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

**My $25 lesson on the dangers of impulse buying**

I have to admit that I’m very frugal. Well, that’s far from being cheap, which I’ve been accused of sometimes. Coming from my kids, I’ll take it as a compliment.

I never hesitate in spending money when it comes to making others happy and comfortable. However, when it comes to spending money on myself, that’s a different story. Maybe it goes back to a long time ago when I was growing up (yes, that was a long time ago).

My family wasn’t poor, per se, as we did have a roof above our head, and three square meals a day. But we did not have luxuries like television, telephones, or even a hi-fi system to play records (remember those vinyl discs?).

I’d never heard of “pocket money” or “spending money.” That’s the reason I freaked out when a distant relative who came home for a visit after working in the U.S. (the Gold Mountain) for years handed me a crisp $5 bill as a gift! Little did I know how hard he had to work for that $5; but hey, I didn’t know, as I couldn’t care less then. Even though I couldn’t spend any of it, as my mother made me put it away in my porky bank right away. But just the few minutes of “being rich” was priceless.

Growing up, I had no desire of asking for luxurious things, as I knew it would be a waste of time. Seeing that parents these days would go out of their way to buy expensive toys for their kids (especially during Christmas) just drove me crazy. Remember when the PlayStation first came out? And they weren’t cheap. I remember they were about $300 to $400 for a set. My co-workers would be calling each other as Best Buy had them in stock, but they only had three sets left. The office would be in a frenzy. For what? I asked myself, knowing that the thrill and excitement would last two weeks. After that, off to the closet it would go, and be soon forgotten.

My American brother loves watching the Infomercial Channel on TV that would advertise all kinds of gadgets — shoes, watches, cooking utensils, cooking equipment, etc. And I have a brother-in-law who would actually purchase them! I visited him a while ago, and he proudly showed me his collection of watches — 40-plus of them! I was beyond words. Holy smokes, I don’t know about him, but I only wear one watch and that’s it. Besides, I feel bad for him, come daylight saving time, he’ll be spending all day resetting all the watches. Ha-ha!

Well, anything to make a buck, right? As a chef, I laughed at the commercials that showed different gadgets to slice, dice and mince vegetables; and each gadget is only $9.95. And if you buy the set of all three, they will pay for shipment. What a deal indeed!

I’ve taught my students that a sharp 8” French chef knife is all the gadget that you’ll ever need. It is all in the wrist — how you hold a knife, and how to hold the product that you are going to cut properly; the goal is to not cut yourself. When you get efficient, then you can speed up.

I love watching the food show ”Yan Can Cook,” hosted by Martin Yan. Not only is he knowledgeable and skillful, but he also makes the whole cooking process look easy, fun and simple. Needless to say, he is my hero. He always cut vegetables with a sharp cleaver and without ever looking down at whatever he was cutting.

Then I noticed that while his right hand is holding the cleaver and chopping away, his left hand holds the key to the magic. All his fingers are like eagle claws, holding the food. Then the knuckles are used as a guide for the blade. Hence, he never has to look at whatever he is cutting, as the “eagle claws” are protecting his fingertips. How clever indeed.

I have to admit that I frequent Google and YouTube quite often to catch up on the daily happenings. Sometimes, I might be able to catch a Chinese movie. Of course, it would be a perfect opportunity for the advertisers to promote their products. Lots of them about shoes, swimming suits, watches (yes, watches not only tell time, but also can track your heartbeat, trace your steps and much, much more).

Then one evening, an ad caught my eye, as it was something that I always wanted. Yes, a night light for my cabinet where I keep my antique china. It is dark inside, and I need a light so I can see those interesting figurines. This ad features an action-sensitive light, that would come on if you are 5 feet away, and will stay on for five minutes after you walk away. Wow, I told myself, that’s something that I needed badly. Yes, I am well aware of “needs” versus “wants,” and this action-sensitive light will fulfill both. So, I hurriedly called the number on the screen, as they said the supply is very limited. My goodness, what if they ran out?

Even though it was on special, the product with delivery still cost $25. It is a small price to pay if it does what it promises. I always ponder the pros and cons before I purchase anything. But this time, the “impulse buying” had taken over me. I might even have paid more. Hmm, maybe not.

So, after having patiently waited for two weeks, my prize arrived, just to find out that it needed batteries before it would work. So, I inserted two AAA batteries, and put the light in an appropriate spot. But to my surprise, the light did not come on. Maybe it was charging, I told myself. After another 10 minutes, I walked closer to the cabinet, and no, still no light. As I slowly walked away, all of a sudden, the light came on, brightly shining on all my collectibles. I was ecstatic, thank you, and thank you.

But that was it, it never came on again. The package that it came with did not have any return address or phone number, just simple instructions. I checked my checking account, and that I did send the money to HomeLife LED, but that was it. No tracking, no way to complain, and no way for a refund. It reminds me of an old cartoon — a huge lollipop with “SUCKER” written on it.

Oh well, so much for any more impulse buying. No, I am happy with my life, and I don’t need any more gadgets.