

# Life Beyond the Sea

*A collection of stories celebrating diversity*







Volunteer Ernest captures Ronald standing by Dandenong Creek which flows alongside the back of his property.

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## About SMRC

Since 1993, Southern Migrant and Refugee Centre (SMRC) has been an instrumental player in the settlement of newly arrived refugees and provision of integration and community-based services for migrants and refugees, through in-language social and economic participation, and health and wellbeing programs across the Southern Region of Melbourne.

SMRC is a leader in the delivery of CALD aged care services with a comprehensive understanding of the needs of our ageing communities developed through decades of service delivery, established community networks, consumer advisory groups, service evaluations, consumer consultations and partnerships with industry stakeholders.

*A wise client once said...*

*"This country is full of opportunities however you have to work hard"*

*"Day by day we worked forward and we never gave up"*

*"Set your mind correctly, and you'll follow the right path"*

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## Palliative Care Social Support Individual Program

*This program is intended for clients receiving palliative care services who are living at home and are from a CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) background. Our program aims to match volunteer visitors with clients on the basis of cultural and linguistic background to provide one on one social support. Support could include visiting for friendly chats, going for a walk or coffee, or any interests shared by the client. Alongside social support the volunteers may also be able to assist with transport to medical or social appointments.*

*The SMRC received the End of Life Ancillary Service Grant in July 2018 through the Victorian State Government Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). SMRC were able to develop the Palliative Care Social Support Program with this grant assistance.*



## About Life Beyond the Sea

*To celebrate the lives of those who have benefitted from the Palliative Care grant, the project 'Life Beyond the Sea' is all about recounting and gratifying these lives from culturally and linguistically diverse clients. Within this project, clients would be focused upon giving a recount of their lives before and after their move to Australia, highlighting a number of challenges and achievements our clients withstood. Drawing specifically upon palliative care CALD clients, the purpose was to recognize, empathize and celebrate migrant individuals - who have originated from various backgrounds and ethnicities - from overcoming hardships while continuing to live in Australia. It also seeks to inspire the younger generations to engage with, not only CALD individuals, but also those of an older generation, as these individuals are prone to severe social isolation. Through reading personal lived accounts of real CALD individuals a part of 'Life Beyond the Sea' Project, it is hoped that it will encourage individuals of differing backgrounds to provide support to CALD individuals who are most in need of social support.*



*These clients who have moved from overseas, bloom just like a lotus flower. It is through the Australian light and soil, which they flourish...*



## Alfreda Welniak

**Experiencing the Second World War in Poland, has prepared Alfreda for everything in her life, including moving across the globe to Australia where she would call this place her new home...**

*Before Alfreda started to receive visits from her SMRC volunteer, she stated that it would just be her "with four walls, two cats, and a dog" within her flat every day. With that, she is very thankful for the social support she receives. Despite her early life's challenges, she remains optimistic yet humorous about life.*

As I lay on my sofa within my flat, I read the Polish newspaper that notified me of news from back home. I still miss Poland, especially the rolling mountainous landscapes of Bielsko – Biala. In the Polish summer, my young, energetic body would catapult up those hills with such momentum. I'd barely tire, as I would hike up these inclines regularly, I was used to its harsh toll on my lower body. These climbs were enjoyable for me. I'd have company on these adventures, as my friends and I frequently organised days within the warmer months to enjoy these days out in the sun. In the cooler months, my friends and I would attend theatre shows and concerts – places that would shelter me away from the bitterly cold snow. Though, there was one thing I couldn't be sheltered from, and that was German Occupation in WW2. Because of this, our family had to move to north Poland, a place called Bydgoszcz. There, my younger siblings and my parents depended on each other.

My two cats and my dog that live with me keep me company every day in my flat. Of course, moving to Australia was profound. My large family who I had grown alongside was no longer beside me when I relocated. I still think of them – my many brothers and sisters who I had a fond early childhood with. I was the oldest amongst my siblings which my independence drove me into the unknown, and into another country. Although I am away from Poland, I still identify strongly with my culture, and especially its cuisine – anything potato-based. I loved meals that would use this tasty, carb in its meals. I continue to eat Polish dishes today whom my daughter in-law cooks, reminding me of home.

I am 87 years old now, and have married, and I created a family. Although I am away from Poland, I do not feel further from alone. I reside in this flat which is connected to my son's home who lives with his wife, granddaughter and great grandson, along with my beloved pets. I moved here 16 years ago, following behind my son who had moved 10 years earlier.

Since I have moved to Australia, I have loved it here. When I first moved, my adventurous soul went on excursions where we travelled to Perth and Queensland to chase that warm summer sun. Not only is the weather warm, but the people I have met in Australia are very kind and patient to people of older generations.

After my day dream of my life experiences in Poland, and now here in Australia, I continue to stroke my pup, who's sprawled out comfortably on my lap. My two cats lay easily beside each of my hips, for their afternoon laze.



*Alfreda cannot contain her excitement as she looks forward to her volunteer Ursula for their weekly chats.*



## Jin Chen

**Mr. Chen led a fun-filled life back in Shanghai, China. He was always experiencing what life had to offer. So, when his wife and daughter wanted to pursue life in Australia, he packed his bags and came to join them in 1991. After 30 years of living in Australia, Mr. Chen wants to tell his story...**

*It is safe to say that Mr. Chen has lived a fun-filled life, where he has enjoyed almost every bit of it. His infectious smile is no surprise. One day, he hopes to once again see his son, who lives in China. But in the meantime, Mr. Chen continues to reminisce about his days in China, where he explored all his talents. He still lives comfortably in his unit in Dandenong North, where he receives constant support from his daughter and the community that he is a part of.*

I sat on my couch in my Dandenong North unit which housed all my memories from a long-lived life. I was no longer with my wife, as she had passed away over ten years ago. She was my partner for so long, and we had a son and daughter together. At times I miss China and my friends and family who lived there. I had left behind my mother, father, two sisters and three brothers. Leaving these people behind made me reluctant to come to Australia. Besides my wife and daughter, I knew no one here. And although it really is a beautiful place, I knew how challenging it would be to live here. Really, it was the complete opposite to everything I was used to back in China.

My wife's enthusiasm to move abroad was infectious, and I found that I would later join her and our daughter. We settled into a unit which wasn't far from Dandenong Station, and since I had retired in China, I settled in quite comfortably. Comparing the days when I settled here to the days where I worked in a factory surprises me; when I knew no one outside of my wife and daughter and didn't know the language. I was dependent on the people I knew here. In China I had control in my work – and my family was instead dependent on me. It is amusing how things change. I switched the television channel over to my favourite. A Shanghai channel which was airing Shanghai news. When I saw that a news anchor was reporting on the Chinese Spring Festival, I was teleported back home. The days of dancing in Shanghai parks with friends was one of my fondest memories. I loved the nostalgia and memory of it, so I continued when I moved to Australia. I searched far and wide for dancing groups and little did I know there'd be many around Dandenong and Springvale. I joined all of them, which provided me with the opportunity to discover friends. That was not all I discovered. When my son, who lives in China, visited me, he wanted to explore Australia, so we journeyed the east coast, exploring Sydney and made our way up north, to the Gold Coast and beyond. The weather there and back down in Melbourne was remarkable. Warm sun heated the atmosphere, and cool breezes were its relief as they blew every so often. As I remember the brightly lit days of travel, the window behind me allows abundant light to fill the room.

The airing of Shanghai News ended, and the start of a Chinese cooking show began. I loved these as I enjoyed creating nicely presented, yet delicious foods in my past. When I was in China, I made many foods when my family would come together for special celebrations. Making steamed fish was a favourite of mine, and a dish I was proud of creating. I used my other passion for photography, where I would make my food creations and document these through the photos I would take.

For the last 30 years I have lived in Australia, and I regret nothing. I can say that I have enjoyed my years in my new home. Although my son and one of my grandchildren aren't here, I have been surrounded by my other loved ones. Not only that, but I have also experienced the greatest support from the community and my newfound friends.



*Jin Chen is proudly holding photos of traditional Chinese foods he used to cook in his past.*



## Julio Santin

**Julio as a husband and father wanted the very best for his family.**

**Civil unrest in the late 1980s provoked Julio and his family to leave behind everything they knew in El Salvador. They crossed many seas and continents to reach their new home in Australia...**

*Julio remains a proud father to his two sons, although one of his sons passed away some time ago. It was not easy for him, his wife and his son, but they support one another. By achieving so much in his life, Julio has always been guided by his responsibility and his duty to respect others. Because of this, he is really happy with all the help he has received.*

On the 12th of December, 1987, I had landed on the Australian red soil for the first time. It was the beginning of living a life in a foreign country a world away to what me and my family were familiar with. One of my brothers had sponsored my family to come to Australia as he was already here at that time, and he knew of the circumstances back in El Salvador. Given his sponsorship, I felt like I had been given the winning lotto ticket. My wife on the other hand felt uneasy – she would be moving thousands of kilometres away from her beloved family to a place where she knew no one.

I did carry the pressure of establishing a good life here in Australia. My wife was missing her brothers, sisters and parents, while my sons grew up in a foreign country, leaving behind their many friends. The drive to ease my family's worries prompted me to gain a job within a week of moving. The hour-long commute involved a number of trains and a cycle from the train station to the factories. Although it was tiresome travelling this much, I knew it was worth it.

We'd eventually move from a Moorabbin hostel to a Springvale one during our first year. However, when we had the means to do so, we started to rent a property in Hampton Park. We felt more established in our new country as we rented a place – symbolic of how far we had come in our new life. By this time, my children had settled in school and my wife felt secure here. Though, there was a higher plan for us than this – we managed to buy a house for ourselves several years later, which provided us with the stability we had dreamed of all this time.

Our property in Narre Warren South also came with a spacious backyard, where my wife and I still enjoy gardening. Many fruit trees line the perimeter of our back garden where the space is overwhelmed by green foliage. Lemons and oranges grow abundantly from the trees because of its fertile ground. We also have the space for our dogs to run around and play. Either that, or my wife and I walk them, soaking up the afternoon sun around our neighbourhood.

When I'm not gardening, I enjoy reading and playing chess on my iPad. I like the challenge, and it also reminds me of home. I think of my many brothers and sisters who I grew up with. Being one of ten children had its challenges, though moving to Australia with only one other brother here was unlike anything I was used to. However, when I did come to Australia, I kept in touch with my family, with my wife's encouragement. She especially missed them, and so we would visit every year.

Some time ago, I remember pulling my hands from the fresh soil as I dug four shallow holes with my hands. I had placed one seed in each of the four pits, wondering if they'd all surface from the topsoil. Now, I looked over at them from inside, peering through my glassed back door. Each of them had sprouted and appeared several inches from their mound. I smiled. With the Australian touch of the sun and soil, these plants had flourished.



*Julio relaxes in his beautiful backyard garden proudly admiring the crop he's grown this season.*



## Kamal & Nimali

**Kamal and his wife Nimali came to Australia to start a peaceful life for them and their children. Leaving all they knew in Sri Lanka and coming to Australia was a matter of survival. They proved they could survive, and thrive, along with so much more...**

We had arrived in Melbourne after an 11-hour flight from Sri Lanka in the warmer months of late spring. Melbourne wasn't as humid as back home, and it had given us the sense that we were missing something. I suppose that is natural – coming from all that you knew, the culture, food, and surrounds, to an unnatural landscape. However, I was convinced that we had found the right path, so we keep moving forwards.

Over the course of a couple of months, we found a one-bedroom unit in the suburb of Sunshine, located west of Melbourne. Coming from a well-established life, we had little when we first moved to Australia. In Sri Lanka, I was a civil engineer where I helped build road networks and infrastructure in its capital city – Colombo. Since I had been working under the city's council for over 15 years, my life had become predictable and assured. However, the 30 year-long Sri Lankan civil war had worn down our life of comfort. So here we were, the four of us were crammed in one bedroom, all in the name of a stable life, though no one told us how difficult it would be moving to another country. Experiencing my wife's sadness as she was thousands of miles away from her family back home was difficult. She had grown up in a large family, so she felt that she was no longer surrounded by her childhood. It wasn't as hard for me as I was an only child, and I could only imagine what it would have been like for her. I questioned whether my children felt the same sadness and if we had made the right choice.

Although it has been 32 years since we moved and my wife misses her family immensely, life has improved for us, and it made us accomplish things we never knew we would. Not only did we manage to raise our son and daughter as migrants, we also both worked. I worked as a bus driver, driving along the Chadstone, Dandenong and Berwick bus networks. My wife had entered the workforce for the first time in her life, as she got a job working in many places. She first worked in a factory, and then as a mail sorting officer. From there it was not long that she earned a certificate four in Aged Care, where she worked at a neighbouring nursing home. I had never seen her so proud – for her, working had signified her independence.

With our two incomes, we were eventually able to afford our own place. We had lived in Noble Park for some time and after living in the west of Melbourne for so long, we bought our home in the South East, which overlooked expansive parks. During this time, my family and I started to experience what Australia really had to offer, and we were relishing our life. When we weren't working, we found time to stay active by playing badminton and table tennis. I am proud of what my wife and I have achieved, along with my children's efforts at high school and university.

Everything we have achieved in life is through our strength and determination. We live through Buddhist teachings, and I believe with these principles it has allowed us to extend beyond our goals in Australia. Finding the right path and sticking to it was important for us. We knew that Australia would bring us many experiences and chances, though we knew we had to work for it. Day by day we moved towards our goals – we never gave up.

*Kamal and Nimali to this day continue to stay connected to their community. While they have adult children who can now look after themselves, they keep themselves busy. Nimali enjoys visiting the local community garden, while Kamal continues volunteering for his community.*



*Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic which depicts Kamal and Nimali's Buddhist roots from their home, Sri Lanka.*



## Kenrad D'Souza

**After living majority of his life in Bandra, Kenrad had established a successful life in India. He knew many people, had his own home and was a mechanical engineer who travelled all around India and the globe. Eventually, Australia would be his last stop...**

*Kenrad is a husband, a father to three daughters, and a grandfather to six grandchildren. With his self-made success in India, he brought with him the determination to establish a life in Australia, where he is "really happy here".*

My daughter greeted me with a hug. It had been a couple of weeks since we last saw each other, but I am always glad to see my children. After all, I wouldn't be here without them. I opened the door, and the delicious smell of spiced chicken and vegetables welcomed our daughter inside. It smelled like the home we had in India when my wife was cooking. Except, the scent quickly filled our small flat in minutes, which always left me ravenous. My two other daughters and their children were sitting at the kitchen table, where my daughter joined. Everyone was eager for my wife's home-cooked meal, so my wife served everyone hurriedly.

As I devoured the peppery yet zesty pieces of chicken, I was teleported to Mumbai where I worked at a bakery. The small yet popular bakery would hold many local customers and tourists at a time, who'd spend their day fascinated at the Bombay life. I remember serving thousands of people a week, and from those customers many would come in regularly, twice a week or so. They'd come up to the counter, wanting jalebi or samosas, and say "hello Uncle".

I was always so glad to see them, as they were so polite and kind. Working at the bakery brought a sense of familiarity, as I was a well-respected mechanical engineer before I decided to retire. It brought me a sense of purpose, however I still missed my career which I had worked so hard in school for. My mother was always pressuring me to achieve and to aim higher. She wanted a better life for us since Dad's passing, and she knew that we children could support ourselves. It was important that we also provided for her, as she was our mother who just wanted the very best for us.

After dinner, we all knew what time it was. I got up from my dining room chair and retrieved the leather covered album which had seen better days. The leather had flaked off in parts, barely holding the sentimental contents together. With each turn of the page, I handled it with care. As we flicked through the pages, I noticed photos of me as a child enjoying all of my childhood activities. One photo captured me bowling in action at our local cricket field near our childhood home. The other photos were of me, along with my brothers and sisters, playing carom competitively, where we'd have tournaments in our own living room. It felt bizarre looking upon these sepia-tinted photographs, as if the people in the photographs were historical figures. These photos had accumulated into a montage on the last page, showing memories made over previous seasons. Within these I managed to build a career, a family and a home. And now... now I am living thousands of miles away from what I knew and all I had achieved.

I stretched out of my upholstered chair and placed the album back into its place on the bookshelf. I sat back down pensively. Certainly, I had brought all of those memories with me. Everything that I attained in India gifted me with the opportunity for life in this Great Southern Land.



*Kenrad showing that he is a proud husband to his wife, and father of three beautiful daughters.*



## Maria Esther

**Maria and her husband crossed the globe to live near her son and their family, to chase a life of happiness, family and togetherness...**

As I in my home, surrounded by potted plants and photographs of loved ones, I am remembered by the time when I didn't have all of this. I profoundly recall my move to Australia as one of the biggest decisions of my life. I knew my life in Uruguay wasn't perfect – it had its fair share of problems. Cost of living was skyrocketing, not allowing for us to live in comfort, even though both my husband and I worked. While he worked within professional photography, I worked as a housekeeper, and later care for ill people. It was a scary time for me, as I had no idea what to expect, though I was hopeful that Australia could provide a better life for us. My son had lived in Australia for quite some time before my husband and I decided to move. After all, we weren't exactly young anymore, where the threat of uprooting our lives was real. Because of that, we knew settling into Australia was going to be challenge.

But there was more to our lives in Uruguay than that. It certainly wasn't all bad. I enjoyed my most loved interests, where I mainly cooked favourite family meals. I would cook traditional Latin American foods, and Italian cuisine, such as pasta ravioli. As well, I would spend a lot of time baking many different cakes and pastries. I loved preparing food so much that I would cook for catering businesses. I also reminisce of the time I was surrounded by Latin American music back in Uruguay, as I used to enjoy dancing the tango, and salsa.

Now that I am in Australia, I haven't let go of my love of cooking and music. However, I now spend my favourite days seeing my whole family. My son and his wife started a life and family here, which I now have the opportunity to be a grandmother to two granddaughters and a great grandmother to three great granddaughters. I remarkably saw one of my great granddaughters coming into the world, which has undoubtedly left a profound memory with me. With that, I was motivation to help raise my grandchildren and great grandchildren, and that is what I enjoy most now. It had been a motivation for me, since I was raised by my grandmother until a young age, and then another family had taken me in. For this, I feel so grateful that I am now surrounded by my family, yet in such a place which provides a comfortable life.

Although moving to Australia made it hard for me to practise my religion as I couldn't drive. In Uruguay, I would attend church every Sunday, and for other Catholic holidays and meanings. Though despite not being able to attend church as what I'd hope, I knew that God was looking out for me. He presented me he gift of family, which is something I'll cherish forever.

*Maria finds that her move to Australia was for the best, as it has brought her closer to her beloved family. She continues to relish in Latin American music, and attends Spanish social groups to connect with her friends.*



*Maria is holding a picture of her and her beloved husband.*





**Ronald is an 80 year old man living in Noble Park who made the courageous decision 50 years ago to uproot his whole life...**

## Ronald Fernandez

I can recall my life in India as being a challenging one. Although I was a successful hockey player who enjoyed a lot of my time outdoors while I was young, I remember the somber memory of my parents visiting me for a few hours at a time when I attended a Chennai boarding school. It was so tough for me as a young boy. I just wanted to be with my mother and father. With great support from my siblings - who also endured our parent separation - and the teachings of the strict Christian boarding school I attended; I learned some valuable life lessons that I have carried with me through life.

Meeting my love was a time of happiness for me when I was in India. My life had quickly become assured. After falling in love, I soon had a family where I was blessed with both a son and daughter. Great luck had entered my life, and with that, brought me a great sense of responsibility to provide for my family. It was daunting stepping onto the red Australian soil for the very first time. Have I made a huge mistake? Was this a decision of haste? I kept telling myself it was not. My brother was always talking about how great life was in the 'Lucky Country', I mean after all, he was the one who sponsored me. I promised myself that I would create a great life in Australia. I had to prove to my family and this was the right decision. I knew I had to find a job with all my experience working on the Indian railways.

"G'day mate" said a fellow booking clerk, as I arrived to work in the fresh winter morning. I wondered to myself what that booking clerk meant by that? I had never heard that word before, nor had I heard an accent like that. Who would have thought how difficult communicating would really be. English was my mother tongue, but this... this was something else. My thoughts interrupted me when I heard a group of passengers boarding a train discussing the Melbourne weather, "I brought my umbrella with me just in case. You know Melbourne, the sun may be shining now, but it'll pour later."

I noticed when I first moved to Australia how often people would talk about the weather. Back in India, blistering summer days would remain constant, with the humidity rolling over into the wet season all year round. The weather didn't stop me from enjoying the ride to work each day but the air that passed through my lungs was something I hadn't experienced before moving to Australia. It was a breath of fresh air.

After a long workday experiencing the city bustle, I was relieved to be home. I could hear child-like unrestrained laughter and a fragrant aroma as I stepped inside. I made my way down the hallway, seeing family pictures hanging from the wall. My kids noticed my footsteps on the wooden floor, and I was soon overwhelmed by their embrace. My wife appeared at the end of the hallway giving me the most joyful smile and teased, "The chooks are waiting for you". I reached for the gate's bolt, and my chooks scurried out from their pen, and started to feed from the wheat I had sprinkled on the fresh patch of grass in the warm autumn sun. I chuckled to myself thinking, "I've had a good life here". I felt my feet sink comfortably in the earth which was a mixture of dirt and the recent downpour of rain. After each step that I took, it made a clear impression in the Australian soil. Fascinatingly, I had made my own path...

*Ronald is a longtime member of Champion Old Boys Association which is an organization who raises money for families in India. It is no surprise that he is loved by his family and friends in Australia and India.*



*Ronald stands by his birds who have given him great comfort and happiness over the many years.*



## Stanley Perera

**Stanley is a jack-of-all trades originating from Kegalle, Sri Lanka. Even before coming to Australia, he tried his hand at almost everything. His flexible attitude towards life meant that he was unbothered moving to another country. Perhaps, for the first time, it would offer him and his young family the permanency they had hoped for...**

My wife, younger son and older daughter were excited about the move to Australia, but we were still unsure. Previously in New Zealand, I first moved there by myself, and then when I had enough money, I bought their ticket for a fresh start. Eventually we were brought together, where our life would be stable for many years. I managed to become an employee as a health officer. I kept that job for 10 years, until one day I was let go. In fact, there weren't many job prospects in that small country at that time, so my family and I decided to make the bold move to Australia.

My determination to establish a great life for my family was driven by my experiences as a child. I grew up in a large town called Kegalle, Sri Lanka, located between the capital city, Colombo and another major city, Kandy. I enjoyed growing up in my hometown, as I also had four older sisters and one younger brother. Although my siblings and I were raised by my mother and father, I was the oldest son who carried a lot of responsibility, and I would look after my siblings when I was younger. I learned that when I would have family of my own, caring for my family would be important to me.

My parents had stressed the importance of education, as without it, finding a well-paying job and the opportunities from it would be challenging to get. Education was instilled in me, so I worked hard in my final years of school, where I eventually received a certificate in a Bachelor of Health Science. I never knew that I would work many unrelated jobs, yet I had created so many experiences...

In the year of 1975, I moved from Sri Lanka as I managed to secure stable employment overseas in New Zealand, and then, ten years later in Australia. This was a dream come true for us. A one in a billion chance that this opportunity would present itself. It was a remarkable achievement. I worked hard for this opportunity, and it led to so many great things. Graduating from London, Royal Society of Health in 1964, I have been in association with Harvard University, University of Ceylon, Auckland University and Monash University conducting research and study projects in the field of Public Health as a Medical Research Researcher. I also managed to run an importing and exporting business, and it was a challenge like no other. It was a stressful job. Due to different opinions at the workplace, I faced many challenges. Although it supported us well financially and allowed us to travel many places, I had to give it up.

I often think about the good times of my life, and all that I have accomplished. A lot of my time in Australia involved me scrambling for a job which provided my family a life full of chance – a risk we were willing to take for the second time. My children are now established, creating their own families, and living their lives comfortably.

I consider my life as a success story. With everything that had come my way – the good and the bad. I knew that I and my family would be okay. I also depended upon my Buddhist way of life to teach me to be appreciative of what I have. I find myself reimagining how my life has evolved up until this very moment. The fire blazes in the fireplace across from me, radiating warmth and with it, a ferocious energy. It reminds me of my determination in providing a life for my whole family, seizing for any job opportunity which came my way. The way this fire grew from a tiny match reminded me of my own life. A normal boy from Kegalle, whom spread their bravery like wildfire, wherever he went.

*Stanley is a father and grandfather, who surrounds himself with his loved ones whenever he gets the chance. He resides peacefully in the suburb Noble Park, where his family live nearby. His spirited demeanor is proven through his extensive past – a life chasing and seizing opportunity to provide for his family. His Christian and Buddhist teachings provide the motivation for what he has achieved in his life.*



*Stanley is comfortably sitting by the fire place where he wants to be... in his home sweet home.*



## Yong Shen

**Yong is a beloved mother to two daughters and a grandma to two grandchildren. Coming from Xinjiang province of China, she would make a number of visits to Australia. After experiencing the warm rays of the sun, and crisp air, she was convinced. Australia would be her new home.**

I felt the leather furnished seat shake from under me as I concentrated on the map. Where were we? I recognised the word 'lake' on the map. I learned that word throughout attending English classes when I first moved to Australia. However, learning English had been one of the hardest challenges while moving to Australia, but I had a supportive English teacher. She would teach us online, showing pictures of beautiful Australian destinations. So in my mind, I pictured a crystal-clear lake bordered by lush green river banks blanketed by a blue sky.

I would often let my imagination wonder off, especially on the travels I had taken when I was younger, still living in China. It felt like decades since my travels back home. To me, travelling was a symbol of my fresh break – I no longer worked in that small factory. It was difficult working, while I moved out of home – a home where I was coddled in the best of intentions. I was the only daughter in the family, growing up beside my three older brothers. Not until I was in my mid 20s did I start to look after myself and become less dependent on my mother. Of course, I was grateful for everything she did for me. I knew I was loved very much, and this gave me confidence that I would take with me, no matter the destination. Since arriving in Australia, my lungs were no longer compromised by the thick smoke which lingered in the Xinjiang province. I felt healthier, which encouraged me to exercise more often around my neighbourhood block. When I felt more comfortable here, I started to make my way around to shopping centres, enjoying beach days in the sun, and even going to the hot springs. The fact that I am here now on this trip, is because I had found my independence and my love for exploring new places and meeting new people.

Of course, I still don't leave my loved ones behind. I often think about my brothers and what they were like as children. The memories are all that I have of them now, since I no longer live in China, and I now only have one brother who hasn't passed. I also think of my mother every day. We were close, and this taught me valuable lessons for when I would eventually have two daughters of my own. For all my other relatives who live in China, I make sure I speak to them regularly. Family is very important to me, as I wouldn't be here without them.

As I was distracted by my thoughts of my loved ones, we had arrived at our destination. I had to show my family overseas what I was experiencing at this moment in time. I pulled my phone out of my pocket and I took a photo of my surrounds to send to my loved ones in China.

There was something about Australia that made me find peace. After experiencing the temperate Melbourne weather, I was made to feel alive, yet calm by the moderate climate. Australia also made me focus my attention to my spirit. As I experienced life here more and more, I was inspired to find my spirituality. I started believing in a God that would help me live life through forgiveness and peace.

*After experiencing life in Australia, it was a breath of fresh air for Yong. She enjoys her day gardening, and lightly exercising around her neighbourhood in Springvale. Living near her daughters and granddaughters, surrounds herself around those she loves.*



*Capturing Yong's bright and bubbly personality, she never fails to live every day to the fullest.*



## Zahra Haidari

**Zahra, one of the most courageous people, started her early life in Afghanistan and Pakistan.**

**She made the most important decision of her life. To come to Australia, where she knew she and her family would be given opportunity...**

*Even though Zahra is thousands of Kilometres away from her beloved family, and is unable to visit them, she makes regular contact with them, almost every day. She remains hopeful that one day she will fly to Afghanistan again, to see her family again. For now, she continues to learn English, and stay connected to her community. However most importantly, she remains dedicated in giving her children a full and happy life here in Australia.*

As I do my first prayer for the day in the early morning, I can't even feel my hands. The winter in Australia was no relief to the icy weather Afghanistan would bring in the colder months, or even Quetta - a city neighbouring the Afghan-Pakistani border. I recall being so nervous, yet so excited to start my new life with my husband. There was great responsibility on both our shoulders too. What will we tell our family who we left behind, if life beyond home was not worth it? We would live in this foreign country, our family thousands of kilometres away.

I remember the first time we arrived on foreign soil. It was similar to how I felt when we arrived in Quetta. I recall standing in the Pakistani village shocked. We noticed hundreds of Quetta locals buzzing around the village's markets. You could hear different dialects, all combining into chaos. Melbourne was chaotic in a different way. A metropolitan city with an expansive transport network, along with never-ending residential streets and infrastructure, really challenged our perception of how our home should look.

During my last minute of prayer, I couldn't help but reflect on all the challenges moving to Australia. I knew no one here, except my three children and husband, who had left his shop behind at Pakistan to support me. My children was a blessing to me. I first had Zhela who is my eldest daughter, then Sahil came along, who is my only son, and then Sidra came last. We all had no experience living in a place like this. We had no experience living in a place like this. Instead of being only hundreds of kilometres from family back in Quetta, we were now even further from those, thousands of kilometres away. However, we had made a life here in Australia despite its challenges. I knew I had to learn English, so I attended English classes at Chisholm Institute. I also learned how to drive in a place like Australia, which was probably the most difficult task of moving to another country. However when I was able to drive, I felt so independent and I had the freedom to travel to different places. Travelling was no longer an inconvenience for me. Since we came to Australia for my health, being able to travel to medical facilities was a need for us.

I ended my morning prayer, and all I could think about was to call my sister and brother who I missed very much in Afghanistan. I looked up at the clock hanging on the kitchen wall. It was 6:54am here, but it'd be 1:24 a.m. over in Afghanistan. I couldn't call now and not for another several hours. So I prepared Kabuli Pulao for my husband's lunch, as he would be heading into work today. I wished him a good day at work and walked him out. Soon, his car disappeared out of our street, and what remained was a gleaming sunrise filtered through wispy clouds. I was captivated and I stood there knowing that this moment wouldn't last forever. To my surprise, I felt my three children's embrace and I looked down at each of their faces; we were all here, together, in the Lucky Country.



*Zahra is thankful for each day where she lives her life in peace, alongside her family.*





*Alfreda with her beloved dog Lulu and Ursula. Ursula is one of our longest standing volunteers, as she has volunteered over 20 years of her life to support many individuals.*

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