

# YOU CANNOT HAVE JUST ONE!

## CHAPTER I



*Just who is Rebecca, and what is so special about the dumplings she creates from scratch? Writer Susan Shiber states: "This is the first chapter of a series featuring Rebecca's story and the evolution of the best Chinese dumplings in the world. Perhaps, it is merely my world, but I defy anyone who has one to disagree. And, trust me, you won't stop at a single serving."*

BY SUSAN I. SHIBER

**M**y friends and I like to go to high-end Chinese restaurants. We always begin with an order or two of dumplings to share. However, something happened recently, and the appetizer attraction will never be the same for me. I tasted — devoured is closer to the truth — Rebecca's Dumplings. At a restaurant, two or three dumplings is quite enough. Such restraint is impossible with Rebecca's perfect little pillows of pleasure.

Just who is Rebecca, and what is so special about the dumplings she creates from scratch? This is the first chapter of a series featuring Rebecca's story and the evolution of the best Chinese dumplings in the world. Perhaps, it is merely my world, but I defy anyone who has one to disagree. And, trust me, you won't stop at a single serving.

Rebecca Li Jordan is a native of Nanjing in Eastern China. Located in the lower Yangtze River basin, it is one of the nation's most important cities. Though more important to Rebecca as a child was her family's tradition of making dumplings. "Everyone pitched in," she points out. "It was a whole weekend process. We went to the market early in the morning, chose fresh ingredients, and then spent all day Saturday preparing hundreds of pork and vegetable dumplings. Everything was hand-chopped. My mom was in charge of filling, my dad, the dough. When I was younger, my job was flattening the dough," she recalls with a wide smile and emphatic hand clap.

Years later, the young woman with culinary sagacity, coupled with a perspective for commerce, launched an early career managing the cashier department of a five-star hotel in the Nanhai District. To sharpen her skills, she followed her dream to America and studied business at Dickinson College in Carlisle (PA), then entered a training program offered by Hoss's Steak & Sea House. Rebecca's multifaceted talents were quickly appreciated, and she catapulted from trainee to trainer. She spent a few traveling years opening restaurants and resolving problems. It was both an exciting and rewarding time of her life.

Even greater rewards followed. When Rebecca opted to stay at the former Exton-based restaurant, threads of destiny began to weave a wonderful tapestry. One of her customers, who saw great potential in her personality and work ethic, thought she was a match for his company. She was presented with an opportunity to manage the purchas-





ing department of one of the world's leading direct marketing companies.

As she settled into a new lifestyle, romance blossomed, and Rebecca married, one of her happiest decisions. Rebecca and her husband have two children, Rachael, now age 9, and James, 7, bright and shining stars who light up their lives with joy. All the Jordans love dumplings, but Rebecca rarely had time to recreate her family recipe in their kitchen. "We used to go on *dumpling hunts*," she chuckles. "We drove all over Chinatown in search of truly delicious products, which were good, but not like what we made in Nanjing."

One day, Rebecca's craving for her mom's dumplings inspired her to attempt reconstruction. "I never made them on my own and didn't know all the steps, but I was eager to experiment. After a long day of trial and error, the kitchen looked like a flour grenade had exploded. Bowls and pots were everywhere, and I was covered with ingredients. But the dumplings were pretty good. However, it was such a humongous undertaking, I was content to continue buying from restaurants."

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That all changed when Rebecca's parents visited 10 years ago. She and her mom decided to make dumplings just as they had when she was growing up. They hopped in the car, went to the finest market in Chinatown for fresh ingredients, and returned home for two days of prep and cooking. "I asked for the recipe," notes Rebecca, "and my mother was puzzled. She said I wasn't in China, so why would I want to spend all this time and energy. 'Because I love them and want to share with my family was my reply.' This did the trick, and we wrote down main ingredients and spices for my favorite pork dumpling. The secret is in the combination," she whispers.

What happened next is not just how dumplings are made, but history, as well. Rebecca served the delicious dish to a few friends, and word spread. Everyone wanted the recipe. Rather than give up the family treasure, she agreed to make dumplings for special occasions. She perfected the recipe and surprised her mother on a future visit. "These are better than mine," she cried. "What have you done?" And, *voilà*, a new family secret was born.

People simply couldn't get enough and insisted on paying for party orders. Rebecca was content as long as she covered her costs and had a small profit. The supreme dumpling chef was having fun and money wasn't her goal. She added vegetarian and gluten-free versions and even more orders arrived. No one could stop at one dumpling. *Rebecca's Dumplings are the potato chips of Chinese cuisine* insists one fan.

As demand grew, efficiency ensued. "I break down the steps —18 to 22 — depending on the style, and organized the night before," explains Rebecca. "Everything began to fall into place, and the family recipe evolved into Rebecca's Dumplings. It's a marvelous way to teach our children about business. They saw us perfect food production, research, and obtain insurance and legal certification, and formally launch a corporation. We are just at the beginning of what could become a family legacy," she concludes.

One of the biggest challenges was locating a base of operation. Rebecca required a facility where she could produce, then market her dumplings. A place devoted to entrepreneurial ingenuity. An affordable environment attracting customers who welcome and value handcrafted foods. She found the ideal spot, which is a short distance from her West Chester home. That spot is Artisan Exchange. **CCL**

*Next issue, celebrate Rebecca's first Saturday at Artisan Exchange.*

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