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MY TURN

■ **Wayne Chan**



The Dumpling Complex

What are you doing?" I asked of my wife, Maya, in a tone mixed between innocence and accusation.

"I'm pan-frying some dumplings for the party," she answered, matter-of-factly.

The "party" she was referring to was the bi-weekly neighborhood gathering we affectionately refer to as "Yappy Hour," where a number of families around the block get together at one of our neighbor's homes as a way of practicing camaraderie. The host family supplies beer and wine and all the guests bring an appetizer or snack.

We call it "Yappy Hour" because we typically bring our dogs to the party, so the dogs can have some fun, too. It also gives us a license to use the cutesy term "Yappy Hour." Before bringing the dogs, we brought our kids as an excuse to get together. Now our children are either off to college or old enough to know they wouldn't want to be caught dead going to something so cutesy.

But back to the dumplings ...

As I peered over Maya's shoulder to confirm that she was indeed putting the finishing touches on a delectable pan-seared batch of dumplings, I nervously started asking some questions.

"What happened? Why aren't we cooking up some of the mini eggrolls from the store?"

"We were out of those," she replied.

Then I asked, "Well what about the mini rolled-up sausage pastries?" She shook her head to confirm we were out of those, too. Then I started rambling off the list of items we usually bring to "Yappy Hour."

What about the frozen chicken wings?

No.

The meatballs from Costco?

Uh-uhh.

The mini tacos we did last time!?!?

No!

When I started to blurt out "What about the deep fried —" Maya held up her hand, stopping me mid-sentence. She tilted her head and looked me in the eye: "What's wrong with making the dumplings?"

I looked at her with exasperation. Not knowing exactly what to say, my mind raced with ideas of driving out to get a pizza for the party, or better yet, rummaging through our pantry for some months-old box of Girl Scout Cookies or a bag of half-eaten cheese curls.

With my eyes darting around the room considering other options, Maya looked back at me — hands on hips — and said, "Well???"

Unable to come up with better alternatives and

not knowing what else to say, I simply blurted out: "These people aren't dumpling-worthy!!!"

For those of you who are not familiar with the term, let me provide the following definition:

Dumpling-worthiness (pronounced *dump-ling-wur-thee-ness*), adjective: deemed deserving of, or consumption of, astonishingly delectable wrapped morsel of the gods.

Now, before you start tearing into me, let me explain. Having tried all the dumplings available for purchase in our area, I've found them to be extremely lacking. They're mushy inside — not enough meat, not enough shrimp. Whatever it is, they just don't work.

While I was in Los Angeles for a meeting a few years ago, I stopped at a shop in Monterey Park that happened to sell dumplings. I went there at the suggestion of my auntie, who lives in the area. Years before, I'd mentioned to her that near our home, there are no good dumpling places. Just pretenders. One can only buy dried-up, mealy-tasting dumplings found at a local supermarket.

When I walked into the shop, I knew something was different. In the corner, there was a table of older ladies wrapping dumplings with amazing dexterity while trading stories of the latest gossip. On the other side of the shop were large standing freezers. Peering over them, I saw bags and bags of dumplings.

Yes, they sold them by the bag — 50 dumplings each. They were inexpensive and wrapped in a way that should have included a disclaimer that said, "These dumplings are the real deal — beware of excessive savoriness."

Driving home with my bag of frozen dumplings, I began to wonder. Could these dumplings be as good as they look? What if it's just hype? What if they don't measure up? What if I don't experience excessive savoriness?

Upon arriving home, I stealthily made my way to the kitchen. Before I could tell anyone I was home, the dumplings began to bubble in the frying pan.

And soon, the moment of truth.

They were so good it was like having a marching band celebrating with a parade in my mouth. Really, they were *that good*.

From then on, every three months or so, I drive to Los Angeles — through all the traffic and smog — make my way to the dumpling shop with a large cooler, walk over to the counter, pull out a wad of money, and simply say, "Fill 'er up."

So back to the whole "dumpling-worthiness"

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