

Story 2 - Cheryl Langdon-Orr

What: An AusTrade supported delegation to Mainland China back in the early '80's sponsored by invitation from the then Ministry for Trade and Agriculture.

Background: An Australian Trade Delegation to China (an official visit under invitation from a Minister so all very formal and highly controlled but an extensive 'whistle stop' tour of quite a few provinces with frequent opportunity for trade meetings and official functions/meals with various Industry Local, Provincial and National Leaders) we had our own expert interpreter and at most functions and interactions official Interpreters services were also supplied.

Synopsis: Situations arise where cultural and communication challenges often arise even unexpectedly, one's confidence in "The Art of Small Talk" can literally save the day and often reputation(s)

Set-Up: Day 5 (or was it 6) of a 14-day 'tour' some days had been 2 formal breakfast functions 2-3 luncheons or dinners site visits to showcase industries and activities many many miles travelled and so busy not quite sure what was coming next but there was detailed itineraries to read and transport/guides always supplied.

Situation: As per the distributed itinerary, after a morning of functions and meetings we had a provided for at the night before accommodation venue, an afternoon site visit to a showcased brewery and then a pharmaceutical company Formal Dinner with the Minister who had extended the invitation to visit, and his entourage; then an evening of organised entertainment then overnight at a "corporate resort" owned by the pharmaceutical company. On return to my room after morning activities to put my feet up before our 'Private lunch' in an assigned function room and head out for the afternoon/evening. Note here of all the delegates I was the only female delegate, other women were the wives of my male delegate companions (so there were 4 females in our party 1 interpreter, 2 wives and me.

I arrive a few minutes early as is my preference at the assigned 'Private Lunch' room, which was locked but I sat in the foyer of the room (that should have been a giveaway) staff arrive and open up the room to set the buffet in "Quite the glamorous set up" seating more than our small party of delegates... A group of clearly important local/provincial people start to arrive a total of 7 if memory serves, before I was invited with them into the room, I speak no Chinese, they speak no English; I am the only one from my official party in attendance and luncheon start time has come and gone, there are no interpreters attending and well let the charade/games begin...