

Published August 31st, 2011

Healthy Cooking, Taemi's Way

By Susie Iventosch



Taemi and Gary Westernoff Photos Susie Iventosch

When I think of Japanese cuisine ... tempura, teriyaki, yakitori and sushi come to mind. That's why I was so delighted to receive an invitation to Taemi Westernoff's house in Moraga to learn how to make a dish I'd never heard of before, "Okonomiyaki." This is a traditional Japanese pancake made with Japanese yam, diced cabbage, egg, flour and bacon, or pork belly. Not only is it fun to make, but it's delicious and quite healthy, too.

And, healthy cooking is what Taemi is all about.

"She likes all types of food as long as it is healthy," says her husband, Gary Westernoff. "But, she feels that Japanese food is the healthiest. She will not eat in any fast food restaurants. She calls them junk food."

The couple divides their time between Moraga, California and Honolulu, Hawaii. Near their home in Hawaii, there is a corner with a few fast food restaurants, which Taemi calls "Junk Food Corner," and the only thing they use it for is a landmark for giving directions to their house.

Taemi teaches cooking classes in both locations and enjoys sharing her cooking knowledge with others because she doesn't think American people eat a healthy diet. Teaching helps her to learn and improve her English, too.

"I would love to teach healthy cooking classes to high school students," Taemi said. "Healthy bodies are important for happy, successful lives and before marriage and babies are born."

On a fortuitous trip to Hawaii five years ago, Taemi met her husband, Gary. After they married Taemi moved from her birthplace of Kyushu, Japan to the United States. Of course, she is still passionate about her native cuisine and, as a result, her husband has become a huge fan of Japanese cooking.

Gary, a former construction management executive, has collaborated with Taemi to co-author "Construction Like Sushi," an intriguing cookbook that likens sushi-making to the construction of a building.

"Before our marriage, I did not dine on Japanese food because it was too difficult to prepare and too expensive in restaurants," Gary pointed out. "But I was brought up to enjoy all types and kinds of food because my mother and grandmother were wonderful cooks."

And, despite being from a lineage of rather skilled cooks himself, Gary is absolutely amazed by Taemi's food knowledge and her creative cooking and baking methods, techniques and skills.

"She's opened my eyes to a whole new world of healthy eating without any limitations to the kinds and types of foods-including baked goods," Gary noted. "For example, Taemi thinks sugar is harmful to the body so she will substitute honey or fresh fruits for sweetness. She avoids chicken or beef because she believes they contain enzymes harmful to the body. She likes eggs with bright orange yolks (hard to find in America but are found all over Japan) and she uses Himalaya rock salt in moderation."

But, what is music to most folks' ears, is that Taemi believes in eating at least three meals a day ... alas, always with a vegetable!

On September 11, Taemi will be giving a hands-on demonstration class on how to make healthy Japanese Tempura at the St. Mark's United Methodist Church in Orinda. You will learn the difference between fried and tempered, and other traditional Japanese dishes will be served to compliment the tempura. The class is scheduled for 2:00 p.m. and the \$20 cost for materials and instruction will benefit the church. See information box below to make a reservation.

In addition to healthy cooking instruction, Taemi holds licenses in Sado (Japanese Tea Ceremony), table setting and floral arranging. She and Gary also operate Tabi Tours, which specializes in small group tours to Japan, where they take travelers on an insider's journey through Japanese gardens, cuisine, art and culture.

- To reserve a spot in Taemi's Healthy Tempura Cooking Class, please call (925) 254-5965, or (925) 324-4718, or email stmarksorinda@sbcglobal.net. Class will be held at 2 p.m. on Sunday, September 11 at St. Mark's United Methodist Church, 451 Moraga Way, Orinda

- For information about Tabi Tours, please visit: www.tabitours.com or email: taegar@tabitours.com, or call

(925) 324-4718

- For information about Taemi's upcoming Traditional Tea Ceremony on Saturday, Sept. 24 in Berkeley, please call (510) 549-7000, or email taste@berkeleycoffeeteafest.com

- To purchase copies of Construction Like Sushi or Construction Management Made Easy, please visit Moraga Hardware and Lumber and Across the Way in Moraga, or visit: www.constructionplace.com, or email: twg@constructionplace.com

Reach the reporter at: suziven@gmail.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA