

Published October 12th, 2011

One-Dish Meals from Ying Chang Compestine

By Susie Iventosch



Ying and Vinson Photo provided

I fell in love with Ying Chang Compestine's new cookbook, *Ying's Best One-Dish Meals*, before reading a single recipe. As a mom of three kids who've all left the nest, the loving dedication to her son, Vinson, had me hooked.

"To my dear son, Vinson, Ming Da, I will miss you so much when you go to college!"

In my book, family is what cooking is all about, and Compestine has a wonderful flair for creating easy, fresh, home-cooked meals for a family on the go. Her recipes are tasty, colorful and full of locally available ingredients.

Both of the recipes I tried were delicious: Black Rice with Cranberries, Carrots and Ginger, and Pan-seared Salmon with Lemon-Dill Yogurt Sauce.

"This is not a cookbook just for adults," Compestine mentioned. "It really is a book for the whole family."

Ever mindful of healthy eating choices, her focus on nutrition and healthy lifestyle not only benefits readers, but her own active family, as well. Her husband, Greg, is a distance cyclist, and Vinson is a highly ranked cross-country runner, while Ying immerses herself in competitive badminton to stay in shape.

Compestine learned to cook by helping her Nai Nai (grandmother) in the kitchen, but she confesses her primary motivation was to get to the food before her two brothers did! She didn't develop a passion for cooking until she moved to this country for graduate school. After Vinson was born, she began writing cookbooks and ever since he was very young, they've spent a lot of good, quality time in the kitchen.

"We are busy, but cooking has been a wonderful way for me to connect with my son," Compestine pointed out. "He always helped out in the kitchen by washing and, later, chopping veggies. Now, he is a great cook, himself, and cooks for his own friends when they come over."

Compestine, who has lived in Lafayette for the past eight years, told me that she and Vinson go to the Moraga

Farmers' Market every Sunday together. Sometimes her husband also goes along after his morning bike ride.

"I love it, because it's precious time with our son ... and I get to shop all the booths while Vinson and Greg carry the bags," she remarked. "I'm the empty-handed woman at the farmers' market!"

Among her favorite recipes in the book are: Candied Walnuts with Shrimp in Spicy Garlic Sauce, Garden Salad with Blueberries, Blue Cheese and Walnuts, and Wasabi Salmon with Miso-Sesame Sauce.

The recipes in this book reflect a cosmopolitan cuisine, based upon adaptations of favorite dishes from her jaunts around the globe. When asked what food she misses most when traveling, she said it is definitely fresh veggies.

"One time while I was traveling in Russia, I missed eating fresh produce so much that I had a dream I was planting vegetables in front of the hotel," she mused.

Compestine believes teaching children to cook and develop healthy eating habits is one of the best investments a parent can make in their children.

"It's a lifelong gift," she said. "I know I will never have to worry about my son eating right and maintaining a healthy lifestyle."

About Ying Chang Compestine

Compestine was born in the Wuhan Province in central China and raised under Mao's Cultural Revolution, where books were forbidden and higher education unavailable to most young people. But, she loved to read and whenever she was able to sneak a book, she devoured it, often rereading those books she could get her hands on.

In 1977, after the death of Mao Zedong, the universities were once again open, but the entrance exams were very difficult and extremely competitive. Compestine studied for the exams for nearly two years, and was the only girl in her whole compound to gain entrance to the university in Wuhan. Though her mother and father were both

doctors, Compestine chose to study literature and has since become a prolific award-winning author, with 16 books to her name and two more in the works. Her novel Revolution is Not a Dinner Party won 32 awards and is nominated for the California Young Readers Medal. She and Vinson are now collaborating on a novel for middle school students, A Conversation with a Terracotta Soldier, due out next fall.

Because of her keen interest in healthy eating and nutrition, Compestine finds a way to weave food into all of her books-historical novels, short stories and cookbooks alike. One of my favorite Compestine titles is A Banquet for Hungry Ghosts, a compilation of Chinese ghost stories with recipes that comprise a complete banquet!

Compestine feels very fortunate to have been the food editor for Martha Stewart's Body + Soul (now Whole Living) for three years, and is currently the spokesperson for Nestle Maggi and former spokesperson for Celestial Seasonings. She's a regular contributor to many national magazines: Cooking Light, Ski, Eating Well, Self, Men's Health, and Delicious Living and Diablo.

When she's not busy writing, filming television shows, or watching her son's cross-country races, Compestine is off lecturing about a variety of subjects at writers' conferences and universities, aboard cruise ships, and on radio programs.

For more information on Ying Chang Compestine, please visit: <http://www.yingc.com/>
Ying's Best One-Dish Meals (Sellers Publishing) is available from online retailers and locally at:

Moraga Hardware's Across the Way
1409 Moraga Way, Moraga, CA 94556-1914
(925) 376-3600

Diablo Foods
3615 Mount Diablo Boulevard, Lafayette, CA 94549
(925) 283-0737

The Storyteller
30 Lafayette Circle, Lafayette, CA 94549-4313
(925) 284-3480

Orinda Books
276 Village Square, Orinda, CA 94563
(925) 254-7606

Reach the reporter at: suziven@gmail.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA