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

**Believing in ghost stories, just to be safe**

I just read something on Facebook that cracked me up. Oh, and I so needed some laughs, too, after being trapped in our house for months.

There is a picture of Bill Murray, the comedian, holding a glass of liquor. And the caption goes something like this: “Hey, whiskey is a spirit, and spirit relates to ghost; so, I’m getting rid of this spirit now by drinking it. After all, I’m the Ghost Buster.”

It is quite clever, connecting spirits with ghosts. Then the movie “Ghost” came to mind. It is a romantic film, featuring Patrick Swayze, Demi Moore and Whoopi Goldberg. It is a typical Hollywood movie, with an ending that you already knew before the movie even started; but it was still entertaining.

Patrick Swayze was murdered by a business associate, yet instead of leaving this world and entering the next, his spirit kept lingering on earth as he has to warn his lover about some imminent danger. The story of ghosts, spirits and realms of different worlds started to haunt me again. No, I have not actually seen a ghost or any spirits in different forms; yet I’ve heard so many different stories that I tend to believe their existence, just to be on the safe side.

Growing up in Hong Kong, I remember that our family shared a flat in an old building which had three stories. We happened to live on the third floor, sharing the space with other family members. I was probably 3 or 4 years old then.

My YeaYea (grandpa on my father’s side) had left for Peru for job opportunities when the family was still young. My MaMa (grandma) would keep an eye on the young boys — my brother and I, and my two older cousins. To keep us out of trouble, she would tell us stories to retain our attention.

She would keep a straight face, and to this date, I don’t remember if she was trying to be funny or not. MaMa would tell us stories of how she was raised on a farm in the countryside and left for Hong Kong as a teenager. It was intriguing to listen to stories of cows and goats, as there were none around us; and the only time we saw any live animals was in the marketplace.

Then she started to tell us stories of how, because she possessed “a third eye,” she could see a lot more than normal people were able to see. In other words, she could see the ghosts or spirits around us. I think she was making the stories up so we kids wouldn’t be running around wild, especially to the busy street below. Not only that we could get lost, but some strangers could snatch us who sold the young boys as slaves to different parts of Southeast Asia (that’s what we were told).

For whatever reasons, the strategy worked. After she told us that she saw a young woman weeping, sitting on the corner of my bed, I was petrified. I wouldn’t dare go to bed unless my younger brother was with me. And she would tell us that when we were using the stairs, never ever touch the railings on the side, as that was what the spirits or ghosts would use to slide up and down different floors. Needless to say, none of us kids dared to walk down the steps by ourselves. What fond memories indeed!

Those memories started to fade as I got older (but not wiser). And somehow, I kept thinking to myself, what if my MaMa was telling the truth, that she did have a “third eye” that could see the spirits from the other world? Also, where do people go after they are dead? So many questions, yet no real answers. The movies about vampires, poltergeists and zombies didn’t help at all. Also, the TV series about ghost hunters left me with more questions. Besides giving me nightmares, I am still at a loss.

So, where do people go after they are dead?

I’ve heard many stories about near-death experiences, that there is life after death; they encounter all that, but somehow, they come back to life as it wasn’t time for them to go yet. One of the stories was told by a good friend who was a business executive. He was actually pronounced dead during an operation. Somehow, as in a miracle, he came back to life and was able to tell us the story.

He felt his spirit/soul left his body when the heart monitor stopped. He was actually looking down from above and saw his own body and the doctors and nurses around the operation table. Then he saw his family, all sad and mourning. Then he saw friends and family members whom he hadn’t seen for a long while; they were all smiling and waving at him. All of a sudden, he realized that they were all deceased; that’s when he came to, and the monitor showed a pulse again. Though on the operating table and unconscious, yet he could describe what everyone in the waiting room was wearing. So, where did he go for a brief period, and who did he see?

My wife used to be a hospice chaplain, and she would tell me stories about her patients. I admired what she did, as she helped her patients to finish their last journey by giving them the courage, the comfort and the peace of letting go. She explained to me that one’s body is full of energy, and that energy is released back to the environment once the body stops functioning. That energy can be in many different forms and shapes. It is not unusual that after someone has passed, their friends or families would experience some kind of phenomenon that is unexplainable. There might be a gathering of butterflies, dragonflies, or blooming flowers that just happened — a message of bidding farewell.

My brother and I still laugh about our younger days’ happenings. But just to be sure, I still refuse to use the hand railings when I walk down the stairs; just to be sure.