

## ISU Student Teaches Children in Mongolia

RENEE FUNK<sup>†</sup>

In Mongolia, they milk everything: yaks, cows, goats, and horses. Fermented mare's milk or airag is the national favorite drink. Amazingly, the mares are milked eight times per day to make this drink. The milk is only fermented for five days so the alcohol content is low. How is the taste, you ask? Let's just say it's an acquired one.

I was fortunate to travel and work in this fascinating country, eleven time zones away, during the month of June 1999. My parents, my brother, and I all went through Christian Veterinary Mission (CVM). While in Mongolia, we worked with CVM veterinarian Gerald Mitchum and his wife Francis, originally from North Carolina. They have been working in Mongolia for five years.

My first task was to start a school in the Ekh Bulag valley in a remote mountain area with two Mongolian women, Yenjaa, my translator, and her mother Soudnam. A flooded river made getting up to the mountain quite a challenge! Most of the children who attended had never been to school, could not read or write, and were between the ages of ten and seventeen. One interesting side note is that most of the children's parents are literate because they were raised under the Communist regime where they were forced to go to school. However, these people do not feel that they have the supplies or time necessary to teach their children.

In order to get the school started, we called a meeting for all the families in the valley. Next, we gave the students a pre-test to place them in the correct class. We ended up with 36 students attending our school. I taught English, mathematics, games, and art all in Mongolian. I also taught

them the game duck, duck, goose. It was a big hit. I intended to teach them other games, but they liked it so much that I never did. Then, I was actually a student for one class each day: Mongolian language.

While on the mountain, we lived in a ger, the traditional home of the nomadic people of Mongolia. We got water out of the river and used a wood stove for heat and cooking.

Our neighbors brought us yak hides to sleep on, furniture for the school, and plenty of dairy products. They were very generous. Our neighbors also sold us a sheep so that we would have mutton to eat. It was

only \$15. What a bargain!

Highlights from this portion of my trip were hiking around the neighboring mountains with Yenjaa and befriending the "Old Man" who was the head of the family living near us. I don't mean Old Man as an insult. That is what his name means in Mongolian. Another highlight was the children saying "Hello, how are you?" to my mom when she came with the new teacher replacements. University students from Ulaan Baatar, the capital city of Mongolia, taught the school for the rest of the summer. My mother and I met up with my father in another area of the countryside, where he had been doing veterinary seminars for the rural veterinarians.

Then, all three of us headed back to Ulaan Baatar. My father and I put on various lectures at the Agriculture College about dairy

---

**"We lived in a ger. Our neighbors brought us yak hides to sleep on."**

---



Renee Funk

<sup>†</sup>Renee Funk is a third-year veterinary student at Iowa State University.



**The embryo transfer demonstration took place in this barn. Two veterinary students built the chute to restrain the donor cows.**

farming and facilities for veterinarians and farmers. The people of Mongolia seem very interested to learn how to make their farms more productive.

With our lectures complete, we had time to do some touring. First, we visited a pig farm and a dairy farm that Gerald and his group are hoping to use as model farms for other farmers to come, see and learn from. Next, we visited the national vaccine factory, Biokomminant. The assistant director of the factory told us about their major problems and asked for our help. My father and I have continued to work on these problems since returning to the United States. Finally, we made a cultural visit to see the folkloric ballet. It was fantastic. I was most impressed with the traditional instruments

they used in their orchestra, as well as the costumes.

Our last veterinary undertaking was to do an embryo transfer demonstration on two cows for the Agriculture College faculty and veterinary students. This was the first bovine embryo transfer ever in Mongolia. The demonstration went very well. We recovered

eight embryos, but had trouble finding that many recipients. The best part was seeing the faces on the veterinary students doing rectal palpation for the first time.

Our religious work for this trip involved supporting the Mongolian Christians by attending their church and holding Bible studies for the college students in the church. Christianity was unknown in Mongolia even five years ago. Traditionally, Mongolia is a Buddhist country, but 70 years of communist control resulted in many atheists. As far as the current political-economic climate in Mongolia, it is very similar to many of the former Russian republics. They are just developing their market economy and have had several prime ministers overthrown in recent years. The government now in



**Ekh Bulag valley where I lived for two weeks.**

place is believed to last.

Veterinary medicine has historically been regulated by the government. Beginning in 1999, it was decentralized, and now veterinarians are supposed to set up and run private practices. One problem with this new system is that the farmers have no money, and bartering is very prominent in the rural areas.

Another issue of concern is brucellosis as a public health problem. It is believed that up to one-third of the people living in the countryside are infected with brucellosis. The mountain area that I was in had a 26% prevalence among the yaks, according to Gerald's testing. Needless to say, we boiled our milk the entire time. Dr. John Thomson, Dean of the Mississippi State University College of Veterinary Medicine, has been working on getting a national eradication program for brucellosis developed in Mongolia. If it is implemented, they will need many veterinarians to vaccinate all the animals which would employ them and alleviate some of their current economic problems.



Renee Funk

Construction of a ger, the traditional Mongolian dwelling. It is made of wooden beams and felt pieces.

The economic future of Mongolia is uncertain at this point, but the Mongolian people are very intelligent and determined. I believe they will find a way. My time in Mongolia was just amazing. I learned much more than I taught, and believe it or not, our family bonded. It is an awesome feeling to know that I have vet student friends on the other side of the planet.♦

---

## Acupuncture Class to be Taught in Beijing

KIM GERAGHTY<sup>†</sup> AND JENNIFER FRANKLIN<sup>††</sup>

On May 12, twenty-five ISU Veterinary Medicine students will embark on a study-abroad trip to China. The three-week trip will introduce the students to the principles of veterinary acupuncture and other traditional Chinese medicine techniques.

The trip will be based primarily at the China Agricultural University in Beijing. CAU is noted for its faculty and their expertise in traditional Chinese medicine. Two faculty members of the

ISU College of Veterinary Medicine will be accompanying the students to China. Dr. Walter Hsu, professor of pharmacology, has an interest in traditional Chinese medicine. Dr. Karen Kline, a neurologist, is interested in the applications of acupuncture in veterinary medicine, such as in post-operative pain management. Also joining the students are Dr. Hsu's wife Jean, and Dr. Charles McDaniel, a veterinary practitioner in Ankeny.

The majority of the classwork for the three-week course will be in a laboratory setting. Topics studied will include concepts and history of acupuncture, methods of acupuncture and moxibus-

---

<sup>†</sup>Kim Geraghty is a first-year veterinary student at Iowa State University.

<sup>††</sup>Jennifer Franklin is a second-year veterinary student at Iowa State University.