

Teacher penetrates bamboo curtain

By Jerry Kaplowitz

Who could have realized that a 16 day vacation would result in a chance to experience the opportunity of a lifetime.

While touring mainland China in August of 1978, Grossmont College English teacher Len Pellettiri and his wife Emma pondered the idea of applying for a teaching position in the People's Republic.

"The decision was not an impulsive one," confessed the effervescent Pellettiri. "My wife and I have been fascinated with Chinese history and culture for many years." Enthralled by the possibilities, Mr. and Mrs. Pellettiri inquired through the Chinese liaison office in Washington, D.C. upon their return. When they received no response, a second request was filed.

In December of 1978, a phone call from a Chinese official confirmed their hopes; the applications had been accepted. They were asked to come as soon as possible.

As Pellettiri vividly recalls, the initial feelings were of excitement and anxiety. "We were appalled at the time, I had a contract that extended until the end of May. We can't just pick up and leave like they think. It's not easy being bourgeois," he jested. Despite these initial apprehensions, the Pellettiris' mutual belief in the "oneness of life" propelled them in their quest.

The life of Len Pellettiri, 51, reads as a fervent dedication to personal involvement in humanistic concerns. His educational experiences goes back 26 years, when he taught comparative religion at a church Sunday school. Associations with the United World Federalists, the Journal of Holistic Health and the opening of the Pellettiri household to a pair of Japanese foreign exchange students attest to these convictions. He has taught English at Grossmont for 11 years.

"I have been all over the world, but China is a special place," he states with a childlike enthusiasm. "The Chinese revolution is still a young 30 years old. The people still have a moral fervor reminiscent of the pre-revolutionary United States epitomized by Thomas Jefferson. That is what appeals to me most."

Having departed Feb. 3 for a journey that will take them to the other side of the globe, the Pellettiris were scheduled to enjoy brief stays in Honolulu, Hawaii and Tokyo, Japan before arriving in Peking, their city of residence for the next two years.

continued on page two



Len Pellettiri is currently teaching in the People's Republic of China.

from page one

As if the trauma of a sudden relocation were not enough, Len and Emma face uncertainties regarding accommodations and abilities of communication.

Authorities have relayed the probabilities of temporary quarters in a local hotel. They are unsure of a future residence. Hurried preparation also allowed for only two Chinese lessons, a doubtfully sufficient number to ensure fluency. "Our lack of language will be our only restriction," he adds.

However, it is Pellettiri's professional forte that will be his major asset. He will be teaching english to Chinese students and teachers at the Foreign Trade Institute for a salary of \$200 per month.

The prospect of such a trip would have seemed incredible as recently as 1971. After years of anti-American feelings, after an era in which China seemed as tightly closed as the Forbidden City, after years of hearing that American's were foreign devils, the gates of the People's Republic have again turned outward.

Gaining impetus by 1969, American re-examination of Sino relations by then President Richard Nixon, soon led to a lifting of the travel ban to china and the first trade agreement in almost 30 years. A gradual withdrawl of U.S. military presence in Asia, especially in South Korea followed, providing the biggest indication that tensions had mellowed.

In 1971 China was admitted into the United Nations.

Pellettiri sees his journey as a continuation of this spirit. "The trip is more than a means of professional growth. In a small way, I hope I can help build a bridge between two great countries."