

My Story ~ 13. While Travelling Life's Journey, Cherish Every Step And Every Stop Along The Way



“Live your life, enjoy every moment and appreciate every beautiful view, either in China or in Australia.”

The long rainy season arrives again in Perth, bringing with it a gloomy air. In retrospect, everything that has happened after we moved to Australia appears in my mind. Having gone through so many things, the people that we have met along the way is becoming increasingly clear to me.

Everything was so strange when we first came to Perth and for a long time we didn't have any sense of belonging to this place. Though we lived here, it seemed to be a distant place and we didn't belong here. Then one afternoon when I was driving through the campus of University of Western Australia with no one on the road, it began to rain and the trees on both sides of the road were green and luxurious with Swan Lake revealing her beauty in the distance. All of a sudden, something deep in my memory was prompted and I recalled that everything seemed so familiar that it was as if I were in my hometown. I could feel a deep and sentimental mood and felt a hand grasping the softest part of my heart. I realized that I should no longer treat myself as an outsider but should try to observe and feel everything here. Life never lacks beauty, but the eyes need to open if you are to see it.

I was born in Xinjiang in the winter of 1965. Though there were already two brothers and one sister in my family, I was never spoiled like the youngest child is in many families. According to my parents, life at that time was not easy and it was extremely hard to raise such a big family. In my hometown, men were in charge of providing for the home and women did household chores. My grandfather told my mom that: “Family only exists on the basis of the country. So

your man works outside of the family for the country and you should be at home to support." My mom was quite young then and was educated with revolutionary thoughts. She would never be restrained by family duties and went to work in the hospital of our county. She was young and driven by her heart. So I was entrusted to the care of my nanny. When she came to see me, she found that I was starving and eager to eat anything given to me, which touched her so she finally took me home.

Mom told me that I was entrusted to two aunts until she resettled with my father after he was transferred to civilian work after the army service. They returned to Beijing in 1970 and cousins from my aunts sent me to Beijing to be with my parents. I was five at that time.

Adolescence should be passionate and vigorous while mine was full of anxiety and depression with a great difference from being the son of a red army soldier to that of a "white cuff". Though I was lucky enough to enter college, my major of electronic communication engineering was never of much use. The first stage of opening-up brought with it a lot of temptation. I applied for a job with a foreign-funded enterprise after graduation from college and did basic work in electronic communication. Well, it was quite fashionable and admirable at that time but I never gained approval from my family. In their eyes, I should join the army to serve the country like my brothers.

A rigid and formal life led to my eagerness to see the outside world. Both my wife and I like reading and used to travel to places of interest when we were free. As a result, we were getting more and unhappy with our current life and started to collect information and get ready for immigration. I remember clearly the experience that I rode my bicycle for 40 minutes to a famous restaurant and learned cooking from the chef there. Seen from my current perspective, it was definitely great courage and persistence that supported me for the ethereal and vague Australian dream.

In 2005, after nearly a half year's waiting, our work visa for Australia finally arrived. With an undecided future ahead, I was looking forward to a strange and unknown life. The moment we landed in Australia, I just felt that the sky was so blue, the land so green, the sea water so clear, the air so pure and the view so beautiful. I was curious about everything I experienced. Australia in my eyes is a country advocating environmental-protection. You can see beautiful parrots

wherever you go and your morning dream is always woken up by their unusual voices. Well, the kangaroos with their interesting bodies are so happy and free that they can even be seen on the highway where they compete with cars which inevitably causes serious traffic accidents. Of all the native animals in Australia, the one with which people could do nothing about is the fly. There are so many of them and they are just so passionate and bold that I was seriously shocked.

Because I got a work visa, I had to start my working life as soon as I arrived in Australia. I thought I had made a full preparation, but the sudden change from a white collar job working from 9AM to 5PM to a kitchen helper resulted in a great drop in my mental attitude. I had never experienced such life but, if seen from now, it did provide me with a different experience for my life. I went through the most boring work and associated with people living at the bottom of society, that experience gave me a lot of thoughts and feelings.

The first job in Australia was a kitchen assistant in a fast food restaurant run by a Chinese person. It was in this kitchen that I began my observation of Australia. Business was good and the restaurant was located in a residential area, the local residents were of low status, including aboriginal people, low-paid workers, drug addicts, disabled and old people. They made up the majority of the customers and I learnt a lot about the life of these unfortunate Australians.

The first week was full of brand-new information. Why do I say so? Firstly, my English was not so good, especially listening and spoken English. Though I have recited lots of words I just couldn't understand the Australians and had no confidence in talking to them. I had to say "sorry" at least twice before I could roughly grasp my workmates' words. Secondly, I had no knowledge about the fast-food industry and had to learn everything including vegetable names, the position of seasoning and other containers. Of course such things are nothing if you are familiar but for me, a newcomer to Australia, everything was full of challenge.

I also had to give a hand to cashier to handle the money for my boss. I was often in a great panic because of my unfamiliarity with bar codes, packing, and of course English. I had to keep an eye on things and listen carefully to the order and felt rather uneasy. Telephone orders were the scariest thing when I was on duty and I would pray millions of times not to receive phone calls. From a white collar worker in an office facing the ocean to a small time kitchen helper and

cashier in a foreign land, this transition was really hard to accept, thus I began to encourage myself every day that it was not shameful to work using my hands.

Because we were located in a residential area, I became familiar with my customers and my English was getting better and better. I could even joke with them when on the cash register and got to know more and more about the local community.

One day my boss warned us that the next day would be the day welfare benefits were paid and we would be extremely busy. The moment I set foot in the restaurant, people swarmed in. The dining area, normally empty at 11 o'clock was full of people. They would hurry to withdraw money at the ATM and came in to buy various meals. Money was spent quickly. Aboriginal people with handfuls of 20-dollar notes were the most obvious customers who would order some food that was not usually ordered. I was afraid when I first saw these natives because their clothes were dirty and you could see dirt on their hands. I could even see pinhole and smelled marijuana on them. Some were not sober due to drugs and were shaking when they were ordering, having no normal appearance at all. According to some customers, they could get 600 dollars from the government and some even got 1000 dollars through various subsidies. My boss didn't know what to do with them: should he be happy or sad? They were generous with their welfare payments which my boss loved, while on the other hand, they would come to steal at the end of a month and calling the police was of no use.

A lot of empty nest elderly men lived near my restaurant. They lived alone in housing for seniors and repeated their simple and lonely life day after day. After all, they were living at the bottom of society and there was no healthy food for them, only cola and potato chips. Besides, they smoked a lot, so their health was really in bad condition. These old people would come to chat with me after we became familiar. Maybe in their mind, it was much harder to go through the feeling of loneliness than to chat with a stranger. David was one of them. He had lived alone for his entire life and had never been abroad. He lived in the senior housing with an occasional rugby match and his retirement pension. He asked me the first time we chatted: Are you Chinese still hungry? Do you have subways? I was shocked by such questions they had no idea about China, did he think I was from Africa? Well, my Chinese pride told me that it was necessary to give him a good lesson and enlighten him about China. So we wandered from ancient inventions to modern railway, from the twelve zodiacs to the twenty-four solar

terms and from eight styles of cooking to snacks in the street. I used all my words and he was totally absorbed. All he wants to do now is to visit China; I was quite satisfied with this conversation.

Everyone around shouted “winter is coming” when the rainy season arrived. I had the first windy and rainy season in this restaurant. As a Chinese from northern China, this was really the first winter with “plum rains”, no snow but only light and heavy rains. I would cover myself up from top to bottom when I finished work at 12 in the evening and went to wait for the bus in the dark. I had to walk home after getting off the bus. Well, I was afraid of those Aboriginal Australians asking me for a smoke. I would keep my head down and walk without looking back because it was scarier than a storm if a black shadow with a knife in hand suddenly appeared. This feeling would accompany me until I arrived home and turned all the lights on. I probably frightened myself and as I remember now, what I was afraid of was actually the dark. I was afraid to go to the toilet at night back in China but here, in Australia, I had to go to work before daybreak and go home on the last bus. When I was sitting on the bus, I would try to guess the passengers’ profession. This kind of life was totally new to me. I remember once on the bus, I spoke with a Chinese lady who told me that she had to go to bed by 8:30PM since she had to go to work by 5:30AM, or in other words, she had to get up by 4:00. She was so calm and quiet with these words and all of a sudden I realized that no one’s life is easy, and I’m not the most miserable one.

With such a regimented life and hard work, I began to doubt my decision to come to Australia. I was confused. For some time, I started to smoke and became weak, vulnerable and irritable. I found excuses to fight with my wife and no longer cared about my children’s study. I even began to pack and get ready to go back to China. The heavy weight of body and emptiness of spirit provided me nowhere to place my fragile emotions.

It was good luck that when I was wandering and hesitating a friend introduced me to the church and suggested that I talk with a minister using Chinese. After several visits to the church, the sincere minister and passionate members of the church introduced me to a new spiritual world. I begin to realize that life is a journey and there’s no need to know the final destiny but to appreciate the scenery along the way and also the mood you carry. The journey will never end with the beautiful scenery. You have to leave the road you have travelled and never turn back, never stop. Keep a peaceful emotion and a sober mind. What you

have to do is to enjoy the feeling, enjoy the scenery and no matter if you are in China or in Australia that is the beautiful thing that I had been too busy to find. I thought that a beautiful life was always ahead of me so I had wandered with a heavy heart. There are some sentences in the Bible: “never be worried about the future, the flying birds don’t cultivate, neither do they harvest and the world has to raise them. Lilies in the field are never worried about whether they can bloom as nice as others, when actually they are more beautiful than the pearl in the Crown of Solomon once the timing is right. Then why are you worried? Humans are more precious than the flying birds and lilies, so will God abandon you?” Thanks to God, I started to forget the anxiety in my life to pursue the beauty around me. I began to enjoy every minute of my life.

Once I went for a walk with my family simply by chance. With the seaside in the setting sun, a cool wind, flying seabirds, tourists playing in the water, the view was just so beautiful. The red sun, the sea and sky formed a marvelous scene of redness. I was quite excited to see this splendid sunset with my family. What a wonderful scene with sound of waves and flying seabirds! I was so happy being part of this. Happiness is just around us with everything we have met and done and just as Roland of France said: “the world does not lack beauty, but the eyes have to find it.” In contrast to this, an ancient Chinese poem says: “You do not see the true face of Lushan Mountain because you are in it.”

This year will be the ninth anniversary of my coming to Australia. Nine years have passed in a moment. I came to Australia, not for the reason of disappointed love, or bad work, or dispute with my parents, but because of a boring life of seeing the same people, doing the same work and going to same place for work every day. I didn’t want to settle down here nine years ago and don’t want to now. The older I get, the more I feel that it isn’t necessary to fix something definite in life but just go in a natural way. Though life is not decided by us, we still can choose our attitude towards life and live happily. Don’t bother yourself and do what you can and what you want. Why not?

If you ask me about my home, I will tell you that my home is in the scenery and on the land below my feet. If you continue to ask about my identity, I will tell you that I remain Chinese but with a love for Australia.