

My Story ~ 3. Many Small Stones Can Build A Pyramid - That Is How Miracles Are Created



"If each person contributes one dollar, one million people will contribute one million that makes a millionaire."

I was born in Shanghai in 1951. My father's family moved from Jiangsu province in the 1930s. At that time my father wanted to have four sons, he had chosen four Chinese characters as his boys' names: "Ping, Sheng, Ke and Li", meaning: "common people born to be independent". I am the second son, so my name is "Sheng".

As a young man, I followed my country's call, "marry late and procreate late", I got married when I was thirty-five. Many people asked me why I came to Australia, in retrospect, the primary reason was that my wife's sister was in Australia, so my wife and I immigrated to Australia after we got married. But most importantly, it was a dream in my heart. At that time in China, we needed coupons for everything, grain coupons, meat coupons, eggs and oil, you name something, we had the coupon for it. For clothes, young children wore the left over clothes from their elder sisters and brothers. Life was not easy. So when I was a little boy, I dreamt to live a better life, to pursue something different. I always imagined what the outside world was like? Was it the same as China?

Finally, in May 1985, with the dream and desire hidden in my heart for many years, I came to Australia with my wife. But what I never thought was that when I set foot on the land of Australia, I discovered that the new environment and the new world I had dreamed about for a long time turned out to be quite similar to Shanghai.

Life was still not easy for me, the greatest difficulty was the language barrier. At that time, China and the Soviet Union were brother countries. I learned Russian at school, I didn't know English. So I had to study English first. Secondly,

financial difficulties, I had to go out and look for work. I worked in different restaurants, I worked on farms, picking grapes in vineyards under the high temperature of over forty degrees. Such hard times continued for six months. October 1985, Perth Casino was opened and needed a lot of people to work there. I was so lucky and got a job there. Nearly three decades later, I still clearly remember my employee ID number, it was 944. I was in charge of washing dishes and mopping floors in the kitchen. That was my first formal job and I continued working in the Casino for fifteen years.

Only I clearly know about the hardships I have endured in the past fifteen years. At that time, not many Chinese people were working in the Casino, communication became my greatest difficulty, both for my work and everyday life. For example, it was not easy for me to buy a car or a house. But I told myself, since I chose this pathway, I would keep moving forward, not to give in easily, to face any difficulties and to consider them life experience. There were no immediate and easy way in life, so I carried on looking on the bright side of life, otherwise you would feel unhappy and live a meaningless life.

I tried to conquer my difficulties with the language and found it was not impossible to learn English. But what really made me feel upset was that my professional skill I had learned in China did not apply to the work here. My specialty was original machine design in the electromechanical field. Before coming here, I was on the technical staff of a company, but in Australia I could only do manual labor such as washing dishes or mopping floors. The psychological gap would be appreciated by most people.

I never stopped thinking about how to make my specialty come in handy. Fortunately Heaven never seals off all the entrances and exits. One day, a great opportunity arrived.

That was in 1986, the Casino planned to promote their business image, they had employed an ice carving master from Japan. The chief chef asked me to be his assistant because I was young, and I could learn from him during my spare time. I eagerly accepted the offer. Perhaps you may question, what was the relation between ice carving and a chef assistant? Actually, they had nothing to do with each other, but, carving had lots to do with my machine designing! Although my painting skill is not the best, I would be able to combine the mechanic technique and knowledge with ice carving. For example, the circle, line and triangle used in the machinery can be transformed into a form of art. Therefore I started my

apprenticeship career, which really changed my whole life to a new direction that I never thought was possible.

One day, the chef unexpectedly called me to the office.

"What is the matter?" I asked.

The chef smiled and asked me: "I have noticed that you have been helping the Japanese ice carving master for a long time, do you really like ice carving?"

I was a little surprised. In fact, I had rarely seen the ice sculptures before helping the Japanese master. I originally came from Shanghai where there is no ice, only the northern regions of China, such as Harbin have ice sculptures. Nevertheless I became fascinated with ice carving.

So I said: "I like it, and often work with the master in my spare time and learn a lot of things from him."

The chef nodded and continued: "Do you know how much a set of ice carving tools cost?"

"I don't know."

"More than five thousand dollars, imported from Japan, do you want a set?"

"Why?" I was very surprised.

"If you want to keep on doing the ice carving, then you need a set of tools."

"So?"

"The Japanese master is leaving for Sydney! I want you to be our ice carving master!"

"Really? That's great! I accepted happily.

Since then, I had a good job. What really made me feel happy and excited was that I finally found a suitable position using my special skills! In the process of ice carving, I can combine the mechanical pattern and art design and can also use the mechanical knowledge to solve the connecting problem between the components of ice sculpture. I possessed an unique advantage that not many people had. Because of my special skills, I made myself a reputation in Perth, people started to call me the Big Master of Ice Carving.

Another valuable experience in my life is also related to ice carving. That was one day about two years later when I started working on ice carving independently. Our chef had invited many celebrities to Perth, including the Governor General of Western Australia.

Without warning, the chef asked me to prepare a special and attractive entrée. After accepting this task, I was excited but also felt some pressure. Excitement,

because I could take the opportunity to display my skills in front of the Governor; pressure, because I was worried that my title - the Big Master of Ice Carving - could be doubted and dismissed if I did not make a good entrée. Regardless of these concerns, I tried to encourage myself with confidence, believing that I was able to accomplish this task. I started with the whole creativity of the ice sculpture. Perth is famous for its Swan River, also called the "Swan City". So I decided to use Perth's unique feature, the "swan River" and made a detailed design proposal. In the design were two large lakes, the so-called "lake" was to pour water in a shape of a fountain, I carved eight ice swans spreading their wings and hovering above the lakes as if they were about to fly away. The chef loved my design proposal. But in reality, I knew I would have to face many unexpected difficulties, mainly the technical problems. With my experience and knowledge in the mechanical field, I prepared myself to solve the problems that I was to encounter in this ice carving task, not only technically but also the timing. The task turned out to be successful. That ice sculpture left a beautiful and deep impression on all the guests, I received high praises for my skills that night and many days later, plus it was reported in the media. Today, in retrospect, it was the proudest moment in my life.

In addition to the ice carving, I also did some other jobs at the Casino, such as washing dishes and sweeping floors, and helped the chef washing and chopping vegetables. The chef liked me very much, and that was the reason why he recommended me to do the ice carving.

But I still had some difficulties communicating with the chef when talking about special cooking terms. So I did a lot of self-studying about cooking. Gradually I started to help the chef prepare some cold dishes, in addition to washing and chopping. In common with all Shanghai people, I am clever and deft. Shanghai men are also known for taking good care of their wives, including helping the women in the kitchen at home. So it was very easy for me to learn how to prepare vegetables and make cold dishes at the Casino. The chefs in the kitchen all liked me very much. Later I learned some new cooking skills and concentrated on learning to make cakes and other stuff. I liked the challenge and also had my own pursuit.

After accumulating a lot of experiences, in 1994, I was chosen to join the provincial team to participate in an international cooking competition. We won the championship for the Western Australian team. I was the first Chinese chef to

participate in such grand cooking competition in Australia. Thanks for the dessert that I made, our team won the "Best National Team" title.

Looking back, I am deeply grateful to one person for my achievement. When I first came to Australia in 1985, I met a man named Yan who was twelve years older than me. Yan graduated from university majoring in science, he was a Singapore businessman. He liked to play Tai Chi, I learned Tai Chi in Shanghai, so I taught him Tai Chi. I visited him, on a Sunday, he said to me:

"Come here, sit down and have a cup of coffee with me."

We chatted for a while, he then said: "I have a suitcase for you."

"Suitcase? For me?" I was a little surprised.

He said calmly: "After graduating from university, I took this suitcase to Malaysia, I had ten dollars on me at that time, and now I have one million dollars. I have kept this suitcase, now I want to give it to you, not for financial assistance, but from another perspective to motivate you to keep going forward in life."

His words really had touched me and have always echoed in my ears, especially when I encounter difficulties, I use his words to encourage myself to get over any hardship and keep walking forward.

Time flies, I have been living in Australia for nearly three decades. All my family are living in Perth. My three daughters were all born here. My first daughter was born in 1988, in the year of the Dragon. She is now studying economics in the University of Western Australia. After her graduation, she will help me take care of my small business. My second and third daughters are twins, the elder one is studying law at Curtin University, and the younger one is also in school and she is a part-time model, she often goes to the fashion shows in Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. Now, our lives are quite easy and comfortable.

We often hear people say that it is very difficult for a Chinese person moving from a familiar environment and suddenly dropping into a brand new environment. But for me, life in Australia is not that hard. In short, everyone has a dream, you should just lower your head, walk step by step, and finally you will get there. Why? Because everyone has the same chance in this country, just like me, from a foreigner doing dishwashing and floor mopping, to a few years later, being elected as the best staff member of the year among three thousand workers in 1994. I am now the vice chairman of the Chamber of Commerce, I feel very proud, not for myself, but for all the overseas Chinese in Australia. With the continuous opening up of China, Australian people also understand more about China and the

Chinese people. I always tell myself that the work I do, the things I say and the actions I take, including how you walk on the street, how you speak in public, and driving and every other thing, I always remind myself that I am Chinese representing China. I should leave a good impression on others. After all, there are barriers between different cultures, and the habits, even the way we speak can be different among different people. As long as each of us pays a little attention to these small details, other people will think of and treat us with respect.

I am often asked: having lived here for decades, do I feel or think, that am I am Australian or still Chinese? My answer is that it cannot be determined easily. My blood is Chinese blood, which can never be changed. But my lifestyle is basically Australian.

I often say to some new comers, especially young Chinese people: you love your biological mother for she has given birth to you. But you should love your foster mother more for her kindness and bigger heart. Your biological mother has brought you into this world, but without your foster mother's nurturing and cultivating, how can you grow up and live healthily and happily?

Living here for so many years, I eventually have achieved a little fame and been recognized by the community. Maybe on some occasions, the different culture will still cause some barriers. But culture is built on the basis of mutual respect, for example, I go to a house, the master of the house asks me to take off my shoes at the door, of course I will take off my shoes, because I am invited to their house, so I should show my respect and follow the habits of the house master. I always think that when you feel uncomfortable, you should think if you have done something wrong, or think about what other people would think. Personally, I have friends with high status, the deputy governor and the minister of health are my good friends.

We play golf together and go out often, and we also have very good business relationships. I always think that you should see yourself as an Australian first, and the real Australian is not only the native Australian, but the people who come here from all over the world. Just like our Shanghai people, there are no absolute Shanghai people in Shanghai, many people living in Shanghai who comes from all over the country and even the world. Now we are living in Australia, I will see myself as an Australian; other Australians may come from England, India or Italy. So in my view, we should not resist different cultures but try to understand other

people and integrate ourselves in the Australian society.

Now I'm still working in my own bakery, supplying desserts to many restaurants in Perth. The quality of service is most important in business. In the opinion of the range of services and the service industry, we should help the customers if they have difficulties, because they will never forget your help. Of course, this is a business skill, from another point of view, Chinese people have the necessary qualities to do this well.

At present, in addition to my own business, most of my energy is put into charity work. I have always wanted to be involved in charity. My next project is related to the older people.

There are many elderly people in Perth, and they will go to a nursing home at certain ages. In this regard, I am not really happy that old people must live in nursing home when they get older. Perhaps this is related to the traditional Chinese concept in my blood. I think one family should be multigenerational, and family members should live together for generations.

So the purpose of this charity project is to make the elderly live with their children, and enjoy a happy life together. This project is not only for the Chinese, but for all the elderly people in Perth. In my opinion, charity is the well-being of the entire community without the differences of country and nationality. In fact, I am not in much contact with the Chinese community, and my help to the community is for everyone. I will do everything within my power to help others and contribute to the whole community. For example, if an artist wants to get some painting materials, or a photographer wants to hold a photography exhibition using my bakery, I will provide them with the materials or the venue for free. First, I like to do these things; second, I think as a Chinese, it is a way to promote Chinese culture.

Although I do not do too much art work now, I am always happy to contribute my share to other artists, especially young people. In addition, I have donated to public benefit activities for a long time, year after year, and my name has been recorded in institutions related to the public benefit activities. I'm really happy to do good things, and it has great significance to contribute to the society as a Chinese person. I am very proud of that. I always hold my point of view: if everyone does one small good thing, then the conditions around us will become a little better, and other people will agree with you more. How could they not agree with you? Your help, your strength and your contribution are always needed and

welcomed by the community.

If you ask me how my achievements have been derived, my answer is that it started with one dollar. If you want to support and contribute to society, one dollar's effort is not too small. If each person contributes one dollar, one million people will contribute one million that makes a millionaire. Do not underestimate little things; many little things make a miracle! Many small stones can build a pyramid that is how miracles are created!

From: Fan Hong & Liang Fen (Eds.) - My Story ~ A Study On Chinese Cultural Identity In Australia

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