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

**What it takes to be a comedian**

My wife loves watching movies in the evenings. It is good to have a little time to unwind after a long hard day of working on different projects — her pottery assignments, her church planning, plus her gardening developments. On top of that, to entertain the grandkids whenever they come for a visit.

I do my best to accompany her sometimes, with a bowl of freshly made popcorn with melted butter. I will join her occasionally, but not when she watches those “chick flicks,” or movies that are so deep that give me nightmares — spending hours trying to figure out just who is who, and how each character is related to the other. I don’t have the heart to ask her to watch Kung Fu or James Bond movies with me all the time, so we finally compromise and watch some stand-up comedians instead. It is a good remedy; we both get a good laugh and then go to bed in a happy mood.

There are a lot of comedy shows on Netflix to choose from. Some comedians are classy and funny, while others are raunchy and tasteless. After a while, we kind of figure out who we will enjoy watching, and who we won’t. The shows usually last an hour, or hour and a half. Most of the time it is past bedtime when the show ends. Good timing indeed, as both of us would fall asleep immediately with a smile, and no nightmares. Then one evening, it just dawned on me — just how do these comedians do it — talking for hours, with one joke after another? It must be a gift.

I started to get hooked on TV variety shows after I came to the U.S. I loved to watch the singing and dancing, and laughing at the funny jokes by different comedians; there are so many of them — Bob Hope, Jack Benny, George Burns, Milton Berle, etc. — and they all have the gift of making people laugh by telling jokes. Just where do those jokes come from? And just how do the comedians remember all of them, one after the other, without drawing blanks?

Goodness, I remember when I was teaching Junior Achievement in my younger days; even though I was prepared, with notes written well ahead of time, and practiced what I was going to say over and over, even talking to myself in front of a mirror to make sure that my gestures were appropriate, I still lost it, right in the middle of a sentence! I couldn’t remember what I was going to say next as my mind was drawing a blank. On top of that, I started to sweat, and my throat went dry.

Thank goodness I was in front of some 14- and 15-year-old students. But what if they were adults, who paid good money to watch me? No, I could never be a comedian, as much as I love to tell jokes. I can’t imagine … after telling a good story, I might forget the punch line and have the whole audience just staring at me.

So, I read about what it takes to become a comedian, and what it takes to become successful. While a lot of folks can pick up any topic and make fun of it, others have to spend a good amount of time studying and practicing. I read that it takes a good 10 years for an amateur comedian to become a pro, and the only way to become successful is to learn how to live through failure. And this whole time, I thought it is an easy living, just to work a few hours a night, tell a few jokes, and then go home with pockets full of money!

Just what does it take to become a successful comedian? One rule of thumb is that you can get four to six laughs each minute from the audience; and that’s 240 jokes that you have to remember. So, for an hour-and-a-half show, one has to tell between 360 and 540 jokes! Phyllis Diller, the comedian with a wicked laugh and a strange hairdo (she looked like she just stuck her finger in the electric socket), could tell 12 jokes in a minute. That is 720 jokes in an hour! Just how did she do that?

Most comedians tell stories. Stories about recent events or happenings that engage the audience, something that the audience can relate to; and then they keep adding punch lines as the story unfolds. I found a group of comedians that became famous by telling jokes about themselves, their friends and their families. Yes, the Blue Collar team — Jeff Foxworthy, Bill Engvall, Ron White and Larry the Cable Guy. Foxworthy became famous for his “you might be a redneck” jokes. He is from the South — Atlanta to be specific — and he admits that every time he needs inspiration for his jokes, he just pays his relatives a visit. What a hoot!

Yes, instead of getting mad at things that we have no control of, let’s learn to laugh about it instead. Maybe it will help us sleep better at night. I understand that talk show hosts have a team of writers to keep supplying them with jokes about the latest events. What a way to make a living, staring out the window writing one-liners that would make the world laugh.

I know that I can never become a comedian as I can’t even remember what I had for breakfast the day before. And to crank out five jokes a minute? Or 300 jokes in an hour? I’d better stick with my cooking classes. Three to four dishes in an hour is easier. And if I ever forget the recipes, I can just make it up as I go along.

No, I don’t get paid by the minute like some of the comedians do. But I get plenty of hugs and kisses instead. After all, there are better things in life than just making money, right!?