



IN CONVERSATION

Interviews with notable
Chinese Australians

IN CONVERSATION

MARITA CHENG



Where do you live?

I was born in Cairns, QLD and then moved to Melbourne, VIC.

How would you describe yourself?

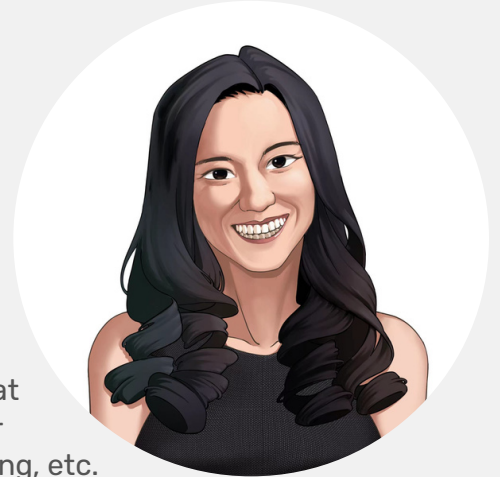
Chinese Australian.

What languages do you speak?

English, Cantonese, Japanese and very little Mandarin.

What kind of student were you when you were at school?

I was a very good student. I got straight A+s. I tried really hard at school. I also had many interests and did a lot of extracurricular activities - piano, Japanese, swimming, debating, public speaking, etc. We were very poor, so I wanted to get a scholarship to go to university.



What was your favourite subject and why?

My favourite subject was mathematics because I was good at it and because it made me feel calm and zen to solve maths equations.

What do you know now that you wish you'd known when you were growing up?

Do more fun projects! To learn about yourself. There was so much I didn't know back then! I'm very happy with how I turned out when I graduated high school. :)

What did you want to be when you were growing up?

I wanted to build robots to help people in their everyday lives! I didn't know that was called engineering. I'm glad I learnt in year 12, that building robots is called mechatronics engineering, and that I was able to go and study it at university!

How did you end up doing what you do now?

I started a nonprofit organisation, Robogals, when I was at university. We've now taught 150,000 girls our robotics workshops in 13 countries. I was named Young Australian of the Year. That opened me up to many more opportunities, including starting my own companies. I'm also an engineer - I solve problems using maths and science.

What do you like about your jobs?

I like working with other people to achieve a goal bigger than we could achieve alone. I like making a difference in people's lives and impacting thousands of people around the world. I like making a contribution to other people.

How do you like to spend your time when you're not working?

When I'm not working, I like to learn. I take various short courses to learn. I like to speak. I travel around the world and give speeches. And I like to create. I try to always be creating things. Creating things makes me happy.

What makes you feel proud?

I feel proud when I persevere and accomplish something difficult, when I reach a milestone or achieve a goal.

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IN CONVERSATION

ELIZABETH CHONG



Where do you live?

Melbourne, VIC is my home.

How would you describe yourself?

An Australian-Chinese. When I was younger I thought of myself as more Chinese. But as I've grown older, Australian culture has become mainly my culture... some things are very deeply ingrained, however, like courtesy to elders and a love of Chinese food. I inherited them from my parents so that stays with me.

What languages do you speak?

English. My Chinese has almost disappeared but I think it would come back if I was speaking with someone from the area of China I came from in South West Guangzhou.

What kind of student were you when you were at school?

Average. Not brilliant. Not a disgrace. Bs were accepted but I aspired to As as well. We liked a bit of fun and were a little bit more sporty.

What was your favourite subject and why?

English expression and English literature. I was naturally happy doing both. I loved reading.

What do you know now that you wish you'd known when you were growing up?

I used to be a little too spontaneous and then I was sorry because I messed things up. I've learned to take things a little slower and think things through.

What did you want to be when you were growing up?

I dreamed of being a concert pianist or opera singer but that was fantasy. I also thought of journalism. But I trained as a teacher and I started teaching right away.

How did you end up becoming a well-known cookbook author and presenter?

It was accidental. I was giving a lot of free cooking demonstrations for charity and then one day, teachers from my children's primary school asked me to teach a group of ten teachers. Since then, I've taught over 35,000 students. Much later, one of my former students suggested I write a cookbook. The publishing house, Macmillan, contacted me to write my first book. Another former student arranged for me to appear on the 'Good Morning Melbourne' TV show, leading to working with the national TV show, 'Good Morning Australia.' I did 12 years presenting with Bert Newton on 'Good Morning Australia.' He was a household name so my name also became well known.

What do you like about your jobs?

The interaction with people. I led many people on gastronomic tours of Asia. You need to love people to do this as it's a very demanding job.

How do you like to spend your time?

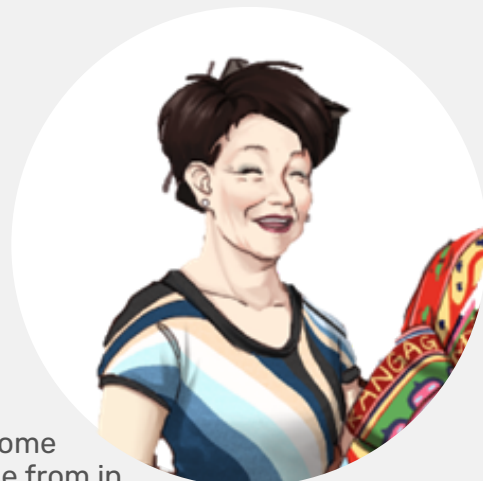
I find my life a good blend of relaxing and catching up with friends and then I always have something I'm working on. I still do TV appearances when invited. I'm also going to a dance/exercise class and learning to play mahjong.

What makes you feel proud?

I'm very proud when someone comes up to me because they remember me, either as a past student or from TV, and they want to thank me again for contributing to their life in a positive way.

Any advice?

Don't be afraid to walk through the doors. Just take things one step at a time.



IN CONVERSATION

JASON CHONG



Where do you live?

Adelaide, SA.

How would you describe yourself?

I'm an Australian-Singaporean stand up comedian and film maker, thanks for asking!

What languages do you speak?

English.

What kind of student were you when you were at school?

I was pretty good academically, played sport and music, but was always getting in trouble for talking in class and making the other kids laugh. I spent a lot of time sitting at the desk in front of the teacher.

What was your favourite subject and why?

I loved music because it was creative and I was allowed to MAKE NOISE!

What do you know now that you wish you'd known when you were growing up?

I got into uni, finished my marketing degree and never explicitly used it. I don't really regret it though, as it creeps into a lot of things that I do. Perhaps I could have chosen something different that would have helped me sooner (like going to film school), but it all worked out and I think I've ended up where I'm supposed to be.

What did you want to be when you were growing up?

An inventor. I didn't really know what that meant at the time, but now I think it was me wanting to be creative, but thinking it was going to have to be in an academic field. Turns out I AM an inventor - I create stories!

How did you end up doing what you do now?

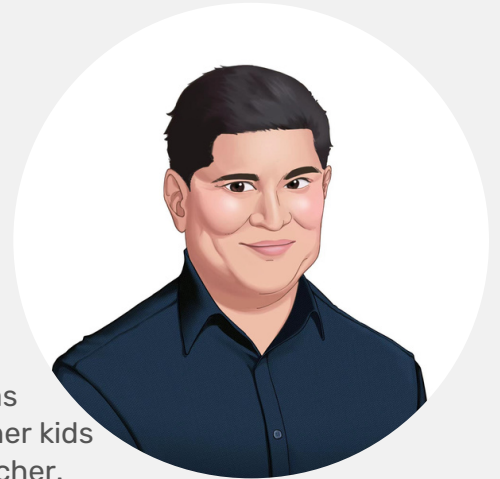
Stand-up came about through a bit of student radio at uni. Then after uni I went on a gap year, and my mum sent me newspaper clippings from home whenever she sent me mail (the internet was a bit harder to access then). One of the clippings was for a stand up comedy course because she knew I liked watching comedy on TV, and I kept that in my passport and called the number when I got home. As for film making, during that same gap year I was working in a pub in London and feeling frustrated. I realised that for the first time in my life I wasn't learning anything and that I missed it. So I went to a bookstore and bought a book that just happened to be about film making. When I got home I had 4 books on filmmaking in my luggage and knew I wanted to go to film school.

What do you like about your jobs?

I love that I'm able to have an idea and follow it through as far as I think I can take it. I can think of something that will make me laugh, and flesh it out, bring it on stage, work on it some more, combine it with some other ideas and it can turn into a show I can tour the country and the world with. Or I can think of a film or game show idea, write it, see who's interested, collaborate on it with them and it can end up on a TV or movie screen somewhere!

How do you like to spend your time when you're not working?

Unfortunately, when you work as a freelancer or for yourself there's not heaps of 'not working' time. It's hard to switch off when you've got multiple projects on the go at once. And when you make entertainment, what other people do to relax IS your work! But I like spending time with my wife and all our friends. We like to play board games (but now I'm having ideas for board games I'd like to make, so that's ruined...) and I just bought a 3D printer and I'm trying to figure that out. Oh, and I started playing ice hockey a couple of years ago and I LOVE doing that. It all comes back to that realisation that I really like learning stuff.



IN CONVERSATION

JASON CHONG



What makes you feel proud?

I like the life I've built for myself. I have a wife, a dog and we're about to have our first child (my wife and me, not me and the dog). I also feel proud that I have created opportunities for other comedians. I love making spaces for my other talented friends to play in, either by creating TV shows and games for them to host and appear on, or by encouraging and supporting Asian Australians to get on stage and try stand up comedy. A lot of those people are now doing great things, and their success makes me very happy.



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IN CONVERSATION

HELENE CHUNG



Where do you live?

Hobart, TAS.

How would you describe yourself?

Journalist and author, the first non-white reporter on Australian television and the first female the ABC posted abroad as a foreign correspondent.

What languages do you speak?

English.

What kind of student were you when you were at school?

When a teacher and I liked each other I did my best and excelled. When a teacher treated me unfairly, such as Sister Rita who hit my chill-blained knuckles when they slipped onto the wrong notes of the piano, I did poorly.

What was your favourite subject and why?

Speech and drama, because the teacher was fun and encouraged me. I like acting different people on the stage and reciting poetry.

What do you know now that you wish you'd known when you were growing up?

The importance of science. I played up in this class but now realise science helps us understand how the world works. The importance of Latin. Latin is a language that helps us learn about the lives of people who came before us and developed the world we know today. The importance of sport. I wish I had bothered with sport because it would have made me a fitter and healthier person.

What did you want to be when you were growing up?

First I wanted to be an artist. Then I wanted to be a police woman. Later I wanted to drive a tram.

How did you end up where you are now?

I recorded an interview with a Hobart butcher who said he had seen a Tasmanian tiger. This is a striped animal most people believe is extinct. When my interview was broadcast on radio the next morning, I decided I wanted to be a radio reporter.

What do you like about your jobs?

The thrill of asking a stranger to tell me something interesting other people don't know. The satisfaction of making a small piece of news reach a wide audience. News of the Hobart butcher's sighting of the Tasmanian tiger went right around Australia.

How do you like to spend your time when you're not working?

Reading, gardening, swimming and exercising, seeing art, films, opera and theatre, and meeting and eating with family and friends.

What makes you feel proud?

I'm most proud of my mother who became a single mother decades before the term 'single mother' was heard. She proved strong and independent when most woman were weak and totally controlled by men. My mother urged me to study, work hard and make myself independent.



IN CONVERSATION

ALFRED HUANG



Where do you live?

Adelaide, SA.

How would you describe yourself?

Chinese Australian.

What languages do you speak?

English, Mandarin, Cantonese and Shanghainese.

What is your favourite place in Australia and why?

Adelaide – because it is a beautiful place, safe, friendly and multi-cultural.

What is your favourite place overseas and why?

Shanghai. It's modern, vibrant, attractive and friendly.

What kind of student were you when you were at school?

Smart but quiet.

What were your favourite subjects and why?

Mathematics and science.

What do you know now that you wish you'd known when you were growing up?

A balance between study and sport.

What did you want to be when you were growing up?

An engineer. I worked as an engineer for over 25 years.

What did you like about your job?

I could see the physical outcome of my efforts.

How has your family responded to what you do?

They are quite happy with what I have achieved.

How do you like to spend your time?

Reading, getting together with my family and meeting with my friends and supporting community work.

How do you deal with challenges?

Be positive and take on the challenge.

What makes you feel happy?

Achieving my goals.

What makes you feel proud?

That I've made a contribution to the society.

What are your favourite foods or places to eat?

I like a variety of food –Chinese, Western, Korean and Vietnamese.

IN CONVERSATION

JOY LI

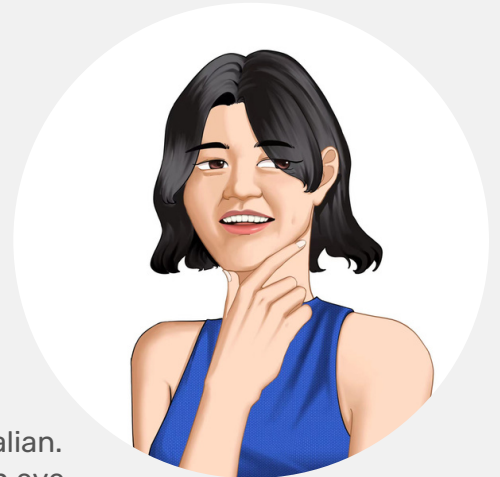


Where do you live?

Sydney, NSW.

How would you describe yourself?

Joy by name and Joy by nature! On a day to day, I would describe myself as a brand designer, creating brands for clients all around the world. There are other times I would describe myself as an illustrator, where I have worked on fun and interesting projects for companies such as Adobe, Nike, HP and SBS. Many of the themes in my work draws from my Chinese culture and experiences growing up as an Asian Australian. Visually, I use a lot of bold vibrant colours and have quite a keen eye for textures and detail. Outside of work, I enjoy getting outdoors and going for a swim and snorkel at the beach.



What languages do you speak?

I speak English and Mandarin.

What kind of student were you when you were at school?

I was a relatively hardworking student, moreso when it came to the subjects and teachers I enjoyed. I tend to see the word 'contentious' a lot on my school reports.

What was your favourite subject and why?

Visual arts was my favourite because It combined my two favourite things – getting to create things and learn about the history of our visual culture.

What do you know now that you wish you'd known when you were growing up?

Being brave and asking more questions. You get to understanding things much better.

What did you want to be when you were growing up?

I distinctly remember wanting to be a dentist or a fashion designer when I was very young.

How did you end up doing what you do now?

I didn't know my current job existed when I decided to study my degree at university. As I learnt more about the career opportunities within the creative field, I found a niche that I found interesting and naturally fell into the industry.

What do you like about your jobs?

I enjoy being able to use my creative skills to visually problem solve for the ever changing variety of new social and business challenges. I am also constantly learning and adapting to new forms of technology and new ways of visual communication.

How do you like to spend your time when you're not working?

When I'm not working, I enjoy going outside and trying new things. Whether that's discovering new foods and cuisines or trying out any activity that involves the water – like snorkeling, surfing, scuba diving, paddle boarding or kayaking!

What makes you feel proud?

I feel proud when I persevere and accomplish something difficult, when I reach a milestone or achieve a goal.

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IN CONVERSATION

ALICE PUNG



Where do you live?

I live in Melbourne, VIC.

How would you describe yourself?

Teochew Chinese Australian.

What languages do you speak?

Teochew and English.

What kind of student were you when you were at school?

I was quiet, introverted, daydreamy, and needed to see a speech pathologist until I was in Grade 2 because even though I was born in Australia, I had problems pronouncing words.

What was your favourite subject and why?

Art in primary school, because there seemed to be no parameters to that subject; and English literature in high school because I liked reading and telling stories.

What do you know now that you wish you'd known when you were growing up?

That I would have autonomy over my life, and independence, and that things weren't always going to stagnate. Also, that the VCE/HSC is not as important as everyone makes it out to be. When you are seventeen, your world is full of potential, and it is so heartbreaking to see young people at that age believing the opposite.

What did you want to be when you were growing up?

An artist.

How did you end up doing what you do now?

I wrote quite a few short stories in university, got them submitted and published, and then went on to write books. I also work as a legal researcher in the area of minimum wages.

What do you like about your jobs?

Making the law accessible for ordinary Australians, creating stories for children and young adults where they feel like they have a sense of agency and that their lives are fully seen.

How do you like to spend your time when you're not working?

I read a lot, and like to spend time with my family.

What makes you feel proud?

Receiving an Order of Australia Medal for my services to literature. It was completely unexpected, and to this day I do not know who nominated me! But it is a lovely feeling, to know that my work mentoring and encouraging younger writers has made some difference to the diversity of our literary landscape. I am excited about all the emerging new and exciting voices out there now.

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