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Debut of Ghostly Books by Local Author

By Cathy Tyson



A Banquet for Hungry Ghosts cover

Ying Chang Compestine

Boy Dumplings cover

Lafayette author Ying Chang Compestine has two new books coming out just in time for Halloween, "Boy Dumplings" and "A Banquet for Hungry Ghosts."

"A Banquet for Hungry Ghosts" was written while she was on the recent book tour for the award-winning "Revolution Is Not a Dinner Party." "Everyone asked me to do a sequel," said Compestine, but she just wasn't inspired for a similar tome at that time. This collection of short stories for young adults has historical notes that flesh out the stories, as well as simple, kid-friendly recipes. The book takes readers on a journey across China and looks at hungry ghosts who continue to torment those who wronged them, but it's really a metaphor for modern China. She focuses on social issues, corruption and the growing gap between rich and poor.

"During my childhood, people loved to share legends and ghost stories. It was one of the rare forms of entertainment available, and a favorite pastime. I've always been obsessed with food, perhaps because growing up, I experienced the political unrest of the Cultural Revolution that left the nation starving. Food was rationed and I felt I never had enough to eat. So it seems natural that food is now a central theme of my writing," said Compestine.

It's interesting to note that government repression actually fostered

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her creativity. "When I was growing up, the government banned any form of fantasy or escapist literature, particularly the ghost and fairy tale genres. At the time, the Communists didn't want anyone to believe that ghosts or magic existed. Yet an oral tradition remained, despite the ban. The adults used the scary ghost stories to entertain and discipline children. We were told the ghosts would punish misbehaving children. My young friends repeated ghost stories they'd heard to intimidate each other. I often made up stories in my mind about powerful ghosts coming to my aid and exacting revenge upon those who had wronged me," she continued.

Americanized, Casper-type ghosts and the goodies associated with Halloween are no match for Chinese ghosts. "The legends of hungry ghosts haunting the living are tied to famines and wars that have occurred throughout China's long history. The spirits of those who died of hunger and injustice cannot rest and must return to the world of the living to hunt for food-and the individuals who wronged them."

"Boy Dumplings" is an illustrated children's book geared for youngsters between four and eight. Searching for his dinner, a hungry ghost finds a boy just right for boy dumplings. Together they look all over China for the necessary ingredients, as the boy tries to outfox the ghost. The illustration on the cover was based on her son, many years ago, when she began her first draft of the book. Now he's on the cross country team at Campolindo, and "has a six-pack."

Look for Ying Chang Compestine at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center Gala on November 7, 2009. For more information about the author, see her website www.yingc.com

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