

I've never liked swimming all that much. Indoor pools taste too much of chlorine and the water is cold. In terms of temperature, the ocean is no better. And worst of all, without my contact lenses in, I can hardly see a thing. Yet, somehow, during my time in Hong Kong, I've found myself itching to go swimming every time I see the ocean. Maybe it has something to do with the intense heat and humidity on cloudless days. Or maybe it has to do with the bright emerald color of the water, or the fact that it's so salty that keeping oneself afloat and swimming long distances are almost effortless endeavors. But it just might also have to do with something I've been learning every time I go on board the Huan...

I wasn't entirely sure what to expect from this internship. I knew that I would spend some time on a large Chinese junk and that I would get to work with disabled children, which was the real lure for me. Having worked for an AIDS doctor and a nursing home before, I was interested in learning about how disadvantaged populations are treated, and interning at Adventure-Ship seemed like the perfect chance to look at and work with a group I had never had experience with before. Spending time exploring Hong Kong would be another bonus, since I had never been there. Indeed, the first month of the internship was very informative, with numerous visits to schools for mentally handicapped children of different grades, ranging from mild to severe. We observed children having lessons in the classroom, outside riding bicycles, and even learning to swim in a local pool. These visits showed me how the children were different in both mental and physical abilities, with some mild-grade children putting together Powerpoint presentations in comparison to the severe-grade ones, of whom some were wheelchair-bound, and some were unable to communicate at all.

The other significant portion of my first month, however, was taken up by both observational and participatory trips on the Huan, and which showed me, in contrast, how much the mentally handicapped are the same, not just to each other, but also to the rest of us. The participants shared my feelings of awe at the beauty of the network of islands strewn amidst the green waters of Hong Kong, while enjoying the ocean breeze on a blazingly hot day. Together with their "normal" Buddies, they helped the crew with on-board tasks, like raising the anchor, moving the speedboat from the deck to the water, and installing the vertical ladder in its place. The most defining moment for the great majority of the participants, however, came with the trapeze. Most of them did not know how to swim and were frightened at the thought of jumping into the water below, yet they steeled their courage and took the salty plunge. And when they broke the surface, I saw that the fear and trepidation on their faces had been replaced by pride, self-confidence, and satisfaction that they had beaten the challenge. Some even went back to jump a second or third time. So if these kids dare to jump into the water without a second thought, what have I got to complain about?

I've also come to realize that Hong Kong is the most accessible place for people with disabilities that I've ever seen. Every overpass and public transportation station has a wheelchair ramp or a lift. Every crosswalk and nearly every escalator has sound signals for the blind. In a region where the great majority of the population takes public transportation and prefers walking to driving, having these aids to accessibility

prominently placed serves as a constant reminder that people with disabilities are equally active members of society.

There are, however, many other things I've come to appreciate about Hong Kong. I love how similar the place is to Taiwan, from the environment and weather to the beautiful selection of Asian fruits and the cheap, but tasty food. (The very best food I've eaten, of course, was homemade by Kan Ge and Chung Ge on the Huan!) The city also has a certain charm to it, with the majestic green mountains in the background mitigating the cold effect of towering skyscrapers and apartment buildings. And as someone for whom the majority of her experience with public transportation has been with the MTA in New York City, I can only marvel at the wonders of not only having trains come every three minutes, but knowing exactly when they will come.

Overall, this summer has been one of the most unforgettable ones I've ever had, and my memories of being on board the Huan will always stay with me. For that, I can only give the Yale-China Association and the Jockey Club my deepest and immense gratitude.