

Karen Wrigley



"I have a new perspective of my life, the United States *Karen L. Wrigley* and the world."

Senior, Business

LIKE MANY OF US, Karen Wrigley has asked herself, "What am I going to do with the rest of my life?" Following her high school graduation, she answered that question by utilizing her typing and shorthand skills for 13 years as a legal secretary and then as a paralegal. Subsequently, after one year of law school, which she hated, the question resurfaced, and Karen realized that it was time to prepare for a second career.

Tired of night school, she decided to check out CSUF's Reentry Program. Reentry students are men and women over 25 who are returning to the classroom after having been away from the formal learning process. Karen says she not only received "support" and "comfort" from the Reentry

staff but benefited from a part-time job at the Reentry office — her "second home."

"It's scary to give up the security of a monthly income," Karen says. "I didn't know where I was going to get enough money to support myself. But I just decided that I wanted to get my degree and somehow it would work out, so I covered my eyes and went for it."

Returning to the life of a university student has worked out for Karen Wrigley, so well that this is Karen's story about her China Semester:

"China gave me a carefree feeling," she says. "In the morning, many people exercise. They ride bikes all over the place. We had a great time riding bikes around West Lake in the city of Hangzhou. It's one of the most famous lakes in China."

Karen's group from CSU, Fresno arrived in China in late August. It was hot the first few weeks then it turned cold, but once in a while the sun would come out. Looking back, she says it was the most beautiful time of the year.

Living arrangements at Hangzhou University turned out to be a plus, with the group residing in suites in the foreign faculty building instead of student dorms. The students shared the three-room suites, and Karen met a new friend — "a life-long friend" Melissa Porter, a junior, and Karen participated in many Chinese customs together, in addition to attending classes and sightseeing.

"One of the things I enjoy about the Chinese culture is that the people entertain each other," Karen says. "You don't have to be a professional performer. Everyone is expected to show honor and to participate. They invited us to perform, so we sang some American songs for fun."

A business major, Karen studied in China for 12 weeks. She found Chinese professors to be less flexible — "more by the book" — than their American counterparts and noted that they were very conscientious about living up to administrative expectations.

"Seeing this was one of the things that made me realize how much I take for granted the style of freedom we have in America," Karen says. "Because so many people live in China, they are more limited as to when to go to school, where they can work and where they can live. Those limitations would be hard, especially for me, because I've been so mobile in my life."

For Karen, it was "neat" to touch another culture so closely and share different experiences. She could attend a class in Chinese architecture and then walk across the street and see the real thing. She learned Tai-Chi, a form of martial arts known as "the gentle type." She studied Chinese history and walked the Great Wall of China. She traveled to Shanghai and Beijing and visited the Forbidden City where the "Last Emperor" was filmed.

"People ask me, 'How was China? Tell me about it.' I was talking with Melissa and asked her, 'What do you say?' She said, 'Very little.' It is so hard to put my feelings into words. Since coming home, I feel so different. I have a new perspective of my life, the United States and the world."