

Shanghai,

We got off to a rough start you and I. You were grey and unfriendly in the start of January and had no time for me and my rambunctious toddler or my morning sickness. You shut me in and made me quiet and wary to navigate your streets for fear I'd get lost without Google Maps. I was social media starved and VPN ignorant.

Everywhere was something new, something I'd have trouble comprehending or communicating effectively. I stuck my chin out at your challenges and took myself out for lunch in my first week, convinced I could beat you but you put me in my place as I took a big gulp of my mistakenly ordered hot orange juice. You were scary and different and made me miss home.

But then something happened; spring skies opened up and reminded me that they can be blue. Your traffic became commonplace and manageable; looking out the windows to enjoy the scenery and appreciate that I wasn't behind the wheel. Your language barrier became a hurdle to jump as I learned more and more everyday and became more confident. Your residents became less intimidating as I got to meet them and they knew me as a familiar face. Although it may have felt like a long transition it was no time at all to be wrapped up in your urban arms and embrace the journey that I and my family were now on.

Everyday over five years was an adventure. Food stalls with delicious steam buns, cafes with purring cats and desserts served in tiny toilets, people wearing pyjamas in the afternoon, morning breakfasts of long-pulled noodles, walks in Tianzifang, foot massages, science museums, bund sightseeing, styrofoam packed scooters and markets upon markets upon markets.

In the end, a difficult relationship turned into the one I learned from the most. You have a way of stretching people past their limits to learn something new everyday. You create challenges for those who become too complacent and push them to realize they can achieve more. You wrap your arms around the people who want to be embraced by you, teaching them to move with your chaos like learning to dance to the rhythm of a heartbeat.

I will never be able to express just how much you have changed the course of my life. And in troubling times I look back on the experiences we shared together with fondness and with the knowledge that a great city can overcome anything and your people will persevere over



deafening media scrutiny and unfounded racism. For, if I can still love you after I've scalded my tongue on hot orange juice, you are truly a city worthy of love. I love you Shanghai.