

Once a Year Fun: Lion Dance

By Aly Kolta

It was Sunday, February 17th, 2008. I went with Kaitlyn, her friends and her family. This was my third time performing the Lion Dance with the group "Chinatown Community Young Lions" for the Chinese New Year Celebration. This time I performed the head of the lion. When I heard this, many emotions were filling my head. One of the thoughts that just filled my head the most was, "What if I mess up?" I knew that the answer would come up soon.

I loved the confetti I saw when I walked down Mott Street. It reminded me of the previous days when I performed the lion dance on the streets in Chinatown and the crowd shot the confetti shooters to cheer for me. "POOW! BOOM!" the big loud sounds they made were exciting and they motivated me to dance with more energy and liveliness. I felt like screaming with the confetti as it was shot into the air.

One main goal that I wanted to achieve was to go to as many stores as we could in Chinatown to deliver good luck to them. In Chinese tradition, the lion dance scares away the many evil spirits that creep to your door. We are supposed to scare those evil spirits.

In the middle of the lion's forehead, there is a mirror which is supposed to let the evil spirits see their own reflection. This will frighten them. The southern lion heads are the only ones with the mirror. The sounds of the drums, cymbals, and the gongs will also frighten them.

Before we began going around Chinatown, we had to take the Lions out of the Club's building. We could not just carry the Lion Heads in our hands; we had to awaken them and bring them out. It was my job to do that. "Come on, Aly! We are starting," called Jeffery.

Three lions came out into the hallway. The first lion was green (a boy named Wilson was in the head and Kaitlyn was in the tail), the second lion was silver (I was in the head and my brother was in the tail), and the third lion was purple (Tony was in the head and my friend Jeffery was in the tail).

While I waited for my turn, I was remembering what I knew about the Lion Dance. I rehearsed the steps — I had to bow to stores and people to show respect, meanwhile I also had to make the lion look alive. "Michi," I yelled to my brother under the tail. "What?" said my brother, Michi. "Look alive, o.k.?" I reminded him. "Sure," He answered. One of the things I also thought about was that I could only leave a store backwards, tail out first, to make sure that the evil spirits would not creep into the store again. I also thought about the purpose of doing the lion dance—to bring good luck to all. It is an important part of the Chinese culture. It is a big piece in the puzzle of Chinese New Year celebration.

As I watched the green lion coming out, I saw his eyes blinking and his ears wiggling. That reminded me to blink my lion's eyes when I went out. I tested it five times before my

turn. Then, I saw the green lion stare at everyone in the crowd. The most important thing I remembered was to have fun. Finally, it was my turn.

Inside the lion head, I was nervous and worried if I would mess up. After I made it through, I passed the lion head to Kaitlyn. I felt like all the nervousness was flowing out of me like a river. I went to my mom and asked her how I did. She said that I did well. Then, Kaitlyn's older brother's friend came over to me and told me that I did very well. That made me feel so much better.

Later on in the parade, I started to feel so much better. At that time, my aunt and uncle came to see the performance. By that time, we were halfway done with our route. I hopped on the drum cart and started drumming. When I was done, Kaitlyn's uncle told me that I did well. The third time that I played the drum, Kaitlyn's dad gave me a thumb up.

My friend Jeffrey came up to me and told me they needed help with the silver lion. So, I ran over to help them. By that time, it was already 5pm. Then, we all gathered in front of the club building and did our final dance.

This dance was always at the end of the day. Before I was in the group, I remember watching the 2004 ending dance, I also remembered seeing the lions eating the lettuce leaves and spitting it out. At that time, I never imagined that four years later, I would be doing that myself. While I was dancing in front of the club building, I saw some people come out with tables and put them in front of each lion. I didn't know what the tables were for and I was puzzled. Then, I saw them put lettuce and oranges on the tables. One guy came up to me and asked, "Do you know how to do this?" and at that moment I knew exactly what we were going to do and I answered, "Yes".

We finished the ending of the lion dance. I felt a lot stronger than I did when we began. After all this, I learned that the Lion Dance is an important part of Chinese culture. I was glad to participate and help to scare away the evil spirits. If you are interested in the Lion Dance, do some research on it and go to the parades during Chinese New Year. Look out for our group. Happy Chinese New Year!

CCYL (Chinatown Community Young Lions) ROCKS!

