*Wok & Roll by Peter Kwong, (Frederic) Inter-County Leader*

**Making Crab Rangoon with fourth-grade students**

A while back, I got a call from a teacher who was coordinating a special event at Frederic School System asking me to do a cooking demonstration and talk about my hometown. Their classes were having an Asian Week, and they would love someone to come in and talk to the kids, and the cooking demo is something extra.

Well, I think I did something similar with Luck School before. Thinking that it would be for a small class of 20 to 30 students, I ended up doing it for 80 students! It turned out to be a successful event, and I have thank-you letters from each of the students afterward. Even though they addressed me as “Mr. Wong,” “Mr. Wang,” “Mr. Kong,” … but the messages were most touching; and if that doesn’t warm one’s heart, I don’t know what will.

Without blinking an eye, I said yes to her request. It first started out with students from the fourth grade. But when the other students from other grades heard about the event, they all felt left out and wanted to participate. My philosophy has been the same — cooking for one and cooking for 100 is the same amount of work. So, why not?

So, I agreed to come to the school and talk to the kids about my home country and then share with them one of my favorites, Crab Rangoon with dipping sauce. Then Melinda, the event’s coordinator, called me back and said, “Thank you so much. Now we have students from kindergarten through fourth grade who would love to participate.” So, nonchalantly, I asked, “And just how many students that might be?” “Oh, about 300,” she replied.

So, I don’t remember how I got into cooking for 300 students. But life is a challenge, no!? I’ve taught many classes in making Crab Rangoon with dipping sauces, so I did a quick calculation in how many helpers I would need and how much supplies I needed to purchase. And the challenge is, all the cooking has to be done by 2 p.m., as that’s the break time in between classes.

Well, I’ve learned that it is easier to deal with adults as they can reason with you. But doing business with kids is most difficult; they don’t care about what’s going on. All they do is just look at you with sad eyes when you can’t keep a promise. No, I can never live with myself when I see the sad face of a child. So, it’s time for my sad face, cooking for 300 kids.

The first challenge was how many ingredients I would need. After figuring out how much of each ingredient I would need, the next challenge was not just shopping for them, but who was going to make them and cook them. “No problem,” said Melinda, “I will get you the helpers.” She kept her promise and got me 24 fourth-graders who would love to cook (but with no cooking experience). She also got me a few adults who would volunteer to supervise and to do the deep-frying.

Thank goodness for my past experience of working in large kitchens preparing for special events. I remember we were serving dinners for eight different weddings on the same evening; each wedding ranged from 400 to 800 guests, and of course, they would all love to be served at 6 p.m.

In a sense, serving 300 Crab Rangoon was a piece of cake, but I only have 10 minutes to teach 24 kids in preparing them, and then another 10 minutes to cook and serve them. Now I know why I had gray hair, and now those precious gray hairs have disappeared.

Love those kids, when I made a statement, they all stopped, listened and followed my instructions. First, the perfect Crab Rangoon came out, with cheers from all. Then, the second and the third perfect ones followed. I was speechless. We started frying them immediately. After all, serving 300 guests is not an easy task.

All of a sudden, there was no laughing or giggling, or any fooling around. Everyone was getting serious, and into making the perfect Crab Rangoon for their peers. I’ve never seen anything like that. It would have cost big companies thousands of dollars to teach team building and working together. Here, the fourth-graders showed us how to get it done.

I left the cooking scene as I had to go to the gym to address the whole school. Goodness, there were kids everywhere on the gym floor, all eager to listen to me (and of course, waiting to try the Crab Rangoon). Kids from kindergarten to fourth grade, all in the same place watching me. Thank goodness for my public speaking practice. I just love those kids.

So, I told them about Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, China, and the foods that the folks eat. Most kids were listening with interest. I kind of lost it when two kids came up to me and asked me if I am married. What? What to do with Crab Rangoon and Southeast Asia? But, I love those kids.

I could have sung a Chinese love song, but then, the Crab Rangoon from the kitchen showed up; and all the kids lined up to get a taste. They took the food back to their classroom and had their snacks.

While I was busy talking to the rest of the group, a bunch of students left their classrooms after their snacks and came back and thanked me. “Thank you so much for the Crab Rangoon and for talking to us today.” I don’t think anyone instructed them to do that, but they did anyway. What a nice gesture. I am a sentimental fool and I was ready to cry. But no, not in front of the kids. I just can’t and won’t.

There are many ways to say “I love you,” but I found out that the best way to say that is to do simple things that make others happy. In that one simple afternoon, I made 300 kids happy by doing something easy, simple and fun. Yes, I’m supposed to be retired, just sit on my back porch, enjoy the lake view and drink beer all day. But no, I’d rather be doing things that make folks happy. That is what bring happiness, no!?