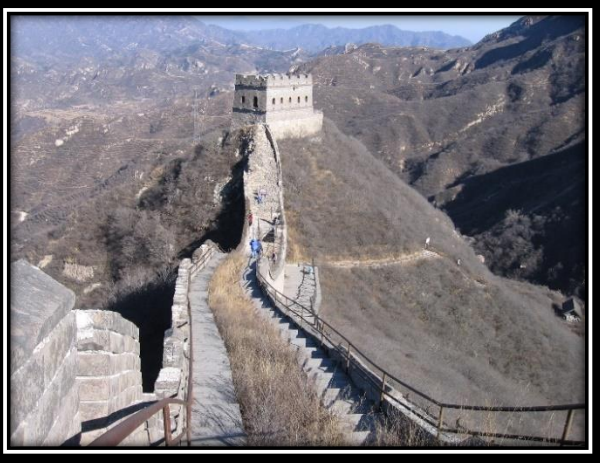


09 THE LEGACY OF THE CRUELEST EMPEROR

Two of the things we always think of when we think of China are the Great Wall and the Terra Cotta Warriors. The Great Wall of China is considered one of the seven wonders of the world, and is the symbol of China, the Dragon Line. "It is said that you can see parts of the Dragon Line from space," lectured our guide. "The whole wall is about 13,000 miles long, of which about 4000 miles remain today. It took 14 years to build the wall, 12 of those in the Qin Dynasty of 221 to 206 BCE. The Qin Dynasty was the first royal dynasty in Chinese history, and the emperor was Qin Shi Hwang, considered the most powerful Chinese emperor and also the most brutal. He unified China when he was 39 years old, establishing the basic boundaries and administrative system that created the country, which remain today. The country takes its name from his dynasty. He standardized the currency measurement and character and proclaimed himself emperor of the whole China. He used over half the population of China to make the Great Wall, the terra cotta soldiers, and his tomb, turning the people into his slaves. Over one million people died building the Great Wall. Qin Shi Hwang did not start the Great Wall, but he connected the whole thing. The wall was originally built for protection against Mongolia and for trade. There are 56 different nationalities within China today, Han being the main one, but there is no more pure blood of the Manchu or the Mongol." We traveled by bus to visit a section of the old wall at Badaling, a suburb north of Beijing. On the way to Badaling we passed several other old sections of the wall, some of them under reconstruction.

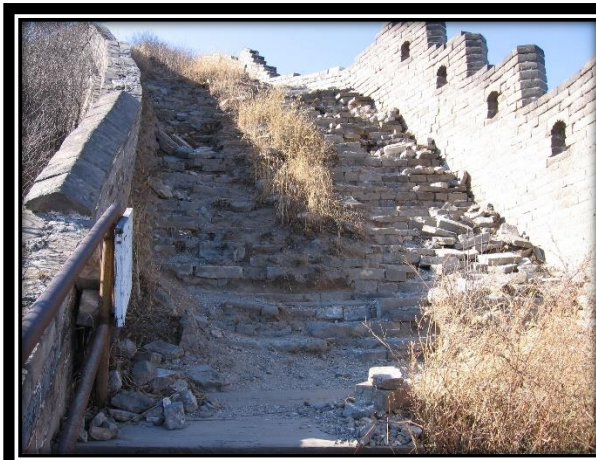


When we arrived at Badaling, I was thrilled to see that we indeed were being allowed to visit an original old wall under construction instead of visiting the usual sections already renovated for tourists. I relished the opportunity to see a genuine and authentic section of the Wall. Our guide was not feeling well that day and asked us to visit the wall on our own while she rested on the bus. "Please do NOT attempt to climb the sections that are dangerous with crumbling loose rocks," she cautioned us. Nice try, I thought. How could we NOT climb those sections now that we were warned against them?





All went swimmingly at first, thanks in large part to the iron handrails that had been installed as part of the renovation process. I made good use of those. Some men in our group thought they would be cool walking up the middle through all the weeds. That lasted about two minutes, just long enough for some pesky seeds to attach themselves to pant legs. When we came to the section of the wall in the next photo here, which was so obviously exactly what our Guide had cautioned us against, I noticed with a bit of trepidation that there was as yet no handrail. Myrtle plowed right on, and pretty soon she was on hands and knees. I just dropped without fanfare and started scabbling up like a turtle, or an exceptionally big bug, digging in my toes to keep from going backwards. Ha! How long do you think THAT lasted? Myrtle slipped and started sliding down backwards, heading straight for me. I bellyflopped and covered my head and hoped she would roll right over me. Fat chance. She hit me with a whoomp and totally knocked my breath out of me and I wanted nothing more than to whop her a really good one. But when I saw her, I could not speak, much less move. She was filthy with dust all over, bleeding from hands and elbows and knees, and her pretty new Chinese jacket that she had just bought was ripped in several places, with one sleeve hanging precariously. She just sat there stunned, eyes brimming and blinking, until she looked at me staring at her in open-mouthed horror; and then she rolled onto her back and started howling with laughter. I figured she had crashed her head and gone insane. Her howling brought a few of our more adventurous compatriots, and soon there were five of us sitting and lying on that rocky little mountain, just laughing our heads off. Then one of the men said, "Well, if we're going to conquer that mountain we'd best get going."

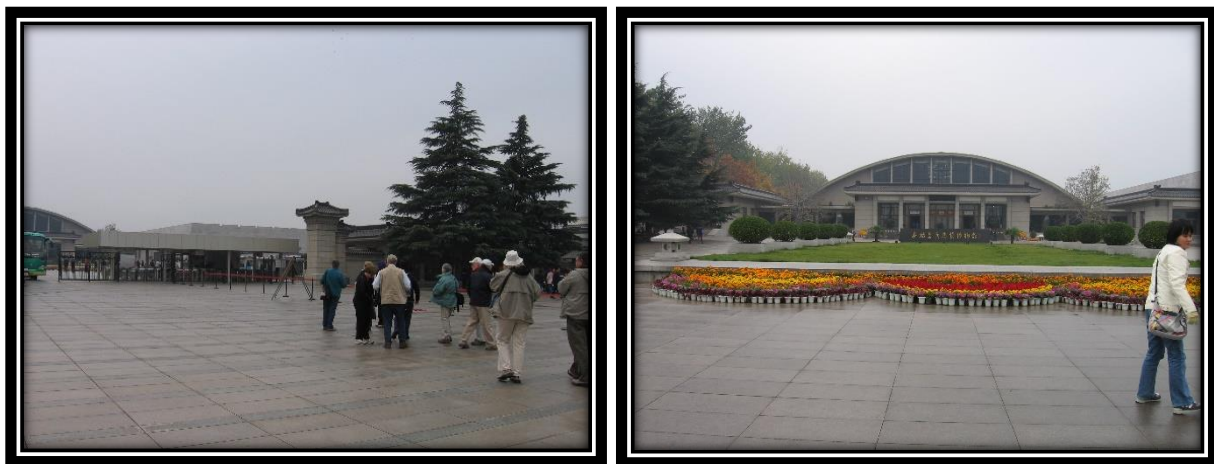


That energized us like a volt of electricity, and we all started moving and groaning a bit. The man extended his hand to Myrtle, gallantly ignoring her bloody hands, and then the five of us joined hands and started slowly up that treacherous incline, bent over like crabs and huffing and encouraging each other and in general just making fools of ourselves. But you know what, dear reader? There was magic in numbers. We made it to the top! Yes, we really did! My fingers were all numb from being crushed by shaky hands, but we made it! And our reward? Well, the view hadn't changed much, still just hills and more hills and snaking walls, but the point, of course, was that we had climbed our Mount Everest!



We scrambled back down successfully, and I helped Myrtle scrape the worst of the dust and debris off herself. One of the women offered her extra water bottle that Myrtle could use to wash off some of the blood. And I was amazed at our group! They came together like real troopers to help Myrtle, even providing clever distractions so that Myrtle could get back on the bus without alerting our Guide to her situation. Well, not quite all of us, of course. ObOff stood off a bit and smirked, and I just knew she was dying to say, "I told you so. If you had listened to our Guide as I did, you would not be in this predicament." Whatever. It was a great day.

And I was sore all over the next day. Myrtle gamely kept her groaning to a minimum and did not complain about all her pains even once, bless her heart. Fortunately, we would have an easy day, visiting the Terra Cotta Warriors. The weather was overcast and drizzly, and we were all grateful that our guide had a friend who was able to get us special tickets so we could bypass some of the crowds and get closer positions to the view the warriors.



On the bus our Guide picked up her trusty red microphone and gamely began her lecture, speaking over and around her ever-present cough drop. ObOff inquired solicitously about our Guide's health, and I do believe she would have offered to give the lecture about the terra cotta warriors if given half a chance. In a snide aside Myrtle hissed, "She is, after all, a Cantonese Scholar. Gag." But our Guide persevered. "The Terra Cotta Warriors are often referred to as the 8th Wonder of the World. In 1987 this entire site was declared a world cultural treasure. The soldiers were discovered in 1974 when a local farmer was digging a well. Archaeologists found the first soldiers at the left corner of Building One, which we shall enter first today. Excavation goes slowly and carefully as information becomes available. For example, it was learned that the colors on the soldiers faded in three minutes of exposure to air. Archaeologists are working with specialists from Germany to know how to preserve the colors, then will excavate more. There are 11 corridors in Building One. Three rows in front serve as the vanguard. The soldiers are aligned in the real battle formation of the Qin period. The chariots of wood were damaged by fire, so no intact chariots were found. Invading armies damaged the soldiers. The remaining warriors are infantry. Building One is the biggest building open to the public, but not the largest. They are finding new things all the time. Stone armor has been found with 600 pieces attached by copper wire, weighing 18 kg." There were a few gasps when our Guide said the armor weighed 18 kilograms. "That is about 40 pounds!" exclaimed one of the men. That must have been very difficult. Chinese people are in general quite small people." Our Guide concurred and said the soldiers trained well, and they were beaten if they failed at their task. Then we were at Building One and piled out to walk quickly through the drizzle.

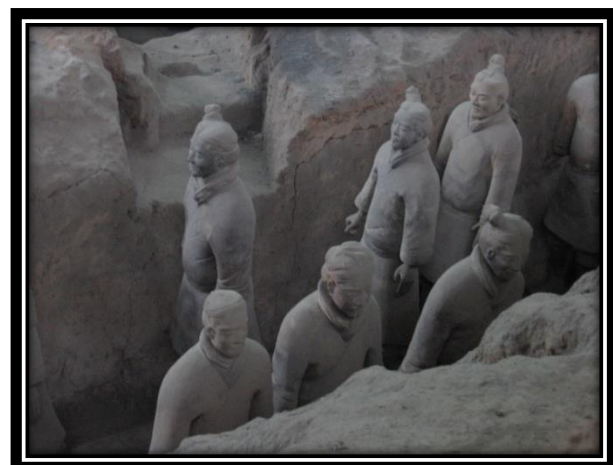


I liked the informative plaques in the buildings. This plaque in Building 1 says, "Pit 1 is the largest of the three pits. It measures 230 meters long from east to west, 62 meters wide from north to south covering an area of 14,260 square meters. Up to now, about 2000 pottery warriors and horses and 20 wooden chariots have been unearthed within an area of 4000 square meters it's assumed that more than 6000 terra-cotta warriors and horses and 50 chariots were buried in Pit 1." Then we saw the soldiers. Oh, my! We were breathless trying to absorb the full scene.



It was quite dark in the cavernous building, almost like twilight, despite the banks of windows high up. We were allowed to walk the entire perimeter of the building. Everyone in our group and all the other visitors we passed talked in hushed and reverent tones, even the children. It is said that every soldier was modeled after a real soldier in the army and therefore no two terra cotta soldiers are alike. I tried to find two alike but failed. As the scope of this gigantic project came into focus in my mind, I found myself mourning the soldiers, as though this were a great mausoleum for them. But it was not for them.

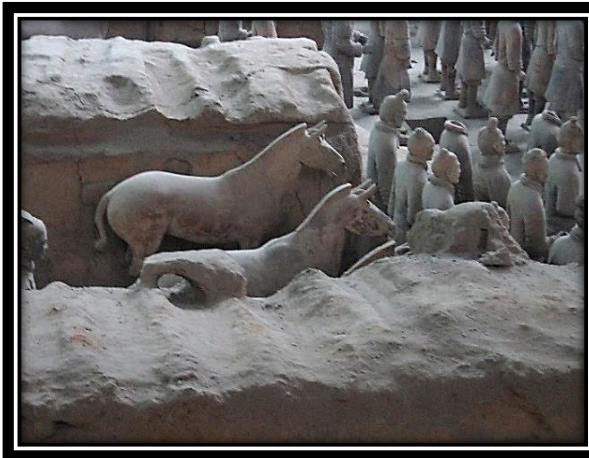
It was for the brutal Emperor Shi Huang who ruled China for 37 years. He used 720,000 people to construct his tomb, the largest tomb in the world. Wooden beams separated the columns of soldiers. When this cruel emperor died in 210 BC, there were peasant uprisings. Angry peasants burned the hated mausoleum and destroyed the soldiers. The massive wooden beams collapsed and the soldiers were buried and forgotten, not to be unearthed for 2000 years.





As we gathered in a quiet corner where excavations had not yet begun, our guide lectured briefly. "You see here what the first discoverers found: strange formations in the earth, with no clue what treasures lay beneath them. In 1980 archaeologists found bronze chariots in Building Two, ½ life size. They were broken into many pieces and are now restored. Some researchers think the chariots were built for the spirit of the emperor. Building 3 is the smallest but the most important building, opened in 1998. They think they will find in Building Three a combination of cavalry, infantry and charioteers,

bringing the total Terra Cotta Warriors to over 8000. The bricks here are over 2000 years old. Emperor Shi Hwang died suddenly on an inspection tour, and his ministers kept it secret for a while to try to finish the mausoleum project. But it was never finished. You will see bricks lying around. There may be more horses and chariots in Building Three. Some of the soldiers there are headless. No one knows why, but Chinese people are superstitious."



In Building Three we saw the importance of managed light for the preservation of the artifacts. There was an eerie, hushed atmosphere.



As I stood admiring the beauty of these four horses pulling the ornate and strange-shaped chariot, Myrtle suddenly came up beside me and sucked in her breath with a delighted “Oh.” I saw her eyeing the inside of the chariot and could sense her itching to hop into the chariot seat and yell, “Giddyap.” So of course I grabbed her hand with enthusiasm and started blathering quietly about what a glorious opportunity we had to view such history and treasures. Then I outright lied, all in the name of peace, of course, by saying, “I overheard a group of people saying that last year a visitor broke the rule and climbed into the chariot, and on his way home he was struck by a truck

carrying horses and was killed.” Myrtle looked at me with some doubt, but I had achieved my mission, to keep her out of mischief. So all was well.

Our group was ushered to the gift shop on the way out so that we could buy authentic Terra Cotta Warriors souvenirs. These replicas of what we had seen in the buildings would not come cheap: \$2000 for clay and \$6000-10,000 for bronze. Yikes! Then I spotted the Jade Temple Dogs and started for them; but Myrtle waylaid me, "Don't bother, dear, you will need to mortgage your house. They only cost \$35,000." OK, then. I settled for a nice small box of clay warriors, one that would fit in my suitcase.



We got back to the hotel in the evening and wanted to go swimming in the hotel pool to help loosen our abused muscles. The attendant told us firmly that we needed swim caps. We were disappointed but returned to our room. However, Myrtle was suspiciously quiet all the way back. Sure enough, when we got to the room, she tore into her suitcase, pulled out a bra, went into the bathroom, and came back out with a bra on her head, urging me to hurry up and do the same so we could go swimming. I wanted desperately to hoot and tell her she looked like Princess Leia of Star

Wars, or better yet, a Hopi girl with a squash blossom hairdo; but I diplomatically refrained. Nevertheless, I determined that I would NOT be seen wearing a bra on my head! I found a lovely blue scarf that I turned into a swim turban with some clever pulling and tucking. For a moment I saw Myrtle thinking about changing her mind and using a scarf, but that moment passed. We hurried back to the swimming pool. As usual, Myrtle entered with her head high, like she owned the place; and I think the attendant was so busy asking herself if that thing on Myrtle's head could possibly be what she thought it was, that by the time she got her wits about her, Myrtle and I were already dropping our robes and diving into the water. We had our lovely little swim, which did wonders for all those aching muscles we had. Ahhhh.

To be continued . . .