



# Yan Can Cook So Can You

Born in Guangzhou, China, in a time when even oil and meat were rationed, Chef Martin Yan went to bed every night hungry. But an empty stomach didn't stop him from dreaming for the day that he would be able to provide food for his family and the community.

Yan's love for cooking began in his father's restaurant kitchen, where he was introduced to the sights, sounds and aromas of delicious food being cooked and prepared. After the restaurant was shut down by the Communist government, it was Yan's mother who continued to foster his interest in food.

"My mom can whip up a savory meal from practically nothing," Yan remembers fondly. He recalls that she was innovative, creative and generous with what little she had.

At the height of the Cultural Revolution, Yan's mother encouraged him to seek freedom and a new life in Hong Kong. Having left his mother behind and after his father passed away, Yan soon found himself alone in a strange world at the age of 13, sleeping and working as an apprentice in a popular restaurant.

"Life then wasn't that bad," Yan remembers. "I didn't miss much because I was there for a reason."

And what a reason it was! His whole world became all about food and how to prepare it tastefully and artfully. Little did he know that this was only the beginning of his journey as a world-renowned chef.

Yan later received his first formal training at Hong Kong's Overseas Institute of Cookery, supporting himself by cooking and cleaning houses. His employer, a school principal, recognized Yan's natural talents and helped him continue his education in Canada. He departed Hong Kong for Calgary, where he eventually owned a cooking school.

It was there that Yan made his first foray onto the small screen. He was asked to demonstrate two dishes, but his endless talk prevented him from accomplishing this task. "If you want to see the completion of the dishes," he teased the audience playfully, "you'll have to get the boss to bring me back." The following day, he signed on to host 130 cooking shows—one show every day for six months.

Yan continued his education at the University of California in Davis, where he pursued a Master's degree in food science. Yan remembers being inspired by culinary great Julia Child. Her show inspired him to teach. But he soon discovered an invaluable lifelong lesson from an unexpected source: his student.

In one of the first classes he taught, a student snored so loudly that Yan woke him up by loudly banging his spatula against a wok.

"I told him to go home and sleep," Yan says.

To his surprise, the student and all of his classmates burst out laughing. Then Yan gave in and joined them. From then on, he embraced the philosophy of connecting with others through his sense of humor. Yan's trademark cooking shows and classes are peppered with entertaining G-rated jokes and acrobatic cutting techniques, keeping his audiences laughing and wanting more. "It's not an act! It's just my enthusiasm coming out," says Yan.



His award-winning cooking show, "Yan Can Cook," is one of the world's most-watched cooking shows, airing in more than 50 countries. Chef Yan also is now a highly respected food consultant and a renowned culinary instructor, traveling extensively around the world as a speaker on cooking techniques and food trends. In addition, he is the author of 26 best-selling cookbooks and a frequent contributor to a wide variety of food publications.

However, Yan's success has not come without obstacles. In addition to the hardships that he faced growing up as a poor boy in Communist China and surviving on his own at a young age, he also faced a language barrier when he came to North America. "I started learning English at 17," says Yan. "And when the camera rolled, I got excited and the real accent became more pronounced. I've worked hard on language skill and it's much, much better now. Well, my two kids frequently corrects my English."

"When I receive calls for help, I'm reminded how fortunate I am and about the need to be charitable," says Chef Yan. "I have a great job and a great life."

Yan is a popular role model for aspiring chefs, and also an inspiration for the rest of us. "If Yan can cook, so can you," he says. "Food brings family and people together. It's the bridge that connect different cultures, leading to a more tolerant and harmonious world."

"But even if Yan can't cook," Chef Yan adds, smiling, "you still can do it if you're passionate enough about it. I encourage you to pursue your loves, dreams and passions, because success won't be measured by the fortune we accumulate or the fame we acquire. It's what we do with passion, with purpose, that counts!" — Mai Bui & Jennifer Wolfe