

ESOL VOICES: Student Spotlight

Suyu Wang

Suyu, who is also known as Lori Wang, was born in China. She is the only child in her family. She was educated in China from primary school to sophomore year of university. After that, she immigrated to the United States when she was nineteen years old. She now lives in Rochester, NY and is studying at Monroe Community College. Her major is Electronic Engineering. Her goal is to achieve a master's degree, and if possible, a doctorate.



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The Missing Fish

This year was the first time I cooked for the Chinese New Year Feast. Not only does this day mark the beginning of the lunar calendar's New Year, but it also carries the best wishes of the Chinese people. The most meaningful aspect of the Chinese New Year is that we spend the time with our big family. Although I am in the United States now, I still want to celebrate simply with my small family here.

While I was cooking, I was also checking the recipes online in order to make sure that they were delicious. I spent almost a whole day to cook a table full of delicious foods. There was chicken soup, pork, shrimp, dumplings, spring rolls, and the indispensable whole fish.

When my grandparents and mother came to the dining room, they were very moved by what I had done for them. I also felt a sense of accomplishment. After that, we sat together, and we enjoyed these delicious foods. As I ate the fish this year, my thoughts

returned to the Chinese New Year when I was five years old...

As a 5 year old child, my most looked forward to day during the year was Chinese New Year. That day I wore new red clothes and shoes. We went to the market to buy candies, melon seeds, peanuts, and all kinds of red adornments. I wanted to help my parents clean the house in order to sweep away any misfortune, and we put spring couplets on the wall for incoming good luck.

In the afternoon, all the members of the family came to my grandmother's house. We made dumplings and spring rolls together. "It's time for dinner!" announced my grandmother who had already cooked a table full of delicious dishes. Actually, she was the busiest one who spent the whole day to prepare these dishes.

We sat in age order around the round table, and we all held up our cups and cheered, "Happy New Year!"

Subsequently, I said, "May you be happy and prosperous. Can I

get the red envelopes please?"

They all laughed. My grandmother, aunts, and uncles gave me red envelopes, and they wished me to grow up healthy and happy. The red envelopes are usually filled with luck money that is used to suppress or put down the evil spirits. That also is the blessing from their elders to children. However, for me that meant I could have my own money to buy some snacks, toys, or other treats I wanted.

The table was filled with fish, pork, chicken, dumplings, rice cakes, and spring rolls. After my grandmother used her chopsticks, other people could begin to eat.

After a while, I found that no one ate the fish. When I carefully tried to use my chopsticks to reach the fish, my grandmother said, "You can't eat the fish tonight. We need to leave it until tomorrow because that means there will be surpluses every year. We will have abundant foods in the next coming year." I was a little bit unwilling to remove my chopsticks. For the

whole dinner, I always looked longingly at that fish.

After dinner, we sat together and watched the Spring Festival Gala on TV in the living room. While my family laughed at the funny skit, I quietly walked to the kitchen. I tried to reach the cupboard and open it, but I was not tall enough. I looked around, and I was pleasantly surprised by a little chair. Then, I carefully stood on a chair, opened the cupboard, and took out that plate of fish.

That fish looked so delicious, and I couldn't help to taste it. At that moment, I thought that fish was more delicious than anything I ate before. When I ate almost half of the fish, I realized that I should go back with them in order to avoid their suspicion. I gingerly

used my fingers to turn around the fish, and made it look like a whole fish. I climbed down from the chair, and I moved it back to the original place. I also carefully wiped the fish sauce around my mouth and fingers. Meanwhile, I quietly went back to the living room, and I pretended nothing happened.

On the first day of the New Year, I was awakened by the sound of firecrackers. Every family needs to light up the firecrackers when they open the door for the first time in order to welcome the New Year. My grandmother had already prepared breakfast for us. The breakfast was leftovers from the night before.

When we were ready to eat, my cousin said, "Why is there only half

of the fish?"

I found other people were wondering, and I said, "Maybe a cat came to our home and ate the fish last night."

They were all laughing. I also laughed, even though I didn't know what was funny.

Suddenly, my mother said, "I heard Lori talk in her sleep last night. She said that the fish was so delicious, and she also moved her mouth." They were all laughing again. My face turned red, and I bowed my head.

Nowadays, we don't retain the tradition of leaving the fish until the first day of the New Year. Whenever I recall that year when I was five years old, I still don't know if they knew I stole that fish.