



Text Version of Audio Story: Chinese Food

Well, there I was, working as a national broadcaster for AccuWeather — one of the world’s largest weather broadcasting services, providing voice feeds to radio and TV stations all over the country.

Weather reporting really isn’t very glamorous; but, you know, it was a good experience for a young broadcaster.

I had worked all morning with a terrible cold. About lunchtime, my boss came to my broadcast booth, *“Nelson you sound terrible on the air, but you know, I can’t let you go home. I want you to get a decongestant on your lunch break to clear your head.”*

“Yes, sir.”

Now, when it comes to taking medicine, I’m pretty much a sissy. I’d probably end up falling asleep at the microphone...and the commute home would have been next to impossible. I had read in a home remedy book that eating spicy, hot Chinese food will decongest your sinuses, so I thought ... *what the heck, I’ll try it.*

I walked downtown to a little Chinese restaurant. It was mostly for take-out. They had a few booths for sit down. A little Chinese man sat behind the order counter reading a book. His one eye was much bigger than the other, and he tilted his head to look at you — and when he did, you knew you were being looked at.

His wife sat in a tall stool near the heat register with a stack of Movie Star magazines. You could see her dreaming that, perhaps, if life would have been different, maybe, she would have been a movie star.

“I’d like to order some Szechuan chicken,” I said. *“And I’d like you to make it as hot as you possibly can.”*

“Oooh, you mean temperature hot or spicy hot?”

I gave him that look. The look I give people when I really mean business. It’s my Clint Eastwood look. I sort of scrunched my face up on one side. I looked at him and said, *“Both! As hot as you can make it.”*

“Oh, you crazy American. You pay first, no refund. I make you eat!”

He took my money and excitedly ran for the kitchen. You could hear the ingredients hitting the wok. He kept running back and forth waving his finger and telling me, *“No refund, no refund. I make you eat, you crazy American. I’ll burn your face off!”*

He brought the plate of sizzling Szechuan to me. He put it down and slid into the seat on the other side of the booth. As I prepared my napkin and silverware, he stared at me with that one big eye. He sat there, waiting for me to stroke out.

“Oooh, you crazy American ... crazy American.”

It was the absolute hottest thing I’d ever eaten in my life. I could imagine fire flying out of my ears, but I sat there calmly, shoveling it in, as if it didn’t even faze me. I wasn’t going to let this old guy get it over on me.

As I left the restaurant, the little Chinese people stood quietly in homage to me, as if I were the mythical fire-eating god. I thought for sure I was dying — but no way I was going to let on.

I would return many times as a regular to Chopsticks Express. I spend my lunch breaks swapping stories with the old man, and he would sit and listen intently. He didn’t know my name, so he dubbed me *“The American Storyteller.”*

When I would show up, he would become excited and say, *“I want to hear a story from American Storyteller.”* I would eventually adopt that name and sign it to all my work.

Broadcasting from the Juniata Valley with the music of Johnny X, I’m the American Storyteller.