

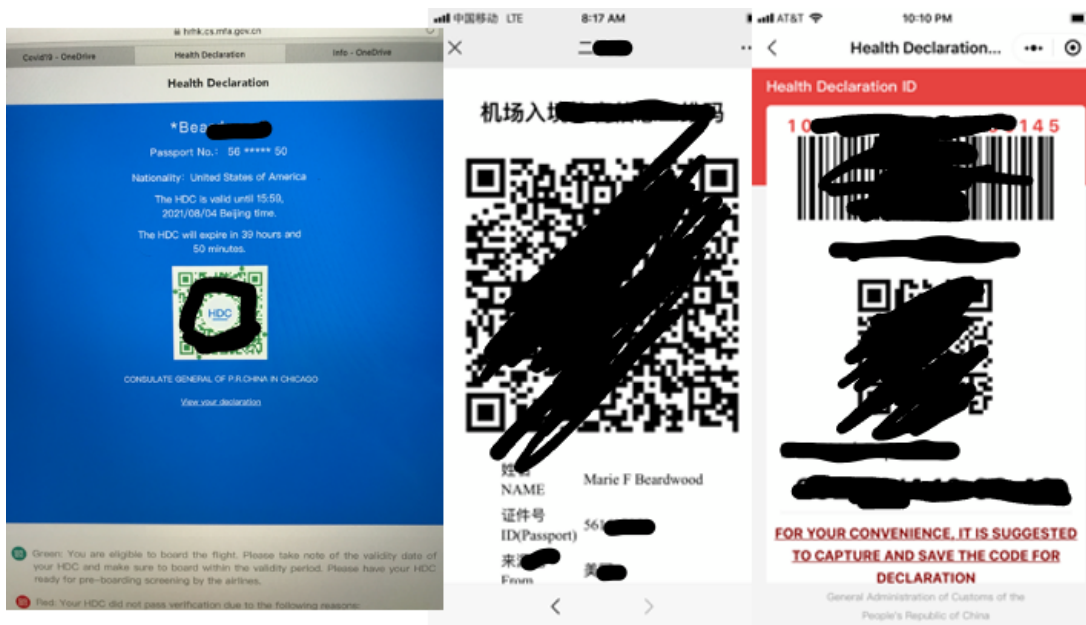
Dear esteemed colleagues, treasured friends and assorted much-loved crazy relatives,

Greetings and salutations from the Chinese mainland.

First, I regret that I have been out of touch - we had a bit of a crazy year last year. As did everyone! Jim was badly hurt in a bicycle accident and had to have surgery and months of rehab, I had eye surgery on both eyes (not at once, silly!), my job sucked so I resigned, my mother died, I got sick and had to see multiple doctors and undergo tests (but I'm ok more-or-less), oh yeah and then the pandemic. But I am back. With a new job, no less! and am thrilled about it. Chief Instructional Officer for a network of American schools in China. I am stoked. I'll be working with all Heads and other instructional leaders to ensure excellence in all things teaching and learning. I sincerely thank my friends, colleagues, bosses, and of course JIM for the support you all have given me on this crazy adventure.

So now we are in China! In the middle of a pandemic!

One of the requirements of being allowed entry into China is that we quarantine for 21 days. Yep, you read that right. TWENTY-ONE days. And trust me, you do what the Chinese government tells you to do. Plus, they have tracked us with assorted bar codes and scanning and the like. Everywhere we went, we had to upload something, type data on some electronic forms and submit it, etc. and get QR codes that we then had to show to or scan for assorted Chinese officials. They even put a QR code on our passports! Sheesh it would have been easier if they just put a microchip in my neck. Like I'm a dog named Simba. But that "Simba" story is for another day.





So, here we are in a "government approved quarantine facility." How is THAT?! you ask. Good question! Surprisingly lovely. The beds are comfy, the wifi is fast, the food is delish. We. Just. Can't. Leave. We are now in our 6th day and it is joyous! Let me give you a run-down of how our days are going.

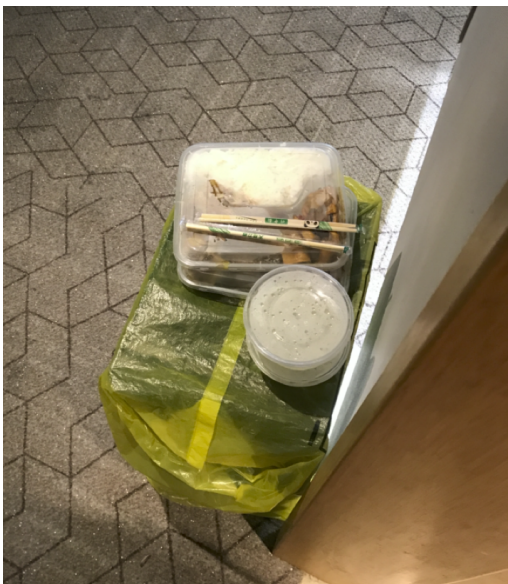
Morning

6:30am (or so)

Time to rise and shine! I entertain myself by waking with a smile on my face and I ask Jim: "What do you want to do TODAY, honey?!" Like we have a choice. And then I laugh and laugh and laugh and laugh. Jim is already quite tired of that joke. I am not. He is so lucky. I also tell him that I wouldn't want to be quarantined with anyone else but him! Why does he not respond with a similar sentiment?? Ha ha.

We get up and have coffee. There is a little electric kettle in the room, but there was no coffee or anything, but my new employer rescued us and sent us instant coffee and sugar. Yay to that because I was developing a caffeine-withdrawal headache.

Breakfast arrives around 7:30ish. We hear them coming in the hall and they notify us that the food is here with a quick rap on our door. They leave it on a little milk crate looking thing in the hallway.



We put on our masks and open the door to get it. We do not go out, but reach around and get it. Sometimes we see neighbors. We wave, but there is limited conversation. One time, I saw the guy across the hall in his underwear. I think he was horrified. Please, it was just black boxers. Get over it, dude.

Breakfast is boring and the one disappointment in the really good meals they are feeding us. A hard-boiled egg and some smooshy roll things and a piece of sweet potato or carrot or corn on the cob and a package of "mustard tuber." Every. Single. Day. Don't know about you, but a hard-boiled egg every day is not something I look forward to. Some days they smell like feet. Mustard tuber is ok, but it is packaged and not fresh, so I pass on it. It kind of tastes like a mild cabbage/onion mix. Cooked, so it is soft but still a little crunchy. Jim eats mine.



The smooshy roll things are pretty good. One is usually filled with some kind of spinach stuff or a meaty mixture. The other is mixed with small pieces of scallion-type stuff.

I have now turned into my mother, who always gave blow-by-blow descriptions of what she had to eat. Sigh. Gawd help me.

We also sometimes get yogurt, which is more of a drink and it is quite good. We also get some kind of soup that I call "gruel." It is not good. Bland and tasteless. We dump it down the toilet. Occasionally, we get fruit. Bananas, usually. Once, we got apples.



At around 9:00am, the medical team comes by to take our temperature. They come twice a day - around 9:00 and 15:00. They are dressed from head to toe in white protective gear, with eye and face coverings. It is a gazillion degrees in the corridors - I can only imagine how hot they are. They look a little like Oompa Loompas. You know the point in that movie *Willy Wonka* when they are wearing white? The good version, not the stupid Johnny Depp remake. With Gene Wilder. Maybe the Oompa Loompas are in the chocolate room? That's the medical team. Except the medical team has blue piping on their white jumpsuits.

All I can see is their eyes. I cannot tell them apart.



But they are lovely and polite and we smile at each other and they take our temperature by scanning our foreheads. They are also small. I am like a giant.



Depending on the day, we may have to be swabbed, too. Swabbing is when they jam long q-tip type things up our noses and into the backs of our throats to test us for COVID. Some on the medical team are more aggressive than others. Some days, I look for blood dripping out of my nose. My eyes tear for hours. I also expect to pick cotton out from behind my eyeballs. We are swabbed about every three days or so.

Jim says "Well, you wanted an adventure." Thank you, baby. And also: Sorry.

After the excitement of coffee and temperature taking and/or swabbing, we must use the latrine. If we defecate, we must put these special tablets in the toilet. These tablets kill the virus. According to infectious disease specialists, testing fecal matter and monitoring public waste systems are a barometer of wellness or not in a society. We must kill the virus before it gets distributed into the public waste system.

According to the instructions, we must put "2-3 tablets" in the toilet before we defecate. Hmmmm. How do I know if I should put in two? or three? Wouldn't it make sense to put it in after, so I know if it is a 2 or 3 tablet dump? So we guess. Hmmmmmm. Will I have a 2- or 3-tablet poop today? "Feels like a 2-tablet poop today, dear!" That is me speaking, obviously. Jim is quite horrified that I am publicly discussing (disgusting?? HA HA) this topic.

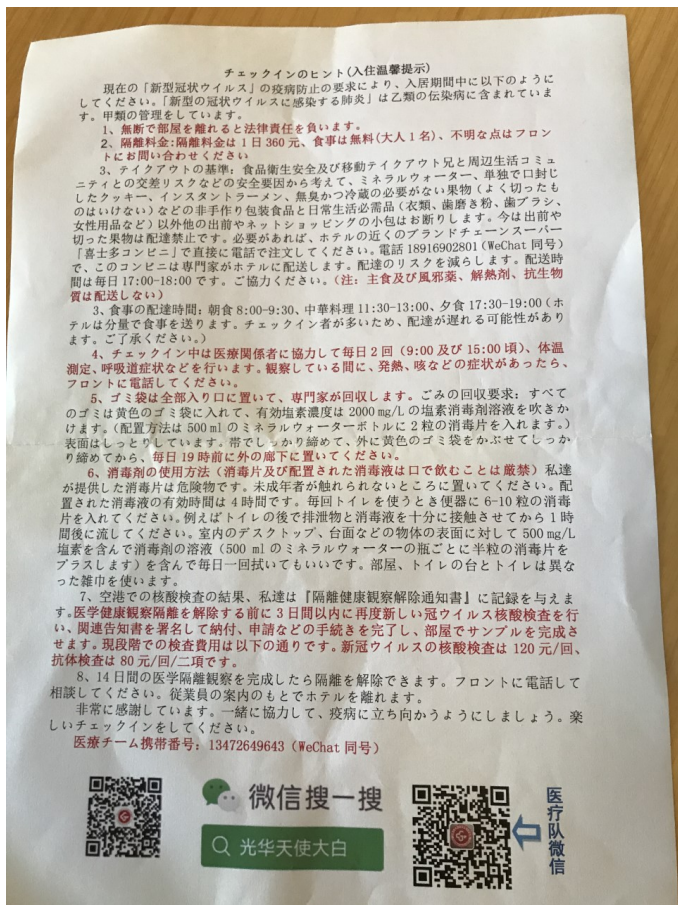
Some days I have a 1-tablet poop.

If I am wrong, are there poop pill police who will correct my dosage?

Then, said poop and pill have to sit for an hour in the toilet. Perhaps it just has to sit there and think about what it did. Then we get to flush. Exciting, isn't it?

We've already had to ask for more tablets. When the medical team comes by, we shake the empty bag at them and they understand. Although, I get questioning looks, kind of like "What, already??!" Do not judge me, Oompa Loompa. Sometimes, a girl just has a bad day.

Instructions



Toilet Poop Tablets. DO NOT EAT.



(Yes, I know there are no tablets in there. If you must know, the tablets are small and white and round. Like a tablet, duh. We had used them up and were waiting for more. So shoot me.)

After all the eating and pooping and temperature taking and swabbing, we have a couple of hours before lunch.

So, I settle in and do some work. or write stuff like this. or annoy Jim. "I'm BORED." "Pay attention to ME!" "You don't love me ENOUGH."

When I say I am bored, Jim replies with making little shapes with his fingers. I think he is trying to make shadow puppets, but is not successful. I appreciate the effort.

When I whine that he needs to pay attention to me, he turns to look at me over his reading glasses. Calmly. Then goes back to whatever he was doing.

When I tell him he doesn't love me ENOUGH, he asks "Who said that??" But does not tell me that he loves me. I frequently fall face down on the bed and sigh and fake cry that he doesn't appreciate me. Enough. "Who said that?" he asks again. "EVERYONE," I say. "I saw it on Facebook." Which is funny because a) we both are not on Facebook and b) Facebook is banned here.

We also read the Providence e-journal on our iPad. Play Words with Friends. Read the Washington Post. That is actually banned here, but I get it because I am using a VPN. Shhhhh. I have to use my Mac, though, which is a bit inconvenient. I used to be able to get it on my iPad. But I have no VPN installed on my iPad. wah wah.

Sometimes I go for a walk. I walk from one end of the room to the other, a total of about 15 steps. I turn around and walk back. I sometimes look out the window. The view is actually pretty nice. There's a lovely little canal right below and we see people fishing. We cannot join them. You know, we are in QUARANTINE!!!

This is my walking route.



View from window.



So. That is our morning. I know it is the end of the morning, because I hear noise in the corridor again. Excitement up and down the hallway. LUNCH!

Gotta go. I'm HUNGRY.

One final thought: The government here has taken very good care of us and everyone else who has chosen to travel here. Wish the USA was as efficient.

Ok, another important piece of info:

Jim's email changed. Gmail does not work here, so his email address is now:

JulioBravo529@outlook.com. If you should feel so inclined, he would love to hear from ye!

That is all, until next time.

Love,
Marie