**Learning to cook Macau-style Portuguese chicken**

A few weeks ago, some old friends that I grew up with came all the way from Toronto to visit our humble abode here in the Northwoods. That was such a joy!

I love Toronto; it is such a modernized city, clean and fast-paced. I thought driving in Chicago or downtown Minneapolis was an adventure, but driving in Toronto is a totally different trip. I am a turtle, always obeying the speed limit sign. How can these guys speed past me when I am already driving 75 mph? Oh, I forgot, they use kilometers instead. Does it mean that they can drive faster (ha ha)? And the police don’t even seem to care.

Anyway, I love Toronto, not only because a lot of my bosom buddies live there, but also there are tons of great Chinese restaurants specializing in cuisines from all different regions: Cantonese, Szechuan, Hunan, Chiu Jau, Hakka, Peking, you name it. I was told that if you dine in a different restaurant every evening, it will take a few years to visit them all. What a dream indeed! And on top of that, there is an Oriental grocery store on almost every block. Totally amazing!

There would be lobsters and live crabs squirming in the tanks and live carps and tilapias, eels and flounders, all waiting for their final fate. My wife is from the Midwest, and when I first took her shopping in the market, she thought it was an aquarium. Yes, it was an aquarium, indeed, but we eat the exhibits!

After showing my buddies all the favorite local tourist spots here, what was left to do? Well, first was to sample all the local breweries and then the craft beers from other areas. It took some time. And after a week, it is sad to say that we hadn’t even covered our own 10-mile territory. So, instead of quoting MacArthur’s favorite words, “I shall return,” they unanimously said, “Oh, we have to come back soon.”

So, besides the beer, I made them brats. Served, of course, with sauteed shredded onions slowly cooked with (what else but) our local beer. My buddies loved the whole routine. Too bad customs has a limit on packaged beer to bring across the border, or they would have loaded up their trunks with a smile.

While most of my old buddies were born in Hong Kong, quite a few came from different regions of China, migrating to Hong Kong when their parents escaped the communist regime during the ‘50s. One of my buddies is from Macau, a tiny peninsula not too far from Hong Kong. While Hong Kong was ceded to the British and became a British colony, Macau was “loaned” to the Portuguese and was ruled under their government.

Looking back, that was totally absurd and ridiculous. Can you imagine a foreign country (say Japan) coming to the States, and claiming that they would take over Arizona for a hundred years? They would rule Arizona with its own government, with policies and legislatures with which America has no authority to question or interfere. Would we stand for that at all? Absolutely not, not even for a half second. But somehow, the Chinese would let foreign countries “do their thing” in their own country. I don’t want to get into more details as that’s not the purpose of this column. But, somehow, the story leads to the Portuguese chicken that my buddy made for us one evening.

I remember vacationing in Macau a few times while growing up. While gambling was banned in Hong Kong, they had casinos everywhere in Macau. It was "the Oriental Monte Carlo" then, and still puts Las Vegas to shame.

Anyway, while visiting Macau, there was a restaurant that I will always remember, as they featured two of my favorite dishes, Portuguese chicken and deep-fried squab. We all know what chicken is. But squab is another term for pigeon. Yes, pigeon. No, I don’t think the chef would go under the road bridge to catch them, but I was told that they were farm raised. They were cleaned, deep-fried and served with a five-spice seasoning salt. The skin was delicate and crispy, and the meat was moist and flavorful.

So, my buddy who grew up in Macau volunteered to make my favorite dish. What can I say? Seagulls and crows are plentiful here, but pigeons? No. So, we’ll stick with the Portuguese chicken. It was an evening of fun, drinking and songs, eating and more songs, and more drinking and more songs. Oh, how I miss the good old days.

My buddy gave me his recipes while he was cooking. It was passed on to him by his godmother who was a chef for a loyal Portuguese family back in the 1950s. Nothing was written down, but somehow we all remembered, after a few drinks. So, here is the true recipe that I’ll share with you all:

**Portuguese chicken**

* 1 whole quartered chicken, seasoned with salt and pepper
* 4 cloves minced garlic
* 2 onions, quartered
* 2 potatoes, quartered
* 4 oz baby carrots
* 1 can coconut milk
* 1 can condensed milk
* 1 tbsp curry powder
* 1 tsp curry paste
* 1 tbsp chicken bouillon
* 1 tsp brown sugar

In a large skillet, add a little oil and the garlic and onions. Brown chicken pieces till halfway done, then add potatoes and carrots. Brown for another two minutes, then add all the sauce mix. Let simmer for 30 to 45 minutes. Season to taste. Add more curry powder or sugar. When potatoes are tender, chicken should be just right.

The trick of this dish is to serve when the chicken is just tender and not overcooked. The sauce should be rich and thick. Thicken with cornstarch if necessary.

You folks should know how to make rice by now. Cook your rice and add shredded coconut with raisins into your rice. Mix well, and put the Portuguese chicken over the rice and serve.

You’ll be the hero. Bon appetit.

*Peter Kwong’s book “Wok & Roll” is available at phkwong.com.*