

Chapter 1: Pre-Liberation

Before 1949

When we lose, never lose the lesson.

MY FAMILY WAS ORIGINALLY FROM A LITTLE TOWNSHIP AT NUOSHUI, COUNTY OF SHIFANG, SICHUAN PROVINCE IN CHINA, at the bottom of Lung Men Mountain Ridge, near the epicentre of the 12 May 2008 earthquake which killed more than 80,000 people.

Despite China's 5000 years of fascinating history, the only thing I can clearly remember about it is my own family at Nuoshui and particularly the kindness of my grandmother. She is one of the motivations and inspirations for me to write this book, to record where we came from and where we are going as human beings and the purpose of our lives. She wanted me to bring our Huang family to prosperity.

While there are hundreds of common Chinese family names, Huang is a major one in Chinese history. It means *yellow*, which is the royal colour for the ancient Chinese emperor and the basic colour of my real estate logo for commercial and business. My family tree is comprised of 20 Chinese characters.

The characters and their meanings are:

Zhong	Loyal
Ming	Light
Guan	Brighten
Shang	Noble
Shi	Gentlemen
Si	Fine
Wen	Education
Nian	Think
Yong	Forever

Chang Prosperous
Da Wide
Dau Road
Qian Huge
Kun Universal
Ding Controlled By You

Huai Looking Forward
Yuan Further
Zhen Conquer
Chun Spring
Bang Territory

My grandfather's name is Huang Siqing. In Chinese, the inherited family name, Huang in this case, is placed before the double given name, his being Siqing. The first part of his given name, Si, indicates his generation of the family tree, being common to the name of each of his siblings. My father's given name was Wenjiou, the name Wen being attached also to that of each of his siblings. In my children's generation, my eldest daughter was named Yongheng, and each of my subsequent children carries Yong in the middle of their names.

My original given name was Nianyong (and my sister's name thus also prefixed with Nian). Due to the Communist Cultural Revolution, however, Nian was taken out of my name when I was only three years old, so I became Huang Yong. When I came to Australia I reversed my name, English-style, and adopted the name of Peter, and am thus now known as Peter Yong Huang or simply Peter Huang.

My great grandfather started our family business in the early 1900s. He grew up in a wealthy farming merchant family as a large landlord, owning a dozen acres of land as well as owning two very successful Chinese wok shops in different locations. He had one very capable elder brother, Huang Sihan, a lame man I never met, who I know ended up staying on the farm. When my great grandfather passed away, the two brothers decided to divide the family assets and live separately, throwing the dice to decide who would stay in the country as a landlord and who would stay in the town as a merchant. My grandfather's elder brother won the toss for the country and his whole family stayed there. He was perceived as a large landlord until the communists took over the government in 1949 and his whole family subsequently suffered severe persecution, becoming third class, penniless peasants along with all the other large landlords in the country.

Prior to the separation of the two brothers, my grandmother was working hard

on the farm, feeding dozens of pigs, and my grandfather and his older brother were managing the Chinese wok shop businesses in the town. Fortunately, my grandfather ended up with the Chinese wok shop businesses instead of being a farmer at the time.

My grandfather had a great outgoing and charitable nature. He took over and ran the family business, Huang's Pot Shop, which had one shop in Shanhe and three, side by side, in Nuoshui (later named Yongxing) as I mentioned before. Those shops were busier than any others in both towns in those days because pots were essential items for every family.

During my childhood my grandmother told me constantly how charitable and kind my grandfather was and she shared her husband's nature, right up until she passed away at 80 years of age, despite becoming poor after the communists took over in 1949. I lived with my grandmother, a doctor's daughter, from when I was six months old until I was 15 years old and at that time living with the entire family of three generations. We did not have much money. We initially lived on six RMB per month, which was mailed to us by my father.

I can clearly remember throughout my childhood, almost every visitor or colleague of my auntie or classmate of mine being forcefully persuaded to stay to share our lunch or dinner. Throughout the whole country during that time of extreme hardship prior to and after Liberation, to be invited to dine in someone's home was considered the highest form of hospitality and every day before Liberation, my grandparent's family always had two to three tables of guests and staff for each meal. Almost all their staff lived and ate at my grandparents' big mansion as they were mostly farmers or relatives from far away. I still remember my grandmother's loud voice calling, 'Hold them! Hold them! Don't let them run away! Let them have lunch first before we let them go!' It was compulsory even for casual acquaintances from the country or factory workers who parked their bicycles at our home while shopping on the market of our country town.

My grandmother was always telling me how, before the Liberation when we had a large business employing dozens of workers, as long as my grandfather could afford it, he would always help whoever was genuinely in need as best he could. His charitable nature was well known in the country town because he came from a farm and always treated people like his family members, trusting people completely even if, from time to time, he was cheated or let down.

Grandmother told me a story about her nephew who was the son of my grandfather's second wife. (My grandfather married three times, his first two wives having passed away while they were still very young and my grandmother being his third wife.) Although the three wives' families were not related to one another, my grandmother

treated their children as close relatives and always called them her nephews and nieces. One of these nephews, Liu Su Kuen was eventually invited to work in the business and being from the country, also stayed the whole week with our grandparents' large family. While there he stole bundles of money, which eventually led to the ruin of the business. One of the long standing loyal workers also shared the same story with me at my grandmother's funeral saying that, when he shared the bed at night with my grandmother's nephew, he often found him before payday with bundles of money tied around his leg.

My grandparents had nine children but, at the time of the Liberation in 1949, only four were surviving. My father was the eldest and the other children were all girls. They built three of the grandest buildings in the area, each building having a shop in the front and a residence with four to five huge bedrooms in the back. The main building had two internal courtyards as well as a large back yard and the side building had one internal yard as well as a back yard.

Due to the poor medical service during the war years and his excessive habit of smoking opium, my grandfather passed away when he was 55 years old leaving his 44 year-old widow to look after the whole family business as well as four young children. She never remarried, remaining faithful to her husband, and passed away at 80 years of age in 1985, just before I graduated from university.

The war between Japan and China began in 1937. The then Nationalist Party's headquarters was based in Congqing City, Sichuan province, before they retreated to Taiwan. This is why most of the veteran pilots of Taiwan's air force were from Sichuan, and the Sichuan dialect was the semi-official language in some of Taiwan's military retirement villages. (Many of these pilots have since migrated to Australia and become my valued real estate clients and friends.)

Eight years of war (1937-1945) against the Japanese was followed by a further four years of "Liberation War" (1945-1949) between the nationalists and communists. The war, with both parties fighting under the motto of "Safeguard the People's Right", almost ruined the country's economy. My grandparent's family business suffered greatly from the ever-lasting wars. After the Liberation in 1949 the family business was effectively closed down due to six main factors: first, the 12 years of war; second, my grandparents' habit of smoking large amounts of opium imported from the modernised Western countries and Japan; third, their extremely generous and charitable practise of giving to the poor as well as to their staff and workers no matter how much was left over for them; fourth, my grandfather's subsequent passing away; fifth, the massive stealing by my grandmother's unrelated nephew; sixth, the return to the country by most workers to share farm land as promised by the Communist Party.

The whole family was left with only three empty buildings and hence escaped the

persecution of the communists as they were no longer considered to be large landlords or large capitalists, despite the local authorities' attempt to prove this was not so at one stage!

My grandmother, Zhang Xinchou, and her four children, Huang Wenjiou, Huang Wenying, Huang Wencheng and Huang Wenhui, were all lucky to have survived, and thus the immediate family of my memory would smoothly transfer from my Grandfather's Si generation to my father's Wen generation, my Nian generation, then to my children's Yong generation which includes Constance Yongheng Huang, Harvey Yongfeng Huang and Jade Yongcui Huang.

Chapter 2: Communist Life

1949-1963

“The Rule of AG95—Attitude and Gratitude counts for 95% of our success.” —Peter Huang

AMERICAN MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER LES BROWN SAID: ‘IT’S NOT OVER UNTIL YOU WIN.’ No matter what happens, always be grateful and learn from it which is my belief. At the time of the Liberation in China, my grandmother’s four children were still very young. My father, at 16 years of age was the eldest son, the eldest daughter, Huang Wenying, was nine, the second eldest daughter, Huang Wencheng, was four and the youngest daughter, Huang Wenhui, one year old. My grandmother had given birth to nine children but despite her family being quite wealthy only these four survived until then because health and nutrition during the war were of a very poor standard.

After my grandfather passed away in 1948, my grandmother carried on with the business for a little while with the support of her nephew and the old employees, many of whom, originally peasants, were from the country. After the Liberation, those workers gradually went back to the country to take up their share of the land, which had been confiscated by the communists from the large landlords.

Despite her nephew having stolen a great deal of cash from the business, my grandmother struggled to keep it going as well as raise her four young children and my mother who had been staying with my grandparents since she was a child. In 1950, within a few months of the Liberation, the business was closed down completely. As the business had closed, the owner was not classified as a large capitalist and my grandmother avoided severe prosecution.

At the same time, in 1950, my father married my mother, Shen Xianhui, when she was 15 and he was 17 years old. The marriage had been arranged by their parents, the match having been made many years before by Elder Auntie Tan, the sister of my maternal grandmother. My mother’s family, Shen, were large landowners in the area so, when both of the children were only a few years old, the parents of the

Huang family and the Shen family agreed to the marriage between them. Prior to the Liberation, because of the rapid decline of my grandfather's business after the assets were separated, my maternal grandmother was contemplating revoking the marriage contract by asking for the return of the Eight Characters, the Chinese tradition being that the wealth of both contracting families must be similar. However, due to the Liberation, the Shen family also became penniless, so the marriage proceeded. A large banquet was held with around 20 tables, organised by my paternal grandmother, some money having been borrowed, it was said, for the grand wedding in that liberated year of 1950.

During the first few years after the Liberation, the communists prosecuted many large landlords who had lived in the country. My great uncles' families, on both my father's and mother's sides, suffered more persecution and humiliation than anyone else in our family.

My mother's side of our family was persecuted severely, her mother's brother-in-law, Tan Baozhi, and his son, Tan Jinhua, being executed by firing squad because they were not only large landlords but also prominent officials under the previous opposition party, Kuo Mindang's Nationalist Party. On the eve of their execution, my maternal grandmother's younger sister, Tan Baozhi's wife (who was called Younger Auntie Tan), hung herself for the sake of her dear husband and son. That's real love! My maternal grandmother's elder brother, Luo Hongji, was also executed by firing squad. My maternal grandmother, Luo Hongqing, was herself widowed at 25 years of age, when my mother was only one year old. Her husband was killed by a local villain and she never remarried, passing away at the age of 91.

With the business closed down, my paternal grandmother was left with her children and daughter-in-law, and no income at all. They lived on their cash reserve and by selling jewellery but there was not much left. The only alternative was to sell the assets they owned, so my grandmother decided to sell two of the houses and retain the main building in the middle to feed her family. The children were still very young, and with no income, nor any such thing as a pension for farmers or unemployed people, the money raised by selling property and jewellery did not last long.

While my grandmother was hoping my father would enter a government career or find a job locally when he grew up, he still had a long way to go. In the meantime he, as a young boy, was tempted by the prospects of becoming an army man with a guaranteed income so when the Korean War started in 1950, he was looking forward to joining and going to Korea to fight the Americans. My grandmother felt desperate because my father was her only son and therefore the only hope for the five women in the family. She did not dare imagine the consequences of my father being killed in the war and, no matter what he said or did to try to persuade her to let him go, she would

not budge, feeling that regardless of their need for money, as long as he was there with them, they would survive and eventually have a brighter future.

However, my father's male pride would not allow him to sit still much longer with five women at home, no income and no subsidies from the government. He started to rebel against my grandmother until she was forced to lock him in the bedroom. One night, at midnight, my father climbed out the window and fled to join the army, before my grandmother could catch up with him. He was determined to go. He wanted to find a way to save his family and at 17, he considered the army the quickest way, the only place where he could earn a good fixed income and send all the money back home to feed his mother, his wife and three younger sisters.

My father joined the Chinese People's Volunteer Army, a force especially deployed by the Communist Party to fight in the Korean War. Instead of declaring war, by means of this force's voluntary support of North Korea, the government had a legitimate reason to have troops there to safeguard against a potential invasion by America and prevent them controlling China and the rest of Asia.

Because my father grew up in a wealthy family and held a rare high school certificate, he was considered one of the best educated recruits in the army and was therefore sent to Nan Jing's Cannon College in 1950, graduating later as one of its first alumni under the Communist Party. Although the Korean War was over when he graduated, there was still fighting between some rebels of the Communist Party in remote areas and my father was sent back to the National Army as a security guard to participate in anti-rebellion operations.

He later joined the cavalry to become a cavalryman, travelling with his unit between the forests and regional towns in the remote area of Qin Hai. Sometimes, when they were out of food and lost, they were driven to chew their leather belt or the bark from trees but still he continued to send almost all his salary back home to his mother to feed the whole family. My grandmother was a devout Buddhist and, every time she received the money in the mail, she would kneel down in our large courtyard and pray for Buddha's protection for her son's safety and the safety of the whole family.

It was during this period that my father's horse got pneumonia and, soon after, my father was also affected. My father shed tears when his loyal horse was put down and buried on the spot. Afterwards, he was sent to the hospital for treatment and this sickness was possibly one of the causes of his lung cancer later in life.

After 1954, when the Land Revolution was finished, the focus was turned to business owners. Earlier, during the first years of the Liberation, all the large land holders, including my maternal grandmother, were required to kneel down before various assemblies to be criticised again and again for the wrong-doing of owning too much land, too many properties or being too wealthy, all evidence of their crimes. After

1954, the business owners (or capitalists, which included my paternal grandmother), were brought before the assembly to be examined. My grandmother was requested to confess her wrongdoing of being a capitalist but she refused. She fought back against those on the dais by bashing her hand on the table, pointing out that she and her family had very few assets after the Liberation and that her son was a glorious army official in the Chinese People's Army. In the end, because she was related to an army official and the business had ceased operating soon after the Liberation, the whole family was spared further persecution.

In the meantime, my grandmother decided to send her two daughters and daughter-in-law out to work, even though they were still very young. Finding a job was extremely difficult in those days because, since the revolution and especially after 1954, private enterprise was forbidden. Those peasants who had been given a small share of the previous large landholdings had only a few years to enjoy their own fortune after the Liberation. Originally, as promised, they had been given all the land by the communists, free of charge, this having been their main reason for supporting the Communist Party during the civil war with Jiang Kai Shi's Nationalists. However, their land was soon taken back by an even larger landowner, the Communist Government, who resumed it. Private businesses were also gradually transferred or forfeited and became wholly owned by the government giving them, therefore, total control of the country's employment.

My mother and my grandmother's fourth daughter, Huang Wenyin, eventually found a job in a government-owned supply and distribution centre and her eighth daughter, Huang Wencheng, found a job as a trainee hairdresser in a salon which was also government-owned. All of them worked hard day-in and day-out. My father, who was like a second father to his younger sisters, was now very far away and Huang Wenyin, who as the eldest was like a second mother, had taken on the responsibility of earning the extra income to support the whole family, together with my mother and my eighth auntie. My mother was later on enrolled in the medical college for further study due to her better primary school education than most others from being raised in a wealthy family and my fourth auntie ended up marrying a capable young man, Li Hongwu. However, before happier times dawned, she sadly passed away early in 1960 at only 20 years of age, due to the extreme hardships and malnutrition suffered during the three years of the "natural disaster period" and, only a few months after her marriage, became one of the millions of victims of the times.

Once again, the main responsibility of taking care of the family fell onto my father's shoulders. He was still sending almost everything back home to feed his family. He had transferred to work in Beijing, the capital city of communist China, but my mother was not used to the life in the cold north of China so they decided that my father

would return to Chengdu, the capital city of Sichuan. In 1962 he transferred to an air force unit there called AIR028.

Almost 14 years had passed since my father married and joined the army, and he was fast approaching 30 years of age. He and my mother decided it was time to have their first child and subsequently I was born in 1963, probably the most populated year in human history.

The three years of hardship and starvation throughout the country, from 1959 to 1962, was due to the Great Leap Forward (whereby private enterprises were transferred to the communist government), conflict with Taiwan, and the USA (and later even with the Soviet Union) and various natural disasters. In this period tens of millions of people died of pure hunger, a repeat of the Soviet Union's similar transformation, in 1932 under Stalin, in which tens of millions of people also died of hunger. My grandmother told me that, in this period, most people looked dark yellow due to the extreme lack of salt, oil, rice and meat. She very often saw people walking along the street when, all of a sudden they would just fall down on the ground and die from starvation. She said that she never witnessed the extreme hunger and widespread starvation, even before 1949 in Sichuan during wartime.

While communism's ideology is to contribute and receive proportionately, it unfortunately mutated to an averaging system. In the end, it caused those who contributed more to get less, those who gave less got more and those who contributed nothing got everything. During those three years, this was the common plight throughout the country. Due to the "false, huge and empty" culture at the time, most local "People's Communes" were reporting to the government false "achievements" credited to the transformation, and statistics indicating glorious productivity. After sending the majority of the goods to the Central Government to pay off the debt to the Soviet Union and donating to other international communist alliances, most local people were left impoverished, some eating grass and the bark of trees to survive because they were supplied with only a small amount of rice and cooking oil and almost no meat or vegetables. All this was due to the lack of productivity arising from "big rice pot" thinking, but the people were led to believe it was purely a "natural disaster". My grandmother's eldest daughter, Huang Wenying, was just one of the millions of unnecessary and unfortunate victims of that time.