

Josie's story from China

Part Two

Josie arrived in Perth in June 1990. Many business people had set up schools for Chinese students eager to study in Australia. Some were good schools. Others were not so good. Josie did not learn anything new at her English classes. The lessons were too simple.

Josie had to attend at least 80% of her classes to comply with her visa conditions. She worked during all her free time. When her visa expired, she paid AUD2000 for another visa. When that expired, she knew she could not earn enough money for another visa. But she was not ready to return to China. She had wanted to experience freedom and learn many new things. She had hardly learnt anything new since her arrival.

So Josie did not renew her visa again. Instead, she became an illegal visa overstayer. She thinks that there were about 40,000 Chinese students in the same situation at the time. They were like ants. They were everywhere.

Josie did not go to any more English classes. Instead, she worked many jobs. One evening, she had dinner with some Chinese friends. The next day, she heard that they had been deported. Josie became very scared. She decided to leave Perth and travel through small towns. She thought immigration officials could not find her so easily in the outback.

She worked as a manual labourer in small towns in Western Australia. She moved often. After twenty months, she thought she could find work in Sydney and flew there. But there were too many other Chinese young people looking for work.

So she used the trip to see Australia. An inter-state bus ticket cost \$25. She saw the Opera House in Sydney, the Parliament House in Canberra, and the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne. She loved the art and enjoyed her travels very much.

Finally she stopped in Adelaide because she found work and a spare room where she could live for free. She worked many jobs: carrying heavy jump rails at a racecourse, waitressing at a restaurant and collecting donation for charities. She saved up enough money to buy an old car and a TV so that she could watch the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. That was her only relaxation. She had to work all the time just to survive.

By 1992, Paul Keating was the new Australian Prime Minister. His government allowed Chinese students who had arranged for visas before 1992 to apply for political asylum. The Keating government also introduced a law whereby people who came to Australia without valid visas could be detained with no time limits. This was to tell the world that Australia had strict immigration laws.

By 1993, Josie was very tired of working. She took a long holiday. She travelled on by train from Adelaide to Alice Springs on The Ghan. She made friends with Aboriginal people in Alice Springs. She flew to Melville Island and made more Aboriginal friends. She laughed when they said that she looked like the sister of the famous kung-fu actor, Jackie Chan.

By the winter of 1993, Josie returned to Perth. She had already lodged her political asylum claim. This meant that she was no longer an illegal visa over-stayer, but she was not allowed to travel out of Australia and was also not allowed to work. But if she could not work how was she to survive?

To be continued in Part Three.