



One In A Billion: Journey Toward Freedom

Kai Chen

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Kai and his mother were sitting on an Air China 747 in San Francisco International Airport, waiting impatiently for take-off. Kai's father had passed away a year before in the spring of 1988. He was taking his mother home to visit his elder brother in China. The take-off had been delayed because one of the Chinese passengers failed to show up even though he had already checked his luggage. He had decided to remain in the US illegally. This incident took Kai back in time to his own painful and courageous decisions. A 12 year old Kai was sitting on the train waiting to leave Beijing for Manchuria. Young Kai was confused about why he was leaving, not knowing he and his brothers were being forced to join their exiled parents in the small city of Tonghua. He had spent the past five years with an abusive grandmother and Big Brother in Beijing. Life in Tonghua wasn't any easier for Kai who grew into a teenager with a different accent and a unique physical appearance - 6'7" by the age 15. But the most mind-boggling torment for Kai and his family was still to come. In 1966, the Cultural Revolution began. With half of his relatives in Taiwan, Kai and his family endured political persecution and discrimination. He and his brothers were again forced to leave the city to go to the countryside. Kai set out to overcome these obstacles. He used his basketball skills to land a job in a Liuhe grain depot while playing for the depot's team. Soon after, with China's return to professional sports, two basketball coaches from the National Sports and Athletics Commission recruited him for the National Basketball Team's training camp in Beijing. At the camp, Kai met his best friend Xiao, a track team member, who was later expelled because his father had worked for Kuomintang's army. Kai remained a little longer and then was also expelled for the similar reason. Determined not to return to the isolation of the small town factory, he escaped to Canton. He was caught and then forced back

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