

A Dream Is Dashed, But the Signs Are Positive



Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

Jin Luo, an immigrant from China, uses sign language to communicate. He had a stroke in February 2003.

By JOSEPH P. FRIED

Jin Luo, who arrived in New York from China eight years ago, has had more obstacles to building a life in his new country than most immigrants. Lacking literacy in English is



only the beginning. Mr. Luo, 50, is deaf and unable to speak English or Chinese. But until two years ago, he had a dream. He was working at a Pathmark supermarket in Queens, earning \$7 an hour to bake cookies and clean up around the store. But he envisioned himself as someday earning a better living by cooking Chinese food at a hotel, a hope that he expressed in The New York Times in November 2002 in an article that was part of the New York Times Neediest Cases Fund campaign that year.

That dream, he said recently, ended after he had a stroke in February 2003. It left him unable to stand for long, an obstacle to working in a busy

kitchen. "I have no dreams for the future," he said, speaking in American Sign Language through an interpreter. "It will stay the same, same, same."

Indeed, Mr. Luo is still at his Pathmark job, after missing five months of work as he recuperated. Now he earns \$8.75 an hour, but works only 20 to 25 hours a week.

"My boss tells me there are enough people and he can't schedule me for more," Mr. Luo said in the living room of the \$600-a-month, one-bedroom apartment he shares with his wife, Xing Luo, 43, near Union Square in Manhattan. He showed a recent week's pay stub, which he said was typical, recording take-home pay of \$157.

Ms. Luo, who is also deaf and unable to speak, works full time as an office cleaner, earning \$17 an hour. So the couple is more financially secure than in late 2002, after Ms. Luo lost her job at a factory when it closed.

The Luos, who have been married for 13 years, have no children. They

met as children attending a school for the deaf in Taishan, in Guangdong Province. Ms. Luo immigrated to the United States in 1985, went back briefly to China to marry Mr. Luo in 1992 and, returning to New York, saved for his journey here, which he made five years later.

Mr. Luo, who said he became deaf at age 5, when he fell off a ledge and landed on his head, held various jobs in China, including substitute math teacher for deaf children, watch repairman and cafeteria cook.

After arriving in the United States, he moved in with his wife, her parents and her brother in their Astoria, Queens, apartment and went to work sewing clothing at a factory where his wife worked, he said through the interpreter, Aviva Ben-Shitrit.

Ms. Ben-Shitrit was provided by the Brooklyn Bureau of Community Service, which has been aiding Mr. Luo since 2001, when he took a course at the bureau that teaches people with disabilities how to stock shelves and work in basic food preparation. The bureau is a beneficiary agency

Previously recorded	\$3,108,757.41
Recorded Thursday	\$108,078.00
Total	\$3,216,835.41
Last year to date	\$3,525,934.93

of the Neediest Cases, and money from the fund has helped to finance the program. The bureau then placed Mr. Luo in the job at Pathmark.

Mr. Luo's job coach at the bureau, Steven Lawson, said he deserved aid and encouragement because "he's a great worker who is able to perform well in the hearing world."

Mr. Luo, a slender, boyish-looking man with a quick smile, said that he and his wife moved into their current apartment a year ago, rather than continuing in the close quarters of the apartment in Queens that they shared with his wife's relatives, where their only privacy was in their cramped bedroom.

Though having suffered a setback in his vocational aspiration, Mr. Luo has not stopped his efforts at self-improvement. With his proficiency in Chinese Sign Language insufficient in the United States, he has taken classes in American Sign Language. And he is using a hand-held computerized Chinese-English dictionary to teach himself to write in English.

As for no longer seeing himself with a cook's hat in a hotel kitchen, Mr. Luo said: "I'm not angry. I'm sad."