

My Story ~ 5. Three Words, One Marriage



“Run-in period requires time; a marriage is much more complicated than test driving a new car.”

I was born in 1963, but I feel much younger, I cannot be called a beauty, but I am rather good-looking and stylishly dressed, some Australians even take me to be high school student. But on personal experiences and mental qualities, I am prematurely aged. Shadows left in my childhood often appear in my dreams, and wounds in my young heart remain unhealed. Due to the historical background of my parents' family, I have gone through many emotions that other people of my age have not experienced.

I am the youngest child, I have five brothers; and I am the only girl. Looking back on my early childhood, I had secretly decided that I would not stay in China, I had to go abroad. The reason was simple, when I was 6, my family was deported to Inner Mongolia, my parents were much wronged and endured much suffering, I didn't want to experience the same life, and I had to find a way out of this country, I did not want to stay in this country, it was all too painful. Seeing how my father and my mother were tortured every day, my young heart was bleeding. Then I did not go to school, but I did know what “torment” “suffering” and “poverty” meant. I remember, my family had a very comfortable and cozy life in the city, then one day we woke up, and found ourselves falling into an abyss in an out-of-the-way place, all of a sudden we became penniless. I knew a family like my parents' should not be so poor, but I was not clear about the reason.

I didn't find any opportunity to go abroad. Nine years passed in a flash, my family returned to the city in 1978, by that time I had grown up a lot... Later I got married, had a baby, and when my child grew up, I put all my hopes on her. There is a saying on WeChat “some people are particularly wise, they do their own things, some people are stupid, they cannot do anything, and they just lay an egg like a bird, and then send that egg out.” I am among the stupid ones, I was a fool who laid an egg and put all the hopes on this egg.

Perhaps because of the underlying historic reasons and the failure of having very much in common with my ex-husband I became a single mother and struggled through life with my daughter. From the very beginning when my daughter went to school, I simply did not prepare her to take the College Entrance Examination in China. My daughter is just like me in character, she's very direct and straightforward, and follows her own pathway with no change of direction. She was not good at dealing with people and I didn't think she was particularly clever. If she had continued to live in China, life would be very difficult for her. I'm not saying that China is not good, but we Chinese always have a network of relationships which is very complex.

During her school years in China, I had been impressing on her mind the idea of studying abroad. In 2008, she graduated from high school, I sent her directly to an Australian college to study nursing without taking the College Entrance Examination.

At that time I was still working in China, so my daughter studied here alone, as a child of a single-parent family, she seemed to grow up particularly fast, and became an adult in an instant. You can imagine how hard it was, my daughter had to study and work part time but she managed to hang on. Two years later, my daughter applied for a visiting visa for me.

It was 16 December, 2010 when I came to Australia for the first time.

My first impression of Australia was profound and deeply moving. I got off the plane, at 11 pm, my daughter picked me up; I could see nothing but darkness all the way. It was very quiet, occasionally there were two beams of white light coming from the opposite direction as they came nearer, I could see it was a car.

The next day after breakfast, my daughter took me out to look around, as I got out, all kinds of feelings welled up in my heart, and the memory box which had been gathering dust for 40 years suddenly opened. What appeared in front of me was a picture of the grassland of Inner Mongolia! My memory of Inner Mongolia is the endless prairie, which is known locally as a large grassy meadow, in summer, the prairie is lush and green. I looked up; I saw the spotless azure blue sky in Zhelimu Inner Mongolia! Wow, the heavens and the earth of these two places were so much alike! And the people of these two places were similar... In my opinion, China's Mongols and the local aboriginal people of Australia are part of an earlier civilization, years earlier than other ethnic groups. They are simple good-natured, down-to-earth people who don't beat about the bush, compared to

some of the so-called civilized people they are easier to get along with.

I got a one -year multiple entry tourist visa for my first visit to Australia, each visit could only let me stay for up to three months in Australia. Within the one year of the visa validity, I made a round trip every three months; the greater part of my hard-earned savings was spent on my daughter's tuition, and the rest on the airlines.

Of course, I wanted that money back; I worked during every three-month stay in Australia, even though I knew it was illegal. As I mentioned earlier, I was well prepared. Before going to Australia I asked about jobs other than restaurant work which required no language. I had never learned English; I knew only Hi, Bye, and Thank You. Later I heard that massage is a relatively easy way to make money. I learned massage to get ready for working in Australia. Also I became mentally prepared, because there was a world of difference between my job in China and a masseuse. A full-time radio host became a masseuse, can you imagine my feelings? But going abroad was my life-long wish, and I could earn Australia dollars. Being determined with a clear goal, although I was only a halfway decent masseuse, it didn't take long before I became a real masseuse.

The second day in Australia, I headed for the massage parlors. I soon discovered massage parlors here which were mostly run by Chinese were mixed, as we Chinese put it: some stores were yellow (porn), there were also regular massage parlors just like the one I worked in.

With my down-to-earth manner and the skills I learned from the crash course books on Chinese medicine anatomy and massage techniques before coming to Australia, I soon created a good impression on the manager and the guests and my monthly income reached over five thousand Australian dollars, of course, I worked Seven days a week, I was very tired, but satisfied.

However, I cannot, say there were no personal problems. Most of the managers I met were Chinese. Chinese people have their unique characteristics; some of them are very difficult to get along with. A typical Chinese attitude is like this: when you did well he doubted you, when you didn't work well he tore you down, besides, I couldn't speak the language then, some young girls from Hong Kong and Taiwan openly bullied me, they knew I did not understand English, they sweet talked my customers into becoming their guests, although I did not understand English, I knew what they were doing. But a poor man cannot afford to cherish pride or resentment, the famous old Chinese saying is very much

to the point, it clearly described my situation at that time. I needed money, so I bowed to others, I could put up with all these difficulties.

During my previous visits to Australia, I went to work almost as soon as I got off the plane; I had no time to look around and no chance to relax. This sudden relaxation felt strange, maybe I had become accustomed to rushing about. After a few days wandering, I felt at a loss, the owners of the massage parlor where I worked were a couple who were very good to me. They knew I was single, and they asked me why not find someone to marry after the one-year stay? They thought I should take the opportunity to find a man to marry in order to solve the problem of my identity. I had never thought about remarrying before. All my hopes were pinned on my daughter. In fact, I heard that a lot of people regained their identity through remarrying. But, I was skeptical of everything, friendship, love, affection, everything in the world.

One evening, at an Italian restaurant, I saw a woman with an Asian face at the door, I said I wanted to eat Italian food, the old lady pointed toward the restaurant without speaking. I walked into the Italian restaurant. I found a place to sit down and waited to be served. There was a man sitting nearby, he saw me come in and sit down, after a little while, he got up, came over to talk to me, he seemed to be asking me "You're by yourself?" I nodded, in fact I did not understand him, I guessed it was what he meant, and I immediately took out my phone, and found I had just guessed correctly. He asked if I minded him joining me as he was also alone. I said "OK." in Chinese. Actually I still did not understand him. He seemed to understand the whole thing, and sat down. Then we started ordering together, and then he began to chat with me, I knew none of his words. So I took out the phone again, he stopped every time he finished a sentence, and I looked up the words one by one, and then made up the sentence, so I could understand his meaning. Fortunately, I was kind of clever. I carried on with the lively conversation with smiles and laughter, though I did not know what he was saying. This Mr. Foreigner could also be considered smart, maybe he did not understand what I said either, after a while, he called over a Chinese waiter to be the interpreter. The waiter told me his mother was English, and his father was from Hong Kong, and he could speak a little Chinese. The young waiter thought I had known the gentleman for quite a long time, he did not know we had just met.

Mr. Foreigner spoke some more the waiter told me that he sold tablecloths. Oh, I then understood why the man had referred to the tablecloth by shaking it; he had

wanted to tell me this. However, does selling tablecloths have anything to do with me? Then I began wondering whether this gentleman wanted to sell his tablecloths by eating with me, or wanted to sell his tablecloths in China? Since I was Chinese and Chinese product was cheaper.

Dishes arrived and we were eating and chatting warmly with questions and answers, but most probably they were all irrelevant. Because I was no longer translating word for word, I was too tired, and the cell phone was running out of power, the waiter had gone to greet the other diners, but he came by once, told me in broken Chinese that it did not matter, and soon we would slowly understand each other.

After dinner, I said I was going to check out, because this was my first time alone with a foreigner eating and talking, I felt very happy, understood or not understood we communicated well with sign languages and body language. According to the Chinese custom, I was the host of the table so I stood up and went to pay the bill without thinking of going Dutch. I was glad to pay the bill and it was a natural thing to do. But that gentleman immediately stopped me, saying firmly that he would not let me pay, and he would pay instead. I said no, it's my treat, thinking that we didn't know each other, and I didn't want to owe him a favor, though I didn't have much money, I didn't want the psychological burden. We didn't agree with each other at the front desk in a deadlock. Then the waiter came over, he told me, "You're embarrassing him by doing this, how can a gentleman let a lady pay his dinner? It's the first time I have seen a Chinese woman rushing to pay the bill " He added, "This time you let him pay, the next time you can invite him to dinner."

I let the waiter tell the foreigner that the next time would be my turn. I remembered very clearly it was a Thursday, I said I would invite him on Sunday. The man accepted at once. I was faced with a dilemma because I knew few restaurants, I had only heard of a Chinese tea house named "Dragon", I planned to take him there for tea with my daughter thinking that I needn't speak English in the Chinese restaurant. He took my phone number and left me his phone number, and asked me where I worked, I told him through the waiter.

The massage parlor that I worked in was close to the Italian restaurant. On Saturday, the gentleman came to the massage parlor. He knew I did not understand English, so he said directly to the manager that he would take me to Li Jung Xian in the Royal Casino for tea on Sunday.

I said, well, we could go to Li Jung Xian in the Royal Casino for tea, but I would pay.

He agreed to the idea. Next morning, he came and picked me up, but we did not go to the big casino. He said Li Jung Xian needed a reservation and we couldn't get in without a booking a seat. He took me to a small restaurant which didn't need any reservation. We just wanted a snack. I thought to myself, he's a good guy, knowing I'm a migrant worker with little money; he didn't want it to be too expressive. When we finished, he was going to pay the bill, I stopped him with one hand, my other hand picked up the phone, and I asked my sister to tell him that I wanted to pay the bill. He no longer insisted. That little something cost me 70 Australian dollars equal to over 400RMB, my wage of one day. I had made myself appear generous by slapping my own face.

At dinner, he told me that his home was in Melbourne, he was alone in Perth, I understood the two names, and looked up the other words. He told me he would leave at one o'clock, and asked me if I would join him on the "farm", I took "farm" as "mum", I knew the English word "mum", Immediately I thought of his mother in Melbourne, and I knew it would take quite a few hours to fly from Perth to Melbourne. Besides, why should I go with him to Melbourne to see his mother? It's too ridiculous! I rang my daughter at once, and then I put the man on the phone, let him speak with my daughter. She had just woken up, did not give it too much thought, She exchanged a few words with him, and then told me, "Mom, he invited you to his mum's, he wanted me to ask you if you would go with him?"

She told me that the man had a farm somewhere, and he wanted to show me around. At once I began to calculate, first, I was a stranger who could not speak English, if he sold me, I wouldn't be aware of it. Second, we were both single, a man and a woman, he had never married and I am single for many years, I couldn't go for an outing with him and stay overnight on his farm after we had just met twice, I could not do anything which would make me cheap especially in front of my daughter.

I was quite conservative, and I was a little scared. But it was really a good opportunity. I'd love to see what it was like on an Australian farm, and how it was different from the grasslands of Inner Mongolia. I asked my daughter for advice; she said she wanted to meet this person. We arranged to meet at the massage parlor.

He took out his driver's license as soon as he saw my daughter, and told her to

take a picture of it. He said my daughter could find him anytime, anywhere with this license. My daughter took the picture immediately. I felt very embarrassed, because it seemed we did not trust him, and if I didn't trust him, why didn't I stop going out with him? However, I went to the farm with him and returned two days later.

The farm house was big, there were five rooms. From that day on, he came to the massage parlor and asked for a massage from me every day. After the massage, he would stay and wait till I got off work, he would invited me to go out for dinner with him, and it went on like that for a whole week. One day after the massage and I had finished work, we went to dinner, he said to me: "Will you marry me?" I looked up the word "marry", and burst out laughing. This guy had played a really big joke. This might be the Australian culture and customs, right? He said "I am serious". I checked the meaning of "serious", I thought you couldn't be so shocked even if you were serious, right? Only a week, after only a week, even a flash marriage couldn't be so amazingly quick. I thought this was too ridiculous and didn't take it this "proposal" seriously. But to tell the truth, I was still a little touched. Unexpectedly, the next day he went to the parlor and said he would marry me, but not right away, in six months. It was only four weeks before I went back to China. He asked me about my flight and the departure time, the next day he bought a ticket on the same flight. He wanted to go to China with me. In China, he made a formal proposal and we had a small engagement ceremony. He stayed in China for two weeks, and then returned alone to Australia. We of course often kept in contact by phone or text message, through translating, quite often we misunderstood each other, and so he suggested that I learn English all day. From that day on, every day I learned English at home, I also went to school to study English. He applied for a spouse visa and one year later we got married, and I went back to Australia. Although he is now 65 years old, he's very diligent and simple. He is running his own farm while doing trade business with China. He's very good to my daughter and me. We have been married for almost two years. There, of course, have been lots of bumpy times with us, mostly due to cultural differences and language barriers. I am now a full-time housewife. I have been learning English except when doing housework. As for my husband, perhaps it is because of his age as well as being busy he refuses to learn Chinese. He knows only three Chinese sentences. The first is "Xifu", which means "wife"; the second is "Xiexie", which means "thank you", the third "Ganbei." which mean "cheers".

My husband respects Chinese culture very much, although he is a native Australian, he wants to “do as the Romans do”; he drinks Chinese tea, eats Chinese food, and can use chopsticks well. Maybe it’s because of the long time he spent doing business with Chinese, he has learned a lot of Chinese people’s bad habits, For example, he won’t talk straightforward, but “beat around the bush,” Although he can’t speak Chinese I think he’s becoming more like a Chinese person. He likes to say “It’s all right”, “its okay”, which is not in line with my personality. I always call a spade a spade and I go straight to the point when dealing with things. Sometimes I get confused. But our relationship is very equal. He is the eldest of his family, his brothers and sisters are all older than me, but they all respect me very much.

I am now living a life of triple influence, I have been in this country for over three years, even though Chinese culture is an important part of me, I have changed a lot, however I still feel deeply rooted in Chinese culture. Since coming to Australia, I have been trying to change bit by bit, and I have changed a lot since I left China. Now that I am one half of a cross-cultural marriage and native Australians are totally different from us, it all adds up to the cultural change in my life, I am discovering, new things changing, analyzing and adapting. The so-called “adapting” is to adapt to the custom of foreigners, because we are a family, I want to fit in and be accepted. And I began to meet with those Chinese who have been in Australia a long time, before I rarely met and I was unwilling to deal with Chinese people. I have made rational analysis as to why I behave like that? Isn’t it good that we all become friends? I want to open my arms to embrace everyone, and I want to see myself in front of a large mirror, I will dance before the mirror and, I will correct any action myself which is not in place, or incorrect. In addition, I also analyzed those Chinese who have spent a long time in Australia, I must pay attention to avoid their character defects, and I must not make the same mistakes. So far, I feel I am much better than before, and our married life is rather happy. We never argue, maybe the language barrier also has its merits, right?

We have lived together for more than two years, every Christmas or July, we go to Melbourne, for the family reunion, I’ll cook some Chinese dishes, rice, dumplings and it’s a time when we want to talk about Chinese culture. A year after we got married, his mother passed away. His mother’s house has a history of nearly 100 years, my husband and his brothers and sisters all grew up there. Later, his sister

told me, an elder brother, my husband had bought their mother's house in order to keep the childhood memories and have a place for brothers and sisters to get together. The move was quite Chinese way of doing things. He did not tell me what he had done, and I didn't say anything to him, for I couldn't make myself understood in English but more importantly, I won't ask him anything he isn't willing to tell.

We often hear that some couples break up because they had no common language, just like my first marriage. Even now, my present Australian husband only knows three Chinese words, but we seem to have a common language on many things. And my English has improved a lot. I can speak English for three minutes between "Hi" and "bye", of course, with I Phone on my hand all the time. There have been some bumps in our two-year-long marriage, but it's a normal married life. We are still in the run-in period, it will take time, committing to a marriage are much more complicated than taking a test drive. Now we are kind of on the track, we manage to find time to chat. He is interested in listening to my family story, he said, he could understand 95% of my words when we chat; I think it's because my English has improved a lot. With the help of my I phone, I'm able to understand half of his words. I'm hoping one day we will understand each other 100%. Bless me!