

Dear Reader,



My name is Susan, which is my English name. Actually, my mum gave this English name to me even though she can't really speak a word of English. So she doesn't really know how English name works, but her last name is actually Su. So she thought that it would also be family name first and first name last, like Chinese names. So she thought Su then would incorporate her last name and that would be the first bit of the name as well. And actually for a while, I really hated the name because I started to realise that no one my age was named Susan. Really grandma level. But now I think I've made peace with it... mostly.

I came to Brisbane when I was 15, in 2011, so that's been 12 years or so. I came here because the education system in China is extremely competitive. I went through primary school in an international school with an American style education system, one that is kind of learn as you play and with lots of foreign teachers as well. Then after graduating primary school my parents put me in a local middle school. And that was way too different. The teachers were super strict, everyone's really competitive. The teachers would hit the boys. I don't think they do that anymore, but the teachers would hit the boys and that really terrified me. And the kids all went through local primary school so they were really good at maths and science and the only thing I was good at was English. And so we will take an exam every two weeks, I think. And then they would put a list on the wall who did the best all the way from 1 to 40. There were about 40 kids in my class and I was always kind of the last ten.

When I finished middle school, we had the high school entrance exam. I couldn't get into the best high school in my area and that means there's probably no way that I could get into a good college and then my future would be ruined. So my parents thought about sending me to another international school but they are super expensive in China, way more expensive than sending me abroad. We were considering Singapore, Australia or Canada but I think what really drew me to Australia was that I was reading the flyers from the agents and I saw that schools start at nine and finish at three and I thought, that's insane. Because even in middle school in China, I went to school, I think just before 7am and then I finished school at 6:30pm. Go home, eat food, go back to night class until 9:30, 10pm. Then study more at home and I wouldn't sleep until 11pm, 1am sometimes. And I still couldn't finish homework and then get up early, 5am. So it's just that cycle. And then I was the bottom student anyway, so I don't know what I was really studying for. So the Australian school hours was such a massive, big plus. So I came here in 2011 and I did year 10, 11, 12 here at Kenmore State High. It was a real good school then, but it was definitely a very, very white dominant school.

After high school I studied education and arts at UQ, but I really don't know what I wanted to do. I think it would have been nice to do a gap year, but it wasn't an option as then I was on student visa. So I kind of just thought, well I'll go do teaching. So I did a dual degree of arts, majored in film and TV and Chinese and also secondary teaching. After that I suppose I worked as a high school teacher for a few years. Did not enjoy it at all, did not really work with my temperament. I'm too much of a pushover. Like I love helping, I love teaching, I love lesson planning. I love when my students are interested in what I'm teaching. But I'm not good with behaviour management. And Australian children, they're very different from Chinese children. And I think the dynamic between teachers and students, what the teacher can do or can say is also very different. In China the teacher has a lot of power and a lot of respect. Here the parents are pretty much like, 'No my kid is at school, it's your problem. It's my problem when they are at home.'

I didn't have my PR at that time and that's also I think one of the reasons I did education because

it's always on the Skillsselect visa stream. After graduating I stayed on through the graduate stay visa first because that was the only one that I could get. It's a two year visa back at the time if you did a full bachelor's degree and above. And then I think I spent about eight months not working, just doing the English test again and again. Because for the Skillsselect you have to rack up points. Those tests are really hard and I threw in so much money because I couldn't get my writing points up. It's just really a money making scheme. Back then it was \$325 per exam and I don't remember how many times I did the test, but it was at least 5 times. And then I did a few other things, like translation course. If you become qualified translator, interpreter then you get more points. So I am, or I was, I don't think I'm still qualified, a paraprofessional interpreter. Which I don't even know what I can do with that.

Eventually I did get enough points for them to send the invitations. So once you have enough points, the government needs to give you an invitation first, then you apply. If you don't have the invitation, you can't apply. I think I got the invitation mid 2018 and then I put in the application straight away and then February 2019, I actually got the permanent residency visa. It was really, really fast.

My parents are still in China. They've visited a couple of times and I am in the process of applying for a sponsor visa for my mum. Which costs a shitload of money. It's all money money money. There are two visa streams for parents sponsorship. One is that you can just apply and queue and that takes about 30 years to get processed, which there's no point really. And then the contributory route which you queue for, but then once it's getting processed, you pay 42 grand per person. And that still takes 10 years. They say the queue for your application to even be processed is about a decade at the moment. And the projection just keeps being longer and longer every year.

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I didn't have much of an impression of Australia before coming here. I didn't really learn much about Australia at school in China. I think my impression was just that it's a white country. I thought, you know, kind of maybe like America, but just in a different area. When I first came I feel like it's a bit of a blur because it was all, I think, nerves. And obviously I think that there would be because where I was from, a small city in China, not many foreigners at all. So even coming here just the visual of the people would have been probably a big shock to adjust to. The food, big shock also. The language barrier wasn't too bad because I spoke a lot of English when I was in primary school, but the accent's strange and people look different.

School was good. But again, going to school, how kids were acting in class was a big shock compared to how I was used to. Kids were chatting in class, talking back to the teacher all the time. The teacher couldn't really do anything about it. And I suppose going into year ten, because most of them had been there since year eight, they already had their groups. And I remember the first day during the first break and I was just standing there. I recognized two groups of girls in two different sections. They were all from my form class and I was deciding which group I wanted to introduce myself to so that I could join them. And then I saw, in the much bigger group, a girl just pulled the pants of another boy open and like looked down into his pants. And I watched that happen in front of me and I thought, 'Oh, no. I'm going to go to the other group.'

It is quite a white school and I think most probably still quite white. In my grade there were about five of us Chinese international students, and the other four were boys. So I ended up making good friends with a few Australian girls who were sitting on the other side and were just quiet. I started sitting with them and they were nice. There were other Asian kids in my grade. They either moved here quite young or they were born in here. And, this is just my experience, but those kids were the meanest for some reason, to me.

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From the point of view of someone who's not white, I don't find Australia so racist but also I think it very much depends on the social bubble that you're in. I feel like maybe going through university and then, you know, hang out with teachers and stuff who are typically pretty progressive people and then working at university and things where I feel that people either have a better understanding of the world and have a more tolerant attitude towards things in general. Or even if people are internally racists, they know that they can't say that. So it definitely doesn't feel like I have to guard myself all the time based on how I look. But there have been a couple of times just here and there takes me out of my bubble and I realise, okay other people still exist. People saying racist stuff like yelling at you.

I definitely think I'm Asian after so many years of going through identity crisis. Not that serious, but I'm thinking about high school because of the other born-in-Australia Asian kids who didn't really want anything to do with me and stuff. I probably didn't admit this to myself, but I probably desperately didn't want to be Chinese. I wanted to be one of the kids who were born in here, and I wanted to be like them. I was never mean to anyone, but I think I definitely despised where I'm from for quite a long time. And now I think I'm very much at peace with the fact that I'm Chinese. You know, it doesn't matter. That's just a fact. But whenever I go back, I don't feel I belong there. At all.

I feel that I belong here, for a lot of reasons. Well, the gay thing is probably a big thing because the city that I'm from is so small. Like back to my grandparents' generation, they have absolutely no idea of what it is to be gay, they don't have that as possibility. And that's something that I'm currently struggling a little bit as well with my own parents. My mum's really, really good. I only came out to her the year before. She took it like a champion and she was so great. My partner, Mikha, and her have a great relationship on WeChat because it has automatic translate function. So Mikha's obviously becoming a big part of my life and I can't really share that with my extended family, you know.

And also just way of living in China I suppose, lots of pressure. People drive like they're insane. I don't know how to cross the road there anymore. And yeah, just super busy, a lot of pressure. The way people work, it's called nine nine six, which is 9am to 9pm, six days a week. That's the standard way of living. And people are not nice to service people. It's just a cultural thing, you know? And it really stressed me out every time when I go back because my parents can also be rude to service people. But they've been there their whole life so it's not their fault. And I don't want to point it out because I don't want to be the person who my dad thinks, 'Oh she's been there for a few years, she thinks she's no longer Chinese.' So I just don't.

And I think because I went through university here, a lot of my values and, like, what I value in life and also politically... a lot of that was shaped very much throughout my university years, which, I admit, is very western. And my dad is very patriotic, so yeah, just lots and lots of things make me feel like I definitely don't belong there. I feel very comfortable here, because I feel like I don't experience racism so often. I feel that I do very much belong here. I've got really long friendships and now I have Mikha's family who's like a second family to me.

## **Susan**