*Wok & Roll by Peter Kwong*

**What we can learn from a restaurant with no name**

Most of the restaurants would have big signs in front of their eateries, some even with flashing lights to catch your attention. Yet, there’s one restaurant that has no name at all.

McDonald’s has its big “M” golden arches; Pizza Hut with its red roof; and we all recognize Domino’s when their delivery car drives by flaunting its rooftop sign. So, what restaurant has no name in the front? Give up?

There would be three letters, KFC, with a portrait of a smiling elderly gentleman. You got it — Col. Sanders and Kentucky Fried Chicken. Driving down the freeway, we know that there’s a McDonald’s close by when we see the big golden arches. What marketing genius indeed.

KFC has a portrait that stands for scrumptious, delicious and “finger-lickin’ good” fried chicken.

How can it be possible? How do we make connections with a smiling gentleman and his famous fried chicken?

I have been in the hospitality industry for years. I’ve seen a lot of restaurants come to fame with a simple concept. I have also seen a lot of restaurants that went down the hill.

According to the Small Business Administration, 95% of restaurants fail in the first year. Do you believe that? That’s why, while most bankers want to loan you money, when they hear the word “restaurant,” they smile and then kindly show you the door.

I first encountered KFC when I came here to the states 40-plus years ago. We have fried chicken in Asia, but it is totally different here.

In Asia, we would hang the chicken to dry for a day or two, brush it with honey, then slowly pour hot oil over the chicken till the skin turns crispy, and the meat would be moist and tender.

Yet, Sanders called for a different recipe. He would season the chicken with his 11 “secret” herbs and spices, coat them with a cream mixture, then deep-fry them. Outside is crunchy and crispy, yet the meat is tender and favorable. How can it be possible?

Harland David Sanders was born in Indiana. Even though he did serve in the military, his title of “Colonel” was given to him by the governor, as his famous chicken was bringing in a lot of awareness to the state of Kentucky.

His dad passed when he was young, so Harland worked a lot of odd jobs to help his mother sustain the family. He loved cooking and had developed this 11 secret herbs and spices to fry his favorite chicken dish.

His career started out on the side building of a gas station, but as his fried chicken got more and more popular, he had to move to bigger places to accommodate the growing business. In 1935, when he was 45 years old, he knew that he had to bring his business to another level.

It took a long time to fry the chicken in a regular fryer, so he started to fry them in a pressure cooker. It worked! The cooking time was cut in half. So, Harland was carrying his cooker and his 11 secret herbs and spices and traveling around the country, looking for a financier who would back him up with this new concept.

Thousands had turned him down and more would laugh and taunt him, “Selling just fried chicken and nothing else? You’ll go bankrupt in no time flat!”

He would still be wearing his bright white suit and his black bow tie whenever he went; his trademark — an old man with a goatee, selling fried chicken. What a joke.

Finally, Pete Harman from Salt Lake City loved his fried chicken, believed in his passion and dream, and became his partner. Indeed, the last laugh came later when he sold the concept in 1964 for $2 million. That is a lot of cash now. Can you imagine that amount 50 years ago?

His 11 herbs and spices recipes had been guarded for many years. Even though the company has changed hands many times, that was the sacred guarded recipe. But somehow, like the song “Secret Love,” the secret is not a secret anymore.

A few years ago, the *Chicago Tribune* published the recipes found by the nephew of Col. Sanders’ second wife. So, folks, are you ready to make your own famous fried chicken?

Here is the “secret” recipe that feeds four:

Ingredients:

* 1 chicken, quartered
* 2 cups flour
* 2/3 tsp salt
* 1/2 tsp dried thyme
* 1/2 tsp dried basil
* 1/3 tsp dried marjoram
* 1 tsp celery salt
* 1 tsp ground black pepper
* 1 tsp dry mustard
* 4 tsp bell pepper powder
* 2 tsp garlic salt
* 1 tsp ground ginger
* 3 tsp ground white pepper
* 1 cup low-fat cream
* 1 beaten egg
* 4 cups canola oil

Directions:

In one bowl, mix all spices and flour together. In a second bowl, mix cream and egg.

Soak the chicken pieces in the wet mix and coat with the dry mix. Heat up oil to 350 degrees and fry the chicken pieces for 10-12 minutes, then set aside to cool.

Fry the chicken at 350 degrees again for 15-18 minutes until golden brown; turn over only once.

Cover a plate with paper towel to absorb the extra oil and lay the chicken pieces on top. Enjoy.

Please note that, depending on the equipment you have, results may vary. Experiment with it until you get it exactly the way you like it.

When I returned to Hong Kong around 1975, I saw a lot of Kentucky Fried Chicken stores all over the island. But then, there wasn’t a lot of business, as folks weren’t used to westernized fried chicken served with side dishes like coleslaw and mashed potatoes with gravy. I was told the concept didn’t make it and finally closed down.

However, when my wife and I visited Hong Kong and China a few years ago, there were KFCs everywhere! But this time, they served congee, a porridge or rice soup, with fried rice instead.

How clever! You have to be persistent and know your market.

Hats off to the colonel. He would be smiling at all of us licking our fingers.