

My Story ~ 11. Start From Simplicity



"We started from scratch, no language, no jobs and no money, but we didn't give up and continued working, step by step until we achieved today's success. It is a heavy burden that we, the first-generation of immigrants have to carry."

I was born in Shandong but my hometown is Fujian. I have two brothers and three sisters. It was very interesting that we six siblings were born in six different places, we followed our Father's working place which changed frequently; the place where our father worked would be a birth place for one of us. My hometown is Guantou Town, Lianjiang County of Fujian Province, one of the overseas Chinese hometowns in China. There are several hometowns of overseas Chinese in Fujian Province, such as, Meihua District, Mawei District and Tingjiang Town in Changle. Guantou Town is next to Tingjiang Town, which had become a hometown for overseas Chinese when I was a little boy. At that time, almost all the people who lived in these towns went overseas and lived outside China. Before I went overseas, my eldest brother went to the United States with my sister-in-law; my youngest sister went to study in Japan, and I went to the United States two years after that. Soon after I went abroad, my second sister also went to the United States with my brother-in-law.

At that time, going abroad had become a trend. People began to seek opportunities by going overseas once their children became eighteen years old. People from rural areas wanted to send their children abroad for a better life, they didn't have any other ambition or desire to remain in the countryside. At that time, people knew that America had tall spectacular houses and buildings. US dollars were much more valuable than the Chinese RMB; the monthly salary in China at that time was only a few dozen yuan, while working in a restaurant in American for one month, one could earn about two thousand US dollars,

converting that to RMB yuan, it was more than ten thousand yuan. There was a great disparity between the two currencies! As a result, many people and their children left their hometown and emigrated to other countries. Many years later, these overseas Chinese had grown old and become wealthy, their children and grand children had grown up, but they had a feeling of homesickness. They wanted to revisit or return to their hometown and brought with them donations and contributions. This is a very common thing for many older overseas Chinese to do.

My hometown Guantou was such a place during those years, all the young people went abroad to earn money. Nowadays the situation is very different. The wages in the United States are still the same, but China has undergone enormous changes. Running a business or working in other industries in China, a person can earn as much as in the United States. With China's opening up, people's attitudes have changed with each passing day. They go abroad to have a look and return home with new ideas and the ability to do a better job at home. Although most of my family members are still overseas, some living in the US, and some living in Japan, I came to Australia and became an overseas Chinese in Australia.

I was once an automotive soldier in the logistics department at a base in Shanghai. After returning to Fujian from Shanghai, I was assigned to the supply and marketing department as a driver. Accompanied by the spring breeze of the reform and opening up, the supply and marketing department also wanted to open up to the outside world. Because I was familiar with Shanghai, I took the directors of Guantou supply and marketing department to Shanghai to explore and develop our business. After the trip to Shanghai, the two directors appreciated my abilities, and thought that it was a waste of talent for me to be a driver as I was capable of some management. The director of the County supply and marketing department said to me that the county supply and marketing department was ready to set up an office in Shanghai. He valued my experience in Shanghai, so I was appointed to be the director of the Shanghai office. My status was changed overnight from an ordinary driver to that of director of the Shanghai Office. I liked the challenge, but some people did not understand why I changed jobs. The benefits of being a driver were very good with high wages and extra benefits, and the driver was never short of money. If you brought back something for others after a business trip, they would give you ten yuan as a reward. At that time, ten or twenty yuan was a lot of money. But for a long-term position being a

driver was not what I wanted.

I took the appointment and went to Shanghai. At that time, my youngest sister graduated from high school but failed to enter the university. Going abroad for further study was popular at that time, I thought it was a wise decision for my sister, so with my help, I sent both of my younger sisters to Japan. As a result, a lot of friends and relatives came to me for assistance. I began to understand and know more about the United States, Australia and other countries as I needed such information in order to help friends and family. A few good friends of mine in Shanghai went to Australia, and they persuaded me to go with them.

I had to quit my job in order to go abroad, but my leader did not want me to leave and kept my position open for me without salary. The leader said to me that I could return and continue to work if I failed overseas. I was in my early thirties then and had a good job with my own driver, many good friends and guanxi. But my characteristics are like an old Chinese saying, “a good horse will never turn round to graze on an old pasture”, so I would never go back once I left China.

In 1989, I arrived in Sydney, Australia. I was already married, and our child was over two years old. The overseas students in Australia, especially our Fujian people, looked for a job immediately they arrived in Australia; but after getting a job, they would stop studying. In retrospect, Shanghai people would study at school since they had paid the tuition fees, and they didn't rush to look for a job like Fujian people did. If you noticed that a student did not come to class, he must have found a job, and I was very happy for him. My situation was quite different. I came to Australia to investigate possibilities, I wanted to improve my status, then return home to develop my business and wealth. My mother didn't want me to go abroad at first, so I said that I would stay in Australia for six months, maximum nine months, then I would return home. I was happy enough in China and just wanted to see the outside world. Before leaving for Australia, I bought a house and told my family that I would be back as soon as I had got permanent residency. If I was successful, I would be able to travel around the world in the future. I could also visit my brother in the U.S. and visit my sisters in Japan.

However, after I set my foot in the land of Australia, I felt that I had lost my balance. While in China, I had good prospects both financially and socially; I never expected to go overseas and live such an ordinary life, I felt as if I was falling down into the hell from heaven. The huge difference in life made me

confused and lost. I used to live an extravagant life, but here I had to live with a group of my countrymen who were living a frugal life. They were peasants from the countryside, so they did not complain about the hard work or hard life. They were content with the little money they could earn. I helped a person to write a letter to his family, he could not even speak Mandarin. He would send money home every two to four weeks. He worked every night shift and ate the cheapest chicken pieces, but he was always joyful and enjoyed every day.

Back in China, I remembered looking down from the plane, I could see cities like Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong, everywhere there were skyscrapers, but now in Sydney, it looked like a big garden, which made me very happy. I spent a month to adapt to the new living environment in Sydney, and then I started to work, I realized that life was not easy. I did some interior decoration work in Sydney with some friends from Shanghai, earning fifty dollars a day. We got up so early that we would fall asleep in the car while driving to the site. Xinjiang and Northeast people worked harder and to save time, they ran on the work site instead of walking. Their hands were calloused and bled easily when driving a nail into the wall using a hammer. This was my first job, bitter and tiring, but I learned patience and persistence. Fortunately I had some work experience in the construction industry before becoming a soldier. I worked hard for over a year, but I got hepatitis due to the laborious work. With the help of my friends, I went to Melbourne to recuperate. In 1994, I went back to China to run a real estate business.

After managing the real estate business for over a year, my wife and I went to visit the United States for over a month. The Chinese restaurateurs in the United States worked hard like hell, they only knew stoves at work and pillows at home; they looked exhausted from fatigue; they didn't have the time and energy to care about their children's education. I thought that all the hard work should result in a better life, the happiness of the family should be the first priority. If family members are far apart and cannot be together, even if you have lot of money, what is the use of the money and what is the point of life?

Maybe while growing older, people develop a deeper understanding of the state and society – a deeper insight into life. I started to understand the unbalanced feeling inside me in the early years, the mental effort of competing with others was not right. When I first came to Australia, I did not have the ability to compete with others, so I had to start from zero. After returning home from the United

States, I settled down and started from the basics. In 1999, I started a clothing business in Australia.

After half a year, I opened four clothing stores, and also inspired interest in the people around me. You don't need much knowledge if you take on a clothing business, once the business has been established you know what has to be done. In contrast to the other clothing stores, my wife was in charge of the store sales, and I was responsible for marketing and wholesale. I had several clothing stores, so I was a big client in the eyes of wholesalers.

Colleagues thought my ability of doing business was good, so they followed in my step to run a similar business. In fact, I didn't know much more than them except that I was prepared to take a risk. The main supply of goods was from Dongguan, China, the clothing factories were either very big or pretty small, or the quality of clothes varied. If I purchased the clothes from those small factories, although the quality could not be guaranteed, the prices were very low, if I could see that the quality was good enough, I would buy everything. Only in this way could we form a wholesale market, we set the prices on our own, which ensured our reputation. In Australia, clothing for middle-aged people is hard to sell, but if the price is cheap enough, people would buy. We know elderly people do not follow fashion like the young people, and it doesn't matter if our English or service is not the best, the important thing is price. That was my experience of running this type of business.

During that time, I ran the clothing retail business to accumulate money, while planning to do business in China. I was always interested in the real estate industry, so I decided to go back home to buy houses using the money from selling clothes in Australia. I bought five properties in a group, paying off the loans while buying. When I noticed that house prices were increasing, I stopped buying. My business partner and I organized people to investigate real estate in Sydney and Newcastle. One of my partners suggested that I should stop the retail business but invest in the real estate business. Since that decision was made, our cooperation began to develop with a clear business plan. We started buying land and continuingly undertook projects for two years.

In late 2011, I suggested setting up the Lianjiang Association in order to unite the Lianjiang people in Australia. As for the name of the association, someone suggested that we should use a big name, but I thought the name was not so important, it was more meaningful for the things that we planned to do. So I

chose Lianjiang, our small county's name as our association's name. When you want to do important things, you should first do the most central and basic things, starting in a small way and gradually expanding to bigger things. I was the executive vice president of the Lianjiang Association, responsible for all the activities. We raised 180 thousand dollars for the Association to be used as operational funds. In the second term, I was elected president. Then I adjusted the donation program and we raised more than 110 thousand dollars.

Not long after I became the president, a fellow countryman became ill with a heart problem. I brought a dozen people to visit him in the hospital and gave him two red parcels, one from the association contained 3000 dollars and one from myself with 500 dollars. It was not a lot of money, but it was our kind gesture. On another occasion, a countryman had to go back to China due to an unsuccessful visa application. Some members and I paid him a visit before he left Australia. We gave him 1000 dollars in the name of our Association plus 500 dollars from my own pocket, it was a farewell gift. We actually wanted to make Chinese people in Australia feel a sense of belonging and let them know they were not alone.

I do things according to the principle. First of all, I focus on my own circle, my own small family is the centre for me; secondly, it is the bigger family, including my parents, my brothers and sisters; then the third, including my friends and relatives. If you have the ability, you should do more for the community and the country. Having mentioned the country, honestly speaking, I am now an Australian Chinese. Although without Chinese nationality, I am still a Chinese person in my subconscious. For instance, when watching sport, if Australia is competing against other countries, I hope the winner will be Australia, but when Australia is against China, I automatically prefer China to win, it shows my roots.

Many friends at home have tried to persuade me to go back to China, but taking my children into account, they are still young and receiving an education so I have decided to put that thought aside for a while. I hope my children can receive a good education in Australia while being able to maintain their traditional Chinese culture. My kids have not grown up as yet, and like young trees, they need tender care, I may go back home after my children have grown up. We have struggled for a life time, and it does not matter whether we are rich or poor, we have strong vitality. But it is different for the younger generations who were born after the eighties and post-nineties; I think we should be with them as they pass through the rebellious adolescent period. I won't go anywhere until my eldest

daughter has completed her university study. I'd rather earn less money, than not have my children's education as the priority. My eldest daughter is majoring in pharmaceuticals; she has set a good example to her younger sister. I say to my daughters, "You can stand on the shoulders of your parents, and do better than us".

Looking back, I gave up the position of director of the Shanghai office and chose to come to Australia. This decision, I have not regretted at all. We started from scratch, no language, no jobs and no money, but we didn't give up and continued working, step by step till today's achievement. It is a heavy burden that we, the first-generation of immigrants have to carry. My children have seen their parents work hard in order to create the present life. I believe they will appreciate their lives more when they grow up.

For the future, I am thinking realistically and ideally. I need to develop my career but health is also important. Sharing has become more and more important for me as I am growing older. I will train the successors while still expanding the business. For my generation, we have elderly people at home who need to be looked after and youngsters to be educated. It is a big job for an individual to fulfil. Our successors cannot fight alone; we need to form a team. It will be great to make our business a listed company in the future, so we can take our Chinese brand into the world. From the bottom of my heart, I still lean toward China more, so I may return to my motherland in the future. As an overseas Chinese, we have the obligation to take the good and modern things the West has to offer and take them back to China.