

# WHEN THE SKY WAS BLUE

a short film  
written by RACHEL CHOI





## LOGLINE

One Sunday after church, eleven-year-old Leah experiences a series of small but striking coming-of-age and intercultural moments as she wrestles with her conflicted relationship with her immigrant mother.

## ABOUT

Drawn from writer/director Rachel Choi's own lived experiences, *WHEN THE SKY WAS BLUE* is about inherited and mirrored narratives (particularly internalised racism), different love languages (amplified by cultural and generational differences) and finding a sense of belonging. It's about knowing that you're loved but not feeling it. And ultimately, accepting imperfect ways expressing and showing love because we're all just trying our best.

*WHEN THE SKY WAS BLUE* has been selected for Screen Queensland's RIDE Shorts initiative which supports and showcases early career filmmakers from underrepresented backgrounds. Currently due to enter production in July, the film will premiere at the Brisbane International Film Festival in October 2021.

## MOOD REEL

For the mood reel, please visit this link:  
<https://vimeo.com/535643041/8eb89dda26>.









# SYNOPSIS

LEAH (11) is a sensitive, artistically-inclined and determined young girl caught in between her competing desires to make her parents proud and explore her own sense of individuality.

At a bustling Chinese restaurant for a typical Sunday lunch after church, Leah experiences a series of moments that reveal her conflicted feelings around her Chinese heritage and her relationship with LI-JING (mid-40s), her strict hard-working immigrant mother: overhearing Li-Jing and a church auntie exchange gossip and brag about their children's accomplishments; facing her reflection in the bathroom mirror, trying to make her nose pointier; drawn to a beautiful fish in the restaurant's fish tank, she's sorry for its trapped circumstances and senses a kindred spirit.

When Leah encounters another girl (about her age) hiding under the restaurant table, she is surprised and intrigued but their exchange is interrupted by Li-Jing abruptly scolding Leah.

Later that afternoon, the family are on their way home with a car full of Asian groceries. Li-Jing is ignored by her husband when discussing dinner plans and then berated by him about work deadlines, revealing that despite their differences Leah and Li-Jing are more similar than they think. Meanwhile, Leah is only interested in the other girl at the restaurant and is quietly delighted when she learns that she'll be moving to her school. However, her joy at the prospect of a new friend is dashed when the family arrive home and she discovers her beloved pet fish has died.

Later, while Leah helps Li-Jing prepare dinner, she's asked to scale the fish. Leah freezes. She can't. Her mum insists that she must and pushes hard. To Li-Jing, it's a matter of survival. Leah does as she's told, crying.

At dinner, the house phone rings and Leah goes to the hallway to grab it. It's YeYe (Grandpa). She attempts awkward conversation in Mandarin and English, hurrying back to pass the phone to her dad who then makes an

unkind joke about her Chinese. Leah confronts him and while this too is dismissed by her father, in this moment Li-Jing really sees her daughter.

Later, Leah's lying on her bed when her mother enters the room with some cut pieces of apple. This is Li-Jing's way of showing her love as she struggles to find the words. Leah begins to realise that her mum is trying her best, just like her. Leah pulls her mum in for an embrace before taking her hand to go outside.

Leah and Li-Jing kneel at the fish grave holding incense. In sharing this moment with her mum, Leah doesn't know what to make of it but is grateful. As if about to plunge into water, Leah takes a deep breath...



# CHARACTERS



## LEAH

(11-years-old)

Leah is creative, thoughtful and gentle. Born and raised in Australia by immigrant parents, Leah feels caught between her Chinese cultural heritage and dominant White Australian culture.

Longing to be seen and heard, Leah feels distant to her family. As much as she wants to forge a different path for herself from the one she feels her parents have set for her, she wants them to be proud of her and half expects at every turn that they're not.

Leah has recently found that she no longer wants to eat meat and is interested in art instead of piano. Curious and observant, she moves through the world constantly looking for connection.



## LI-JING

(early-mid 40s)

Li-Jing is hardened from years of having to prove herself, but she's also insightful and sensitive. Born in Malaysia and the eldest daughter of 7, Li-Jing couldn't speak English before arriving in Australia with her best friend Josephine to finish high school. Strategic and success-driven with a creative flair of her own, she studied architecture at university where she met her husband and together started their construction business.

She works tirelessly to support her entire family. For Li-Jing, nothing is more important than family and equipping them for their own survival. She often comes across cold as she's less inclined to provide comfort with warm gestures or hugs or say "I love you"; instead she expresses love through devoted and enduring acts of service, which are sometimes misplaced and often go unnoticed.



## FEI-HONG

(mid-late 40s)

Pragmatic, practical and private, Fei-Hong's early years were shaped by his father and mother's work as a stage writer and Cantonese opera performer, respectively. Their work in entertainment may be what shaped Fei-Hong's negative view of creative professions.

Fei-Hong moved to Australia from Hong Kong at the age of 13 with his father after his mother passed away. His father also passed away days after he graduated with his engineering degree and so his wife's family is really all the family he has.

He feels strongly about his role and responsibility to provide as 'the man of the house'. While family is important to him he is often preoccupied when he actually spends time with them, often failing to listen and notice.



## RESTAURANT





## CAR





# HOUSE





## THE TEAM



### RACHEL CHOI

Writer & Director

Rachel Choi is a filmmaker and intellectual property lawyer with an affinity for participatory and collaborative filmmaking.

She produced the short film 'MY HOME IS A DOG THAT LIVES INSIDE ME' (2017) which screened at various international film festivals including Edinburgh International Film Festival and New Orleans Film Festival. Working with the same team, Rachel is in post-production for her first feature film 'PARIS FUNERAL, 1972'. Adopting a similar filmmaking process as with their previous project, the film is unscripted, shot on 16mm with non-actors and on location in Australia, France and Italy.

In 2020, Rachel was granted the Lord Mayor's Young and Emerging Artists Fellowship to undertake an internship with Beijing-based production company Factory Gate Films. More recently, Rachel worked on the Universal Studio Group TV series YOUNG ROCK as a Screen Queensland Producers Attachment and she is currently developing several projects which explore her experiences as a second-generation Chinese Australian. WHEN THE SKY WAS BLUE will be Rachel's debut film in the role of writer and director.

[www.rachelchoi.com](http://www.rachelchoi.com)



### SHEREE RAMAGE

Producer

Sheree Ramage has over a decade of project management experience within the film industry, having worked on prestigious international and local events such as the Asia Pacific Screen Awards, Edinburgh International Film Festival, London Film Festival and Brisbane International Film Festival.

She has a passion for fostering opportunities that ignite and develop young people's interest in film, having previously coordinated the Cine Sparks youth program and Queensland New Filmmakers Awards at BIFF, and securing the participation of Brisbane film students in the European Film Awards' Young Audience Award.

She is the recipient of a stART grant to develop the concept for the Asia Pacific Young Audience Award, which will see three Asia Pacific films screened to 14-16 year old jury members in 2021.

Sheree holds a Bachelor of Business from the Queensland University of Technology, is a submissions viewer for Scout Youth Film Festival in the USA, and is a peer assessor for Arts Queensland and the City of Melbourne.



## THE TEAM



### BONITA CARZINO

Director of Photography

Bonita Carzino is a Naarm / Melbourne based cinematographer. After graduating from Swinburne University with a Bachelor of Film & TV in 2017 she since been working on short films, music videos and commercial work, growing and developing her skills as a cinematographer working with both film and digital.

In 2018, Bonita received Film Victoria funding to be part of the camera attachment program for TV series 'MUSTANGS FC' and received mentorship under Craig Barden ACS. Her work has been shown at various international film festivals such as Berlin International Film Festival in 2020 for short film 'GREVILLEA' which also had its Australian premiere at Sydney Film Festival 2020; St Kilda Film Festival 2018 for graduate short film 'SKATES' which was also awarded Best Short film at Emerge Short Film Festival 2018 and received an Award of Merit for Women filmmakers at Accolade Global Film Competition 2019.

Bonita has also had her work premiered online at publications like Fashion Journal Magazine and Clipped TV: Clip of the Day.

[www.bonitacarzino.net](http://www.bonitacarzino.net)



### ARUNDHATI MADAN

Production Designer

Arundhati Madan graduated from a Fine Arts (Fashion Design) degree from the Queensland University of Technology in 2015. She first worked in film as the costume designer and assistant production designer on the short film 'IN A CANE FIELD' (2016). She has since worked as a Costume Assistant for a production by Expressions Dance Company, in Set and Visual Merchandising, as well as Styling for artists such as Pete Murray, JDJR & Tori Forsyth. Most recently, Arundhati was working in product development for local jewellery business, Molten Store.

Through her creative endeavours, Arundhati has established an interest in communicating ideas through visual storytelling and supporting a director to execute their vision.





## CONTACT

Rachel Choi  
[contact@rachelchoi.com](mailto:contact@rachelchoi.com)

I wish to honour the Traditional Owners of the land and waters  
on which I live, work and swim, the Jagera and Turrbal Peoples.  
I humbly pay my respects to custodians past, present and emerging, everywhere.  
Sovereignty was never ceded.

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