In August 2006, I arrived at Shanghai American School wondering what kind of community I’d find. My husband and I have been teaching overseas for thirteen years, at five different schools in Asia and the Middle East, and in that time many of our friends and family at home have asked us how we do it. How do we pack up our belongings and move with our two children to jobs, cities, and countries entirely new to us, where we don’t know the language and we can’t read the signs? A job at an international school, however, is much more than a hundred and eighty days of teaching and a check every month. When you take a job overseas, someone meets you at the airport and takes you to where you will sleep that night. Someone shows you where to buy bread and milk and toasters and televisions. As you start your new job you meet other teachers, some of whom are new, like you, and some of whom have been around for years. You swap stories with the former, and take advice from the latter. You go out for dinner, and you go shopping. You make friends, and with any luck your kids do too. You enter a community.

International teaching has its material perks—tax free incomes, low cost daily living, and lots of opportunity to travel—but the best overseas posts, I think, are defined not by the salary packaging or living standards, but by the warmth of the community. International school teachers will often identify paths they wished they spent the time they spent in the most difficult circumstances, in developing countries or areas of conflict, precisely because the dedication and day to day life brought people together. It was immediately clear that day to day life in Shanghai was going to be comfortable—our apartment was huge enough for a resort hotel—but as we went through the orientation week activities with the other eighty or so new hires we quickly found other families to bond with. Shanghai American School, however, is China’s largest international school, and the largest school Andree and I had ever worked in. SAS offers a core American curriculum to about three hundred and fifty students to two hundred and forty teachers. Shanghai was going to be comfortable—our apartment was huge enough for a resort hotel—but as we went through the orientation week activities with the other eighty or so new hires we quickly found other families to bond with.

The day I arrived at Shanghai American School, I met my students. My life as a faculty member. The brief description of the CFGE training sparked a hope that our large faculty could begin to find connections that could bring teachers together in meaningful ways. On the first morning of our training the school superintendent took some time out from his busy schedule to join our meeting. He told us the story of how he had heard about CFGEs in the US (continued on page 14).