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

**My wife can have her cats. I prefer my pet fish.**

My wife loves animals, and I just like to cook them. Out of respect, I will not make roast duck, rack of lamb, frog legs, venison or rabbit stew at home. Heaven forbid we have Bambi and Thumper for supper.

However, I might order them when we go out to dinner. She won’t even look at me when I am devouring my favorites.

While living in Milwaukee, we had three cats, seven birds and three tanks of tropical fish; thank goodness we have downsized. She loves her cats, so every time I use the phrase “there are many ways to skin a cat,” I have to make sure that she is not around.

I do not hate cats, but it is just annoying knowing that all they do, besides eating and sleeping, is shed their fur, poop and pee in odd places excluding their litter boxes, use our expensive couch as their scratching post and produce an occasional hairball, which always finds its way to my bare foot.

I stopped complaining, as the only thing she would always say is “But honey, they are so cute.” What to say and what to do?

I find comfort with my tank of tropical fish, they are my true pride and joy; easy to maintain and no pooping and peeing in odd places. I change the water every six or seven months, scrub inside the tank occasionally to clean the moss buildup and that’s it.

Plus, while the cat food and kitty litter would cost more than my beer, a container of fish food costs less than $3 and lasts more than a month. You do the math!

Growing up in Hong Kong, I always loved pet fish. Goldfish, tetras, angel fish and neons, I found it soothing and peaceful just watching them swim around. I never had a tank until we finally moved into our own apartment, living by ourselves with no other families.

I don’t remember how I learned about setting up. I saved up enough money to get a good-sized tank, 36 inches by 18 inches. It set nicely on top of our china cabinet.

There was a pet fish store closed by and I always asked the owner a lot of questions. He was kind enough to tell me what equipment I would need, teach me about different fish behavior and how to maintain the water condition. He had good advice and a great strategy to get me hooked.

I can still see the smile on his face; I was a great customer for life! Guess what I did with all my lunch money? I remained his faithful and loyal customer until I left Hong Kong for the States.

When we were moving up north, the moving company would not transport the animals and the fish, so we had to fit them in our cars. I managed to give two smaller tanks away.

I had a small, two-door car then. Imagine putting a large fish tank in the front seat and a tub with all the fish in the trunk. My wife, with the help of her buddy Rebecca, had to transport the cats and the birds. After a five-hour trip, like a miracle, all survived.

Goodness, that was only two years ago. It took two semis to move us. One for my wife’s pottery and art stuff, and the other our belongings. I never could have imagined that we had so much stuff, especially because we had already gotten rid of half our belongings earlier.

I told myself, “This is it, this is your last move, they’ll have to carry me out.” It amazes me to learn that a lot of folks were born here and have lived here all their lives! How fortunate indeed.

I finally found a home for my fish tank — right on top on an antique chest facing the lake. Not to create more shock, yes, fish have feelings too, I tried to arrange the rocks and plants like old days. The water in Milwaukee is fine but what a relief it was to find out the water condition here is even better.

So, the tank was filled with fresh lake water and the water pump and heater were set. I was told that at night, the temperature outside can go under 40 degrees. After the plants were staged and the rocks were placed in a harmonious arrangement — fish love to swim through gaps and cracks between the rocks — I was totally exhausted and went to bed.

What an amazing sight it was the next morning when I found out not only had all the fish survived their five-hour trip with no oxygen but also that they were happily swimming in the new environment. I was thankful and grateful. I grabbed a chair and just sat and watched and watched. They had regained their colors, which meant they were comfortable. What a relief!

I added a few more species to the family. Somehow, they all swim around in groups, greeting each other passing by. No chases, no bites and no bullying each other. My morning ritual is to go to my back porch and listen to the birds while drinking my jasmine tea, then go watch my favorite pet fish.

The filter system works so well that the water is crystal clear. The fish appear to be literally gliding on air. Somehow, I wonder if they are observing me, knowing that I am watching them?

Yes, I know my wife loves her cats. After all, we have had them for a long while, but to each their own. I don’t have to brush my fish, cleaning up the mess is nothing, there is no foul smell, and my fish don’t roam around the kitchen counter and eat the leftovers while knocking the flower vase over with water spilling everywhere.

Moreover, when fish food costs less than my beer, what’s to complain? I’ll keep enjoying my pet fish.