Adrienne D’Olimpio ’88
Barlow Travel Grant Write-Up

I had the trip of a lifetime this summer. As an English teacher to all Chinese students in a Vermont independent school, my teaching day has taken on a unique perspective. Aside from hearing a steady stream of fast-paced Chinese all day long, I now have students who arrive from huge urban cities of 10 million people to our small, rural town of 2,500 people. They are in a complete state of culture shock on the first day here. I could imagine slightly what it was like for them to be suddenly transported here, but not really. I had no idea what it was like where they came from. What better way to spend 17 days then to flip the tables on myself? So, thanks to the Barlow Travel Grant, off I set for China!

I had three goals for my trip: visit and sight-see with as many of my students as possible; observe as many English language classrooms as possible and meet as many parents as possible. In order to do this, I had to travel from city to city, since my students are from all over China. My itinerary included Shenzhen, Hangzhou, Shaoxing, Shanghai, Qingdao and Beijing. One of my students volunteered to accompany me as a guide, translator and travel companion, and I realized very quickly that there was no way I could have done this trip without her.

I also kept a blog, which I haven’t done before, but I found it was a good way to put my reflections on the page, with pictures of course, and to keep track of where I was and what I had done. www.mrsdgoestochina.wordpress.com At times hilarious, at times depressing, at times illuminating, it was a good way to keep all my thoughts in order and educate and entertain family and friends back home.

China is incredible, huge, scary, beautiful. The hospitality and generosity of the families and students I visited with was heartwarming. The experience of observing the classrooms and understanding what my students have done, and what they need to do to get into universities here, will definitely impact my teaching approaches in the year to come. Thank you, David Barlow, for this experience. It was truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.