



Pandas International October 2007 Newsletter

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This newsletter will focus on two stories of individuals who volunteered at Wolong this year, their thoughts, their experience, and their love for pandas.

If you are interested in volunteering check our web site <http://www.pandasinternational.org/volunteer.html>

Note: Due to traveling to China, major health problems, and an auto accident, we have not gotten out our monthly newsletters.

We have so much to tell you about Suzanne's trip to Wolong, the new cubs at Wolong and various other panda stories, we will send two newsletters a month till we get you caught up on all the news.!

Our Summer Vacation

by Rebecca & Richard Johnston, Wolong Volunteers

As frequently and most aptly stated by panda keepers at the San Diego, CA Zoo, I too have been having a love affair with the Giant Panda for some time now. Not since 1987 as in the case of the San Diego Zoo, but since 1999 when Hua Mei, born in San Diego of parents Bai Yun and Shi Shi, received the title of "first panda to be born and survive to adulthood in the U.S." Subsequent to that momentous achievement, I have been following all the breeding efforts, births and other news worthy events on the websites of all four zoos in the U.S. that have the great privilege to work with such an admired and magical animal. The Panda web cams that each of the zoos maintain are a great window into the world of pandas. I watch the cams religiously and have followed the births and step by step growth of Mei Sheng and Su Lin in San Diego, Tai Shan in Washington, DC, the birth of Lun Lun's first cub Mei Lan "Atlanta's Beauty" and the most recent birth of Bai Yun's fourth cub born in San Diego." The Panda News updates that each of the websites offer is also a great way to track the milestones of breeding efforts and panda events. When folks ask me what it is I like so much about pandas, it is sometimes hard to describe. I believe that people are born with a love for animals; it is not something that can be learned or mimicked. Obviously, I have a great love of all animals but my love for pandas is more like a reverence. Their human-like behaviors especially with regard to the female's maternal instincts have always fascinated me. To watch the relationship form between a very large and gentle mother and a very tiny delicate baby to me represents a bond that I have never witnessed in any other animal species. The

The giant panda cub who didn't make it, but left a legacy of love

by Chet Chin, Wolong Volunteer and Panda Parent

When he was born, he made headlines around the world, not just because he was a giant panda cub, but because he was the first giant panda cub to be born with a harelip. Unfortunately, the external defect and various other internal health problems proved too much for his little body and he died soon after being born. Despite his very brief time here, he left a lasting impression and legacy, at least for me. He changed me and helped me to make a stronger commitment to the cause of the giant panda.

At the time he was born, I'd been following giant pandas news for six years, ever since first discovering Hua Mei on the San Diego Zoo pandacam during her public debut at six months old. Mostly, it had been a "hobby" of collecting print literature about giant pandas, searching online for their pictures, participating in online discussions, and also purchasing panda-related items directly from the zoos that had panda exhibits.

At the time he was born, I had been in a bit of a depression. But when I saw his picture, I knew I wanted to be a part of the love and the care that would help him overcome his health problems. I went to the Pandas International website to look up information about adopting a giant panda from Wolong. After various email exchanges with director Suzanne Braden, I received the good news that my application to adopt this little cub with the harelip had been approved. Sadly, within weeks, I

antics displayed by young cubs is also quite amusing and those that love pandas can watch and be entertained by these small black and white bears for hours. Based on their dwindling numbers in the wild, the Giant Panda is listed as an endangered species and this has raised my awareness of the need for strong conservation efforts to ensure their future survival. With the support of Panda Int'l and private donors the breeding centers in China as well as zoos around the world have worked miracles with pandas in captivity to increase their numbers and to begin to change the destiny of this grass eating bear. Never in a million years did I ever expect to witness, let alone participate, in this vast conservation effort. This is how it happened:

For our summer vacation this past July, my husband Richard and I made the long sojourn to the mountains of China to the Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda, Wolong Nature Reserve, Sichuan Province that is home to about 70 Giant Pandas. Searching the internet Richard had stumbled upon a volunteer program being offered by the Center and signed us up for 5 days duty. The mountain road to the reserve was under construction and the trip was long, dirty and at times very dangerous. Not knowing what to expect I wondered if maybe we had made a mistake in taking on this challenge. That was until we made our entrance into the panda reserve and were met almost immediately by an adult Giant Panda standing upright in her enclosure and gazing over at us as though to welcome us to her home. We later nicknamed this panda "the poser" since it became obvious to us that she really enjoyed having an audience and would take on different human-like poses to the enchantment of all those watching. From that moment the experience grew into one of wonder (and hard work) as we were assigned to care for seven 2-year old pandas being raised together in the same enclosure. Much to our surprise and amazement two of the cubs in our care were the second set of twins born to Hua Mei at the Center in 2005. Being responsible for the care of these twins, Wei Wei and Ting Ting seemed to bring full circle the boundless conservation efforts on-going in China and the U.S. and it gave us a great feeling of satisfaction to be connected to this effort even if only for a brief moment in time.

received news that he'd passed away. (Note – it was only recently that I learned he died within 3 days of being born; due to the irregularity of news coming out of Wolong, we weren't informed until almost a month later.)

In her email telling me the sad news, Suzanne Braden told me he had a younger twin sister, would I like to transfer the adoption to her? My reply was an unhesitating yes.



Fast

forward to September 2007. I had come to Wolong Panda Reserve, on a 4-day volunteer trip that would allow me first-hand experience at looking after giant pandas. In addition to my volunteer duties, I would also be meeting my adopted panda daughter, the younger twin sister of the cub born with a harelip.

I'd named her Yoong Ping, in memory of my parents and my niece who'd succumbed to leukemia in March 2006 after a four-year fight. But Yoong Ping's official name is Feng Yi. Initially, I'd been disappointed my name for her had not been chosen, but was later cheered by the fact that Feng Yi is as good a name for my little panda daughter.

So yes, I met my little darling, Yoong Ping. The date was Wednesday, 12 September 2007. And she bit and scratched me!

Of all the panda cubs born in 2006, I had to choose the most independent and fiercest of them all!

I was warned that she bites and in fact, just the week before, she had scratched and shredded the sleeve of someone's uniform!

Yes, I was warned but I still wanted to meet her. It came to the point where I said I would be happy just to see her and touch her. Which I did, but I got photos, too.

I remember anxiously waiting the better part of the morning,



Our

volunteer tasks at the Center initially began with the basic chores of cleaning the indoor and outdoor enclosures and gathering and distributing fresh bamboo but as we began to gain the trust of our master and teacher we were permitted to feed the pandas their special panda cakes at several different intervals during the day but only through the bars of their indoor enclosure. By mid-week our master allowed us to enter the outside enclosure area to feed the pandas their panda cakes as well as their daily bowls of powdered milk and also to assist him in coaxing down some of our more adventurous charges out of the tree tops. It was a great honor for us to have been trusted to work side by side with our master caring for the 2-year olds and the fact that the pandas had even begun to recognize us was the greatest gift of all. As our final day for volunteering approached it was with mixed emotions that we were to bid farewell, being a bit homesick but at the same time not wanting this incredible journey to end. So I say to those of you reading this newsletter, if you find yourself having a love affair with the Giant Panda consider taking the great leap into their world by visiting the Wolong Reserve and volunteering as a panda keeper. I can assure you that as a caregiver to the world's most treasured animals you will never feel more gratified.

and then it just happened. I was told to go to the entrance of the kindergarten yard. There, I dipped my pair of volunteer boots into a pan of water, slipped on shoe covers over the boots, put both my arms through the sleeves of a pair of disposable blue coveralls, had the front and back of my hands sprayed and slipped into a pair of disposable gloves. And then I was inside the kindergarten yard.

It had been raining and the ground was muddy and slippery. One of the other giant panda cubs ambled up for a closer look at me, but I paid him little attention; all I wanted was to get to my panda daughter.

I knew exactly where she was — up on her favorite perch at the top of a tree stump. One of the keepers lured her down with a piece of panda bread, which she took in her mouth and promptly turned around to go back up her perch! No can do, missy, come down here, you!

I had other cubs wanting to play with me — one had his paws around my leg — and the one cub I wanted to play with kept trying to get away from me! HRMPHHH!!!!!!!

It was hilarious, I kept trying to get her to stay still and she would just walk off. Eventually, she warmed to me, and even had her paws wrapped around my leg for a brief, precious moment. Unfortunately, it was time to leave the yard, and I did not want to overstay my welcome.



would've loved to have our picture taken together on the bench just outside the door to the kindergarten yard. But her keepers wouldn't let her out of the yard; they didn't trust that she would not wander off. So I took my "bench" picture with a friendlier panda cub by the name of Lang Lang, who sat quietly on the bench snacking on the piece of panda bread he'd been given, and letting me hug him, hold his ears and even take a close-up of my hands with his paw. What a difference from my fiercely independent Yoong Ping!



**Holidays are close!
It is time to get
your holiday cards!**

It was only after I'd stripped off the blue coveralls that I saw a scratch on my right arm. Even through the protective clothing, she'd managed to leave a mark — a much-cherished mark — on me. Thinking back to those few minutes when I'd tried to win her attention, I remembered she'd clamped her mouth over my right wrist, but had not actually taken a bite. And I remembered thinking so this must be how it feels when a panda mother picks up her newborn in her mouth.

I have enjoyed my four days in Wolong. I feel very honored to have been there as a visitor, a volunteer and a panda parent. I plan to visit at least once a year from now on, and have started making plans for the next visit, down to where I want to stay in Chengdu enroute to Wolong!

Volunteer at Wolong!

Wolong is now allowing individuals or groups to volunteer at the Wolong panda reserve. These trips must be arranged by qualified individuals or travel agencies.

Wolong National Nature Reserve is located in an alpine valley on the Tibetan Plateau. The crystal clear waters of the Pitiao River run through the reserve. Wolong National Nature Reserve has become China's largest and certainly the most important sanctuary for giant pandas and other rare and precious animals and plants. Primitive forest and original ecosystem here are well preserved, and therefore the Reserve is a rare natural park.

[Visit the Volunteer page at pandasinternational.org for more information.](http://pandasinternational.org)



[*Click here for all holiday cards.*](#)

OTHER ITEMS...



PANDAS INTERNATIONAL RECEIVES "BEST IN AMERICA" SEAL

Pandas International has been selected by Independent Charities of America to receive the "Best in America Seal." We are very proud to have been selected for this seal and will continue to strive to excel in our efforts to save the pandas!

REMEMBER PANDAS INTERNATIONAL IN YOUR WILL!

A Board Member of Pandas International called to let us know they had included Pandas International in their will. A huge thanks for the generous gesture! [Please contact us](#) if you, too, would like to include Pandas International in your will.

MONTHLY DONATIONS — One of the best ways to help the pandas is to sign up for an automatic monthly donation, for as little as \$10.00 a month you can help us with the medical needs of the

pandas. [Donate now!](#)

PAYROLL DEDUCTIONS — Pandas International has been selected as an approved agency by the Combined Federal Campaign for federal employees in Colorado. If you work for the federal government please consider a payroll deduction for Pandas International.

COMBINED FEDERAL CAMPAIGN (CFC) — If you are a Federal Employee and participate in the CFC payroll deduction program please contact us for our CFC number to donate through this program.

DOES YOUR COMPANY HAVE A MATCHING PAYROLL DEDUCTION PLAN? Let us know if your company has a payroll deduction or any type of matching donation plan for which Pandas International could apply.

TEACHERS, SCOUT LEADER, SUMMER CAMP COUNSELRS — One of our generous sponsors, Pandas Express, the fastest growing Asian cuisine restaurant chain, is teaming with us to offer an educational program to local elementary schools about the endangered pandas in China. *Panda Partners* is an environmental education program that uses age-appropriate materials to bring pandas, conservation issues, and a bit of China to the classroom. We have found most elementary school aged children love the panda and are eager to learn about them. If you are a teacher or know one who might be interested please check the web site at www.pandasinternational.org.

TRAVEL TO CHINA — We have had several requests to travel to China to just the panda reserves. Kim of Kim's World Travel has arrangements with Wolong and Bifengxia and can arrange this type of trip for you. If interested please contact Kim at Kim@Kimsworldtravel.com or 303.388.3813.

VOLUNTEER AT WOLONG — It is now possible to volunteer at Wolong, cleaning cages, delivering bamboo, etc. Kim of Kim's World Travel will make arrangements with Wolong for you to volunteer. If interested please contact Kim at Kim@Kimsworldtravel.com or 303.388.3813.

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PANDAS INTERNATIONAL • P.O BOX 620335 • LITTLETON, CO 80123

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