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Compestine's *The Runaway Wok* Heralds a New Year

By Lou Fancher

The 2011 Chinese New Year begins February 3rd, and Yin Chang Compestine's *The Runaway Wok* (Dutton) is the perfect non-edible way to celebrate.

The Lafayette author's new children's book, illustrated with vibrant intensity by Barcelona's Sabastia Serra, tells the story of Ming, a poor boy whose happy encounter with a runaway wok brings joy to his family and neighbors.

Ming's mother sends the boy to the market with their last remaining eggs, directing him to purchase enough rice to share with others. His father laments their poverty: despite the fact that he works for Mr. Li, the richest man in Beijing, the family faces a sparse New Year's celebration.

Instead, the wok "skippity-hoppity-ho's", retrieving a bounty of food, toys, and even gold coins from the stingy Li family.

Ming and his parents demonstrate their generosity amidst sudden abundance: "Mother Zhang served the food; Father Zhang divided the coins up among the families; and Ming handed out the toys to all the children."

Compestine avoids what could have been a too-sweet,

heavy-handed lesson on sharing with a shadowy twist, when the wok swallows up the Li family and carries them away, never to be seen again.

It was the fastest Compestine has ever sold a book; she frequently writes 50-60



Cover image for *The Runaway Wok* provided

I wanted to write about Chinese culture and traditions, but in a fun way," Compestine said, in an interview about the book's origins. "I love folk tales. My editor, Stephanie Lurie, asked me, 'Have you read this Danish folk tale?' I read it at noon, wrote my story, and emailed it to her at 11:00 that night. The next day, she made me an offer."

drafts and often exceeds even her editors' desire to "make it just this much better."

The intensity comes, in part, from her early years and her relationship with food.

"For many years in China, food was always scarce. So people treat it with respect. You offer the people you love the food, even if it means less for you. Food represents sharing, happiness, celebration," she explained.

The author of a number of cookbooks, Compestine spends the equivalent of months on the road; visiting schools, leading cruise workshops, and addressing writer's clubs.

"I am so busy!" she exclaimed, explaining the lack of local signings for *The Runaway Wok*. "I love visiting children at schools."

With a son, Vinson, a junior at Campolindo High School, Compestine says her parenting style falls in between Chinese and American.

"I have high standards, but I let him have a lot of fun. We are very equal and I encourage him to be open."

She said the best thing she can do for him as a parent is to take him to the real China.

"It's harsh conditions, but it's important. I want him to really understand his roots and to see how fortunate he is. In this country, with so much, it's easy for kids to forget about sharing."

Compestine usually celebrates the New Year with a family dinner or a party with friends, but this year she will be on the road, talking about her book and encouraging readers to practice the ancient art of sharing.

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Orinda's Team Ecko Takes 2nd and Campo Filmmakers Place 3rd in Iron Filmmaker Contest



Pictured from left are Bill Snider and the movie-making Dream Team: Taylor Hunt, Colter Harris, and Sam Crossley (not pictured: Aja Adair, Scott Call, Michael Chickering, and Grayson Kurthuu) Photo Ohlen Alexander

The 2011 Iron Filmmaker Contest was held on January 29th at the New Rheem Theatre. Iron Filmmaker is a

competition in which participants are given a surprise theme and 24 hours to script, shoot, edit, and submit a film based on

that theme. This year's theme was "Be careful of what you wish for." There were 19 films submitted and shown at the

New Rheem Theatre. Each audience member was given a ballot to vote for the best films after seeing all them. The films presented cliché wishes, wishes that had a deeper meaning to them, absurd wishes, and wishes that people don't actually mean.

In the Best Picture category, a team from just down the 680 corridor won the competition with the film *Bob's Day Off*. An Orinda team came in 2nd place, and Campolindo student filmmakers were awarded third place. Moraga Hardware & Lumber owner Bill Snider took first place honors in the Best Performance category for his role in the three minute video. The Dream Team's film was about a man wishing on coin thrown into a fountain.

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Indie Film Festival Makes its Mark in Moraga

... continued from page A1

"In this business, scripts like this don't often come along," said Merriman, who has been acting for 15 years. Merriman plays the role of Luke's older brother Jon who dedicated his football season at Wake Forest to Luke's memory and helped lead the Demon Deacons to a school-record of 11 victories and first-ever Orange Bowl berth. More than a tragedy to triumph sports tale, the inspirational story recounts the Abbates' decision to donate their son's organs which were given to five recipients, including his heart which saved the life of a young woman with the same uncommon blood type.

At Sunday's Slate Awards, The 5th Quarter won for Best Music Score, and Merriman picked up the prize for Best Actor. "It's an amazing story. It changed me," said Merriman, who still keeps in touch with the family.

The second feature of the evening was the independent film *Fanny, Annie & Danny*, which contained all the classic elements of independent filmmaking: a story that grabs you and challenges you, characters you care about or love to hate, and exceptional acting, performances that stick with you. Over the course of a disastrous holiday dinner, writer and director Chris Brown deftly tells the

story of a dysfunctional family that has grown apart and weary of each other's needs. Brown's wife, actress Jill Pixley, plays Fanny, a disabled adult with obsessive-compulsive tendencies who tries desperately to survive within a family nucleus that is about to implode. At times painful to watch, viewers were simultaneously captivated and disturbed by the honesty of the characters and realism of the subject matter.

"That's what indie films are all about—to move you and to make you think," said Derek Zembrak, President and Founder of the CAIFF in his comments to the crowd at the program kick off.

If you haven't had a chance to visit what Zemrak is already lauding as the most successful California Independent Film Festival ever, it's not too late. Tonight (Wednesday) there will be screenings of the documentaries *Crimebuster: A Son's Search for his Father*, and *Beyond the Wall*. There will be a closing reception on Thursday followed by the Winning Shorts Showcase, and Diamond Award actress Lea Thomson will be there with her film, *Mayor Cupcake*.

For more information go to www.caiff.org.

Wendy Scheck contributed to this article



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