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National Technical Institute for the Deaf

We Are Not Alone . . .

by Justin R. Drawbaugh

For the first time in history, a delegation of six NTID/RIT undergraduate and graduate students, two faculty/staff members and two interpreters went to China. The group represented NTID and the United States at a meeting in the Tianjin Technical College for the Deaf of Tianjin University of Technology (TUT) in China last November.

PEN-International at NTID sponsored and funded this trip. PEN-International, an international postsecondary education network of universities and colleges around the world educating students who are deaf, provided that opportunity.

The purpose of the trip was to extend students' cultural and personal characteristics while helping them to develop an understanding of diverse cultures, especially deaf culture and deaf education in other countries of the world.

The USA delegates joined the delegation from Tsukuba College of Technology (TCT) and from Japan. The delegates and the deaf TUT students had opportunities to get to know each other through various events. We have ASL and they have Chinese Sign Language, but they can write basic English, which was how we communicated. Interestingly, writing is not only for deaf and hearing people to communicate with each other, but also for deaf people from two different countries who have their own unique languages.

Front Row: Left to Right: Hilary Hannah, Julie Stewart, Susan Fischer. Middle Row: Left to Right: Patricia Sapere, Alison Kent, Elizabeth Ayers. Back Row: Left to Right: Nathan Kester, Justin R. Drawbaugh, Robert Baker, Richard Smith.

During the trip, the delegates visited various cities and historical sites around China. One of the places the delegates visited was the Tianjin School for the Deaf. The deaf students were very thrilled to meet the delegates, and gave the delegates several performances. The delegates also played a gesturing game and other games with the students.

While I was in China, I

had the opportunity to observe how deaf Chinese people are handling deafness in their native country. I returned to NTID with the new experience of knowing that we are not alone because we share the same feelings as those deaf Chinese students we met. They have the same opportunity to reach their dreams and be successful in the future. I was impressed that we are equal in the world because they received similar support that we receive in this country. The deaf people in China, like us, have to face what their deafness is about and who they are.

This experience changed me personally. This experience helped me embrace diversity and better understand deaf people from different cultures. Before I entered NTID/RIT in 1998, I never had any experience with diverse cultures at all. This trip helped me develop the capability to understand more about diverse cultures for the rest of my life. I will be able to have good interaction with people in the future with respect to their culture and my own.

PEN-International helps students in the U.S. and abroad experience cultural and personal characteristics while developing a comprehension of diverse cultures, especially deaf culture and deaf education in numerous countries of the world. PEN-Internation-al helped me identify who I am and what I really want to do in my future, so I can have support to reach my goals where my heart is leading me.

NTID/RIT students are applying this year to be next year's goodwill ambassadors, going to Russia in November 2002. PEN-International is funded by a grant from The Nippon Foundation of Japan to the National Technical Institute for the Deaf at Rochester Institute of Technology.

For more information, PEN-International's website is at http://www.pen.ntid.rit.edu. Our journals, photos, and a video from this trip can be seen under the Cultural Exchange section.