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

**The unsung heroes who make our lives better every day**

My siblings in California called me a few weeks ago and told me that they have to put our dad in hospice as his health is ailing. It is a long story to explain how I have two families — one my birth family with my father and mother, and the other my adopted American family with my mom and dad.

Mom passed away a few years ago, and now this happens to Dad. I was devastated. It just so happens that Fred, the oldest of the clan, (well, actually, I am the oldest agewise, but he was there before me) was driving cross-country from the East Coast to see Dad, and he called me to see if we could go together.

The idea has popped up a few times. As Fred doesn’t like to fly, he drives to California quite often. I’ve never been fond of driving, as I have no sense of direction, and let’s just say I am not a good driver. I couldn’t join him the past few times as I had all kinds of commitments lined up — cooking classes, book-signing engagements. Needless to say, I jumped on the opportunity this time as everything is canceled. I am a free man for a while.

Being isolated in my house all this time, I wanted to go out and see the world again. My wife was strongly against the idea at first, as the pandemic is still going strong, and she is a natural worrier. Goodness, she would sanitize all the shopping bags before I could bring them inside the house every time after my shopping trip.

After weighing out all the pros and cons, I finally told her that it is something that I have to do. I wanted to have a chance to hold my dad’s hand and say “I love you, Dad” while he still recognizes me.

Not only is Fred a good driver but he also is a very responsible person. He called my wife and promised her that we will be careful and conscientious about the trip. After he showed up at our house with his supplies — face masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, etc., her reluctance eased and ceased. With her blessings, Fred and I hit the road.

Starting out late in the afternoon from northern Wisconsin, we passed Minnesota and ended in Iowa on our first day. Then passed Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas on the second day. It was smooth driving as there wasn’t much traffic on the road. I had a chance to actually enjoy the sceneries for a change.

Then I started to notice the string of semis (rigs or trucks, whatever you call them) on the road. And the thought came to mind, “where are these trucks going, when I thought the whole country is on a standstill?” So, Fred came up with this idea, “Since you’re a writer, why don’t you write a story on these guys, what they do to accommodate the pandemic?”

That’s what I admire about Fred — he can talk, think, drive, and enjoy his coffee at the same time. “Leave it to me, I’ll find some truck drivers to interview, and I’ll ask them these questions. Can you write these down?” But of course, I was just getting bored looking at the same scenery, it had been the same for the last few hours. So, I grabbed a pen and some papers and said, “Fire away, Fred.” And I wrote as fast as I could.

There are plenty of truck stops on the way, many of them offer extensive choices of food, hamburgers, pizzas, sandwiches or fried chicken. For something healthier, you can get pineapple chunks or grapes in a cup, or bananas (two for $1), or apples ($1 each).

Thinking that’s what the truck drivers would eat while they’re on the road, I just smiled. At one of the truck stops in Albuquerque, N.M., Fred said, “This looks like a good place. Get your pen and papers ready.”

Before waiting long, he came to me with a smile (even covered with a mask, I recognize the smile) and said, “Come here, I would like you to meet my new friends. He led me to two men who were also wearing masks and introduced me as his brother (it surprised me that they didn’t look surprised about a white guy having a Chinese brother), who was interested in writing a story on truck drivers. So, Fred started to ask our prepared questions, and they talked like old buddies. That’s another gift of Fred’s that I admire.

So, these two gentlemen are a father-and-son team. Perry, the father, has been driving for 22 years, while Orane, the son, just started 4 1/2 years ago, and they have been driving through the pandemic period, delivering merchandise of all kinds (from furniture to hand sanitizers) from Chicago to Phoenix and Colorado, and anything in between. They are long-haul truckers who will be driving on the road four to six days a week.

Yes, truck drivers are worried about the virus. While some do not want to drive at all, others feel that as long as they are careful and conscientious, they would keep doing it; and their families do feel the same. Yes, all are nervous and worried, but as long as the awareness is there, there is nothing more they can do; life goes on. Even though we were outdoors when we were chatting, they were both wearing their masks and kept at a distance from us.

In less than 10 minutes, good old Fred got them to open up and they told us something that I always wanted to find out — how does one live through fear and danger? There are so many unsung heroes during these tough times — all doing what they have to do and must do.

We thank the doctors and nurses, but there are so many more unsung heroes that are helping us through these tough times, taking the chances of facing the unknown dangers just to serve us. I can’t help but think what our lives would be without these unsung heroes. No more groceries, then how are we going to live? No more gas station workers, then where do we get our gas? If just for one day, the truck drivers can’t make any deliveries, where will we all be?

I have to thank Fred for his driving, his company, and for sharing his wisdom of life to make this difficult trip more enjoyable. We’ll be seeing our dad soon. Keep him in your prayers.

Again, I am most thankful that I do this long drive once in a great while only, while the unsung heroes are doing this day in and day out, giving us a better and more comfortable life. As the saying goes, “If you got it, we brought it.” Once again, we want to thank all the unsung heroes from the bottom of our hearts. Thanks for working day and night for those whom they never met, or may ever meet.