

# **A conversation with Su Min: Is it possible to restart one's life at the age of 56?**

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## **Editor's Note**

In 2020, Su Min, a 56 years old Chinese woman lives in rural China, chose to hit the road alone. With just herself and a car, she decided to escape a marriage that had stifled her for half her life and embarked on a solo road trip across China. Her story, widely shared through social media such as TikTok, reached millions and inspired countless people. In 2024, she was also recognized as one of the BBC's 100 Most Influential and Inspiring Women globally.

In China, although divorce is becoming increasingly common, the stigmatization of divorced women—especially older women—remains widespread. When a woman is unhappy in her marriage, most people advise her to simply endure it, believing that things will eventually pass. Su Min was once one of those women. She dedicated half her life to her family, taking care of her children and husband. Even when her husband subjected her to domestic violence, she initially hoped she could just “endure” it.

Until one day, she made the decision to leave and pursue the life she truly wanted—even though she was already 56 years old, an age considered retirement in China. Su Min's story has inspired many: it's never too late to leave.

Four years later, a film adaptation of her story, *The Decision to Leave*, was released, starring renowned actress Yong Mei. During the film's release, we sat down with Su Min for an in-depth conversation. What did “leaving” mean to her? What has she experienced over the past four years? What challenges do women face when choosing to walk away? Has she truly gained the freedom she longed for?

## **Hosts**

- Wang Qing
- Ruo Han

## **Guest**

- Su Min

## Transcript

Ruo Han:

Over the past four years, many people, including myself, have been captivated by the short video account “50-Year-Old Auntie’s Road Trip.” The creator behind this account is Su Min Aunty. In the autumn of her 56th year, she chose to leave behind a stifling home life and drove away from Zhengzhou, the city where she had lived for over 30 years. In her short video bio, she wrote:

*“After turning 50, I decided to leave home. Just me, my car, and a tent—traveling across China, wherever I go, that’s my home.”*

Her story resonated deeply with many because it reflects the reality of countless Chinese families. Many women saw themselves in Su Min, with some even calling her the “Nora” of our time. Recently, the film *The Decision to Leave*, based on her true experiences, has been a box office hit. Today, we are honored to have Su Min with us to talk about her journey over the past four years and her experience of rebuilding herself.

### **After the Film’s Success, What Has Su Min Been Up To?**

Su Min:

Hello, everyone! I’m Su Min, now 60 years old. I started my solo road trip at 56 and created the “50-Year-Old Auntie’s Road Trip” account. Initially, my goal was simple—to document my life, share the beautiful things I encountered, and discuss how I tackled challenges along the way. I also hoped to convey a relaxed and joyful attitude toward life, especially to other women.

Ruo Han:

I’m so happy to talk with you today! You’re about the same age as my mother, and I actually shared your videos with her. I remember the first time I saw your videos, you were around 56 or 57. I could clearly sense that you were growing younger in spirit with time.

Su Min:

That's just how people are—when your spirit is lifted, your whole appearance changes. If you stay in an oppressive environment, your entire state of being reflects that.

Ruo Han:

So, what have you been busy with recently? The Decision to Leave has been a massive hit, even reaching audiences overseas. Since its release, has your life changed? What's next for you after four years of traveling?

Su Min:

Since the movie came out, I've received even more attention. Many people ask me how much of the film reflects my real life. I usually tell them it's about 80% accurate—although there are some creative adaptations, many key moments are taken directly from my true experiences.

Many women who watched the film said they saw themselves in it. Some even said it felt like looking into a mirror—not just a story about me, but about them, too.

Since the film's release, my life has been even busier. I'm almost always on the road—unless something urgent comes up at home, I only return for about a week at a time. I've also been attending various in-person events. Interestingly, the book I published three years ago, *After 50, I Left Home*, has seen a resurgence in popularity because of the movie, and bookstores have been hosting related discussions.

As for future plans, I've already traveled through two-thirds of China. There's still a third I haven't seen, so I plan to keep going. I've also considered traveling abroad if circumstances allow, but I don't like making rigid plans—because life never goes exactly as planned. For now, I'm simply continuing my journey.

### **Encounters with Other Women Facing Similar Struggles**

Wang Qing:

Since your videos gained popularity, many women in similar situations have reached out to you. Have you been in contact with them more frequently? What advice would you give them? Would you encourage them to leave, like you did?

Su Min:

It really depends on the individual. Everyone's family situation is different. Some women have happy marriages and warm homes—there's no need to leave. But for people like me, who couldn't find a sense of belonging or respect within the household, leaving was the only way to regain control of my life.

In my marriage, I was invisible. No one acknowledged what I did, and I was treated like a housekeeper—summoned when needed, forgotten when not. Traditional values often place women in the roles of caretakers, responsible for cooking, raising children, and managing the home, even when they also have jobs. In such environments, many women feel neither valued nor respected. That's why I chose to leave—to see what else the world had to offer.

For women who feel trapped in an unfulfilling marriage, I wouldn't say everyone should leave immediately. Instead, I'd suggest exploring ways to reclaim personal happiness—whether that's through travel, taking up a new hobby, or furthering their education. For example, a friend's mother was inspired by my story and took up vocal lessons, only to discover she had an incredible natural talent for singing! Sometimes, changing your routine can open up new possibilities.

That being said, leaving isn't for everyone. If someone isn't particularly fond of traveling or isn't comfortable handling things alone, suddenly setting out on their own might be more stressful than liberating. The key is not to blindly follow what others are doing but to find a path that truly suits oneself.

### **“How Leaving Changed My Life”?**

Ruo Han:

It's been four years since you left home. What do you think has changed the most about you?

Su Min:

The biggest change is that I'm no longer the indecisive housewife I once was. Leaving transformed my mindset, my perspective, and ultimately, my fate.

If I had stayed in that house, I don't even know what state I'd be in today. I was already struggling with depression when I left, and I often wonder—if I had stayed, would I have ended up in a hospital, battling illness? But now, I'm full of energy, my health has improved, and I feel truly alive.

Looking back, leaving was the best decision I ever made. And I'm incredibly grateful that I had the courage to walk away when I did.

### **How Should Women Face an Uncertain Future?**

Wang Qing: I think what Aunt Su Min just shared is truly touching, and I believe many listeners will resonate with it. Today, we've talked about the state of unhappiness that many women experience in their marriages. Leaving such a situation still requires a great deal of courage. Personally, I strongly disagree with the idea of "just making do" in a relationship. However, I know that some people feel that after being together for so many years, even if they're unhappy, they might as well just endure it. I'm sure, Aunt Su Min, you've heard this kind of reasoning many times as well. I'd like to ask: What would you say to people who have such concerns? And when you left your relationship, how did you deal with the uncertainty of what came next?

Su Min: I think a lot of this comes down to security—many women feel they lack the ability to live independently. Some women, after having children, lose consistency in their careers and their economic situation becomes unstable. Without a steady financial foundation, they fear that leaving a marriage will make their life even more difficult.

The fear of an uncertain future is something we all experience. Many women ask themselves, "I don't have a stable income—how will I survive if I leave my marriage?" This is closely tied to the role women are traditionally expected to play in the household. Many women, after having children, find it impossible to return to work and eventually lose their financial independence. As a result, they rely entirely on their husbands for financial security, and their voices in the household are diminished. When a woman lacks financial autonomy, she often has to submit to whatever her husband says. In this kind of situation, divorce seems out of reach—not because they don't want to leave, but because they don't see how they could make a living on their own.

But I want to tell all women: You are stronger than you think. Many women hesitate for years because they fear they won't be able to support themselves. But the truth is, you won't know until you take that first step. When I left, I had a pension, but it wasn't much. Initially, I planned to live on about 60 yuan (less than \$10) per day, so I had to be very frugal. I learned how to cook simple meals, how to camp, and how to save money on accommodations. Over time, I found ways to earn a little extra, and things gradually got better.

I'm not saying every woman has to leave home and travel like I did. But I do encourage women to develop some level of independence, whether financially or emotionally. It could be through taking up a new skill, finding a hobby, or even seeking part-time work—anything that helps you build a life outside of your marriage. When you know you can survive on your own, the fear of uncertainty becomes much smaller.

### **What Happens After Leaving?**

Ruo Han: That's such an important message. I think a lot of people assume that women who leave their marriages must have had a "backup plan" in place. But as you just shared, you didn't have a clear plan at the beginning—you just knew you had to leave. Looking back now, what do you think was the most important lesson from these past four years?

Su Min: I think the biggest lesson I've learned is that life can be completely different from what you expected. Four years ago, I never imagined I'd become who I am today. Back then, I just wanted to escape that suffocating home. I never planned to be on social media, never thought about writing a book, and certainly never expected that my story would become a movie. But life has its own way of unfolding.

Another lesson I've learned is that happiness doesn't come from waiting—it comes from action. If I had stayed at home, waiting for my husband to change, waiting for my family to treat me better, nothing would have changed. The only way for things to get better was for me to take that first step.

Finally, I've realized that it's never too late to start over. When I first left, I was already 56. Many people think life is "set" by that age—that you can't change anymore. But I proved to myself and to others that it's possible. At 56, I left home. At 57, I started making videos. At 58, I published a book. At 60, a movie was made about my life. I'm still moving forward, still exploring, still seeing new possibilities.

### **Closing Thoughts: The Journey Continues**

Wang Qing: I love that message—it's never too late to start over. I think so many women need to hear that. Thank you so much, Aunt Su Min, for sharing your journey with us today. Before we wrap up, I want to ask: What's next for you? You mentioned that you've already traveled through two-thirds of China—what's your next destination?

Su Min: Right now, I'm planning to continue my journey through the parts of China I haven't yet explored. I also have a dream of traveling abroad if the opportunity arises.

But honestly, I don't like to plan too far ahead. Life is unpredictable, and I've learned that the best adventures often come unexpectedly. For now, I just want to keep moving, keep experiencing new things, and most importantly, keep enjoying life.

Wang Qing: That's such a beautiful mindset. Thank you again for being here with us today, Aunt Su Min. Your story is an inspiration to so many people, and I know our listeners will find strength in your words.

Su Min: Thank you! I hope more women find the courage to live the life they truly want.