

Grandma's Dumplings

By Emily Cameron

7thGrade, Peterson Middle School

I watched as my grandmother's nimble fingers minced the ground pork into fine pieces, then piled the pork onto a flattened dumpling skin, adding mushrooms, carrots, garlic, ginger, cabbage, and other ingredients as well. She pressed the dumpling skin together, sealing the filling inside and creating even ridges along the seam of the skin. "Is it ready yet?" I pleaded.

Her narrow, dark eyes flickered up from the half-finished dumpling in her hands. "Patience," she said sharply through her thick Chinese accent. "You can eat them when I'm done making them."

Resting my small chin on my fist, I sat down at the kitchen table, tracing the smudged glass with my fingertips. My grandmother was known for her cooking, and, more specifically, her prized dumplings. I had always been a fan of Chinese food, but whenever I visited my grandmother in Malaysia her dumplings were the only thing I would ever eat. My family had flown all the way from California to Kuala Lumpur to visit my mother's side of the family. I had been excited for the trip, mainly because I was looking forward to seeing my grandmother. Grandma and I had always been very close.

The sound of the plate clinking against the glass of the table awoke me from my daydream. The five fresh dumplings on the plate were accompanied by a small bowl of soy sauce. I dipped one of the dumplings in the soy sauce and stuffed the entire thing in my mouth. The salty soy sauce mingled with the taste of the pork and garlic. It was probably the best thing I had ever eaten.

My grandmother dapped at the juice dripping out of the corners of my mouth with a napkin. "Slow down!" she admonished in Mandarin. "You shouldn't eat the whole thing at once."

But I didn't care.

I was born into what you might call a mixed family. My father is Australian: light skin, gray eyes, brown hair; whereas my mother is Malaysian-Chinese with black hair and dark eyes. So I came out looking like a mutt, with dark brown hair that match my eyes.

Growing up in America, I ate a lot of so-called Chinese food. Chow mien, rice, spring rolls, and other standard Asian-American foods. But none of them were really what I would consider authentic Chinese food. Only when I visited my grandmother in Malaysia did I find out how good authentic Chinese food tasted.

Now, looking back on all those times I spent with my grandmother, I wish I had taken the time to appreciate her more and treasure all the precious moments I spent with her, instead of taking them for granted. I never knew what I had until it was gone.

My grandmother passed away on September 27, 2009 from a heart attack. Since I was in school at the time when she fell sick, I could not visit her, as she lived in Malaysia. I only wish I had spent more time with her to learn how to make these delicacies while she was alive.

Now, whenever I eat dumplings at Chinese restaurants, an image of my grandmother comes into my mind as the flavors burst in my mouth.