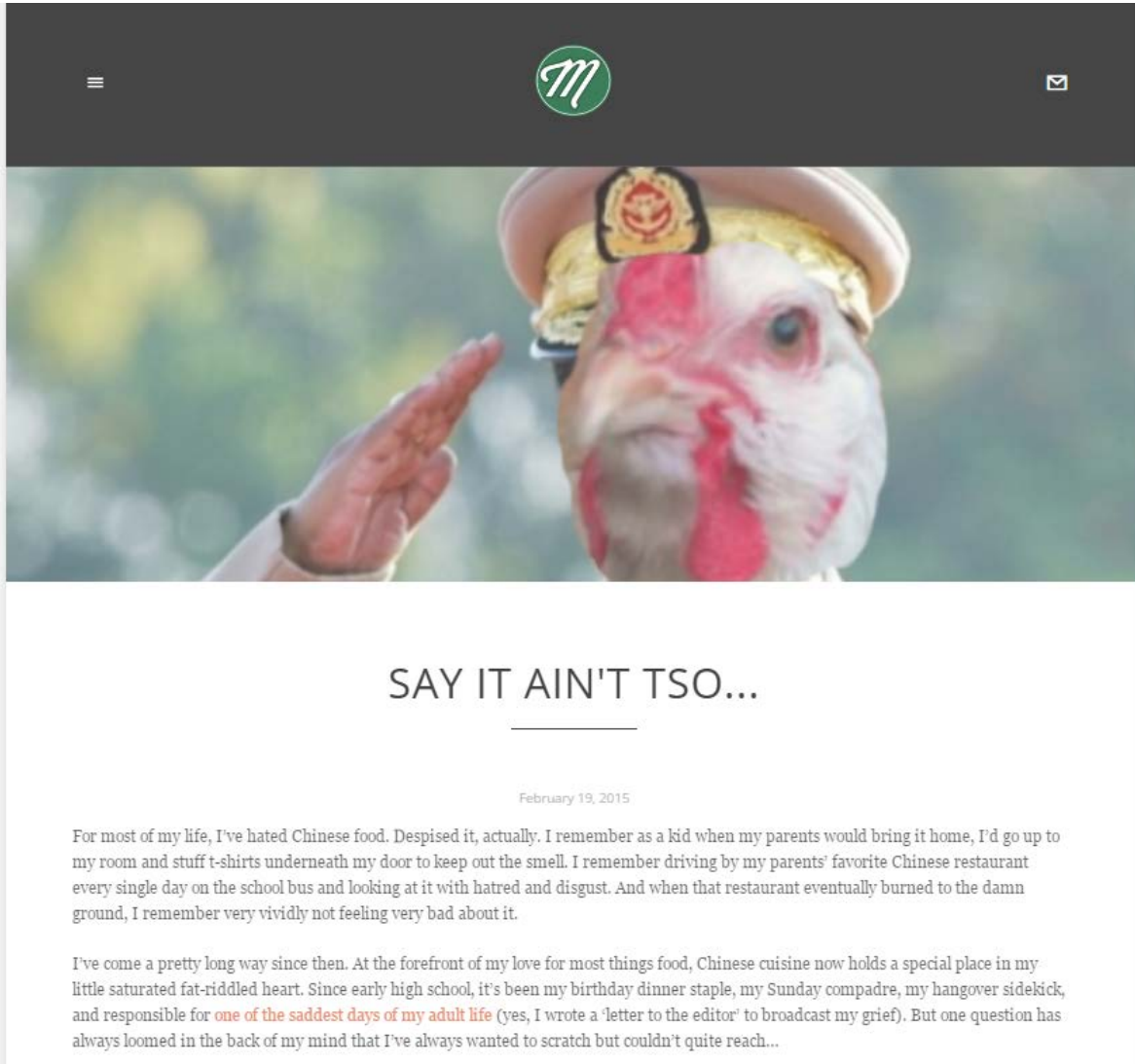


Blog Post

February 19, 2105

Synopsis: a sample from my blog. When curiosity reaches a certain level, sometimes you just have to know. This post is one of a few I've written that encompasses that feeling of not knowing, finding out, and telling the world about it. It serves as a creative outlet and a great excuse to dive into something you've been wondering about.

Visual context:



Say It Ain't Tso

For most of my life, I've hated Chinese food. Despised it, actually. I remember as a kid when my parents would bring it home, I'd go up to my room and stuff t-shirts underneath my door to keep out the smell. I remember driving by my parents' favorite Chinese restaurant every single day on the school bus and looking at it with hatred and disgust. And when that restaurant eventually burned to the damn ground, I remember very vividly not feeling very bad about it.

I've come a pretty long way since then. At the forefront of my love for most things food, Chinese cuisine now holds a special place in my little saturated fat-riddled heart. Since early high school, it's been my birthday dinner staple, my Sunday compadre, my hangover sidekick, and responsible for [one of the saddest days of my adult life](#) (yes, I wrote a 'letter to the editor' to broadcast my grief). But one question has always loomed in the back of my mind that I've always wanted to scratch but couldn't quite reach...

Was General Tso an actual person and if so, why is his chicken so damn delicious?

I used some really reliable resources like Wikipedia and Yahoo! forums full of bored lunatics to get this research train rolling. E.g., username 'SwaggerTrain' from Saint Paul, MN gets us off to a decent start: "Who cares, he was a chicken LOL" – quite honestly the best answer I've found so far. Dig a little deeper: General Zuo Zongtang is generally known as General Tso throughout Asia. According to his wiki, Zuo died at the age of 72 in 1885, which unfortunately makes it highly unlikely he could have possibly known how famous his name would become on a completely different continent 100 years later. However, the guy was pretty impressive – he established China's first naval academy, and suppressed two major rebellions under his watch. Way to go, GT!



The actual dish itself appeared for the first time in New York in the 1970's, invented by a chef from Taiwan. Naturally, he opened a restaurant with it as one of his flagship dishes, and the place closed within a year. Fun sidenote: no one in China knows what the hell General Tso's chicken is.

How do you pronounce General Tso?

Quite frankly, I wish I never looked this up. Almost every opinion on the internet begins with "I've always pronounced it this way, but *insert some pointless aside about being from Louisiana or what they heard a waitress mumble once*." There's a [Youtube pronunciation](#) as 'so' or 'sew' – the video also has far more 'thumbs down' than 'thumbs up' which is mildly concerning.

I called 4 local restaurants to simply ask what the right way to say it was. The results were as follows:

Sample A: 'sow'

Sample B: 'so'

Sample C: "is this for pickup?" (this was a generally unsuccessful survey attempt)

Sample D: 'so'

Either way, I've probably been pronouncing it wrong my whole life and will continue to do so. *jen-a-rull*: rest easy knowing we can at least still pronounce that.

Real Talk: General Tso vs. Sesame



Am I really the only one with the courage to stand up and suggest these dishes are the exact same thing with the exception of sesame seeds? I've looked up multiple recipes for each and the only difference I can find are the sesame seeds and the occasional hot peppers. Maybe, deep down, that's all there is to know: the General is just a tricked out version of a classic for people who either like spicier foods or don't like sesame seeds. Either way, I love them both the same.

Here's to General Tso: a Chinese leader remembered in his home nation for his courage, ingenuity, strength, and wisdom, remembered by the rest of civilization as the crazy popular spicy fried chicken dish that no one can pronounce. Not a bad way to put your stamp on humanity either way.