

ing by the late afternoon—early evening hour on the invitation, would probably be offering us finger food, and Horst was not a finger-food man. He agreed, and I called up the others. We met at my apartment on the West Side of Manhattan and went up to Columbia, and we entered that giant party all of us together, still friends decades later, still proud of each other and our membership in that small, unofficial club. And there was Stan Karnow, who had worked for the *Washington Post* back then, who looked at us and said simply, "There they are, the boys of Saigon." Which we were, and still are, and, I guess, always will be.

That night, we left together when the party was over, not just the five of us, but a larger group now, with wives and children, and we went downtown to Indochine and had a very good dinner, first rate, really, but not as good, never as good, never could be as good, as dinner at the Diamond.

PETER HESSLER

Hutong Karma

FROM *The New Yorker*

FOR THE PAST FIVE YEARS, I've lived about a mile north of the Forbidden City, in an apartment building off a tiny alleyway in downtown Beijing. My alley, which has no official name, begins in the west, passes through three ninety-degree turns, and exits to the south. On a map, the shape is distinctive: it looks a little like a question mark, or perhaps half of a Buddhist swastika. The alley is also distinctive because it belongs to one of the few surviving sections of old Beijing. The capital, like most Chinese cities nowadays, has been changing fast — the biggest local map publisher updates its diagrams every three months, to keep pace with development. But the layout of my neighborhood has remained more or less the same for centuries. The first detailed map of Beijing was completed in 1750, under the reign of the great Qing emperor Qianlong, and on that document my alley follows the same route it does today. Xu Pingfang, a Beijing archaeologist, has told me that my street may very well date to the fourteenth century, when many sections of the city were originally laid out, under the Yuan dynasty. The Yuan also left the word *hutong*; a Mongolian term that has come to mean "alley" in Chinese. Locals call my alley Little Ju'er, because it connects with the larger street known as Ju'er Hutong.

I live in a modern three-story building, but it's surrounded by the single-story homes of brick, wood, and tile that are characteristic of *hutong*. These structures stand behind walls of gray brick, and often a visitor to old Beijing is impressed by the sense of division: wall after wall, gray brick upon gray brick. But a *hutong* neighborhood is most distinguished by connections and movement. Dozens of

households might share a single entrance, and although the old residences have running water, few people have private bathrooms, so public toilets play a major role in local life. In a *hutong*, much is communal, including the alley itself. Even in winter, residents bundle up and sit in the road, chatting with their neighbors. Street vendors pass through regularly, because the *hutong* are too small for supermarkets.

There are few cars. Some alleys, like the one I live on, are too narrow for automobile traffic, and the sounds of daily life are completely different from what one would expect in the heart of a city of fifteen million people. Usually I'm awake by dawn, and from my desk I hear residents chatting as they make their way to the public toilet next to my building, chamber pots in hand. By midmorning, the vendors are out. They pedal through the alley on three-wheeled carts, each announcing his product with a trademark cry. The beer woman is the loudest, singing out again and again, "*Maaaaiiii piiiijjuuuuuuu!*" At eight in the morning, it can be distracting — "*Buuuuuyyy beeeeeeeeee!*" — but over the years I've learned to appreciate the music in the calls. The rice man's refrain is higher-pitched; the vinegar dealer occupies the lower registers. The knife sharpener provides percussion — a steady click-clack of metal plates. The sounds are soothing, a reminder that even if I never left my doorway again life would be sustainable, albeit imbalanced. I would have cooking oil, soy sauce, and certain vegetables and fruit in season. In winter, I could buy strings of garlic. A vendor of toilet paper would pedal through every day. There would be no shortage of coal. Occasionally, I could eat candied crab apple.

I could even make some money from the freelance recyclers. On an average day, a recycler passes through every half-hour, riding a flat-bed tricycle. They purchase cardboard, paper, Styrofoam, and broken appliances. They buy old books by the kilogram and dead televisions by the square inch. Appliances can be repaired or stripped for parts, and the paper and plastic are sold to recycling centers for the barest of profits: the margins of trash. Not long ago, I piled some useless possessions in the entryway of my apartment and invited each passing recycler inside to see what everything was worth. A stack of old magazines sold for sixty-two cents; a burned-out computer cord went for a nickel. Two broken lamps were seven

cents, total. A worn-out pair of shoes: twelve cents. Two broken Palm Pilots: thirty-seven cents. I gave one man a marked-up manuscript of the book I'd been writing, and he pulled out a scale, weighed the pages, and paid me fifteen cents.

One day in late April, I was sitting at my desk when I heard somebody call out, "*Looonnnng haaaaiiii! Looonnnng haaaaiiii!*" That was an unfamiliar refrain, so I went out into the alley, where a man had parked his cart. He had come from Henan Province, where he worked for a factory that produces wigs and hair extensions. When I asked about business, he reached inside a burlap sack and pulled out a long black ponytail. He said he'd just bought it from another *hutong* resident for ten dollars. He had come to Beijing because it was getting warm — haircut season — and he hoped to acquire a hundred pounds of good hair before returning to Henan. Most of it, he said, would eventually be exported to the United States or Japan.

While we were talking, a woman hurried out of a neighboring house, carrying something in a purple silk handkerchief. Carefully, she unwrapped it: two thick strands.

"They're from my daughter," she said, explaining that she'd saved them from the last haircut.

Each ponytail was about eight inches long. The man picked up one and studied it closely, like a fisherman who knows the rules. He said, "These are too short."

"What do you mean?"

"They're no use to me," he said. "They need to be longer than that."

The woman tried to bargain, but she didn't have much leverage; finally she returned home, hair in hand. The man's call echoed as he left the *hutong*: "*Looonnnng haaaaiiii! Looonnnng haaaaiiii!*"

Not long after I moved into Little Ju'er, Beijing stepped up its campaign to host the 2008 Games, and traces of Olympic glory began to touch the *hutong*. In an effort to boost the athleticism and health of average Beijing residents, the government constructed hundreds of outdoor exercise stations. The painted steel equipment is well-intentioned but odd, as if the designer had caught a fleeting glimpse of a gym and then worked from memory. At the exercise stations, people can spin giant wheels with their hands,

push big levers that offer no resistance, and swing on pendulums like children at a park. In the greater Beijing region, the stations are everywhere, even in tiny farming villages by the Great Wall. Out there, the equipment gives the peasants a new lifestyle option: after working a twelve-hour day on the walnut harvest, they can get in shape by spinning a big yellow wheel over and over.

But nobody appreciates the exercise stations more than *hutong* residents. The machines are scattered throughout old parts of the city, tucked into narrow alleyways. At dawn and dusk, they are especially busy — older people meet in groups to chat and take a few rounds on the pendulum. On warm evenings, men sit idly on the machines, smoking cigarettes. The workout stations are perfect for the ultimate *hutong* sport: hanging around in the street with the neighbors.

At the end of 2000, as part of a citywide pre-Olympic campaign to improve sanitation facilities, the government rebuilt the public toilet at the head of Ju'er Hutong. The change was so dramatic that it was as if a shaft of light had descended directly from Mount Olympus to the alleyway, leaving a magnificent structure in its wake. The building had running water, infrared-automated flush toilets, and signs in Chinese, English, and Braille. Gray rooftop tiles recalled traditional *hutong* architecture. Rules were printed onto stainless steel. "Number 3: Each user is entitled to one free piece of common toilet paper (length 80 centimeters, width 10 centimeters)." A small room housed a married couple who served as full-time attendants. Realizing that no self-respecting Beijing resident would work in a public toilet, the government had imported dozens of couples from the interior, mostly from the poor province of Anhui. The husband cleaned the men's room; the wife took care of the women's.

The couple in Ju'er Hutong brought their young son, who took his first steps in front of the public toilet. Such scenes occurred across the capital, and perhaps someday the kids will become the Beijing version of Midnight's Children: a generation of toddlers reared in public toilets who, ten years after the Olympics, will come of age and bring hygienic glory to the Motherland. Meanwhile, Ju'er residents took full advantage of the well-kept public space that fronted the new toilet. Old Yang, the local bicycle repairman, stored his tools and extra bikes there, and in the fall cabbage vendors slept on the strip of grass that bordered the bathroom.

Wang Zhaoxin, who ran the cigarette shop next door, arranged some ripped-up couches around the toilet entrance. Someone else contributed a chessboard. Folding chairs appeared, along with a wooden cabinet stocked with beer glasses.

After a while, there was so much furniture, and so many people there every night, that Wang Zhaoxin declared the formation of the "W. C. Julebu": the W. C. Club. Membership was open to all, although there were disputes about who should be chairman or a member of the Politburo. As a foreigner, I joined at the level of a Young Pioneer. On weekend nights, the club hosted barbecues in front of the toilet. Wang Zhaoxin supplied cigarettes, beer, and grain alcohol, and Mr. Cao, a driver for the Xinhua news service, discussed what was happening in the papers. The coal-fired grill was attended to by a handicapped man named Chu. Because of his disability, Chu was licensed to drive a small motorized cart, which made it easy for him to transport skewers of mutton through the *hutong*. In the summer of 2002, when the Chinese men's soccer team made history by playing in its first World Cup, the W. C. Club acquired a television, plugged it into the bathroom, and mercifully mocked the national team as it failed to score a single goal throughout the tournament.

Wang Zhaoxin modestly refused the title of chairman, although he was the obvious choice: his entire life had been intertwined with the transformation of modern Beijing. His parents had moved to Ju'er Hutong in 1951, two years after the Communist revolution. Back then, Beijing's early-fifteenth-century layout was still intact, and it was unique among major world capitals: an ancient city virtually untouched by modernity or war.

Beijing had once been home to more than a thousand temples and monasteries, but nearly all of them were converted to other uses by the Communists. In Ju'er, the monks were kicked out of a lamasery called Yuan Tong Temple, and dozens of families moved in, including Wang Zhaoxin's parents. Meanwhile, other members of the proletariat were encouraged to occupy the homes of the wealthy. Previously, such private *hutong* residences had been arranged around spacious open-air courtyards, but during the 1950s and '60s most of these became crowded with shanties and makeshift structures. The former compound of a single clan might become home to two dozen families, and the city's population

swelled with new arrivals. Over the next twenty years, the Communists tore down most of Beijing's monumental gates, as well as its impressive city wall, which in some places was forty feet high. In 1966, when Wang Zhaoxin was a six-year-old elementary-school student, he participated in a volunteer children's work brigade that helped demolish a section of the Ming-dynasty city wall not far from Jū'er. In 1969, during the Cultural Revolution, the nearby Anding Gate was torn down to make room for a subway station. By the time Mao died, in 1976, roughly a fifth of old Beijing had been destroyed.

In 1987, Wang Zhaoxin's younger brother accepted his first job, at a Beijing restaurant. Within months of starting work, the eighteen-year-old lost his right arm in a flour-mixing machine. Not long before that, Wang Zhaoxin had gone into retail, hoping to succeed in the new market economy; now he chose a product line in deference to his brother's disability. Fruit and vegetables are too heavy, he reasoned, and a clothes merchant needs two arms to measure and fold goods. Cigarettes are light, so that's what the Wang brothers stocked.

During the 1990s and early 2000s, as the Wangs sold cigarettes in Jū'er Hutong, developers sold most of old Beijing. Few sections of the city were protected, in part because local government bureaus often profited from development. Whenever a *hutong* was doomed, its buildings were marked with a huge painted character surrounded by a circle, like the A of the anarchist's graffiti:



Chai: "Pull down, dismantle." As developers ran rampant over the city, that character became a talisman — Beijing artists riffed on the shape, and residents cracked *chai* jokes. At the W. C. Club, Wang Zhaoxin used to say, "We live in *Chai nar*." It sounded like the English word *China*, but it meant "Demolish where?"

Like many Beijing people I knew, Wang Zhaoxin was practical,

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good-humored, and unsentimental. His generosity was well known — the locals had nicknamed him Wang Laoshan, Good Old Wang. He always contributed more than his share to a W. C. Club barbecue, and he was always the last to leave. He used to say that it was only a matter of time before the government *chai'd* more buildings in our area, but he never dwelled on the future. More than four decades in *Chai nar* had taught him that nothing lasts forever.

The W. C. Club was near the head of the *hutong*, which ends at Jiadaokou South Street. That boulevard is busy with streetcars and buses; the nearest intersection is home to a massive new apartment complex, two supermarkets, and a McDonald's. Jiadaokou represents a border: by stepping onto the street, you enter the modern city.

Every day, most working residents of the *hutong* cross that divide. They pass the bicycle-repair stand of Old Yang, who keeps his pumps and his toolbox next to the Olympic toilet. In a *hutong*, there's no better network than one that combines bikes and bathrooms, and Old Yang knows everybody. Occasionally, he gives me messages from other people in the neighborhood; once he passed along the business card of a foreigner who had been trying to track me down. Another time, he told me that the local matchmaker had someone in mind for me.

"College-educated, 1.63 meters tall," he said curly. Those were the only specs he knew. For Chinese women, 1.6 is a magic number — you often see that figure in job listings and dating ads. It's about five feet three. I told Old Yang that I appreciated the tip but that I didn't want to meet anybody right now.

"Why not? You're not married."

"Well, I'm not in a rush. In my country, people get married later."

When I started to walk away, he told me that he'd already given my phone number to the matchmaker.

"Why did you do that?" I said. "You have to tell her that I'm not interested."

Old Yang is in his sixties, a tall, stern-faced man with a shaved head. When I tried to decline the invitation, his expression became even more serious than usual. He told me that it was too late: everything had already been arranged; he'd look bad if I didn't go. That week, the matchmaker called me four times. She introduced her-

self as Peng Laoshi — Teacher Peng — and she had scheduled the date for Saturday afternoon. We met beyond the *hutong's* boundary, at the entrance to the Jiaodaokou McDonald's. My date was supposed to arrive in a few minutes, but there was something that Teacher Peng wanted to clarify first.

"This is an underground meeting," she said, after we had found seats in the upstairs section of the restaurant.

"Why?"

"It's not official. We're not allowed to work with foreigners."

"Why not?"

"The government doesn't want us to," she said. "They're afraid the foreigners will trick Chinese women."

There was a pause, from which the conversation could have proceeded in any number of interesting directions. But Teacher Peng seemed accustomed to filling awkward silences and she spoke fast. "Of course, I'm not worried about you," she said, beaming. "Old Yang says you're a good person."

Teacher Peng was in her mid-forties, and the skin around her eyes was crinkled from smiling so much — a rare characteristic in China. She wasn't an actual teacher; that's simply a title people use for matchmakers. In China, professional matchmakers still play a role in rural areas and small cities, but they've become less important in places like Beijing. Nevertheless, I occasionally see a sign advertising their services, especially in old neighborhoods. Teacher Peng kept a government-registered office in Juer.

At McDonald's, I asked Teacher Peng how much she charged, and she said the fee for meeting someone was usually two hundred yuan.

"But it's more to meet a foreigner," she said. "Five hundred, one thousand, even two thousand."

I asked, as delicately as possible, how much today's client would have to pay for me if things worked out.

"One thousand." It was a little more than \$120. Even if other foreigners were worth twice as much, there was some consolation in being double the minimum.

"Does she have to pay anything just for meeting today?" I asked.

"No. It's only if you stay together."

"For marriage?"

"No. For more dates."

"How many?"

"That depends."

She wouldn't give me a number, and I kept asking questions, trying to figure out how the system worked. Finally, she leaned forward and said, "Do you hope to get married quickly, or do you just want to spend time with a woman?"

It was a hell of a first-date question for a single male in his thirties. What could I say? I didn't want the bike repairman to lose face. "I really don't know," I stammered. "But I want to make sure that she's not paying anything to meet me today."

Teacher Peng smiled again. "You don't have to worry about that," she said.

When I first moved to the neighborhood, I regarded McDonald's as an eyesore and a threat: a sign of the economic boom that had already destroyed most of old Beijing. Over time, though, *hutong* life gave me a new perspective on the franchise. For one thing, it's not necessary to eat fast food in order to benefit from everything that McDonald's has to offer. At the Jiaodaokou restaurant, it's common for people to sit at tables without ordering anything. Invariably, many are reading; in the afternoon, schoolchildren do their homework. I've seen the managers of neighboring businesses sitting quietly, balancing their account books. And always, always, always somebody is sleeping. McDonald's is the opposite of *hutong* life, in ways both good and bad: cool in summer, warm in winter, with private bathrooms.

It's also anonymous. Unlike Chinese restaurants, where waitresses hover, the staff at a fast-food joint leaves people alone. On a number of occasions, dissidents have asked me to meet them at a McDonald's or a KFC, because it's safe. When Teacher Peng told me that our meeting was "underground," I realized why she had chosen the restaurant.

Others apparently had the same idea. One couple sat near the window, leaning close and whispering. At another table, two well-dressed girls seemed to be waiting for their dates. Over Teacher Peng's left shoulder, I kept an eye on a couple who appeared to be having some sort of crisis. The woman was about twenty-five; the man seemed older, in his forties. Their faces shone with the unnatural redness that comes to many Chinese who have been drinking.

They sat in silence, glaring at each other. Nearby, the McDonald's Playland™ was deserted. Teacher Peng's pager went off.

"That's her," she said, and asked to borrow my cell phone.

"I'm at McDonald's," she said into the phone. "The Italian is already here. Hurry up."

After Teacher Peng hung up, I tried to say something, but she spoke too fast. "She teaches music at a middle school," she said. "She's a very good person — I wouldn't introduce you otherwise. Good. Listen. She's twenty-four years old. She's pretty and she's 1.64 meters tall. She's educated. She's thin, though. I hope that's not a problem — she's not as voluptuous as the women in your Italy."

There was so much to process — for one thing, my date seemed to be growing taller — and before I could speak Teacher Peng continued: "Good. Listen. You have a good job and you speak Chinese. Also, you were a teacher before, so you have something in common."

Finally, she stopped. I said, "I'm not Italian."

"What?"

"I'm American. I'm not Italian."

"Why did Old Yang tell me you're Italian?"

"I don't know," I said. "My grandmother is Italian. But I don't think Old Yang knows that."

Now Teacher Peng looked completely confused.

"America is an immigrant country," I began, and then I decided to leave it at that.

She recovered her poise. "That's fine," she said with a smile. "America is a good country. It's fine that you come from America."

The woman arrived, wearing headphones. Japanese script decorated her stylish jacket, and she wore tight jeans. Her hair had been dyed a dark brown. Teacher Peng introduced us, crinkled her eyes one last time, and tactfully took her leave. Very slowly, one by one, the woman removed her headphones. She looked quite young. The CD player sat on the table between us.

I said, "What are you listening to?"

"Wang Fei" — a popular singer and actress.

"Is it good?"

"It's OK."

I asked her if she wanted anything from the restaurant, and she

shook her head. I respected that — why spoil a date at McDonald's by eating the food? She told me that she lived with her parents in a hutong near the Bell Tower, her school was nearby. She asked me if I was from the neighborhood.

"I live in Ju'er Hutong."

"I didn't know there were foreigners there," she said. "How much is your rent?"

This being China, I told her.

"That's a lot," she said. "Why do you pay so much?"

"I don't know. I guess they can always charge foreigners more."

"You were a teacher, right?"

I told her that I used to teach English in a small city in Sichuan Province.

"That must have been boring," she said. "Where do you work now?"

I said that I was a writer who worked at home.

"That sounds even more boring," she said. "I'd go nuts if I had to work at home."

Behind her, the drunk couple began arguing loudly. Suddenly the woman stood up, brandished a newspaper, and smacked the man on the head. Then she stormed out, right past Playland™. Without a word, the man folded his arms, lay his head down on the table, and went to sleep.

A moment later, the music teacher asked, "Do you often go back to your Italy?"

The following week, the matchmaker telephoned to see if there was any chance of a second meeting, but she wasn't insistent. She impressed me as a sharp woman — sharp enough to recognize that my cluelessness might be exploited in better ways than dates at McDonald's. The next time I ran into her in the hutong, she asked if I wanted to become an investor in a karaoke parlor. After that, I avoided walking past her office.

When I asked Old Yang about the confusion, he shrugged and said that I once mentioned that my grandmother is Italian. I had no memory of the conversation, but I picked up a valuable hutong lesson: never underestimate how much the bike repairman knows.

Good Old Wang was right about *Chai nar*. For years, he had predicted demolition, and, in September of 2005, when the govern-

ment finally condemned his apartment building, he moved out without protest. He had already sold the cigarette shop, because the margins had fallen too low. And now there was no doubt who had been the true chairman, because the W. C. Club died as soon as he left the *hutong*.

By then, three-quarters of old Beijing had been torn down. The remaining quarter consisted mostly of public parks and the Forbidden City. Over the years, there had been a number of protests and lawsuits about the destruction, but such disputes tended to be localized: people complained that government corruption reduced their compensation, and they didn't like being relocated to suburbs that were too distant. But it was unusual to hear an average Beijinger express concern for what was happening to the city as a whole. Few spoke in terms of architectural preservation, perhaps because the Chinese concept of the past isn't closely linked to buildings, as it is in the West. The Chinese rarely built with stone, instead replacing perishable materials periodically over the decades.

The *hutong* essence had more to do with spirit than with structure, and this spirit often showed strongest when the neighborhood encountered some modern element: an Olympic toilet, a McDonald's franchise. Pragmatism and resourcefulness were deeply ingrained in residents like Good Old Wang, whose environment had always been fluid. The fundamental character of *hutong* life helped prepare for its destruction.

In 2005, the Beijing government finally issued a new plan to protect the scattered old neighborhoods that remained in the north and west of downtown, including Ju'er. These *hutong* wouldn't be put on the market for developers to build whatever they wished, as they would have been in the past. The stated priority was to "preserve the style of the old city," and the government established a ten-member advisory board to consult on major projects. The board's members included architects, archaeologists, and city planners, some of whom had publicly criticized the destruction. One board member told me that it was essentially too late, but that the new plan should at least preserve the basic layout of the few surviving *hutong*. Within that layout, however, gentrification was inevitable — the *hutong* had become so rare that they now had cachet in the new economy.

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The change had already begun in my neighborhood. In 2004, bars, cafés, and boutiques started moving into a quiet street that intersects Ju'er, where locals were happy to give up their homes for good prices. The businesses maintained the traditional architectural style, but they introduced a new sophistication to the old city. Nowadays, if I'm restricted to my neighborhood I have access to Wi-Fi, folk handicrafts, and every type of mixed drink imaginable. There is a nail salon in the *hutong*. Somebody opened a tattoo parlor. The street vendors and recyclers are still active, but they have been joined by troops of pedicab men who give "*hutong* tours." Many of the tourists are Chinese.

One recent weekend, Good Old Wang returned for a visit, and we walked through Ju'er. He showed me the place where he was born. "There's where we lived," he said, pointing at the modern compound of the Jiu Ju Yuan Hotel. "That's where the temple used to be. When my parents moved in, there was still one lama left."

We continued east, past an old red door that was suspended in the *hutong's* wall, three feet above the street. "There used to be a staircase there," he explained. "When I was a child, that was an embassy."

In the nineteenth century, the compound had belonged to a Manchu prince; in the 1940s, Chiang Kai-shek used it as his Beijing office; after the revolution, it was taken over by Dong Biwu, a founder of the Chinese Communist party. In the 1960s, it served as the Yugoslavian Embassy. Now that all of them were gone — Maoists, Nationalists, Revolutionaries, Yugoslavians — the compound was called, appropriately, the Friendship Guesthouse.

That was *hutong* karma — sites passed through countless incarnations, and always the night was laid low. A couple of blocks away, the family home of Wan Rong, empress to the last monarch of the Qing dynasty, had been converted into a clinic for diabetes. In Ju'er, the beautiful Western-style mansion of Rong Lu, a powerful Qing military official, had served one incarnation as the Afghanistan Embassy before becoming what it is today: the Children's Fun Publishing Co., Ltd. A huge portrait of Mickey Mouse hangs above the door.

Good Old Wang passed the Olympic toilet ("It's a lot less cluttered than when I was here," he observed), and then we came to the nondescript three-story building where he had lived since

1969. It wasn't a historic structure, which was why it had been approved for demolition. The electricity and the heat had been cut off; we walked upstairs into an abandoned hallway. "This was my room when I was first married," he said, stopping at a door. "Nineteen eighty-seven."

His brother had lost his arm that year. We continued down the hall, to the apartment where Wang had lived most recently, with his wife, his daughter, his father, and his brother. The girl's drawings still decorated the walls: a sketch of a horse, the English phrase "Merry Christmas." "This is where the TV was," he said. "That's where my father slept. My brother slept there."

The family had dispersed: the father and brother now live in a *hutong* to the north; Good Old Wang, his wife, and their daughter are using the home of a relative who is out of town. As compensation for the condemned apartment, Good Old Wang was given a small section of a decrepit building near the Drum Tower. He hoped to fix it up in the spring.

Outside, I asked him if it had been hard to leave the *hutong* after nearly half a century. He thought for a moment. "You know, lots of events happened while I lived here," he said. "And maybe there were more sad events than happy events."

On the way out, we passed an ad for the Beijing Great Millenium Trading Co., Ltd. Later that day, returning home, I saw a line of pedicabs: Chinese tourists, bundled against the cold, cameras in hand as they cruised the ancient street.

EDWARD HOAGLAND

Miles from Nowhere

FROM *The American Scholar*

In 1966, at the age of thirty-three, the essayist, novelist, and traveler Edward Hoagland spent three months in the remotest parts of northwest British Columbia, west of the Rockies and south of the Yukon. His goal was not only to drink in a landscape beautiful and harsh, but to talk with the old-timers who had sparsely populated that country, to record their stories of prospecting and trapping, and to document their makeshift existence, which had not changed much since the nineteenth century. His journal of that trip, Notes from the Century Before, published in 1969, would become one of the best known of his nearly twenty books. Having finished the book in 1968, newly married and about to become a father for the first time, Hoagland made a return visit. He found that many of the old-timers had already passed on and that the wilderness, although still rough and beautiful, was disappearing too. But many of the changes he detected were in himself. What follows are excerpts, about one-eighth of his journals from this visit, published here for the first time.

June 6, 1968

Left New York on a smoggy but hot, cloudless day, from Kennedy Airport — just the day after Robert Kennedy's assassination. Everyone stupid with sorrow, poring over the papers or glued to the in-terminable radio commentary, and silent. The parting from my wife was doubly disconnected because of the discomforts of her pregnancy (beginning fifth month), though the doctor yesterday said it was all right for me to leave. The baby is wanted, now that our hasty, belated wedding is past, and we have love. We live in a quiet bit of Manhattan, at the eye of a hundred-mile hurricane of