

*A series
profiling
your fellow
Routematchers.*

by Laura Lee Huttenbach

Fan Wang

Tech Lead, Demand Product

Fan Wang has always been the type of person to dedicate herself wholeheartedly to achieving goals. When she was a kid growing up in China, her music teacher told her that eating spicy food might damage her vocal cords. Back then, Fan's dream was to become a professional singer and dancer, so she avoided spicy food at all costs. In Beijing, she received her bachelor's and master's degrees in electrical engineering before pursuing a second master's degree in applied mathematics on a full scholarship at the University of North Carolina in Wilmington. She graduated from her program in a year and a half, earning straight As and the Outstanding Graduate Student Award.

In May 2000, Fan started working at Routematch, which makes Bahman the only person who has worked at the company longer than her. At the beginning, every person at the company wore a lot of hats, and crossover between modules was standard. She knew everyone. Now, she says, there are a lot of new faces at the company. She'll get on the elevator in the lobby with someone and is surprised when they punch floor thirty-three. She hopes that, through sharing stories with her coworkers, she will get to know them better, and vice versa. "It's a good idea to know if you have common interests with someone," she says, "because maybe if they're doing something that they know you would like, they can invite you to come along." ➤



Q&A with Fan Wang

Q: Where did you grow up?

A. Inner Mongolia, which is a northern province of China. It's different from the independent country of Mongolia. I lived in the second-biggest city in Inner Mongolia, called Baotou. When I was sixteen, I moved to Beijing to go to college. It's funny. When I got there, my classmates were pointing to tall buildings and asking me, "Have you ever seen anything like this?" Because, you know, they thought that Mongolia was supposed to have a lot of animals, and everyone lived in tents. But I was in a city, which is basically the same thing as over here—tall buildings, streets, people from everywhere.

Q: Did you like electrical engineering?

A. When I was young, I loved telescopes. So my major was optical electrical engineering, and I thought I was going to design telescopes. I imagined it was going to be very interesting, but once I landed over there, it wasn't as interesting. You may ask me why I went to graduate school in electrical engineering if I didn't like it the first time. It's because in China, back then in the eighties, there wasn't a lot of freedom to change your major. You couldn't say, "I don't like this, let me work on something else." And my parents didn't want me to be a professional singer or dancer. They wanted me to do something more traditional. It's all their fault [laughs]. Now my children complain that I am doing the same thing to them, that I push them to do very traditional things.

Q: How many children do you have?

A. Two. My daughter is twenty-four, and my son is nineteen. He is actually an intern at Routematch.



Q: What surprised you most when you became a parent?

A. The experience was totally different between my first child and second child. My daughter was born in China, and I never expected a second child because of the policy in China. I thought that was the only child we could have. So I was nervous. I wasn't prepared very well. I was so tired every day. I was really struggling. When I first got her, I swore I could never have another one. But after five years, I forgot all that. I said, "I have to have a second one" [laughs].

Q: When you went to graduate school in the United States, did your family come with you?

A. No. I came by myself. I left my daughter at nine months old with my mother and husband. My mother actually retired to take care of my baby so that I could come here.

Q: Was that difficult?

A. Very. Very difficult. I didn't see my daughter for two years. Back then, you didn't have internet. A phone call was expensive. I think I called only two times. My mom recorded a lot for me, but I missed two years. My daughter and my husband came here in 1995.



Q. What were your first impressions of Wilmington, North Carolina?

A. From movies that I'd seen, I thought all of the United States was going to be like New York City. But Wilmington is a small town by the sea, and many buildings are only one story. When I first arrived on campus, I remember seeing students sitting together in the grass—reading, studying, and having lunch. In China, we have big walls around the universities. There is a lot of security. If you went on the grass, you would get a fine. But in the United States, everything was open to everyone. It was amazing to me.

Q. Why did you want to come to the United States?

A. It was my dream. I wanted to look at the other side of the world. I knew it was so different. This sacrifice is worth it for my future and my kids' future.

Q. What kind of dancing did you used to do?

A. Ballet and traditional Chinese dancing. Did you see the dancing for the Opening Ceremonies at the Olympics? They danced to a song, "Mo Li Hua" ("Jasmine Flower"), and I liked to dance to that song.

Q. Do you still dance today?

A. I take belly dancing classes for fun.

Q. What kind of music do you like?

A. Gu Yi Li. "I Will Always Love You" by Whitney Houston. Oh, and I love any country music, like "Oh! Susanna." I also like a lot of Christmas songs. I'm not Christian, but I really love Christian music.

Q. How do you relax after a long day of work?

A. Read a novel. But I like to read in Chinese, not English.

Q. What person do you admire most?

A. Marie Curie. When I was young, I read a biography about her, and she became my model in life. I read that she won the Nobel Prize in Physics [in 1903], and she would let her children play with the award like a toy. What that means to me is that the prize—the physical trophy—is not important. A certificate is not important. What's most important is what you do, the process and hard work that you put in to achieve something. If you get something too easily and don't go through that process, I don't know if you can feel that happy.

Q. Is that your main philosophy?

A. You don't have to be popular, but you need to be valuable.

Q. What is your most treasured possession?

A. It's not a possession, but my kids mean the most to me. I think it's very important that my children have a sibling. They have each other. I'm very proud of them. I think they are responsible people.



Writer Laura Lee Huttenbach is the author of "The Boy is Gone" and "Running with Raven" (Kensington Press, May 2017). Her website is www.LLHuttenbach.com.