

## *The Betty Letters*

*My Dear Grandchild,*

*After eating my breakfast with some of my girlfriends, prior to going on our weekly shopping expedition in Central, the other morning, we were witness to a very unpleasant incident, one that, really, shocked us. A lorry pulled up, outside the Mandarin Oriental Hotel, and some workers started to unload some aluminium trays, full of roast pork that had been cut into about one-inch rectangles. One of the trays fell off the top of the pile and, on hitting the pavement, it crumbled and some of the roast pork spilled out. The worker just scooped up the meat, replaced it on the tray, and continued unloading the truck. 'Gads!' I thought to myself, 'Is that meat destined to be served to hotel guests?' Well, on investigation, having talked with some of the staff of the hotel, later in the week, I discovered that, in fact, the meat is destined for the staff of the hotel, which is given as a kind of treat, twice per month, with this relatively expensive delicacy. I think that it is a nice gesture of the hotel to give roast pork to the staff twice a month, but, at the same time, it seems to me that the company, delivering the meat, ought to be sacked. After all, when it comes to their health, the staff should be afforded at least the same treatment as any guest of the hotel. Gastroenteritis, acute inflammation of the mucous membrane of the stomach and intestines, caused by eating food that is contaminated with toxic substances or with micro-organisms that generate toxins, is what one could expect if such a situation were permitted to continue. (Don't forget, My Dear Grandchild, I used to be a nurse before I married, Bo-Bo, my froglike husband) I was planning to write to the Mandarin Oriental Hotel and tell Management what I had witnessed when I was restrained by The Frog, who explained that the management of the hotel is not particularly friendly to nosy-parkers. So, I am writing to you in the hope that you will pass on the information to somebody so that the hotel's management will learn of this situation. After all, if it can happen once, it can happen again. And who knows how often it has happened in the past?*

*On reflection, I brought up this matter with The Frog and asked him what kind of care is taken with food deliveries from producers/wholesalers to end-users/the hospitality industry. In Hongkong, it seems that most reputable hotels are, indeed, very careful about the care and quality of food, used in their kitchens. Chilled chickens, for instance, must be delivered at a temperature of not more than 4 degrees, Celsius, and frozen chickens have to be delivered at least at the temperature of minus 11 degrees Celsius. As for seafood, this has the ability of being the most-dangerous of all fresh foods to become contaminated; and, seafood is only too easily infected with micro-organisms. For deliveries of oysters, The Frog explained that all deliveries have to be accompanied with documentation, proving the origin and age of the bivalve molluscs. The fear of most reputable hotels, not just in Hongkong but in most parts of the world, is salmonella, a bacterium, comprising pathogenic, gram-negative, rod-shaped forms, some of which cause food poisoning, typhoid and paratyphoid in people. The Frog said that, when he used to own a hotel in China, prior to marrying me, his hotel, called, naturally, The People's Hotel, followed the recommendations of The Food and Drug Administration and the United States Department of Agriculture. This is called, Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point, or, as it is known in the hospitality industry, HACCP. This is an approach to food safety and pharmaceutical safety, addressing physical, chemical and biological hazards in order to prevent the contamination of food. I looked HACCP up on the Internet and was pleasantly surprised to learn how the best hotels in Hongkong follow the rules in order to protect us, the consumers, from catching horrors by*

*eating contaminated food.*

*However, no matter how careful are the hotels and their managements, they cannot see what happens when food is transported from the wholesaler/importer to the hotels and/or restaurants. And it is in this area, as I see it, where problems can, and, clearly, do arise. There ought to be rules and regulations to govern and regulate the transportation of food, especially cooked food, throughout Hongkong, and, especially, in the hot summer months. What I witnessed was an open lorry, carrying roast pork to the Mandarin Oriental Hotel, unloaded by a couple of dirty labourers, both of whom did not seem to take any care about what they were doing. (The workers seemed to be interested, only, in getting the job done quickly in order to make the next delivery.) The lorry, for instance, should only be permitted to unload the pork under controlled conditions at the loading bay at the side of the hotel, not on the pavement, outside the hotel. That is just common sense. Then, there is the matter of the health of food handlers, in this case, the scruffy looking men, unloading the roast pork. I cannot suggest what rules and regulations should be laid down to protect the public in this regard, but I am certain that experts of The Medical and Health Department of the Government of Hongkong can come up with some basic, simple measures in order to prevent contaminated food from being ingested by people, eating in restaurants and hotels.*

*By the way, where is your favourite place when eating out?*

*Look, I have to go now, talk to you, next week.*

*Chief Lady*

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