

# EDUCATION

## Georgetown man has adventure of lifetime teaching English in China

**ROBERT MCKINNON**  
Special to The IFP

I didn't believe that it actually existed, until we dropped out of the fog, and onto the tarmac of Shanghai's Pu Dong Airport.

Still groggy from the 19-hour flight, I stumbled off the plane, and wandered around until I found my bags. I wasn't too sure where to go next, so I stared out the window for a few minutes. I saw cars that I had never seen before, street signs that defied pronunciation, and a city that looked totally alien...only I was the alien. Confused, and disoriented, I turned away from the window.

"What am I doing in China?" I asked myself, even though I knew the answer.

I was there to teach English as a second language at a school six hours southwest of Shanghai.

Having been a student at Georgetown District High School just a few years before, I had never pictured myself being in this position. Shaking myself back to reality, I ventured through the crowd until I found some people from the school

who had been sent to pick me up— two teachers, and an off-duty police officer, who was also our chauffeur for the night.

After our introductions, we piled into their tiny car, and headed out of the Shanghai lights toward the small town of Changzhou. Six hours later, we pulled into the gates of the school, and after they showed me my apartment, I decided to wander around the campus. As I walked into a courtyard surrounded by three large buildings, I heard students shouting. Curious, I looked up to see approximately 600 students hanging out of the windows, all excited about something that I was quite oblivious to.

Now, with their shouts almost deafening, I stood still with a confused look on my face. It took me a minute to realize that they were all staring at me— their new foreign teacher. Even though I felt like a rock star, I didn't want to disrupt their classes, so I left.

I was later introduced to the headmaster, who introduced me to my first class. As he led me down a hallway, he explained to me that the students already had a basic knowledge of English...my job was just to expand that knowledge.

At over six feet, I had to duck through the low



Georgetown native Robert McKinnon rejoices in his experience on the Great Wall of China during a teaching trip to the country.

doorway to get into the classroom which was filled with 55 students who were just as awestruck as I was. Fighting back nervousness, I joined the headmaster at the front of the class. After he introduced me, he left me on my own to start the day's lesson.

As the weeks passed, my nervousness disappeared, and the days became easier. The students were eager to learn, and held onto every one of my words.

Although it would be impossible to describe the entire experience, I would recommend it to anyone who is restless, or looking for a life-changing journey.



McKinnon took time out from his teaching to travel to various tourist spots such as Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City.

### Spread the word!

Remember to tell family and friends about the Georgetown Homecoming 2007, July 27-29. Former Georgetown residents from all over the world are coming back to celebrate together. Information is available at [www.georgetown2007.ca](http://www.georgetown2007.ca).



### Handwriting Skills: Neatness Counts!

Have you ever gotten a test back and had lost marks because of messiness, or because the teacher couldn't read some of what was written? Neat handwriting is generally considered to be a reflection of greater organizational skills. Yet, most teachers think along the same lines — if it isn't well organized on the page, then it probably isn't well thought out. So, more often than not, sloppy handwriting can equal poor grades.

Good handwriting isn't just important for test taking, there are many instances when we need to practice good penmanship and not just in school! Here are some of them:

- \* For taking notes in class
- \* Editing your work,
- \* Writing in your agenda
- \* On job applications — Some employers won't even consider meeting people whose application borders on the illegible
- \* On thank you cards
- \* To take messages

It isn't just important to the upper grades at school either. Learning to print is a great tool for the development of fine motor skills for younger children and it helps develop attention to detail skills. Both of which play a big role later on in school, and in life.

The simple act of improving your child's writing skills is a great way to demonstrate to a teacher the capacity for improvement. Your child's teacher will think, if the handwriting can improve, so can everything else. This is because good, legible handwriting begins with a little organization — this in turn, transfers to other areas of school, and life. For more information on how we can help your child improve their writing and organizational skills, call us today!

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Watch your head! At over six feet tall, McKinnon had to duck a lot when walking through doorways.

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