

Shanghai Get-together 2014

Friendship First, Competition Second

**A story of how Ping Pong Diplomacy
led to an enduring friendship over 40 years**



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“Friendship First, Competition Second” was a popular slogan adopted in the 1970s by the People’s Republic of China when sporting exchanges were frequently used as part of foreign-policy initiatives.

The most famous of these initiatives was in 1971 when, at the 31st World Table Tennis Championships being held in Nagoya, Japan, Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai extended a surprise invitation to the U.S. Table Tennis team to visit China. England, Canada, Nigeria and Colombia were also invited but it was the invitation to the American team that became big news around the world. This was the first official contact between the two countries since 1949 and was the beginning of what became known as “ping pong diplomacy” (Pīngpāng wàijiāo) marking a thaw in Sino-American relations and leading to the visit of President Richard Nixon to Beijing in 1972.

On 6 April, 1971, when news broke of the historic table tennis invitation, Nagoya’s Aichi Prefecture Stadium was abuzz with excitement. One player there that day was 19-year-old Yvonne Fogarty from New Zealand, participating in her second world championships. Little did she know that “ping pong diplomacy” would three years later take her to China as part of a New Zealand table tennis team.

Yvonne Fogarty grew up in South Dunedin, a working class suburb in the South Island city of Dunedin, New Zealand. One of nine children, Yvonne took up the sport of table tennis at a young age. Her father, Bill was New Zealand Singles Champion in 1948 and her aunt Margaret, Women’s Singles Champion in 1939.

In a purpose-built shed at the rear of their family home, Yvonne and her brothers and sisters were trained purposefully by their father and the family eventually set up their own club. Yvonne’s early promise as a left-handed attacking player turned to success in national tournaments, picking up a string of junior titles.



Father & Coach Bill Fogarty and four of his children – Joan, Yvonne, Kevin and Maree

Her success as a junior was rewarded when as a 15-year-old schoolgirl Yvonne Fogarty was selected to represent New Zealand at the 1967 World Table Tennis Championships in Stockholm, Sweden. The only catch was that she had to contribute her own travelling and accommodation costs. But in a wonderful outpouring of community support, a fundraising committee was formed under the leadership of the local mayor and the funds were raised to send Yvonne on her way. "I suppose I must have captured the imagination a bit," she recalled. "I was just 15 and I was a local girl from a big family who had a little bit of success."



15-year-old school girl Yvonne with her sisters Catherine and Barbara before the World Table Tennis Championships in Sweden, 1967

The World Championships in Stockholm were marked by the absence of the Chinese, most notably, Zhuang Zedong, the previous Men's Singles Champion in the last three World Championships. China's Cultural Revolution had spoken. But China returned to the world stage at Nagoya in 1971 and, thanks to "ping pong diplomacy", New Zealander Yvonne Fogarty was soon to meet the Chinese National Table Tennis Team on her home soil.

In July 1972 a delegation of officials, newspaper and television media and eleven table tennis players from the People's Republic of China made a short tour of New Zealand. This was big news for a tiny country at the bottom of the world whose population back then was just under 3 million. With exhibition matches in Auckland, Lower Hutt, Christchurch and Dunedin these talented Chinese players held their audiences spellbound with their speed, skilled ball control and exhilarating back-from-the-table displays.



Yvonne and her family welcome the Chinese team to Dunedin

The Chinese team was of course dominant in its four matches against the New Zealanders. But often competition would take second place to friendship. This attitude was very much to the fore in Dunedin in the China v South Island clash at the University Union when 21-year old Yvonne Fogarty beat Chang Tsui-chih 17-21, 24-22, 21-18. "They knew it was my home town and they let me win. It was a bit embarrassing," said Yvonne.

The fostering of friendship was certainly made a priority on the tour and this was expressed in a simple chant sung by the People's Republic of China delegation when they arrived at the Dunedin airport – "The small ping pong ball makes friends. We have friends all over the world." And though none of the players could speak English, they made up for this with many handshakes and smiles during their short visit. The New Zealand public also reciprocated. An interpreter for the delegation, Lai Ya Pei remarked, "Everywhere we went, we received a warm welcome and hospitality from the people here."

As the Chinese team prepared to fly out of Dunedin, Yvonne Fogarty visited their hotel in the early hours of the morning for an emotional farewell, not knowing whether she would ever see her newfound friends again.

In the meantime, 1973 was to be an eventful year for Yvonne. First there was the Commonwealth Championships in Cardiff, Wales where she got to the semi-finals of the women's singles and as a result of her performance was ranked fourth in the Commonwealth. Then it was on to the World Championships in Sarajevo in Yugoslavia. Later in the year a Japanese table tennis team visited New Zealand. In the televised test played in Auckland, Yvonne had two singles wins against the Japanese women to help her country win the test 3-2. It was indeed a busy year. For her international success, Yvonne was named Player of the Year in her home country.

1974, the Chinese Lunar Year of the Ox (Yi-Chou) was to be a lucky year for Yvonne Fogarty. At the invitation of the China Sports Federation she was selected to be part of a New Zealand team to tour China for two weeks in March, prior to competing in the Asian Championships in Yokohama, Japan.

For a New Zealand sporting team visiting Communist China, the tour was a significant and historic event. China, for so long closed off to the Western world had opened its doors again and extended the hand of

friendship. And of all sports, table tennis was the bridge through “ping pong diplomacy” that led the way to the formation of new sporting, cultural and political relationships between east and west.

Crossing the Hong Kong-China border by train, the New Zealand delegation of players and administrators were taken to a large reception lounge where a customs official announced, “Your baggage is cleared without inspection” – a significant gesture of welcome. The team then headed straight for Guangzhou by train for a two hour stopover before flying direct to Beijing to settle into their accommodation at the Friendship Hotel. Here they met their interpreter Mr Liu who would accompany them for the rest of the tour.

On their first full day in Beijing the team had a morning visit to the Imperial Palace (*Gùgōng*) followed by a practice session in the afternoon and an official reception in the evening. The itinerary would involve six days in Beijing, five in Shanghai and four in Guangzhou with two matches in each city. For the matches in Beijing, the New Zealand team were scheduled to compete against the Chinese National Team and the local Beijing team. Before each contest throughout the tour, the New Zealanders were given the opportunity each morning to practice with their opponents.

The Capital Stadium was the venue for the first match in Beijing against the Chinese National Team and what an overwhelming experience this proved to be. The indoor stadium was built in 1968 and hosted the historic China versus United States match in 1971. With seating for 18,000 spectators, the stadium was packed to capacity. A thunderous standing ovation from the Chinese crowd greeted the men’s and women’s teams as they paraded into the huge indoor arena. This was an unforgettable highlight for the table tennis minnows from a tiny country in the South Pacific who were pitted against the might of the greatest table tennis nation in the world. At the televised event was Foreign Minister Qiao Guanhua, a sign of the great importance attached to ping pong diplomacy.

The second match the following evening was against the Beijing team at the spectacular Workers’ Gymnasium which was built in 1959 and used for the 26th World Table Tennis Championships in 1961. A capacity crowd once again rose to the occasion with enthusiastic applause.



China v New Zealand at the Capital Stadium, Beijing 1974

The final two days in Beijing were filled with bus trips to the magnificent Great Hall of the People, the Ming Tombs and sections of the Great Wall of China. A visit was also arranged for the teams to go to Beijing

No. 15 School where the mysteries of acupuncture were demonstrated. Friendly games of ping pong with some of the keen boys and girls provided delightful entertainment for the New Zealand players.



Table Tennis fun in the classroom, Beijing 1974



"People of the World Unite!" Beijing 1974

On their final evening in Beijing, the New Zealand team experienced the wonderful hospitality of the Chinese people with a farewell dinner and presentation of gifts. As a finale, their hosts took them back to the Capital Stadium to watch a basketball match between China and the Philippines – and a 112-92 victory to the home team.



Yvonne and Chinese players at the Great Wall, Beijing 1974



Outside entrance to the Ming Tombs, Beijing 1974



At Beijing Airport – Neti Traill, Anne Stonestreet & Yvonne Fogarty with Chinese friends, 1974

The following morning the New Zealanders travelled south to Shanghai, China's largest city. As officials Dick Rassie and Trevor Flint met with their Chinese counterparts to discuss the itinerary for the five day stay, the men's and women's teams got back into practice. But there was no competition that evening. Instead, hospitality came first with a welcoming dinner with their Shanghai hosts.

On day two the team startled hundreds of early risers when they left the Peace Hotel on the Bund at 5am and jogged down Nanjing Road in their distinctive black track suits. With the usual practice in the morning followed by a restful afternoon, the teams headed to yet another imposing stadium packed to capacity. Here they played the Shanghai team and put up in creditable performances, with the men's team of Gary Murphy, Richard Lee and Ling Nan Ming losing 2-5 and the women 2-3.

The next day, the ping pong ball was to dominate in more ways than one. Practice, practice, practice must come first and that's how the morning began once again. But in the afternoon, the little white ball became the star of the show when the New Zealand team visited the Shanghai Double Happiness Table Tennis factory. This visit was an eye-opener to the players as they saw for the first time how the small 38mm celluloid ball was manufactured. The making of a top class product requires perfection and the premier ball was undoubtedly the Double Happiness followed by the Double Circle, Shield and Panda as lesser grade balls.



The afternoon's factory visit must have inspired the players because that night, playing the Shanghai Youth Team at the Luwan Stadium, Yvonne Fogarty and her team mates Neti Traill and Anne Stonestreet won the women's event 3-2. That was their last match in Shanghai but there were still a couple of days to have a small insight into the way of life that Chinese citizens lived under Chairman Mao's People's Republic.



The New Zealand players with the Shanghai Youth Team, 1974

First up was a visit to Shanghai's Long March People's Commune, named after the epic 9,000 kilometre trek of Mao Zedong and his Red Army soldiers in 1934/1935 to escape Chiang Kai-shek and his Kuomintang Nationalist Army forces. This large and very productive commune was a completely new experience for the visitors from New Zealand. After many speeches in English and Chinese, all translated, a tour was taken of the communal facilities, children's school, light industrial projects and the extensive agricultural cultivations.

A cultural experience of a completely different sort was on the agenda for the evening – a night at the opera. But the storyline was a serious one, based on the Sino-Japanese War declared in 1937 and the battle of Shanghai. Back at the hotel reception lounge, a farewell with many speeches and expressions of kindness and friendship was held to mark the final hours of the Shanghai visit.



New Zealand and Chinese players and officials overlooking the Bund, Shanghai 1974

The third and final stage of the New Zealand's team to China took them full circle back to the warmer temperatures of Guangzhou. Here they met again some of the players and officials who had come to New Zealand with the Chinese Table Tennis Team in 1972. Matches against the Guangzhou City and Youth Teams ended the New Zealanders' competition in China.



“Friendship First, Competition Second”. Yvonne and friends, Guangzhou 1974

It was now time to explore the beautiful countryside in Guangdong province and the following morning the team travelled 100 kilometres west to Zhaoqing to the exquisite Seven Stars Cave Scenic Park, famous for its lakes, craggy limestone peaks and illuminated caves. Some of the caves contain underground rivers and the team had a special treat navigating one of the caves in long wooden boats.



Sightseeing at the Seven Stars Cave Scenic Park, Zhaoqing 1974

Heading back to Guangzhou for their last night in China, the team were taken to the theatre before the sobering task of packing their bags for their departure the following day. This historic 1974 two-week visit by the New Zealand Table Tennis Team had come to an end and there was much sadness in farewelling their newfound Chinese friends who had shown so much warmth, kindness and hospitality.

The visit to China was of course a precursor to the Second Asian Table Tennis Championships in Yokohama. After a day in Hong Kong, the New Zealand teams flew into Tokyo and then on to Yokohama to join the 400 players from 30 countries for the two-week tournament. A surprise reunion with players of the Chinese team took place at a local high-school gymnasium when the New Zealand Men and Women's Team were invited to practice with them. New Zealand player, James Morris suddenly found himself at the other end of the table from the current world champion Xi Enting. "It was a bit of a shock – but very good practice," said Morris.



Yvonne Fogarty in action at Asian Champs 1974

The Asian Championships proved very successful for the New Zealand Women's Team. Competing for the first time at the event the women took fourth place (out of 24 teams) behind Japan, China and Malaysia. Their six matches in China two weeks earlier against top-class opposition was undoubtedly a contributing factor in their success in the Asian event.



NZ Women's Team win Bronze at the Asian Champs, Yokohama 1974

After four weeks away it was now time to return home and for Yvonne Fogarty it meant returning to her school teaching position in the small North Island town of Cambridge. But table tennis was never far away and when the top ranked Czechoslovakian national team visited New Zealand in June, Yvonne was quick to invite them to her school. The team's aggressive style of play, their long-range smashes and their humorous antics in the exhibition matches were a big hit with the children.

Back into competition mode for the major domestic events, Yvonne reached her peak in the National Championships in Wanganui when she picked up the Women's Singles title, beating her New Zealand teammate Anne Stonestreet 22-20 in the fifth. Following the finals that evening, more good news was in store for Yvonne – she was named in the New Zealand team to compete in the Commonwealth Championships in Melbourne and the 33rd World Championships in Calcutta in 1975.

It was in Calcutta that China restored itself as the world's supreme table tennis power by winning both the men's and women's teams events, regaining the coveted "double" after a gap of ten years. In the Netaji Indoor Stadium that evening to watch the teams' finals was Yvonne Fogarty and her New Zealand teammates. As she watched the Chinese players in action, it is more than likely her mind drifted back to memories a year earlier of her own table tennis matches in China. In fact if Yvonne's powers of observation had been sharp that evening, she may have recognised Hu Yulan, the incumbent World Women's Singles Champion that she had met and played against in Beijing's Capital Stadium the previous year.

Towards the end of the Calcutta tournament, as teams turned their thoughts to returning to their home countries, the 24-year-old Yvonne Fogarty received unexpected news that would turn out to provide her with one of the most extraordinary experiences of her lifetime. At short notice, Chinese authorities issued an invitation for four members of the New Zealand team to travel to Guangzhou for six weeks of coaching by leading Chinese coaches. With a strong feeling of déjà vu, Yvonne once again crossed the border by train from Hong Kong to China with her three male companions and on to Guangzhou. Room 1928 of the Dong Fang Hotel was to be her

home for the next six weeks. Her hotel window provided a view of the inner courtyard and gardens below, a welcome connection to the outside world.



View of courtyard, Dong Fang Hotel, Guangzhou

The training regime was set down for six days a week, from 9 to 12 in the morning and 3 to 6 in the afternoon, followed by an hour's physical training. Yvonne was to train in one room by herself with her coach and interpreter while the men were to train separately in another room. Her coach was 29-year-old Mrs Wang Shuyun, a resident of Guangzhou, and her interpreter was Mrs Liu Yen Li from Beijing who was given the position to help improve her English.

The first few days were exhausting for Yvonne as she recovered from a cold. The coaching began with the very basics and then slowly built up. "Every stroke was analysed," she said. "It was OK for the first couple of weeks because it was new and I was keen to impress but it got difficult after that. It was so intensive."

The physical training, designed to enhance her game fitness, was divided into five areas – power, flexibility, speed, stamina and reaction. There was constant reviewing of her progress by her coach and much helpful criticism. The relentless intensity of the on and off the table training and the complete focus and dedication of her coach was a completely new and surreal experience for Yvonne, a bit like a theme from a Liang Yusheng wuxia novel or a film sequence from *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Yvonne's relationship with her coach could be likened to that of wise disciplined teacher and novice disciple. To reach some level of perfection in the art of table tennis, much physical endurance and psychological struggle had to be overcome by Yvonne, like the mastery of martial arts from a Wūdāng master.

For every training session different playing opponents were supplied and a variety of practice routines were devised to help the New Zealanders continually strive for improvement in their game. As well as the practice sessions there was plenty of match play, particularly in the last three weeks. "I improved steadily," said Yvonne. "It took me nine days before I beat one of the girls, but in the last week and a half I won every game. I must have played about 16 girls altogether over 72 sessions."

Most of these games were thoroughly analysed and recorded by her coach, down to every point won or lost. A number of these score-sheets on tissue-like paper have survived today and show in spidery handwriting the number of points won by Yvonne on her serves, receipts of serve, pushes, loops, attacks and other strokes. Nothing went unobserved by her dedicated coach, Wang Shuyun.

On one occasion, Yvonne and the three New Zealand men practiced in the afternoon with the Chinese National Team, with many spectators watching. Her opponents were Hu Yulan, the 1973 World Champion and Zhang Li, the Silver Medalist at the recent World Championships in Calcutta where Yvonne had competed.



Diao Wenyuan and Yvonne Fogarty

It was in serving that Yvonne improved quite markedly. Some expert advice came from one of the top Chinese players, Diao Wenyuan who wandered into the hall one day to watch Yvonne practicing. "Service and receive should be number one," he said, "And keep your service low." Yvonne recalled, "He told us to choose our favourite serve and then he worked on us getting four variations of spin on that serve." He also emphasised the importance of having a small action, exploding at the point of impact with strong use of the wrist. "Explode like a boxer!" Wenyuan exclaimed.

Rest days on Sundays, visits to factories, schools and kindergartens or an occasional evening at a revolutionary opera provided a welcome break from the demanding training regime. On one occasion Yvonne and her male team mates were taken to an afternoon soccer match between Guangzhou and Beijing. As they were driven through the crowded streets on their way to the stadium, Yvonne and her companions found it hard to get used to being made the centre of attention by staring crowds unfamiliar with seeing Westerners at close hand.

The weeks of training rolled by and as player, coach and interpreter spent day after day in each other's company, a natural friendship developed. On the tranquil waters of Liuhua Lake Park close to the Dong Fang Hotel the trio taught each other songs in their own languages as they paddled around the lake in a hired boat. Other leisure times were spent together on swimming outings, visits to the Guangzhou Aquarium, Museum of History and a day trip to Foshan City to see the Zu Miao Ancestral Temple and the famous Shewan pottery kilns.

Despite the wonderful friendship and hospitality of her Chinese hosts, the strenuous table tennis training and the many weeks away from her New Zealand family and friends took its toll on Yvonne Fogarty at times. Homesickness and loneliness were experienced on occasions and eagerly awaited postcards and letters from home provided a much need tonic. Lacking money to buy personal items and being unaccustomed to the traditional Chinese diet added to her difficulties. But these obstacles were made

easier when Yvonne could get together with her coach Wang Shuyun and interpreter Liu Yen Li in relaxed surroundings to share about their own lives and families and their hopes and dreams.



New Zealand players and their Chinese coaches outside Dong Fang Hotel, Guangzhou 1975

New Zealand players and their Chinese coaches outside Dong Fang Hotel, Guangzhou 1975
After six weeks, the day for departure finally arrived and it was time to bid farewell to new friends. An evening dinner for the small New Zealand contingent and their Chinese hosts was the last formal occasion together in China. As is the custom, there were many toasts throughout the night. “*Gānbēi*.” Yvonne’s coach and special new *péngyǒu* friend, Wang Shuyun made a moving toast, “I hope our friendship remains like the pine tree – evergreen.”

It is now 2014 in the Chinese Lunar Year of the Horse and nearly 40 years have passed since Yvonne Fogarty’s memorable first visit to China as a 22-year-old. What direction did her life take when she returned home? Table Tennis continued to be an important part of her life but not to the same intensity.



Double Happiness 1978 – Yvonne Fogarty and Tony Eyre

In 1977 she met me, Tony Eyre, and that's where I come into the story. We were married in early 1978 and, like the Chinese character of the same name, we have enjoyed 36 years together of Double Happiness (*Shuāngxī*) and have been blessed with four children and four grand-children.

Has Yvonne forgotten those friendships she made 40 years ago? No, she will never forget, never completely. But time and new directions and new friendships do dim those memories of the past. Today Yvonne struggles to remember some names and faces of the many people that were kind and helpful to her on her two trips to China. But there are two notable exceptions still dear to her.

Yvonne's time in Guangzhou in 1975 was immeasurably enriched by Liu Yen Li whose interpretation skills were the bridge to communication between player and coach and with all the Chinese people she interacted with. In 1980, Yvonne had an unexpected reunion with Liu Yen Li when a national junior team from the People's Republic of China toured New Zealand. When the team visited her hometown of Dunedin, Yvonne played in a match against them. To her great surprise, she recognized her Guangzhou interpreter friend of five years earlier who was the official interpreter for the team.



Liu Yen Li and Yvonne, Dunedin, NZ 1980

With Yvonne's coach, Wang Shuyun, the friendship between the two of them has stood the test of time. Shortly after returning to New Zealand in 1975, Yvonne wrote to her former coach but did not get a reply. And then seven years later a letter arrived! The beautifully inscribed letter of Chinese characters needed to be translated and Yvonne called on the services of the owners of her local Fish and Chip shop who could read and speak Mandarin. "Sorry for not replying to your letter," Shuyun said. "I wrote many letters to you in my heart," and "Your letter always accompanied me when I worked."

It seemed that the political situation in China under the leadership of the "Gang of Four" (*Sirén bāng*) during the Cultural Revolution made it difficult to send letters overseas. Hoping to communicate with Yvonne more often in the future, Wang Shuyun signed off her letter with, "Your Chinese Sister." The two friends, despite the great distances between them, continued to communicate from time to time through the medium of their translated letters. But two remarkable reconnections were still to come – 20 and 40 years later.



Table Tennis postage stamps from China

In 1994, the World Veteran Table Tennis Championships were held in Melbourne, Australia and, unbeknown to each other, both Yvonne and Wang Shuyun had travelled from their respective countries to compete in the tournament. Both in their 40s now, what were the chances of each of them instantly recognizing the other? But it was Wang Shuyun who scanned the Championships programme and found the familiar name of Yvonne Fogarty (NZL). What a happy reunion it was!



Wang Shuyun and Yvonne, Melbourne 1994

This year 2014, New Zealand had its turn of hosting the World Veteran Table Tennis Championships in Auckland. Not having played table tennis seriously for about 12 years, Yvonne decided to get back into training to give herself the opportunity of competing in this world event that had never been held in her home country before. The event attracted over 1,600 competitors from 57 countries. The biggest number of competitors came from Japan but China was well represented with 128 players participating.

One Chinese player, unable to speak English, headed to the tournament office carrying a photo of herself and four New Zealand table tennis players taken outside the Dong Fang Hotel in Guangzhou 40 years earlier. Were any of these New Zealanders in the photo participating in the Championships was the question she somehow communicated to the organizers. The Chinese player was Wang Shuyun and the faces in the photo were Yvonne Fogarty, Richard Lee, James Morris and Robert Blair.

Remarkably, three of the four players in Wang Shuyun's photo were involved in the Auckland event. The men's coach in China was Mr Lu but Yvonne's coach was of course Wang Shuyun. Both women were now in their 60s and for a second time in 40 years they had again met face to face. With the help of a Chinese friend of the family as interpreter, Yvonne and Wang Shuyun were able to share much together. And like old times, Shuyun coached her old pupil from the sidelines as Yvonne took to the table once again.



Wang Shuyun meets up with Robert Blair, Yvonne and James Morris, Auckland 2014



World Veteran Table Tennis Championships at Trust Arena, Auckland 2014

Yvonne's China experience is never far away. In her hometown Dunedin which has a Sister City relationship with Shanghai, she works at the Otago Polytechnic as an International Student Adviser. Among the young people under her care are many visiting Chinese students that Yvonne helps to feel at home in their new learning environment. Much of her empathy for these students can be traced back to the culture shock and welcome and hospitality she received as a stranger in China those many years earlier.

Table Tennis is never far away either. In an extraordinary coincidence, Yvonne lives in the same street as two other champion table tennis players. Bryan Foster is a former two-times New Zealand champion who represented his country at the 26th World Table Tennis Championships held in Beijing in 1961. And Wang Qi, who as a boy, spent four years full-time in a table tennis school back in Shenyang City, Liaoning Province, is the current Fiji Men's Singles Champion. China and table tennis is what these three friends have in common and understandably they play in the same team in the local inter-club competitions.



Yvonne with local team mates: Wang Qi, David Shelton and Brian Foster

Many memories and impressions of China in the 1970s have stayed with Yvonne – the thousands of bicycles on the wide streets, the huge billboards of Chairman Mao Zedong at every corner, the sight and sound of early morning Tai Chi (T'ai chi ch'uan) in the streets, the intensive cultivation of crops in the countryside and the ubiquitous blue or grey style of dress worn by men and women of all ages.

But most of all it's the Chinese people that have made the deepest impression on Yvonne. Through the sport of table tennis, the gateways opened by "ping pong diplomacy" and the generous invitations to be a guest of the People's Republic of China, Yvonne received the opportunity to experience the warmth and the welcome, the curiosity, the resilience and friendship of the Chinese people. She will always be very grateful for the opportunities that those 1974-1975 trips to China gave her.

When Yvonne describes her 1970's China visits to her young Chinese students they are often astonished and say, "But you must come back, it is so different now." And now 40 years later, ironically it's not Yvonne who has gone back to China, but our 29-year-old son Daniel who as a New Zealand diplomat, recently made his first visit to Nanning for trade negotiations.

Since their reunion in Auckland, Yvonne and Wang Shuyun now keep in touch online through WeChat. If it is not too late to make a Chinese New Year wish, then for Yvonne it would be to make a return journey to

China to spend time with her friend Wang Shuyun; to re-visit the cities where she played table tennis and to witness the great changes that have taken place since her memorable experiences of 40 years ago.



Wang Shuyun and Yvonne Fogarty, spectators together, World Veteran Table Tennis Championships, Auckland 2014