

Oh, where to start, Shanghai.

We met when I was barely more than a child myself, 25 years old and brimming with hope. You embraced me, made me feel at home, in a home away from home. Over the years, Shanghai, you have watched me grow, just as I have watched you change and develop.

Initially my 'home away from home', gradually this shortened into just my home. 15 years and counting. Anniversaries – we call them Chinaversaries – have come and gone. People ask me "Is this home now?", and for so many years I shrugged my shoulders. Now, especially during this time of crisis, I realise I can say "yes, this is home".

Love grew here, friendships bloomed, and my babies were born. They've grown up, knowing you as a motherland. When they're asked where they're from, they reply without hesitation: "Australia and Canada, but also China."

In my work in maternity care, I've seen you welcome over a thousand new lives, little people who will grow up keeping you a part of them as they disperse into the world. We've experienced deaths too, souls who will remain with you eternally, families tied to you forever. But mostly you've given us life and we rejoice in that.

Oh, I know it's not all roses, Shanghai. Like every relationship, we've had our rocky patches. I've threatened to leave and wished you to be different. But in the end we are still here, tied ever more strongly together.

They say you love someone because of their quirks, not despite them, and Shanghai, when I think back on our time together, I know this to be true.

Louise and family.

