

RELOCATING FOR LOVE

Selina Kayman Joseph

I was relocating from Melbourne to New York City for *love*. That was my headline, and boy was it a hit! Billing myself as Australia's hottest TV Producer worked well too. No one cared whether or not it was true - they just loved that I said it. As I cringed with embarrassment from making those claims, I began my bizarre life of opposites in New York City. Remember that 'Seinfeld' episode where George finds success by doing the exact opposite of everything he's ever done before? To survive in New York, I clearly needed to do the same.

Back in 1999, I was living in a three-bedroom house in Toorak, complete with the loves of my life: boyfriend and pussycat. I had a great job as Senior Segment Producer on Bert Newton's Good Morning Australia, over at Channel Ten. I'd worked there 5 years, knew my job well and appreciated its perks. Life was full of friends and parties and meals at nice restaurants. And if at any time I wanted my mummy, she was only a 10-minute drive away.

So why did I throw this all away? How did I think I could do better?

Lots of people leave Australia every year looking for a better life or a better job, or even just more money. I left Australia because I knew that if I didn't go, I'd lose Simon. And I was willing to do anything it took to be with him.

Simon and I met in February 1988, standing under a tree in Caulfield Park. Later that day he told his best friend that he had met the girl he was going to spend the rest of his life with. Sometimes you just know.

Right from the very start, Simon had big dreams. He was highly creative, and not scared of anything. 'One day,' he declared, 'I'm going to live in New York.'

Meanwhile, life went on. We graduated from University, began our careers, and tried to establish our lives. I began with a job in Public Relations, moved into writing, and then eventually ended up in television. Simon began in Marketing and Advertising, and then quit to start his own Public Relations company, opening his first office from the front room of our house in Prahran. The business was a success. A year later he moved out of home and into a 'real' office, and it wasn't long before he was employing 15 people and had opened an office in Sydney. Now, this was all pretty engrossing. It sure kept him busy! But even throughout all that time, his New York dreams were still alive. He was still travelling towards that destination. It was only me who had decided it was never going to happen.

Well, imagine my surprise! In May 1999, Simon signed the lease on an office/apartment in New York City. After all that talk, things were actually happening. He'd prepared me for years, but I hadn't been listening.

1999 was a year of denial. He was spending more and more time there, and I was continuing my Melbourne life regardless. I took trips to New York, supposedly looking for a job, trying to find my feet. But I was frozen in fear. I didn't love the city – those 'I Love New York' t-shirts weren't part of my wardrobe – but most of all, I was scared. I was worried I wouldn't find a job and terrified of the whole visa process.

In the end, love conquered all. I finally realised that Simon and I wouldn't last as a long-distance relationship. Push had come to shove. I had to make a choice. And I chose him.

That's when things started to surprise me. I found an inner strength that I never knew I had and adaptability I would never have imagined. I steeled myself – I gritted my teeth - and I made my move. In April 2000, I arrived, suitcase in tow, in New York City. Now all I had to do was find a job.

Because my area of expertise was food, I booked myself into the International Association of Culinary Professionals' (IACP) conference. The conference is held once a year, and attracts 'foodies' from all over the world, including all manner of food media. Armed with some power suits and a positive attitude, off I went to Providence, Rhode Island. World: meet Selina Kayman.

So there I was on Day Two, glass of red wine in hand, chatting and charming the Senior Vice President of all things food at Martha Stewart Omnimedia. Two days later I found myself at Martha's Connecticut studio, shaking Martha's hand and being offered a job. And it all would have ended there, had I not gotten cocky.

You see, the day before I met Martha, I had decided to do a resume mail-out. With my background in live morning television, I carefully selected eight American morning shows I might want to work for – The Today Show, Good Morning America, The View and others. And then I had my most incredible stroke of inspiration. In less than a minute, I created a letter. I don't know where it came from. I don't know how I wrote it. I hurried to keep up, as the words tumbled out of my brain...

'I am Australia's hottest TV Producer, relocating to New York City for love,' I wrote. 'I hate to blow my own horn, but I've won two World Food Media awards for my work as Senior Producer at Good Morning Australia. Of course, everyone there is devastated that I'm leaving, but their loss could be your gain.'

Well! Where did that attitude come from? From demure to determined, I had come full circle. It was a new me – a New York me. I had shed some old skin, and

overnight grown a tougher one. It knew that this approach would cause me ridicule at home. But I knew it would work in New York. And boy did it work!

Of the eight resumes I sent out, I had five positive responses asking me to come in for an interview. At one interview – for a position at Barbara Walter’s ABC show, *The View* – I had no sooner left the building and began the cab ride home, when I received a phone call asking me to turn around and come back for a second interview. I was feeling like the little Aussie who could!

In the end, I had four job offers and I ended up accepting two jobs: one freelance and one permanent. The people at Martha Stewart had offered me a freelance job producing food segments for Martha’s TV show. Although it sounded good on paper, word throughout the industry was that ‘Martha’ was not a happy place to be. A two-hour each way commute didn’t sweeten things, but I felt working for Martha would be a good rite-of -passage. And it would give me something to do while I was waiting to start work at my real job – as a Producer on NBC’s *Today Show*.

Believe it or not, I had achieved the unheard of. I had sent my resume in to a human resources department, and it actually led to a job. In early May, just before I was to start working on *Martha Stewart Living*, NBC offered me a job on *The Today Show*. Not as a freelancer, but as a permanent, full-time staff member with a contract. Not as a lowly Researcher or Associate Producer, but as a Producer. And, they would sponsor my visa application, and even pay the legal costs.

I worked at Martha Stewart for two months, while we prepared the paperwork and the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service approved my O1 visa. Then I flew in to Sydney and stood in line at the American Embassy, smiling as they stamped my passport. But when I called my new bosses to tell them the good news, they didn’t want me to come back to New York. After all that work to get me to New York, NBC now wanted me to stay in Sydney for the Sydney 2000 Olympics. America may be a land free of irony, but it sure didn’t escape me.

When I finally returned to New York in October 2000, after the 2000 Summer Olympics, and formally joined the staff of NBC, the thing that surprised me most was how easy it all was. Armed with my newfound New York attitude, striding the streets of my new home was a breeze. There I was, elbowing my way through the crowds in Times Square, hobnobbing with the celebs at Rosie O’Donnell’s book launch, and dining on foie gras and truffles at Alain Ducasse. I was interviewing admirals and air kissing famous French chefs. When the twin towers fell on September 11, 2001, I was in the *Today Show* control room. And I got to work on two Olympic Games.

In the end, I decided it was all about attitude. Nothing else seemed to matter. As long as you had the right attitude, anything was possible. You had to show no fear

and act as though you deserved to be there. The sheer arrogance of it took my breath away.

Fast forward to 2003. It's been a wonderful year, with a wedding in March – yes, after 15 years, we finally tied the knot – a honeymoon in Hawaii and a couple of trips home. We're living in a great apartment, at a great location and I can honestly say I love my job.

But everything is about to change. As I write this now, I'm entering my final week at NBC. My US visa expires soon, and I've decided not to renew. I've had enough. I want to go home. I'm sick of elbowing my way through Times Square. And how much caviar can a girl eat?

Simon agrees - it's time for us to go back. His office here is established. He doesn't need to be here full-time. We miss our family and friends, but we really miss the ease of life in Australia. In New York, even the simplest things, like fixing your phone or finding a handyman, can become major dramas. Supermarkets are cramped, people are rude, it's a dirty city, the service is terrible and you have to tip everyone, everywhere you go!

Maybe I've donned rose-colored glasses for my return to Melbourne. After all, last time I visited I found myself much more of a stranger than I would have ever imagined. I couldn't remember street names, all the restaurants were new and our friends all had new furniture. Scary really, but hardly surprising. Three years is a long time to be away. It's funny how I hadn't really thought about that until now.

So it's time for me to re-invent myself once again. But this time, should I be wary of arrogance and attitude? I've done some amazing things, career-wise. But I'd better not be blowing my horn too loud this time, right? Australian's can embrace the underdog, or cut down the tall poppy. Which will I become?

As they say in TV land: 'Stay tuned for the next exciting episode....'



Selina Kayman Joseph is a Producer at NBC's "Today Show", America's top rated morning news program, based in New York City. Prior to leaving Australia, Selina was the Senior Segment Producer at Ten Network's "Good Morning Australia", hosted by Bert Newton. She came to "G.M.A" in 1995 after a successful stint as a freelance writer, focusing on food and entertainment.

Selina has produced two TV segments that won World Food Media Awards, in 1997 and 1999. She lives in New York City with her husband Simon and plans to return to Australia some time in 2003.