

# Westernizing Eastern establishments - an adventure of a lifetime

by Kim Pickering

When a former co-worker asked Nadine Martin if she knew anyone who would be interested in traveling to China, to westernize a Chinese restaurant, no one came in mind.

After giving it some serious thought, she realized it would require someone with restaurant experience, who liked to travel, who would enjoy learning a new culture and language and who had a strong work ethic. After a lot of soul searching, family discussions with her husband Ed, and her children Travis and Talynn, Mrs. Martin decided to apply for the position herself. It wasn't long

before a contract was drawn up and plans were made for the lengthy voyage.

On October 28, 2000, after taking a leave of absence from her Bell World job, Mrs. Martin left her familiar rural life on a chicken farm outside of Milton and flew from Toronto to Anchorage, Alaska, then on to Seoul, Korea and her final destination, Shen Yang, China. Twenty-four hours later, she was met by an interpreter and Mr. Wen, one of the Monte Carlo restaurant's owners, whom she had met previously in Toronto.

Shen Yang has a population of six million. Up until 1972, all busi-

nesses were state owned and under Communist rule. Employees were assigned jobs in all walks of life with equal pay - a method known as the "Iron Rice Bowl." This means all people were guaranteed a job for life. A banker was recognized the same as a waiter. There was security but no wealth or ambition. Workers knew there would always be rice in their bowl so they never aspired to make more of themselves.

Now the Chinese people have experienced economic freedom to farm or work at whatever pleases them as long as it isn't political. As long as they live within the confines of the rules laid down by the Communist Party, without challenge, they can do whatever they please.

The owners of the Monte Carlo Restaurant brought Mrs. Martin over to China as the first foreign employee of a privately owned Shen Yang company. They wanted to utilize her western management experience. It was also necessary to bridge the language barrier and improve the restaurant's positive image. They wanted their privately owned company to demonstrate that they were becoming stronger and they had the ability to compete with similar foreign companies.

As the first foreigner to ever stay in her Shen Yang hotel, she was greeted graciously with a gift of fruit and a case of bottled water.



Nadine Martin played tourist at the city of Dalian, also known as the prettiest city in China.

After a rest to help her beat jet lag, she was picked up and taken to the Monte Carlo restaurant for her welcoming party. All 25 staff members lined up and bowed as they greeted their new Western Director and she was presented with a beautiful bouquet of flowers. At this moment, Mrs. Martin knew she had done the right thing in coming to China.

Mrs. Martin's translator Maya really helped her out with the communication barrier. Maya studied English for 10 years and had excelled at it; however, the only person she had talked to prior to Mrs. Martin was her boss and his interaction with her was limited.

Maya told Mrs. Martin that to share her thought with a foreign person was something she had only seen in the movies. She felt her association with Mrs. Martin was a message from God for her to improve her English knowledge.

Technology proved itself very important during Mrs. Martin's stay. One of the owners set up the Internet on the restaurant's computer so Mrs. Martin could keep in constant communication with her family in Milton. She was also provided with her own cellular phone.

With China being 13 hours ahead, sometimes the time difference made family connections difficult. These actions helped curb her occasional bouts of homesickness.

As the Western Director, Mrs. Martin had full authority to train, dismiss, and teach staff English with the help of her interpreter as well as make changes to improve the restaurant.

The restaurant's owners said, "Please, we need restaurant with western way."

First on the list of improvements was to install western toilets. Although spotlessly clean, the toilets consisted of large porcelain holes flush to the ground. Mrs. Martin said they looked like toilets without the stand.

Another suggestion was for the staff to stand straight and proud, with clean aprons on and welcome the guests. She explained to them their tables were like pieces of art. Dirty placemats, dead flowers, and dirty ashtrays were not art. Anxious to please their new western friend and manager, there were many noticeable improvements to their workstations the next day.

As part of her work Mrs. Martin conducted two staff training sessions each week. On Monday, she instructed staff on service improvements and on Friday, she began to teach English through her translator so foreigners would be more apt to visit the establishment.

The staff picked out simple English names for themselves and gave Mrs. Martin a traditional Chinese name "Xifend" which means "Happy Woman."

During her stay in China, Mrs. Martin had celebrity status. She was quite a novelty. Shen Yang is a large city but it is still quite backward in some ways. A white woman in a business suit wearing pantyhose sure made a few heads turn; the Chinese weren't being rude, but just curious of this foreigner.

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