

Golden Venture Transcript

Mysterious underwater footage of the wreck of a freighter.

NARRATOR

Off the Florida coast, 70 feet under water, lies the wreck of a freighter. The freighter was called: Golden Venture.

Title: Golden Venture

Helicopters hover over the grounded freighter.

NARRATOR

On June 6, 1993, the Golden Venture ran aground off New York City. It carried 286 Chinese immigrants.

Immigrants on the beach in blankets.

NARRATOR

As the survivors huddled on the beach -- their lives, plans and dreams lay scattered on the sand. Our story is about four of those survivors, and about a journey that remains unfinished 12 years later.

CHAPTER 1: Immigrants

Title: Guilin Chen

Guilin drives his car.

NARRATOR

Guilin Chen was 24 when he walked off the beach that day. He was a young man seeking his fortune, who had come to America to join family in New York.

GUILIN CHEN

(subtitled English)

When I was very young, my uncles lived in Myanmar and Thailand. My aunt was in Hong Kong. Then they went to America. It's easier to make money and look for a better life in America.

A man in a white shirt walks up a stairway.

Title: Yan Li

NARRATOR

Yan Li left China for more urgent reasons -- he was in trouble for violating China's population control regulations.

Yan Li talks in the shadows.

YAN LI

(subtitled Chinese)

When we were expecting our second daughter, the government came after us. They said we had violated the one-child policy. They tore down our house and they smashed our TV. After my wife gave birth, they wanted to sterilize both of us. This is when I decided to leave China.

NARRATOR

Yan fled from the police and began his journey. His identity is hidden because today he is in the US illegally.

Arming He in the kitchen of his restaurant.

Title: Arming He

NARRATOR

As a young man, Arming He studied electronics at a technical school. He had both political and personal reasons for coming to America. He left hoping that he would soon be joined by his wife and child.

ARMING HE

(subtitled Chinese)

We all left China for a better life and more freedom. Everyone knows that America is a free country -- relatively speaking, anyway. That's why everyone wants to come to the US. If it weren't good, why would we come?

Kaiqu Zheng walks down the street in China.

Title: Kaiqu Zheng

NARRATOR

Kaiqu Zheng was on the Golden Venture -- but is now back in China.

KAIQU ZHENG

(subtitled Chinese)

Years ago, my kids were little. People thought it was easy to make money in the US. I can work. I'm a construction worker. And if I went to the US, my brother would help me. In China, it's not easy to make money in construction. I needed money to live.

Fujian Province.

NARRATOR

Guilin, Ping, Arming and Kaiqu all came from Fujian Province.

Fujian Map.

NARRATOR

Almost all the Golden Venture passengers came from Fujian, in Southeastern China, across from Taiwan. They grew up on the coast in a culture of fishing and sea faring. They all had family abroad -- millions of overseas Chinese have roots in the province.

CHAPTER 2: Snakeheads

Mug shots. Smuggling ships at sea.

NARRATOR

When the immigrants decided to go to the US illegally, they turned to people smugglers known as snakeheads. Starting in 1991, the snakeheads found a dangerous and profitable smuggling route. They crammed immigrants onto fishing trawlers and freighters, which sailed across the Pacific. In the months before the Golden Venture arrived, US officials were monitoring this new influx

Title: William Slattery, INS Director, NY, May, 1993

SLATTERY

We have about two boats a month coming to the United States. And we've intercepted 18 boats from 1991 to the present. The ships carry about 300 aliens each. We have not had a boat land here in New York yet.

Immigrant smuggling ships at sea.

NARRATOR

This was about to change, because a snakehead in Bangkok had a plan to evade US authorities.

Title: Lee Peng Fei

NARRATOR

His name was Lee Peng Fei, and he was the mastermind of the Golden Venture.

Title: Karen Pace, INS Special Agent.

PACE

He put the word out to the snakeheads, I have space to rent to you. Each one of those snakeheads would pay Lee Peng Fei \$15 to \$18,000 per person, out of the approximately \$30,000 that they were collecting in total.

Title: Kaiqu Zheng

QUESTIONER (O.S.)

(subtitled Chinese)

How much did you pay to go to the US?

KAIQU

(subtitled Chinese)

It was about \$40,000 at that time.

QUESTIONER

(subtitled Chinese)

How did you get all that money?

KAIQU
 (subtitled Chinese)
 Friends and relatives abroad sent
 me the money.

TITLE: Yan Li

YAN
 (subtitled Chinese)
 I paid him \$10,000 up front and
 spent almost \$30,000 along the way.
 When I got to the US, I had been on
 the road three years.

CHAPTER 3: Out of China.

KAIQU
 (subtitled Chinese)
 In 1992, around October, we started
 to climb the mountains. Without
 passports, there was no other way.

Map of Myanmar, Thailand.

NARRATOR
 To leave China, most of the Golden
 Venture passengers walked over the
 mountains of Myanmar and through
 the opium fields of the Golden
 Triangle. Some watched friends die
 along the way.

ARMING
 (subtitled English)
 We drank the water that had the
 poison. Six people went over this
 mountain. One person died.

NARRATOR
 The immigrants then traveled into
 Thailand to Bangkok.

Bangkok.

KAREN PACE
 And there was a staging house in
 Bangkok where they would wait. It
 was called the duck house, and they
 were ducks.

Guilin.

GUILIN

(subtitled English)

They didn't allow us to go out to the streets. They just closed the doors. They said: "You do it this way." We had to follow. We stayed for almost two months.

Mug Shots.

NARRATOR

While the immigrants were shut up in a warehouse, Lee Peng Fei ran out of money. He turned to Sister Ping, the legendary Snakehead then based in New York. With a loan from Sister Ping, Lee Peng Fei bought a tramp steamer in Singapore and renamed it "Golden Venture."

ARMING

(subtitled Chinese)

When the boat came it was all prepared.

Inside the Golden Venture.

ARMING (CONT'D)

It was divided into three levels. Of course, conditions were not good.

Map of route to Africa.

NARRATOR

In February, 1993, 90 immigrants boarded the ship off Thailand. The Golden Venture chugged past Singapore, crossed the Indian Ocean and stopped in Mombasa, Kenya in late March. Several hundred other Fujianese had been stranded in Mombasa after another ship broke down. About 200 of them boarded the Golden Venture off Mombasa, including Kaiqu, Arming and Yan. 300 people were now crammed into the small hold.

YAN

(subtitled Chinese)

Everyone was assigned a body-sized space. You're cramped, whether you sit up or lie down.

(MORE)

YAN (cont'd)

Otherwise, how could you pack in more than 200 people? We were starving. It was inhuman. It was like hell.

NARRATOR

The Golden Venture then continued around South Africa, where the small freighter was hit by a severe hurricane and almost went down.

GUILIN CHEN

(subtitled Chinese)

They weren't waves. They were like mountains crashing over us. We were rolling all over the place.

YAN

(subtitled Chinese)

People were fragile when they faced death. Reactions were different. Some prayed. Some put on their best clothes. Some screamed. Some hugged. I covered myself with a quilt. I didn't want to see anything. I waited for death. A miracle happened. Half an hour later, the sea calmed down.

NARRATOR

The Golden Venture steamed into the Atlantic. It crossed the equator, heading for the East Coast of the United States.

YAN

(subtitled Chinese)

The enforcers were from gangs. They were murderers and arsonists. Some girls were raped. Other people were badly beaten. We had seen it all.

PACE

Small rendezvous vessels, operated by the Fuk Ching gang were to meet up with the Golden Venture and receive the passengers on these smaller vessels and transport them to the United States. The rendezvous never occurred.

NARRATOR

A shoot out in New York put the Fuk Ching gang into disarray, and plans for the pick up at sea fell apart. When the boats didn't show up, Snakeheads took control of the ship and headed for New York City. The ship cut through the waters off Long Island. It neared Breezy Point, closing in on New York harbor. And then the snakeheads turned toward land, going full throttle for the beach.

CHAPTER 4: June 6, 1993.

NARRATOR

The ship was aground 300 yards from shore. The surf was rough and the water was cold. Ten people died.

Title: Ray Kelly, New York Police Commissioner

KELLY

I received a call about 2:15, 2:20 in the morning about a ship having run aground.

Title: William Mundy, US Coast Guard, retired.

MUNDY

And as soon as we took off and got to about to 50 or 60 feet heading towards Breezy Point there, we could see the vessel hard aground. People started jumping in from the bow, from the middle of the vessel and from the aft, the tail end of the vessel. And we noted right away that the people that were dropping off the back of the boat were getting sucked into the screws.

KAIQU

(subtitled Chinese)

We thought we had made it to America. If we could just get to shore, we would be like Superman. A lot of people jumped. We didn't know that so many died until we got to the shore.

ARMING

(subtitled Chinese)

When the boat ran aground, we could feel the bottom hitting the sand. When we jumped into the water, it was extremely cold right away. My arms and legs were frozen, I could barely move.

YAN

(subtitled Chinese)

We saw bright lights on the shore. We knew we had arrived to a land of freedom. We had been so scared during the journey. Everyone rushed to jump into the water. Even if it meant death.

GUILIN

(subtitled Chinese)

A wave dragged me deep under. I kicked four or five times -- but the waves pushed me down again. I swallowed a lot of water. I thought I was going to die.

KELLY

I was lit up by helicopters. There was this bluish light shining right on the ship and I remember right away people jumping off the ship. Certainly a scene to remember. I'll never forget it.

Title: NY Police Office, Chris Muldoon

MULDOON

There was one gentleman coming out of the water, I tried to assist him. I think he believed that I was trying to remove the bag he had around his arm. That's all he had in life. He was in a pair of underwear, and he had this white plastic bag, similar to what you get in a grocery store. And I tried to assist him out of the water, and he give me a shot to the head to the right side that I'll never forget. I often wonder where he is today.

MUNDY

Come back for fuel, we could see the Statue of Liberty, because it was very good visibility that night. And I just thought that it was so tragic that they had to die on the American shore, with the Statue of Liberty right behind them.

GUILIN

At that time, I was just thinking. OK, whatever, maybe I can stay or they may send me back to China. I'm just thinking. OK. I'm safe.

Title: NYC Mayor David Dinkins. Early morning, June 6, 1993)

DAVID DINKINS

I would make this observation to all of the residents of our city, and of our nation. These are people, apparently desperately trying to come to America, and I would hope that those people who are already here would recognize how important the freedom is that they have here.

ABC NEWSCASTER

This is world news Sunday. City and federal officials are trying to find out tonight who was responsible for trying to smuggle hundreds of Chinese illegal immigrants into the United States.

CBS NEWSCASTER

A dramatic reminder today of how desperately some people want to live in the United States.

CNN NEWSCASTER

In Chinese it's called Tao Do, stealing passage. In the 1990s it has become a big and risky business. Early this morning, stealing passage to the US cost at least six Chinese their lives.

Title: Eddie Valentine, volunteer fire fighter.

EDDIE

If you look at these houses, along here, this is where a lot of the people that were in the boat ran to. And they ran under these bungalows and you know, actually banged on people's doors. About two blocks back there was a woman there and two or three gentlemen came to her house and she actually invited them in, and had tea with them. Because she felt bad for them.

NARRATOR

The bodies of six Golden Venture passengers lay in the New York City morgue for 10 months. INS officials made little effort to contact people who could identify them. The bodies were buried anonymously in a collective grave.

Passengers in a holding area.

NARRATOR

The Golden Venture passengers included 262 men, 24 women and 14 children. Six people managed to escape.

The Golden Venture passengers enter a federal building.

NARRATOR

The survivors were bused to an INS facility in downtown New York. The immigrants requested political asylum in the US. Established practice would be to release them on bond. Officials decided to change the policy.

WILLIAM SLATTERY

We've been told that all these individuals will be detained. The interagency task force believes that there has to be a deterrent, and all these Chinese will be detained.

Title: Deputy Director, NY INS, June 6, 1993

MCELROY

This group is being detained to provide an example of what American law enforcement can do when provided this kind of opportunity. The government is entitled to arrest them and detain them until they receive a benefit and a decision from the court.

Title: Rep. Chuck Schumer, D-NY

SCHUMER

In fact, what I would say, just in reference to this gentleman's question is, the law was always intended that every person claiming asylum would be detained.

NARRATOR

The day after the grounding, the immigrants were taken away from New York. Yan, Kaiqu, Guilin and 115 other detainees were bused to the county jail in York, Pa., a large medium security prison. A wing of the prison had been contracted out for INS detainees. The prison is three and a half hours from New York, and advocates charged that the INS was deliberately isolating the passengers from rights groups and legal representation.

YAN

(subtitled Chinese)

We had almost died. Now we were in jail. It was a living hell. Was this the end of our life journey?

GUILIN

I called my cousin, and he said, no problem, just stay there.

NARRATOR

Within a few weeks, there was a hopeful development. A group of York attorneys decided to help the detainees, although none practiced immigration law. Craig Trebilcock, a personal injury lawyer, was one of the volunteers.

CRAIG

Walking in there and saying "hi, I'm your lawyer" was not a warm and fuzzy moment for them. They thought we worked for the government.

NARRATOR

Craig took a crash course in immigration law, but there was no preparing for the much larger issues he was about to confront.

Chapter 5: We were not welcome

CRAIG TREBILCOCK, Attorney, York, PA

CRAIG

Clinton had just taken office in January of '93, and the Golden Venture landed in June of '93. And in that brief time period there were several significant occurrences that changed this nation's immigration policy. One was the first attempt to topple the Twin Towers, and that was looked at as having been perpetrated by people who were in the country illegally or of questionable immigration status. There was a sniping incident at the CIA, a Muslim fanatic was shooting, you know, civilian employees of the CIA. And it turned out that he didn't have legitimate status either. So it was looked at as, hey, there's all these bad immigrants that are causing serious problems in our country. Well, the Golden Venture had the bad timing and the bad luck of arriving right on the heels of those two incidents.

NARRATOR

Fear of terrorism was only part of the equation. The country was coming out of a recession, and immigrants were seen as an economic threat. Some were demanding strong action.

PATRICK BUCHANAN, Republican presidential hopeful, 1992 primaries.

BUCHANAN

Meanwhile, our own country is undergoing the greatest invasion in history. A mass immigration of millions of illegal immigrants, Why cannot we secure the borders of the United States of America?

PROTESTOR

Go home!

DORIS MEISSNER Commissioner, INS, 1993-2000

MEISSNER

There certainly was an atmosphere of urgency and an atmosphere of a new administration recognizing that it needed to confront something that was not necessarily in the game plan.

June 18, 1993

CLINTON

We can't afford to lose control of our own borders, or to take on new financial burdens at a time when we are not adequately providing for the jobs, the health care, and the education of our own people

ARMING

(subtitled Chinese)

Our group came at a time when the country didn't want more immigrants. And we were not welcome.

CRAIG

What happened to them then was really a turning point in US immigration policy. Somebody in Washington made a decision -- no, we're not going to release this group.

CLINTON

The simple fact is that we must not and we will not surrender our borders to those who wish to exploit our history of compassion and justice.

KAIQU

(subtitled Chinese)

Initially, they gave us papers to post bond and be released. Then they took the papers back. The US government wouldn't allow us to post bail. Ten people died. The whole world was watching.

NARRATOR

Beverly Church was another early volunteer. A paralegal, a mother of five and a former nurse -- it was her first time inside a prison when she went to interview her Golden Venture client.

BEVERLY CHURCH Paralegal, York PA

BEV

Down the hallway comes this little Chinese guy you know, an old blue uniform that kind of, looks like somebody's old mechanic uniform that somebody tore the labels off of, that's what they're wearing. And flip flops on his feet. Scared to death. And so skinny. I just, as a nurse and a mom, I just wanted to say, come on, we're getting something to eat. His jaws were sunken in. When I walked out of that sallyport, I felt much different than I did when I walked in. I was determined that I was going to at least do my best to help him.

NARRATOR

The fate of the detainees now hinged on hearings held in the jail. Each prisoner went before a judge, who could either grant asylum or order deportation. Almost all of the detainees requested asylum because they claimed there were fleeing from China's one-child population control policy.

CRAIG

Back in the early 90s there was an increase in pressure put on the people in that region about China's birth control policies. That crackdown was really the spark that set off the Golden Venture passengers, most of them wanting to leave China.

YAN

(subtitled Chinese)

The judge didn't take us seriously. He didn't believe us. He wasn't convinced by what we said. I didn't know how to convince him. I didn't know anything about US laws. According to him, we were all making up our stories.

CRAIG

In the York County Prison about 145 of these cases were heard and two people won. Now, we may be country lawyers out here, but we're not that bad. At that point, some information started to leak out to us by comments made by immigration service officials to individual lawyers like me, comments like "the White House wants these guys out of the country," that these people are a "special priority," that an "example was going to be made of these people."

NARRATOR

Craig was in the army for four years until 1991 and served as an officer in the reserves. Fighting the US government was a strange new prospect for him.

CRAIG

We're not going to let these cases be railroaded through the system, and so we took an appeal into a federal court.

Craig on TV.

CRAIG

They've very nervous because we've been asking questions like what occurred in the White House, what occurred in the National Security Council, and it's at that point that they built this wall that they're not going to cooperate.

NARRATOR

As the legal appeals continued, the detainees had to face up to life in prison.

ARMING

We write a lot of letters, so we were in contact with our families. We didn't tell them that we were feeling pain. We told them we were ok. The future will be better.

GUILIN

(subtitled Chinese)

Nearly 20 of us were kept in a "pod." It was really boring, so we bought cards and made our own mahjong tiles.

ARMING

Think about yourself -- if somebody put you in jail so many years, what would you be feeling? That's exactly what we were feeling

GUILIN

(subtitled Chinese)

Preachers talked about Jesus. Buddhists came too. When they came, we talked with them to kill time. If Jesus is here, why are we still in jail? Buddha says: "If you don't go to jail, who will?"

Chapter 6: Strange Bedfellows.

Title: Sterling Showers, retired factory worker

STERLING

Whatever the weather was, we were here. When it snowed too bad, we couldn't get here -- I think that only happened one time, that we couldn't get here because of the snow.

NARRATOR

Sterling Showers was a worker in a York air conditioner factory. He was moved by the detainees' plight, and decided to help.

STERLING

I can't tell you why. When I heard of the news and everything, I was drawn. I don't know why.

NARRATOR

He attended weekly vigils outside the jail, and began to visit detainees on the inside.

STERLING

I was here every week. Every week while they were incarcerated.

NARRATOR

Support for the detainees grew, and came from many parts of the York community.

CRAIG

It was a really strange cross section, because some people joined because of their pro-life stance. We had some pro-choice people join because they thought, well they're not giving these people any choice at all when they're forcing them to be sterilized. So it was this real strange coalition of very liberal, left wing peace and justice movement types, kind of more conservative, pro-democracy anti Communist, patriotic types; and at the middle, the nexus was these Golden Venture guys.

ARMING

People from the church in Pennsylvania, they tried to help us. We hope and hope, and then the time went faster.

BEV

1994, 1995 and 1996, I worked with Craig, still went every Friday to the prison. What we called pod meetings. That's the way that the prison was set up.

(MORE)

BEV (cont'd)

And in the room where we met most of the time, there was a big blackboard. And I would put things on the blackboard: this is what Senator So-and-So proposed for us, and this is what Congressman's Goodling's doing, and on and on.

GUILIN

Nobody knows how long we're gonna have to stay. Maybe tomorrow gonna be free. But we have hope.

Chapter 7: Folded Dreams

GUILIN

(subtitled Chinese)

We all started to learn how to fold paper. We made them into bowls, pineapples, and birds. Later, we used toilet paper and water -- together with soap to make sculpting paste. We let it sit for two days, then used it to make sculptures.

STERLING

Zheng Kaiqu was the first one I visited in prison. He spent his whole time just making art. I gave him a pictures of Toby, so he made, it was two parrots actually, African gray parrots. And all this is Zheng Kaiqu's. Both the folded and the sculpted. Isn't this beautiful?

KAIQU

(subtitled Chinese)

This is what I made in the US. I made two birds. They are supposed to go like this. It is beautiful like that. Using American glue it would be shiny. This is the US national bird, the eagle.

Title: WGAL TV News, York PA, April 29, 1996.

WOMAN

It's just amazing.

MAN

They've gone from being 50 men with time to kill to being 50 folk artists.

TV REPORTER

The works of art by the Chinese refugees is described as incredible, an expression of freedom and hope -- hope that is waning for some. And attorneys for the immigrants say every week more and more of their administrative appeals are being denied -- right now, deportation back to China seems certain for nearly half of them. In York, Lisa Mishler, News 8.

Chapter 8: Misled

YAN

(subtitled Chinese)

After being in jail many years, I was confused. The immigration service said they could not release us. They said there are two options: we could stay in jail or we could go to China. An officer told us that things had improved in China. And that I wouldn't be persecuted. We were misled.

KAIQU

(subtitled Chinese)

The INS told us there would be no fine.

NARRATOR

Both Yan and Kaiqu decided they would rather be sent back to China then stay in jail.

YAN

(subtitled Chinese)

The police took us from the York jail by the police to Philadelphia, in handcuffs and shackles. We were put on a plane to California. From there, we boarded another plane to Shanghai. Not until we were on board did the police take off our handcuffs.

NARRATOR

Ultimately, 99 detainees opted for deportation. But they didn't know for sure what would happen when they stepped off the plane.

KAIQU

(subtitled Chinese)

We were sent to Fuqing jail. In Fuqing I was fined \$2000. It's miserable in jail. We were beaten...beaten every morning.

YAN

(subtitled Chinese)

The police slapped us around, accused us of tarnishing China's image.

TITLE: Rujian Re-education Center. Detention facility outside Fuzhou.

YAN

They held us for a week and then sent us to Fuzhou. In Fuzhou I was fined. They also sterilized me. It took about 20 minutes. I was terrified. I could see the whole thing. I went home. We hugged and cried. I didn't know what to say. My kids had grown and had changed a lot. The kids were happy to see me. They didn't understand the bitterness of life.

Chapter 9: Release.

NARRATOR

By early 1997, 57 Golden Venture passengers were still in jail, 42 in York. Craig had lost in court, and the chances for release were bleak.

CRAIG

We were able to finally get a front page New York Times article about the fact that these guys were still locked up after all these years. Right about that same time, our local congressman, Bill Goodling, managed to collar President Clinton at the State of the Union address.

(MORE)

CRAIG (cont'd)

And as he's going down the aisle, glad-handing and shaking as you see on TV, Goodling grabbed him and said, "Hey Mr. President, I've still got these Chinese locked up in my district; what are you going to do about it?" And the President told Goodling, "Well call me tomorrow and we'll talk about it."

NARRATOR

Goodling was chairman of the powerful house education committee, and the keynote of Clinton's speech that year was "the National Crusade for Education."

William Goodling, Congressman, 1974-2000, Feb. 14, 1997

GOODLING

Two days later I was invited to the White House for a 45 minute discussion on education. And I took with me some of the artwork of the Golden Venture Chinese in the prison. And gave it to him, and he said, "that is beautiful."

NARRATOR

On February 14, 1997, President Clinton issued a parole for the jailed Golden Venture passengers.

BEV

I'll never forget their faces looking out at me. I put my thumb up to them and they looked back at me and said "all of us?" And I said, "yes, all of you."

CRAIG

They got released on the day I was shipping out to go to Bosnia, actually, so I called back home on the pay phone, I'm standing there in my camouflage Army uniform in the middle of Ft. Benning, Georgia, late at night, and I got the word that they had been released.

NARRATOR

The order was for their release only -- they were not given legal status. On Feb.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)
 26, Guilin and the other York detainees left just as they had arrived, in white and green INS buses. They had been in jail for almost four years.

Various crowd voices. Song: "Freedom."

DETAINEE
 We must say thank you to Mr. President Clinton. He helped us a lot. He let us to be released.

GUILIN
 I just feel...exciting.

Group singing: "Amazing Grace." Voices: "Hallelujah." Crowd noise.

ARMING
 (subtitled Chinese)
 Six years after we left, we came out of prison to face a completely blank slate, an empty life. I lost my family, my marriage, everything.

Chapter 11: Life in the Beautiful Country

NARRATOR
 The Golden Venture passengers released from jail spread out across the country. Nine years later, they are not legally American. They can't go to China to their families. Some haven't seen wives and children for more than 12 years. They live in limbo. Arming had been shuttled from one federal prison to another. He was on the verge of deportation when he was released on the Clinton parole.

Kitchen noises, voices.

ARMING
 (subtitled Chinese)
 Probably not many people know that I came on the Golden Venture. It's nothing special. We are all the same. For the first two or three years out of jail, I stayed in the New York area.

(MORE)

ARMING (cont'd)

I was closer to my friends and relatives. My friend opened a place in Florida and asked me to help. I helped him for about a year. I was getting familiar with things in Florida. I made some American friends. So I decided to settle down here. We're not like Americans. We don't have the language skills and the work skills they do. Americans take it for granted. This is the reality for first generation immigrants. For our American born children, this won't be the case.

NARRATOR

Even without legal status, Arming has opened a restaurant and bought a house, where his employees live rent free.

ARMING

(subtitled English)

For this restaurant, I learned more. I went to bartender school to train myself how to make cocktails. And, I learned to cook Japanese grills and sushi. I'm working the same like a regular worker. We're the first one to open the restaurant and the last one to go home. Every night I have to stay up. Do some paper work. A lot of tax returns. We often work seven days a week. The goal in the future is not working so many hours. We can live like you guys, same, that's our goal

NARRATOR

Guilin lived in New York after being released from prison, but the garment factory where he worked closed. Since then, he has been a delivery man.

GUILIN

(subtitled English)

In America, our work is very simple. Every day, do the same job. I work there at least 13 hours a day. Six days a week. Most students is OK.

(MORE)

GUILIN (cont'd)
 They give a couple of dollars. When I deliver to a building, I leave the car running. See? Now it's 12:02. 11:00 to 12:30. Thirteen and a half hours. At least 120 miles. Uh Oh. Nobody here.

GUILIN
 (subtitled Chinese)
 I work hard but also play hard. Otherwise I wouldn't be so healthy.

GUILIN CHEN
 (subtitled English)
 I sometimes I go to nightclub. With my friends. We have very happy time there. You can dance whatever you want to dance, you know?

Chapter 11: Illegal Alien

NARRATOR
 After Yan was deported and sterilized, he returned to his hometown. He was burdened by debts left from the Golden Venture journey.

YAN
 (subtitled Chinese)
 I was very depressed. People looked down on me. I owed a lot of money. I had no choice but to go to the US again.

NARRATOR
 For his second journey he paid \$50,000 to snakeheads to bring him back to the US.

YAN
 (subtitled Chinese)
 I was introduced to a document forger. The name on the passport was fake. The photo was mine. I was part of a tourist group. My passport described me as an "engineer." The immigration officer was suspicious of our group. When he saw that I'm an "engineer" he asked me a math question.

(MORE)

YAN (cont'd)

He asked me, "If $2X + 4 = 16$, what is X?" I answered him right away. That's why he believed me. This is really simple math for Chinese, isn't it?

NARRATOR

More than 50 of the deported Golden Venture passengers have come back to the US illegally. The current going rate for the trip to America is \$70,000. An estimated 20 to 30,000 Fujianese pay this sum every year.

YAN

(subtitled Chinese)

In the US we need to survive and work toward opening a business. It's hard. But there's a saying. "After you taste the most bitter of the bitter, you will be a man above men." I knew I would be working hard in the US. I would be working 10 hours a day. That's what I'm doing now as a chef. It's exhausting. I'm used to it. When business is good, the boss hires. When it's bad, you move on. I've worked all over. Long Island. Manhattan. Philadelphia. And now in Tennessee. I drifted around the world for more than 10 years, separated from my family. How sad is this? I can't find an answer to the question of life.

Chapter 12: China

QUESTIONER

(subtitled Chinese)

Your daughter is getting married today?

KAIQU

(subtitled Chinese)

This is my daughter.

KAIQU'S DAUGHTER

(subtitled Chinese)

The bride has arrived. Where are the firecrackers?

NARRATOR

Like Yan, Kaiqu was deported from the York jail. He lives in the city of Changle.

KAIQU

(subtitled Chinese)

After more than two years in jail, my family was destroyed. My wife ran away with another man. The kids were little. It was hard to find another job at home. All I could do is go to the US and try again.

NARRATOR

Kaiqu tried to go back to the US. He flew in by himself, and was turned back at the airport. He had also tried to enter the US one time before the Golden Venture.

KAIQU

(subtitled Chinese)

It was during the Gulf War. They thought I was a terrorist. When we got to San Francisco, they sent us back right away. I tried to go to the US three times, but was sent home three times. Isn't it bad luck? If I could have stayed in the US, my family would be doing very well now. It was probably my fate.

In the town social hall.

KAIQU

(subtitled Chinese)

He is one of my companions from the Golden Venture.

QUESTIONER

(subtitled Chinese)

Do you plan to go to the US again?

MAN

(subtitled Chinese)

Yes. I've got a plan. OK. That's enough.

NARRATOR

Around the social hall, poems
inscribed on the columns celebrate
the generations of villagers
who have gone abroad.

(poem #1)

A stream flows to the lake. The
lake thanks and remembers the
stream forever.

(poem #2)

Relatives overseas will thank their
hometown. Through the winds of the
sea. And will spread the name of
their hometown forever.

KAIQU

(subtitled Chinese)

This is my friend's house. His son
has been in England for eight
years. They built it for
\$75,000.

KAIQU'S DAUGHTER

(subtitled Chinese)

When I was young, I thought the US
was heaven and wanted to go. I
don't want to go now, because I
know life is tough there. You work
from 11 a.m. to 3 or 4 a.m. You
don't have a choice. It's work,
work, work and you can't relax.
Life is better at home.

Crowd noises at wedding.

WOMAN

(subtitled Chinese)

Light the incense to bring
prosperity. Luck to the bride's
family. Luck to the groom's family.

Chapter 14: 44 Pounds Of Luggage

BEV

This is the letter that Lin Yan Min
received. Telling him to report and
bring his 44 pounds of luggage to
report, and be deported. And I'm
just flabbergasted. He wanted to
know if he should sell his
property. He's been here almost 11
years.

NARRATOR

Like Lin Yan Min, the Clinton parolees live at the uncertain mercy of the Dept. of Immigration and Customs Enforcement. They are in stateless limbo -- here, but not legally American. They can't go to China, and some haven't seen wives and children in 12 years. In 2001, another Golden Venture passengers was almost sent back.

BEV

He went to report in. And they told him to stay there and they put him in a bus and they were shipping him off to deport him.

NARRATOR

Only Bev's last ditch efforts saved Yi Zhou Hau. But Yi and the other former detainees know that their new lives could suddenly be undone by a deportation notice.

ARMING

It's in your mind all the time. It's happening right now. If you're not legal, you can't even get a license. So problems come up when policy changes. After 9/11, if you are not legal, you cannot drive. If you are not driving, what kind of a life are you going to have?

Bev with Guilin.

BEV

So if you know where any of these guys are, I would appreciate it.

NARRATOR

Bev stays in close touch with Guilin and other former detainees - helping them deal with immigration problems. She has joined with Craig in a stop gap maneuver to protect the Golden Venture passengers from being deported.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)
They convinced their local
Congressman to introduce
legislation called a "private
relief bill." The bill would give
the former detainees full legal
status.

CRAIG
Well you're here physically but
you're not here legally. That's
what parole is. We're going to
tolerate your presence but you have
no legal right.

BEV
I know and you know and they know
in Washington that too many of our
agencies do not know what the other
one is doing. The subcommittee on
judiciary told me two years ago
that as long as they're on a
proposed bill before Congress, they
are safe. Why are they getting
letters saying they're going to be
deported? I mean, does anybody know
what's going on down there? That
scares the hell outta me.

Title: Russell Knocke, public affairs director, Immigration
and Customs Enforcement

KNOCKE
Simply introduction of legislation
on behalf of an alien does not
disqualify them from deportation.
We would work of course with the
members, and if there was
legitimate opportunity for that
legislation to pass, if it's got
legs, then we would certainly take
that into consideration as we're
taking a look at removals for the
coming days and weeks.

ICE video footage.

KNOCKE
We keep in our minds every day the
attacks of September the 11th, we
remember the impact that had on our
country, on our society, on each of
us individually, and we remember
that the immigration system
certainly had a role to play.

NARRATOR

Since 9/11, very few private bills have passed. Even in normal times, they are rare.

CRAIG

The bills been kind of, uh, languishing in congress for a few years now, and it's part of a bigger immigration picture, as has been the curse of the Golden Venture people all along.

BAY BUCHANAN

My name is Bay Buchanan, and I am the chairman of Team America.

CRAIG

There's some strong lobbying groups out there, who are anti-immigrant, and some very outspoken congressmen who just seem to want to seal the borders of the United States.

NARRATOR

Representative Tom Tancredo leads the anti-immigration faction in Congress. Until recently, he was seen as an extremist and was a political outcast. Today he is a key player.

TANCREDO

People have come across by the thousands, and in some cases hundreds of thousands, and have created these incredible, well, they have devastated the land.

SCHWARZENEGGER

Close the borders. Close the borders in California and all across between Mexico and the United States.

BUSH

I stand strongly against amnesty. Amnesty would say to other illegal aliens that you can come to America and get citizenship automatically.

(MORE)

BUSH (cont'd)

Let 'em work in America doing jobs that Americans won't do on a temporary basis and then go back to their country.

Title: Rep. Tom Tancredo, Leader, House Immigration Reform Caucus

TANCREDO

Illegal immigration is just that, and it doesn't matter whether they're coming from China, or Mexico. They are here illegally. As a result, they have to suffer the consequences if they are found out.

BEV

I don't know how I can handle personally, or emotionally, them telling me these guys are going back to China. I really don't know. I guess because I can never believe my country can do that to them -- and yet I know realistically it can happen.

Bev on the phone.

BEV

As long as he's part of the Congressional bill, he cannot be bothered, OK? They're scared to death. They all think they're going to get these letters one by one. And I can't find the right person in Washington that can answer my question. What can you do about this?

NARRATOR

In 2003, Craig was sent to Iraq, now a Lieutenant Colonel. Bev was left to defend the Golden Venture passengers on her own.

Chapter 14: On the Hill.

NARRATOR

With Lin Yan Min's deportation only weeks away, she went to Congress with a group of former detainees, trying to get help before it was too late.

Overlapping voices, chit-chat.

BEV

I want everybody to speak as much English as possible, OK? We're talking about an amnesty bill, you've been here 11 years. Sorry, guys. If I was in China for 11 years, my ass would be speaking Chinese, OK? Let's get with the program. All English. Talk Chinese to each other...

In a Congressional office.

BEV

So we want to reinforce the time lapse. It's been three years since we started this. All the background checks have been done. What do we have to do to get this out of committee and get this on the floor?

They walk through a hallway in Congress.

BEV

I just know in my heart, these guys are going to be some damn good citizens here. We watched them for four years in the prison. They're good people. They're worth every bit of work that we've put into this for 11 years.

They meet with a congressional aide.

BEV

As long as he's on a proposed congressional bill he should be very safe, and we were told this many many times, and yet the INS is sending him deportation letters. This is just absolutely absurd. It's gotten to the point where these guys need to have some help.

Bev talks to the Golden Venture passengers.

BEV

This is very important. Now with Congressman Platts, we're going to be meeting with him and Scott

(MORE)

BEV (cont'd)
 Miller, who you've met with before.
 OK? And Congressman Platts is the
 one we want to get the points
 across to -- bigger. About the work
 cards. And his letter, because...
 he's our point man, so he's the one
 that can handle these problems.

Passenger Michael Chen speaks with another former detainee.

CHEN
 (subtitled Chinese)
 We'll never be able to translate if
 we don't stop him from time to
 time.

BEV
 Hey!

PLATTS
 Hi, how are ya? How's everyone
 doing?

GV PASSENGER
 Nice to meet you, Mr. Congressman.

Title: Rep. Todd Platts (R.-PA)

PLATTS
 Afternoon. Or actually, it's still
 morning. Good morning.

Title: Michael Chen, GV Passenger.

CHEN
 (subtitled English)
 He's being told if you don't leave
 this office I'll put you in prison.
 They took away all his documents.
 His I-94 card, his work card,
 everything. All he had they took
 away from him. And I called the
 people, "Did you get a letter from
 immigration." I was so nervous, if
 I get a letter. Then he told me,
 "Now what can I do? I have to sell
 my property." So I was so nervous,
 when I heard about it from him.
 First thing he called me, and
 hopefully in the future we, Mr.
 Congressman can help us...

PLATTS

You're going to call Bev, and Bev's going to call me real quick.

BEV

Thank you sir, you're a gentleman and a scholar.

PLATTS

Keep pluggin away.

BEV

We'll get it.

PLATTS

Once they came here in an illegal manner they paid a very significant price. They were in prison for approximately four years, so they paid their debt to society for that illegal conduct. Were then let go, told: "you're free to go and to remain in this country" -- but there's never been closure brought to their cases. They've never been processed through to have permanent legal status, to have their green cards and to move towards citizenship ultimately if that's what they choose. My legislation is seeking to bring closure to them.

NARRATOR

The private relief bill is being considered by a Congressional subcommittee. It's unclear when or if the bill will come to a vote in Congress.

ARMING

(subtitled Chinese)

The bill in Washington? I was up there last year. Personally I think it's going to be difficult to pass the bill. We need time, and we need help. All I can say is that I need to work hard.

NARRATOR

After the lobbying trip, a Congressional aide intervened on Lin Min Yan's behalf.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)
His deportation notice was
rescinded.

Chapter 15: Unfinished Journey

ARMING
(subtitled Chinese)
A very good friend traveled with me
on the boat. He was one of the ten
who died. Whenever I think about
that night, I think about him.
I could hear the shouts and screams
of my companions. I wasn't sure why
I didn't die. We jumped into the
water together but others died.

NARRATOR
In August 2000, the Golden Venture
was towed into the ocean off Boca
Raton, Florida and deliberately
sunk to the bottom -- to be used as
an artificial reef. The wreck
became a popular destination for
local scuba tours.

CRAIG
Well we're almost 12 years post-
Golden Venture and the same myopic,
moronic, abusive policies are still
in place. We've done nothing of
worth. We've spent tens of millions
of dollars, we have statistics that
can be twisted around to show, yes,
we're deporting more people than
ever. OK, show me the statistic on
justice. Show me the statistic on
what we've done to our national
soul by being more abusive, by
being less compassionate. It makes
no sense at all.

BEV
I just have to see this through. I
don't know why. Whether it's my
grandfather from the grave saying
get your Irish butt in there and
keep going, I don't now. But it's
something that has to be done.

NARRATOR
After the grounding, the government
hunted down the Golden Venture
snakeheads.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Karen Pace was part of the team that pursued Lee Peng Fei, leading to his arrest in Bangkok. He was extradited and later sentenced to 20 years in a federal penitentiary. Sister Ping, who put up the money for the Golden Venture, was arrested in Hong Kong and extradited. In March, 2006, she was sentenced in federal court to 35 years. INS official William Slattery resigned under pressure in 1997, following a Justice Dept. investigation and allegations of "improper associations" with Korean garment factory owners.

GUILIN

(subtitled Chinese)

There's a Chinese saying..."you plan. Heaven will deliver." It's a matter of luck. You could dream of being president and end up a beggar. It's all daydreaming. You get by day by day, doing whatever you are able to. It doesn't help to think far ahead.

NARRATOR

Unlike the others paroled by Clinton, Guilin pursued his case in immigration court. In June 2004, a Judge gave him asylum. Today he has his own restaurant, and is waiting for a green card.

Mug shot.

NARRATOR

Amir Tobing, captain of the Golden Venture, did four years in jail, and then was deported. Less than a year later,, he was caught by the Coast Guard on a burning sailboat off Washington State. The boat was filled with marijuana. Tobing is serving 10 years.

STERLING

The Chinese, some of them say, well, you're half Chinese, you know, you're part Chinese. I spend more time than I do with American people.

(MORE)

STERLING (cont'd)

When they're around, or even here in York, I spend more time with my Chinese friends than I do with other people. I mean, from that time my life changed. I call a couple of them in China, every week I talk to them.

KAIQU

(subtitled English)

Sterling my best friend. I love you.

STERLING

I talked to Kaiqu, and he was very happy and he recognized my voice right away when he heard it. He laughed. He was happy. And when he left, he said, "I love you, Sterling." Which is what I always told the guys in prison when I visited them. Whenever I left there, I always said I love you. It felt good to hear him say that.

KAIQU

(subtitled Chinese)

He's such a nice person. I could never forget him. I would like to sit down with him and talk all night. What he did is like bringing warmth to a cold man in winter.

Over titles:

NARRATOR

The 286 immigrants who came to America on the Golden Venture met different fates after their ship ran aground. Besides those who died or escaped -- 14 of the juveniles on the ship were released, initially to court custody. 35 received political asylum. 55 were released on bond or INS parole -- their whereabouts are unknown. Two received artists visas. 53 were released in the 1997 Clinton parole. 111 were deported, including 12 who found political asylum in Latin America. Of those 111, it's believed that about half have returned to the US illegally.

YAN

(subtitled Chinese)

What is life? Life is tiring. I've been turned around so many times but I'm still the same. Now I'm getting old. People say life is too short. That's for rich people. For someone who has gone through so much, it's hard to talk about the taste of life. When you're on this road, there's no way back. You have to keep going.

NARRATOR

The hurricanes of 2005 finally destroyed the Golden Venture. The hulk lies scattered on the ocean floor.