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

**Packed house creates lifelong family memories**

Just a few weeks ago, we had family guests in our humble abode — the fond memories will last a long, long time.

It started with my aunt and uncle, from Hong Kong, planning to visit us before their Alaskan cruise. Then, their daughter Alma, my cousin, got wind of the plan and wanted to join … and my brother Paul, from California, heard about it, and he wanted to come too.

Then my daughter Melanie, from New York City, decided she’d like to bring her new husband, Santi, and meet her great-aunt and great-uncle, whom she had never met. With my son Justin, his wife, Stephanie, and our little Ellie, who reside in Minnesota, we had a houseful of people.

But it was so much fun!

My aunt is only a few years older than I am. She is the youngest child of my Pau Pau, grandma on my mother’s side. Since she is the 21st child, I would call her 21st aunt, or YeeJai, which means little aunt.

In many ways, she is like a sister to me. Her husband, my uncle, used to tutor me on English lessons. Oh, how I hated it then. I will never forget that one time, he asked me to write an essay on “reminiscence at random.”

Holy smokes, I was 13 or 14 then. How in the world would I know? Yet, somehow, I remember it to this day.

Cousin Alma is a crack-up. I thought I did things fast, but she is twice my speed. On the first day of her visit, while I was showing her around, she picked up some mints. After taking a deep breath she said, “Hmm, Mojito.” Looking at her with a big grin, I knew she’d be my lifetime pal.

My aunt and cousin love a spotless kitchen. Within two days, they had scrubbed and cleaned, using up all my expensive detergent, which usually lasts a year. Now I’m scared to use my shiny kitchen and utensils!

Needless to say, I was trying to impress them with my cooking skills — breakfast, lunch and dinner!

After a few days, my aunt asked me nicely if she could skip a meal or two. Was I to take that as a compliment or an insult? But I finally slowed down and started to make smaller portions.

I had the menu plan all set — chicken cacciatore, fettuccini alfredo, shrimp scampi, beef fajitas, fish tacos … but the whole plan fell apart.

My brother LoEe, the second child, whose actual name is Paul, and I are only 1½ years apart in age. There are three brothers in our family: DaiGor, which is me, the big brother, LoEe, the second, and the youngest, WaiWai, Francis.

He was born a few months premature, but he grew up to be a strong athlete. He was a lifeguard and ran track in high school, winning many medals. Paul loves fishing, so of course I took him out on our canoe and off we went fishing on our lake.

Either he is too good a fisherman, Mother Luck was watching over us, or maybe the fish were just hungry! Anyway, the first day we went out, we netted 14 fish. On the second day, we took in 20. A total of 34 fish in two days, not too bad.

My aunt volunteered to clean the fish and Alma said she would cook them. There went my dinner plans!

With the fish we made soups and served them pan-fried and grilled. Oh, what a wonderful feast indeed.

After that, either the weather was turning foul, or we felt sorry for our poor aunt slaving over the fish-cleaning chore, and we took a small break. LoEe still bragged about it when his family from California called and asked him just how he did when he went fishing.

“You got two or three?” they asked. “Thirty-four,” he replied with a smirk. I knew he was proud and happy. That made my day.

It is not a Chinese custom to show your affection. We never hug or kiss. Living in the States for years, I’ve become so Americanized that I’m known as “the bear.” Skinny relatives and friends close their eyes when I approach, ready for my bear hug.

I never really hugged LoEe, as much as I wanted to. I remember when we were growing up, we never saw each other much, as I would be brought to my Pau Pau’s place for her to baby-sit me, while my mother would take LoEe on her back to work odd jobs and supplement the family income.

However, every time when we were together, I would feel like I should take good care of him, not that he couldn’t take care of himself. Now the song “He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother,” comes to mind. Regardless, LoEe is my younger brother.

When mother had to work and couldn’t make us breakfast, she would give us a nickel so we could get some cheung fun, rolled up rice noodles. A nickel would get us two and the vendor lady would cut them up in pieces so we could eat them with our toothpicks.

Watching LoEe devour his share, I always gave him one of my pieces. He never said thanks, but always looked at me and smiled back. He always appreciates the little things.

I remember for one of his birthdays, when he turned 4 or 5, I got him a pencil sharpener. It cost a dime or whatever, I forget. Yet, he carried that thing everywhere he went.

For years, he took care of my mother and father, who lived with him. He doesn’t have any hobbies, as his free time was spent taking care of them. After Father passed away, his weekends were spent taking Mother to different doctor appointments.

It was such a joy to see him gloating over his catch and laughing with my aunt’s family, playing the Chinese MahJong game, having a grand time. I did give him a big hug at the airport. He said nothing, but just looked at me and smiled back.

I hope next summer will come soon.