to teach more effectively and I tried my best to improve as the year went on. Teaching and my students have definitely been my favorite parts of this year. I think it was the most rewarding part of this grant and my students were definitely the hardest part of it to leave. I cried so many times during my last week there and during the goodbye parties they threw for me. Girls have a way of doing that I guess. In fact, I still really miss them!!



My students were so sweet! All faces and poses are their own, even mine! lol



In April, we had the second of our Conferences and the other 80 ETAs came to Jeju for some workshops, moments of relaxation, cherry blossom festivals and preliminary goodbyes. May came and went with such a blur of activity, but I somehow added a quick jaunt to Tokyo, Japan. It was an awesome experience not merely for seeing a new culture, but also because it was the first trip that I took by myself. I thought I would be so lonely, but I realized I'm stronger than I think. I actually ended up enjoying the free time to think and the liberty to do exactly what I wanted when I wanted. I must add that people watching is so much fun!

June was a medley of goodbyes, farewell parties, and packing as I was the first of the 14 Jeju Fulbrighters to leave our island home.



13 of the J-Crew missing Lindsay and 2008 Orientation Team and our final gag photo!



I left my homestay family, students, school, and new friends three weeks earlier than the others because I was selected (after a pretty intensive application and interview ;D) to be an Orientation Coordinator for the new group of 08-09 Korean Fulbright ETAs. I was a part of a 6 person Orientation team made up for such a diverse group of people (in almost all ways possible) and yet great group of people that I couldn't have asked for a better group of colleagues, friends, and eventually, family.

July and August were months spent back where I started. I returned to Chuncheon, the city of dakgalbi (the most amazing chicken dish) and patbingsu (yummy shaved ice, ice cream/yogurt, and fruit---This is what red mango and pink berry are famous for!). It was interesting to now be in charge and leading the orientation for the 75 new Fulbrighters whose shoes I was in just a year prior. There were definite moments of déjà vu and irony, but I like to think that these were outweighed by moments of learning and fun! Although we shared responsibility for teaching various cultural, social, teaching, and Fulbright aspects of the year, I was primarily in charge of all the teaching workshops.

It was interesting and fun as I was teaching some very smart and therefore engaged individuals. However, balancing teaching a range of complete novices to teaching others who had already done something as extensive as Teach for America was definitely challenging. Good thing I like challenges! ^^ More importantly good thing I was trained so well by my own professors! I am definitely thankful to my Linguistics professors at CSULB. THANK YOU!! Thank You! Thank you.

A lot of what they taught me and probably more importantly, how they taught me, stuck with me. I was able to adjust and tweak what I had learned in school and in the classroom over the years and develop a well-rounded and well-received curriculum. Not an easy feat considering my own orientation the year before left much to be desired with regards to preparing us for teaching in the Korean Educational system. Overall, I planned and led about 9 different 4 hour workshops coordinating both my own lessons and presentations with workshops from some 25 different presenters I (and my colleagues) was somehow able to convince to come and present. No easy feat considering it was purely voluntary with no pay!! => There is something to be said for Academics willingness to help other like-minded people.

Aside from teaching, I was also the liaison for Camp Fulbright (but that is a whole other situation) and I helped with many other aspects of the 24/7 Orientation. All in all, the 7 weeks passed by quickly and I know I'm better for the experience. In such a short time, I grew both professionally and personally, gaining both friends and experiences that I wouldn't have had otherwise. It's true that one's character is revealed during moments of struggle. Before I get all mushy, I'll stop there.

After Orientation ended with it's seemingly 25 hour days, I got a chance to catch up on some much needed sleep (I think it took at least a week to catch up =D). Later, we returned to Seoul for final meetings/reports, and inevitably the end came. I had spent the better part of each day of the previous 7 weeks with the same 5 people working, laughing, planning, playing Wii, teaching, and learning. It's amazing how close you can become with people in such a short amount of time. They are my second family and it was not easy when we parted ways. I still miss them terribly.

Luckily enough, at the same time my cousin from the US moved to Korea. A weeklong visit to my cousin in the city of Yeosu in the south of Korea was just what the doctor ordered.

(L to R: 1. My cousin Hazel and her bf Cameron enjoying the view 2. Country life is always surprising!)



Through her and her first experience with the culture and its values and practices, I saw how far I had come. Again, I saw Korea in a new light and remembered the feeling of newness and excitement that I experienced when I first moved there. It allowed me to remember that I had in fact really spent 15 months living there, growing there, and just experiencing life there. It was something I occasionally forgot when the pace of life got too crazy, but also something that I know I won't forget again.

It was the final push that I needed and it helped me to finally make my way home.

I've been home now for a few weeks. With no car, and no phone, I've been given much time to reflect, think, and just remember the past year. It was an exciting ride and more than I could have hoped for. I learned so much about my family, my friends, the world around me, and myself over the course of the past year. I'll forever be grateful for my Fulbright year and all that it's given me.

Thank you for being with me throughout the year. Through emails, calls, Skype, Facebook posts, etc., you supported me, laughed with/at me, and just cheered me on/up, even when I didn't exactly deserve it. I thank you for being there with me and taking this journey alongside me. If nothing else, I hope it's been entertaining if not enlightening. I don't know what the next steps of my life will be, but I do know that I'd like to see you again if possible. Please don't hesitate to email or call me at 562-961-9484 and hopefully we can plan a time to catch up, laugh, and just see each other again. Thank you again and can't wait to catch up!!

As always, I hope this email finds you well. If you got this far, kudos =) and again Thank you!

With Love and Friendship,

Christine N. Arrozal