

Ethnicity in Our Community

Ying Sa

Ying Sa was born in China, educated in Canada and now lives in Des Moines. She serves her community by helping immigrants navigate the laws and standards concerning taxes and starting a business. She states that immigrants do not come here (United States) to do nothing. They want to do things. The following is her story in her words.



I was one of five children born to a mother who grew up seeing everything taken from her family by the Communist Party and a father who served time in prison because the Chinese government thought he was a spy. My father was very handsome and at one time he roomed with Mao Tse Tung. But he was never trusted by the Chinese government and by 1949 when Mao became leader he was believed to be a spy. My mother tells the story of how I came to know my father. For three years I walked with my mother past the prison once a week and sang songs so that my father could hear me. When my father was released from prison our family was very fearful and we did not go out much.

When China opened its doors to Taiwan my father's brother was one of the first to visit our family in China. He came with two suitcases and when he returned home it was without them. He brought towels and soap and other things for us. During his visit there were many secret talks between him and my father. When my Uncle left, plans were made for our entire family to immigrate to Canada. I was the first one to travel to Canada because my family wanted me to start my education. I walked two miles each day to school because I did not have the \$.25 for a ride. At the university I was in business school and graduated with an accounting degree but I hated it and I did not want to work in accounting.

I loved crafting. I rented a cart in the mall and made rabbits which I sold for \$12 each. At the end of the first month I had sold \$765 worth of rabbits. My rent was \$750. I cried in the subway on my way home. It was then that I decided to attend a church and it was there that I found friendships and support. They asked me where I went to school and I told them York and they said that was the best business school, "Can you do my taxes?" I closed the cart and within a short amount of time I had 200 clients.

I also met my husband at York and we moved to the United States because he got a job as an applied mathematician at ISU. We had TN Visas, which meant we could go back and forth from here to Canada. But then 9/11 happened and we could no longer travel back and forth. Our visas no longer assured us that we could even stay in the country. We began the process to get

green cards. The U.S Immigration Office wanted us to move back to China but the Chinese government said we were Canadian. The 3-country triangle went on for eight years and we lived in a temporary life.

On December 9, 2009 we were told to report to the immigration office in Omaha. We just knew it was going to be the end. But I went prepared. When the officer finally called us into his office, he said that we probably would not get green cards. So I was prepared and told him that he needed to give us some consideration. I showed him that from 1996-2009 we had paid \$350,000 in federal taxes. I showed him newspaper clippings of work I had done in the community. I asked him, "Do you need to deport a teacher and a contributor to the community?" He got up and left the office and said nothing to us. We waited about an hour and he returned and simply said, "Just go back home." We didn't know what he meant but we took our two little girls and left.

From that day whenever I heard the mailman deliver the email I was anxious. One day in March I heard the mailbox close and went out and a plain white envelope was in the mail. I opened it and there were green cards. We could not believe it!

"We need to have faith. That officer needed to give us special consideration. They are not all bad people and we are good people." This was such a gift.

Those eight years made me appreciate everyone who had come into my life. If you can live through the fear, you may find a new life. In the United States, this land is blessed.

When I came to the United States I worked at DMACC. One day I was visiting with a janitor and I noticed that he was holding an IRS form. I asked him about it and he wanted me to look at it and then tell him what he should do. I told him to come back the next day. It turned out to be a refund of over \$600 and he was thrilled. He asked if I would talk to some of his friends. Twenty people came and they all had problems that they did not know how to address. I started having people come to my home until my husband thought that this was an invasion of our privacy.

In 2000 I helped a business man who needed advice concerning how he was selling fish. I had to study the law, DNR regulations and I worked closely with the Drake Legal Clinic. I helped this man and he offered me free rent for an office building. He wanted me to help other immigrants. I moved in and the first month I made \$50 but by the end of the year the business had grown to \$200,000. I only paid utilities for five years before I started to pay rent. I then purchased a building on Ingersoll and opened Community PCA.

In 2003 I was approached by Wells Fargo to work as comptroller for a division that sent me back and forth to Canada. I learned a lot and stayed with Wells Fargo for five years. Then I started to think about my community, "Do I go for humanity rather than profits?" I made the decision in 2008 to go for humanity and went back to Community PCA full time.

During my first year of business I paid myself \$24,000. Today Community PCA has grown to 6,000 clients and 16 employees. This year I made my first employee a partner.

It is important to have entrepreneur services for immigrants. They don't purposely do the wrong things, they just don't know. There is a lot of education that needs to be done.

Ying Sa continues to serve her community through accounting, listening and entrepreneurial information.