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**10

taste buds

chef Larry Janes

Soldiers always on my mind

A LETTER TO THE DESERT STORM SOLDIERS

Dear soldier:

Greetings from suburban Detroit. I've been meaning to write this letter for some time now. Granted there's no excuse for my tardiness, but believe me when I tell you that you have been on my mind more than you will ever come to know.

I'm a suburban food writer and local chef, and the word filtering back here is that, with the exception of your MREs, those guys in KP are performing somewhat of a miracle putting out at least tolerable cuisine. Rest assured that through your efforts, you will come home safe and continue to enjoy good food for a long, long time.

Thought you would like to know that all around my neighborhood yellow, purple, and red, white and blue ribbons abound. It does my heart good to see those shimmering banners of remembrance bedecking car antennas in just about every grocery-store parking lot around town. Beribboned, towering oaks, elms and sycamores lining every street proclaim support in conjunction with thoughts of peace.

If you haven't already torn into the box I sent along with this letter, I thought you might enjoy knowing what's enclosed.

FIRST OFF, there's my own Swiss Army knife that I found encrusted in sand while on a fishing trip on the Big Manistee River. While down with a sore back, I took it all apart, got rid of the rust and the sand (god knows there's enough of that where you are) and oiled it down so that the little nail clippers, the can opener and the fingernail file open with minimal effort. This little knife opened up plenty of food and provided a lot of refreshment. I pray it does the same for you. I have enclosed quite a few packets of instant seasoning mixes as packing material. The good ranch type dressing is good sprinkled over potatoes and casseroles and even on vegetables. The chili, taco and burrito seasoning mixes can spice up just about any meat, and rumor has it that tuna casserole takes on a whole new meaning when heavily sprinkled with the stuff.

The popcorn balls will serve dual purposes. My family says they make great substitutes for softballs, but I also wanted you to know that I usually only make them for special occasions. Congratulations, you have been nominated as today's special occasion.

I thought it only would be appropriate to send the box of mixed nuts from my daughter's school fund-raiser. There are a lot of nuts in this world, and just between you and me, I would rather keep the nuts in boxes like this than give them SCUD missiles and guns.

There are four kids in my daughter's class who have brothers, sisters or other close relatives in the Gulf, and every week a boxfull of letters goes to soldiers just like you. From someone who was just graduating from high school in 1969, at the height of the Vietnam protests, I am proud to support you and equally as proud of my brothers and sisters who are doing the same.

LAST BUT NOT LEAST, all wrapped up in tinfoil with a chintzy stick-on bow, is one of Momma's famous fruitcakes. Don't worry about it spoiling. There's enough alcohol in that baby to fuel an M-1 tank. When I told my momma about this letter, she made me promise to include one of her fruitcakes. Hoping you come home soon, safe and sound. Best wishes.

By Janice Brunson
special writer

BUDDHA'S DELIGHT: Four Seasons. Good Fortune. Long life.

A beautiful prescription for life but in this case, a bountiful feast to celebrate Chinese New Year, fixed by lunar movement on Feb. 15 in the Year of the Goat, 4669.

The line-up of cuisine to honor the event, prepared by Elizabeth Chiu King of Bloomfield Hills, is intended for some 100 members of the staff and their guests at Wayne State University where King's husband Albert is a Distinguished Professor, one of only 13 so named to the university's prestigious position.

The celebration feast, an annual tradition of sharing by the Kings, exemplifies the rich heritage of Chinese cuisine, nuances of preparation and taste based on a creative blending of religion, custom and mythology.

"Eating is the national pastime in China. Food represents a way of thinking, a high order. It is on the par of fine art," Elizabeth King said.

AT NO TIME OF YEAR is this art practiced more perfectly than during the lunar new year celebration, a customary time of renewal when the Chinese "reaffirm the importance of family, tie up loose ends and begin new projects."

"It's like July 4th, your birthday and Thanksgiving all wrapped up in one, the greatest occasion when all members of the family, old and young, are seated at the table to partake of the sumptuous reunion feast made up of all the delicacies the family purse can afford," she said.

King's Buddha Delight is classic New Year's fare, an existing dish she has reworked and dramatically renamed in keeping with the traits common to the Year of the Goat — wisdom, passion and confidence.

Ordinary dishes are often renamed with lavish new names meant to bestow blessings of prosperity, good fortune and long life.

Buddha's Delight blends a dozen "fruits of the earth," the number of ingredients representative of 12 budhas. There are six varieties of mushrooms, including shiitake black, straw and pinhead, cabbage, bamboo shoots and carrots. Glass noodles, tofu, either canned or

A
CHINESE
New Year

THE YEAR OF THE GOAT

pressed into sheets, and dried tiger lily blossoms complete King's culinary creation.

AN ARTISTIC FLAIR evolves with preparation of Four Seasons, a gathering of vegetables — broccoli, cauliflower, carrots and brown mushrooms — each selected for color and taste to represent seasons of an entire year. The dish carries additional meaning: "blessings for the whole year, the whole family together. Completeness," according to King. "Chinese like to use delicate terms in naming food," she said, in explanation of the term

Four Seasons. Complementing the tradition are symbolic meanings of individual ingredients.

Mushrooms mean opportunity and happiness. Eggs symbolize life and the numerous seeds of the pomegranate, many children. Chicken is the symbol of rebirth, shrimp is joy and fish means abundance and plenty. Onions and heads of lettuce are produce bursting forth from the earth and portray new beginnings.

Tangerines wish good luck, their succulent juice symbolic of continued sweetness in life. Tangerines, complete with leaves intact, are

hidden in the beds of children, wishing them, the sweetest issue of life, the sweetest of blessings and the best of good luck.

Food preparation also carries meaning. Meat, fish and poultry are crafted into balls to symbolize harmony, much like the meaning of the round wedding ring. King's feast includes shrimp and fish balls, as well as balls fashioned from meat and fowl.

THE ORIGINS OF Chinese feasts stem from the 12th century B.C., with banquet guidelines evolving from feasts of the fourth century A.D. A typical royal banquet menu during the 18th century Ming Dynasty commonly featured 26 courses, including rarified summer sparrow, braised silver scales and deer smothered in five spices. Dishes carried such tempting names as Floating Bud in the Lake, Petals on a Moonlit Pond and Heavenly Fair.

"Lavish hospitality and a decadent affair," the Kings wrote in "Eating the Chinese Way in Detroit," a book they published in 1980.

Today, Chinese banquets such as the one honoring the new year are much simpler. The 16 appetizers of yesteryear are down to half a dozen now, followed by even fewer entrees that are likely stir-fried. At least one will be vegetarian in traditional Buddhist atonement.

Entrees are followed by several heavy dishes, braised or red-cooked Peking duck, steamed chicken, or sucking pig served in heavy sauce. An elaborate soup nearly always accompanies the meal, as does wine and grain spirits. The meal concludes with tea and dessert, once eschewed as inappropriate.

The goat, pronounced Yang, is the eighth animal of the Chinese zodiac. The Year of the Goat also occurred in 1907, 1919, 1943, 1955, 1967 and 1979.

Persons born under the goat sign are unassuming in manner and speech. Determination, gentleness and tolerance are their strongest points.

Other Chinese zodiac animals include the mouse, the cow, the tiger, the rabbit, the dragon, the snake, the horse, the monkey, the rooster, the dog and the pig.

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Roadhouse stands out



That Charlie's Wayne Roadhouse is about to drop the Charlie's from its name should come as no surprise to restaurant observers. Once an affiliation with restaurant mogul Chuck Muer was an asset. Now that Muer has sold off many of his holdings, and now that a group of ex-Muer restaurants have gone into bankruptcy, owner Fred Ferguson has decided it's time to have the Roadhouse stand on its own.

Mainly, the name change makes the statement that this restaurant's future isn't in doubt. Neither is the future of Uptown Charlie's in Madison Heights, also owned by Ferguson but as yet not targeted for a name change.

Although the menu bears similarity to the Muer selection of offerings, it has its differences too — differences that will be more pronounced when new dinner and lunch menus are introduced in the near future. The Roadhouse still stresses fresh fish and pastas and still serves as accompaniments the trademark redskin potatoes, corn on the cob and salty bread.

At the same time, it is developing its own personality. A creamy cole slaw has replaced the former tart, vinegary slaw. And the restaurant has a new — and apparently quite successful — emphasis on carryout, offering a variety of pizzas and sub sandwiches to go.

was satisfying. The seafood entree we tried — a baked whitefish — showed the restaurant still has a good feel for preparing seafood. The entree was one of about six fish offered that evening, ranging from the mild whitefish to a stronger-tasting mako shark.

Pasta dishes can be ordered in large and small portions regardless of the time of day. We found the lunch portion of the prima fettuccine more than adequate, and a good deal at \$5.95. This entree features fresh vegetables, including broccoli and mushrooms, with the fettuccine in a mild white sauce. The shrimp artichoke pasta is also a winner.

In an effort to try a variety of barbecue entrees, we tried a combination plate (\$11.95) that featured ribs, chicken and Cajun steak. The only really good portion of this entree was the ribs, which were very tender and tasty. The chicken was just a fillet coated with the barbecue sauce and the steak was overcooked.

While taste in barbecue sauce is a highly personal thing, we found this sauce to be a little too sweet and tangy. Still, had the chicken and steak been basted with the sauce during grilling, rather than just coated with sauce afterward, they may have been more enjoyable.

With the barbecue entrees comes hearty helpings of french fries and onion rings, along with cole slaw, garlic toast and corn on the cob. It was somewhat overkill, though the corn tasted good and made an out-of-the-ordinary side dish.



Bill Meyers serves Seafood Alfredo at Wayne Roadhouse.

A RECENT DINNER at the Wayne Roadhouse

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