

My Story ~ 16. A Love Story



“Open your heart and the happiness you deserve will arrive.”

Well, it seems that my going abroad was just to follow the fashion, but actually its roots are back in the beautiful dream that I had been pursuing since I was a child and my inner drive to look beyond the place where I was at that time.

After graduation from college, I left my hometown in the Northeast of China for Shenzhen, a modern city developed from a small fishing village. I was following my boyfriend. I spent nine tortured and struggling years there and grew from a teenager to a mature woman. Since I was not so successful in love, I devoted myself to work. I worked as an English teacher at the Shenzhen Polytechnic for the first four and a half years. Later, I was employed by China Office representing Ballarat University for four and a half years as a co-ordinator of a project of Studying Abroad working at Fuzhou University.

I admit that this transition in work triggered my thoughts of going abroad. I was always restless for quite a while every time groups of students were sent abroad. I was young and there should be opportunities for me to go to see the outside world, which is a wonderful prospect. However, what I lacked was education and qualifications, which I made my priority to overcome. I only had a junior college degree at that time so I pursued college education at the South China Normal College and then an MBA class while I was working at the same time. The classes were taught in English for the MBA, this once again inspired my desire to go to English-speaking countries — to have some real feelings toward the atmosphere of foreign classes and to experience life in foreign countries. The dream of going abroad which seems like the desire of a teenager who wants to meet her Mr. Right had become a rational pursuit of a mature woman.

People often say that Fortune always favors the one who is well-prepared. Well, she knocked on my door when I was preparing and the Fortune that guided my course was an old professor from Ballarat University who had been a loving-

teacher to me. At that time, the International Department of Ballarat University was looking for a staff member in charge of the project in China and the requirement was knowing about Chinese education, Australian education, having work experience and equipped with a knowledge of education. The old professor thought I was the perfect person with relevant abilities and language advantages and he encouraged me to apply for it. So I flew to Australia for an interview in Jan. 2008. After several hours' interview, I was accepted and came to work in Australia in March that year.

So, my coming to Australia was much better than for those with no definite position because I had an offer on hand and thus I did not have to face the stresses of finding a job, a problem for other immigrants and foreign students. Of course, when I first came to this country with a totally different language and culture, I inevitably felt lonely and distressed. However, I think I am a strong woman deep in my heart and I can cope with this adjustment. So my first solution was to work hard - on the one hand, I could forget my loneliness and more importantly, I could get recognition from my boss and associates to establish a firm foothold.

Most colleagues were quite nice and friendly to me, while there were of course some difficult situations. Well, I just opened my heart and communicated with them. After they have discovered what you are like and what your attitude is, they will show their respect to you. At work meetings, you should express your thoughts and proposals clearly to win your colleagues' support. And in one-to-one talks, you should treat the other party with sincerity to win people's trust.

After the problems in work are overcome, life becomes easier and you can make more friends. And maybe you can recognize the Australian attitude of separating work and life. Well, it is at this time that my teenage dream returned to my heart. I didn't find my Prince Charming in China; shall I meet my Mr. Right here in a foreign land? Sometimes, I will just lose myself in the blue Swan Lake. The water splashes onto the bank; swans are playing in pairs, sea gulls are flying in the sky. My dream is just as pure and clear as the clouds in the blue sky.

People are all longing for love and the feeling of love is also beautiful. Even if there's frustration and hurt, I am willing to keep the beauty in my memory and look on it as an unforgettable experience, part of the process of growing up.

Let's talk about my first cross-cultural romance. He was Australian and we got to know each other via a common friend. Our first meeting went smoothly, we talked a lot, later he dated me. Thus a new couple appeared in the park, coffee house, cinema or on the beach. They were deeply attached with each other at the beginning. However, with time passing by, I often neglected him when I was busy and he became unsatisfied, and we began to fight. There were basically two points of conflicts unbearable for me: he didn't want a child and he had many close female friends. Though I received a western education and accepted the Australian attitude of separating life from work, I'm still quite traditional about marriage, children and loyalty. So we ended our relationship.

My second boyfriend was Portuguese. We met each other on the internet and we were quite frank to each other. He told me about his whole life when we first met: his divorce, his children (the youngest being 11 years old), his big family and his large company. I was moved by his honesty and fell in love with him. I had the feeling of knowing him for quite a long time. During the one year's living with him, I tried to become part of his big family and often participated in his great family get together with over one hundred relatives. I did hope to get their approval and start a family with him. But he always held an unclear attitude and seemed to be caught in the shadow of his divorce. It seemed hard for him to talk with me and he comforted me by saying that we were getting on well with each other, so I need not worry at all. Maybe it's just bad timing. I talked with him about commitment at the time he was dealing with big problems in his company; he became annoyed and refused to meet me again.

Though I'm hurt to some extent, I feel blessed in my life. Reflecting the two experiences in love, it was inevitable that we would break up. I am characteristically dissatisfied with the status quo, I am eager to leave all familiar things and move forward. While at the same time, I'm also quiet and want to get married and have children, to live a happy life. A life with insecurity, no-commitment, parties and noise all day are not the life I want.

You would think of me as being experienced in love after these relationships. Well, actually, I still have the sincerity of a girl and of course there's also the charm and attraction of a mature woman. It is probably this maturity and sincerity that attracted my husband.

I met him at a social dance club; I like ballroom dancing and look on it as a

relaxing exercise. And to have a perfect dancing partner dancing to beautiful music is definitely a happy thing in life. However, at the beginning I never dreamed that such a partner would become my future life partner.

He is of medium height, not too fat nor too thin, calm and humorous. We are just perfect for each other so there's a good feeling between us. He is quite interested in Chinese and purposely adds some Chinese conversation during dancing. One time, he asked me: "do you have a boyfriend?" I replied no then he said: "well, do you want one?" "No." I thought he just wanted to practice Chinese so I asked him: "do you have a girlfriend?" "No." I went on to ask: "do you have a wife?" "No." So gradually we got familiar with each other during dancing. We also went out together as friends to see a movie or for coffee.

One day he was very serious and asked me: "Will you consider me if you want a boyfriend?" I replied: "Well, I know nothing about you, so how should I consider you?" he said: "What do you want to know? Just go ahead." So I asked him about his age, job, marriage and family. He told me everything that he is an electronic engineer; he likes music and dancing and can play guitar, piano and trumpet; he was married but got divorced 13 years ago and has three sons; then he said: "If you want to go now, you can go. Normally, people are all scared away after hearing what I have confessed."

I began to look at him with new eyes after his joking conversation. He didn't cover anything but opened his heart. I appreciated his frankness. So I didn't run away and on the contrary, I continued the conversation. He said his youngest son was over 18 years old and all his children were independent. Currently, his second son is living with him but will move out after he finds a job, so there's no economic burden for them. Then he asked me: "What do you want?" I told him: "I want a marriage and a child." I was surprising direct to him and opened my heart to him with no shyness and no reservation. I said to him: "I want to get married and have my own children. If you are afraid, you can run away now."

This kind of directness seems to lack romance, but this is life. There are no fixed rules and regulations in love that require you to fall in love. It just happens and that's that. Life is long which will allow you to continue your romance. He always comes up with some romantic ideas and surprises me on certain important days, maybe a bunch of flowers, maybe an arranged birthday party which surprises me or maybe some sightseeing on Australian National Day. Well, the most romantic

thing we have done was our trip to Bali. Though there are many attractive sights in Australia the tropical charm of Bali is perfect to promote love.

With our lingering memory of charming Bali, we went back to Australia and continued our life and work. My work is still the same with many business trips. There is once when I was away for three weeks. After I came back, he seemed a little emotional and spoke to me directly: "I think you are valuing work above me." I reflected in my heart. Yes, I love this job so I'm quite responsible and attentive. But I also miss him when I'm on a business trip. This feeling is different from the previous two relationships and I know I didn't want to lose him. So I said to him: "Come on. You are the important one of course. My job is just for money. I can give it up if it is OK with you and I can do something else which doesn't need me to be away." He replied after me confession: "No, this is what you like and I can't be so selfish." Then I said to him: "Then what shall we do?" He was emotional and held me in his arms: "I will try to adjust... marry me, OK?"

I had no preparation for this sudden proposal and was hesitant for a time. Was this romantic, there were no flowers, no ring and no ceremony? Scenes on TV are so romantic and warm. Seeing me hesitate, he was quite nervous: "It doesn't matter if you are not ready." No, it's just so sudden but I was happy and excited and could feel my heart beating fast. I said to him with tears: "Of course I will marry you." Then, he suggested in a thoughtful way that we go on vacation to Hong Kong. We did, and he bought the engagement ring and made up a romantic proposal ceremony on the top of Taiping Mount. Facing the beautiful Victoria Harbor, he promised me and gave me a loving heart of roses. In return I showed him my love and commitment with melting tenderness.

We went for a premarital guidance - I was nervous because it was my first marriage, I am not of a young age and he was a little concerned because it was his second marriage. So it was quite necessary for us to get such guidance and our marriage witness asked us to take part. Our answers showed that we care and trust each other; we know each other well except for some small divergences. I'm positive in character and he's negative. It's not saying that he's introvert or pessimistic but he tends to see things on the negative side. However, our witness believes I may affect him with my positive attitude and he can thus become more open and optimistic. His friends say he has become a totally another person and is actually quite charming now.

We had a wedding ceremony in China. Though there are many examples of cross-cultural marriages, few happen in my hometown. So we were honoured and my family and friends were nice to him. He also got to know more about my hometown and Chinese culture and actually fitted in really well. He likes Chinese painting and will always bring everyone a present when we go back. He's considerate to me. Once I was not feeling well and he cooked pork stewed potatoes like my mom does back home and it was delicious. He does have the gift of cooking. He's nice to my niece who lives with us. Sometimes he even drives to the chemist shop to buy medicine when she's ill.

He's nice to his family too. His brothers always text me that they hope to get together sometimes. But there is always some friction in married life so we have two principles: always speak out and trust each other and not hold back if anyone is unhappy or there are any divergences. Well, he does better than me. Sometimes I'm not happy and not willing to talk, he sees my face and asks me: "What's wrong?" Sometimes he just says sorry whether it's his fault or not and I will go through it too. But he complains that I easily get angry. I say: "But I get over it soon too. Do you like my slow anger that lasts for one week or do you like my quick anger and get over it in a second?" Yes, we both laugh at these words.

Many people would think that marriage is the end of love but in my mind, it depends on how you manage your marriage. If both sides can be open and honest to each other, there are no unsolvable problems. This works for all marriages, and in cross-cultural marriages, for two persons with two different cultural backgrounds, they need more managing strategies. Our skill is simple: open your heart to hold on to each other; speak your mind and listen to your partner.

As for the issue of identity, do I feel like a Chinese or Australian? Where's my home? Well, speaking from the point of geography, Australia is my home because I have established my family here. We are expecting that our children will definitely grow up here too. But I am Chinese in my heart which can't be changed. I'm different from those born here, who identify themselves more with Australia. I came here in 2008 and my big family is in China; my parents are in China. The more I stay in Australia, the more homesick I become and I want to go back to snowy northern China. After staying in China for a long time, I begin to miss Australia, the clean air and fragrance of the gum trees. I'm so lucky that my job provides me the opportunity to visit both sides. So I'm not as homesick as others.

Open your heart and the happiness you deserve will arrive.