

The Natural Joy of Charity

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Our supporter and friend, Thomas Xie, was kind enough to participate in an interview.

He is pictured at left with his wife Kathy and son Brendan.

Bringing People Together!

Our service during October 2013 featured an unexpected treat: an authentic Chinese banquet prepared by Sufi House friend and supporter Thomas Xie at New XingLong Asian Cafe, the Saugus restaurant he runs with his father, a professionally trained chef. Having witnessed and shared the pleasure of the meal, Tom was happy to be interviewed about his role in it.

Q: How did you become involved with the House of Sufism and its Sunday Brunch program?

A: A thoughtfully planned, well-cooked meal helps bring people together. Preparing it at the restaurant brings my family together, serving it to others helps them put aside their private concerns and just enjoy good food and the company of other people.

Q: Why did you decide to contribute an entire meal rather than perhaps a main dish or other course?

A: At New XingLong Asian Cafe we have experience catering events for various organizations, and we wanted to provide the same type of complete and festive meal that combines protein, carbohydrates and vegetables in the traditional Chinese way.

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“Charity,
Which
renders good
for bad,
blessings for
curses...”

-William
Shakespeare,
Richard III

Act 1, Scene 2,
Line 68



Jeremiah showing off some of Tom's feast



Chicken and noodles from New XingLong



Our volunteers, seen here enjoying each other's company while they serve our friends

The Natural Joy of Charity

While people may choose to perform charity for a variety of different reasons, there is a common thread among many of them; they describe the experience of participating in any sort of charitable work as joyful.

Food often serves as more than simple calories to be consumed—it has a social significance, as many different kinds of social gatherings, in a variety of cultures, take place over a meal. Celebrating important occasions and feasting have long been important events in a number of societies, and many observers of cultures other than their own often remark upon different habits and manners related to eating when reporting their observations of those cultures. Food is obviously a central feature of the House of Sufism's charitable initiative, as well. After all, it is the centerpiece of Sunday brunch. Additionally, though, sharing a meal with our guests offers us an occasion to bond with them, in the hope that the connections we make can brighten their days, and eventually encourage and inspire them to make long-term improvements to their lives. Our friendships are not the only source of joy in this effort, though. Our ability to enjoy charity may well come from a deeper source.

Recent neurological studies suggest that our ability to serve others and take pleasure in doing so could spring from the same primitive part of the brain that is activated when people enjoy food and sex—our most basic evolutionary drives. From this evidence, we can suggest, however tentatively, that our motivation to care for others and help them when they are in need is simply a part of human nature. Not to claim that it is the only drive at work in human behavior, but one may at least be able to sense that compassion is not unnatural—it is an instinct, one that may need some encouragement, but one that can still come about as simply, and in response to the same evolutionary drives, as any of our other impulses. We can therefore consider our work serving our guests as part of an attempt to cultivate our natural inclination toward compassion.

Finette, happy to make a point



Daniel serving fried rice



Bringing People Together!

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Q: How did you plan the menu?

A: We did not want to cook anything with complicated or unfamiliar ingredients, but we did want to highlight the flavors and textures typical of Chinese food, and to allow our brunch guests to experience the same kind of meal and quality of ingredients that my family enjoys at home.

Q: It was very clear to those present that this was a meal planned and prepared especially for the Sunday brunch.

A: Yes, every dish was prepared fresh. To honor our guests we sent the best we had available.

Q: You even included fortune cookies?

A: Of course! Everyone expects fortune cookies at the end of a Chinese meal! But we also made sure to serve some fresh fruit, naturally sweet honeydew to finish the meal.

Q: You are very knowledgeable about food preparation, but we understand that you also have a professional career in IT!

A: My family came to Rhode Island when I was ten years old, and from the very beginning I was absolutely determined to learn English and to be successful in a respected profession so that I could support my family in my adopted country. But I also honor my father's profession and education in food preparation and service, and am proud and happy to share that cultural experience with others.



How to get involved

1: Volunteer! It is a time commitment of only two hours: 2-4 PM on Sundays. Help us cook and clean or just spend time with our friends!

2: Monetary donations: If you would like to make a contribution to the House of Sufism Charity Initiative, you can write a check (payable to KN), use any credit card, or wire money through PayPal. All your donations are tax-deductible.

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