

WHO MOVED MY RICE?

What the reviewers are saying...

How in the world did a self-proclaimed redneck from Watha, North Carolina, population 98, end up teaching English in Hangzhou, China?

Are cats responsible for poltergeists?

What's a drunken shrimp?

And how in tarnation do you explain to a Chinese hardware store assistant that you need a specific part for your toilet when you can't speak their dialect?

These rather strange posers and a host of other arcanities are addressed in Michael LaRocca's "Who Moved My Rice?" Entertaining and often whimsical, it's a combination autobiography and travelogue that will take you walking, biking, taxiing, and bussing through Hangzhou, Shanghai, Xinchang, and other exotic locales.

You'll meet a number of intriguing humans of the Chinese persuasion. You'll also meet Picasso, who goes bananas over beef gravy and ping pong balls. Picasso is a cat who *thinks* she's human.

The book consists of forty (or so) fairly short chapters that originally appeared in Michael's newsletter and trace his experiences in China. The book is necessarily episodic, which actually ends up being one of its charms. A chapter or two is just right for that time between when you crawl into bed and you reach over to turn out the light. When your head hits the pillow, you'll have a smile on your face.

--Mark Francis

Author of "Valkyrie's Flight", hard sci-fi time travel

<http://atlanticbridge.net/publishing/vflight.htm>

and

"A Kart for Lindy", young adult mystery/adventure

<http://wings-press.com/> (Click on "Young Adult" at left)

Who Moved My Rice by Michael LaRocca is not only funny, it's educational. I've read a lot and traveled extensively around the world and I have to say that this book is one of the best you'll ever read for getting on the inside of another culture. Or in the case of China, maybe several cultures. He describes his interactions with ordinary citizens in a way that will make you feel you're right there with him, and in such amusing, understated language that the images will stick with you for a long time. If you want to get away from newspaper and television accounts and see what China is really like at the street level, read this book. You won't be sorry, I promise!

Darrell Bain, Author of A Strange Valley, Doggie Biscuit!, Medics Wild!, Hotline To Heaven, The Pet Plague, The Sex Gates, The Disappearing Girls, Life On Santa Claus Lane, and others.

<http://www.santa-claus-lane.com/>

Michael LaRocca's latest book, *Who Moved My Rice?*, is a collection of his wonderful newsletter articles from China that chronicle his adventures as a foreigner living and working there. Each chapter reads like a letter from a dear friend, and allows the armchair traveller to vicariously experience day to day life in this exotic locale.

Michael's witty observations and keen insights draw a portrait of cultural exchange as it should be--open, adventurous, and rewarding--enlivened by the antics of his supporting cast; wife Jan, a host of local friends, colleagues and students, and the now famous Picasso, cat extraordinaire.

There is much to be learned in the pages of this book, but for sheer entertainment, it's a must-read. I highly recommend *Who Moved My Rice?*

Judy Bagshaw, Author of romantic fiction featuring full-figured heroines!!

<http://writerlady.homestead.com/homepage.html>

The best writing takes you THERE. You read the words, and are no longer within your own environment, but have been hijacked into the author's world.

Michael LaRocca's writing is like that. In a few bold verbal brush-strokes, he had me in China, sharing his delight and wonder, his respect for his hosts and his amusement at their differences. All I know about China is through having had expatriate Chinese friends, and because I read widely. Having read *Who Moved My Rice?* makes me feel as if I'd been there, and been shown around by this friendly and wise guide.

...Having read his earlier work, what I noticed was that the angst is gone. This book was written with joy, from a place of serenity and contentment, and that's where his words took me.

So, if you want to smile, if you want to learn about the people and ways of this ancient and great land, if you want to make friends with a thoroughly decent 'American redneck', you must read this book.

Dr. Bob Rich

Precisely five words into Michael LaRocca's prologue, I knew I was in the company of a master storyteller. I forgot I was reading. Absent were the things I normally looked for in novels or non-

fiction works. In their place, sheer enjoyment. Forget plot or pace or dialogue, this collection of newsletters formed into a book was, simply put, a step into another world, one beyond my reach.

Michael's easy-going style transcends paper and print. He speaks to you, not caring about form or the eventual editor, as if you were in the room. This is his story. His tales and experiences are all substance. The characters are real, and his descriptions of Hangzhou, the place he and wife Jan now call home, are so vivid I felt I was there in person. Each of his episodes is laced with humor and a sense that, no matter what, every minute of every day was and still is an adventure.

Add to that the contrasts he paints so well of two Chinas on the mainland, the one in Shanghai disdainful of foreign 'barbarians' and the other in Hangzhou open and friendly. Shanghai, where traffic and congestion are the rule; Hangzhou, where bicycles are the norm and fresh discoveries await the curious around every corner.

And of course there is Picasso, work of art, but I will let you meet her on your own.

All in all, a delightful read and highly recommended to those looking for something different.

Gerald W. Mills

Author of *Then Is The Power*, *The Mudslinger Sanction* and *Fire Owl*

<http://www.gerryscorner.com>

In every turn of every road Michael LaRocca finds a new surprise and a new experience in China. Once you open "Who Moved My Rice" you accompany LaRocca as he stops to admire the beauty of China and the gentleness of the Chinese people he encounters in this beautiful tapestry woven with syllables and sentences.

I truly felt the pace and tempo of Hong Kong and Hangzhou.

Michael you have the magic to transport me and whoever opens your book from our doldrums to heights of uncharted imagination.

John Harrington Burns, author of *HIDDEN TREASURES*, *FIRST BITE* and *LITTLE LENNY NIGHTLIGHT*

Who Moved My Rice? is Chinese take-out, without the food! Author Michael LaRocca gives a thoroughly candid, often hilarious, look at his transplanted life in this Asian country. Originally from North Carolina, he teaches English in China. And at the same time, the Chinese have taught him a thing or two about living in this fascinating country.

So, how does a Southerner marry an Australian woman, adopt a cat from Hong Kong and move to China? It's all in the book and it makes a great opening to this delightful collection of essays.

Picasso, the cat, does steal a few scenes and some catnip, but for the most part, she's well behaved and won't shed on the readers.

The author has a wonderful ability to describe places, people and events, with a few well-chosen words. The writing isn't bogged down with details; yet, readers will feel they are actually there. The casual, down home, Southern writing creates a unique blend of East and West.

Readers needn't worry about this book being a documentary or dissertation about China and its people. Instead, it talks about those things "real" people want to know. Like why they need to always carry around a good supply of toilet paper, and is it proper to eat peanuts with chopsticks?

The author takes readers along on a shopping trip, and gives some practical advice on how to survive in the bike lanes. Other adventures include getting a haircut and eating pigeon head soup. Written in the first person, Michael's reactions and thoughts are faithfully recorded. Some of these essays had originally been published in his "Mad About Books" newsletter, but this is his first book about "China travel writing." His sense of humor and honesty will engage readers and keep them turning the pages to see what he's up to next.

Who Moved My Rice? is a marvelous mosaic of memories.

Sharyn McGinty, Review Coordinator/Reviewer, In The Library Reviews
<http://inthelibraryreview.com/LaroccaMichael.html#whomovedmyrice>

What happens when an American redneck author goes to China on holiday, meets, loves and marries an Australian teacher, and adopts a calico cat from the local SPCA? Well, he becomes a pet's companion and a resident of Hong Kong, who eventually moves to Hangzhou, China to teach "Spoken English," of all things.

But adjusting to life in China proves challenging for Michael LaRocca, as shared in his book WHO MOVED MY RICE? -- a factual account of his observations and experiences while living in China. Through personal essay articles by the author, and essays by his "Advanced Writing" students, similarities and differences between two cultures are humorously portrayed.

From skyscrapers in Hong Kong to six-story buildings in Hangzhou, the quieter, simpler surroundings please the author, even though most everyone, including police, drives a "Volkswagen Santana." Michael LaRocca learns quickly that riding a bicycle is safer than walking, and that carrying tissue comes in handy when necessity calls for using a "hole in the ground" public toilet.

Eating "Mountain Frog" and "Pigeon Head Soup" are new adventures for the author, as is learning how to eat with "disposable chopsticks." Besides interesting food in China, there are interesting people, with interesting nicknames: "Rickshaw Man," "Noodle Boy," and the street musician, "Erhu Man." Even the author, Michael LaRocca (considered a celebrity in Hangzhou), is nicknamed "Red Beard."

Mr. LaRocca's cat, Picasso, is a celebrity in her own right, so receives gifts from the author's friends and students -- gifts of tuna and eel-like fish delicacies, some prompting the famed calico's "Caca Maneuver." Picasso is adept at opening dresser drawers and hiding, and is obsessive compulsive with catnip. But she is not a great hunter of rats, so allows her pet -- the author -- to take care of that nasty business.

Michael LaRocca, in a light-hearted writing style, hilariously depicts life in China. His students' complementing essays are not credited by individual names, but the writing proves they are a talented young group -- a group Mr. LaRocca must be quite proud of teaching. Besides personal essay articles, Michael LaRocca offers numerous funny one-liners about "Signs You Might Be In China;" and includes a touching tribute to his brother and a police officer's brother; plus, provides helpful tips for anyone considering moving to China. So I highly recommend WHO MOVED MY RICE? by Michael LaRocca, to his fans, Picasso's fans, and to anyone interested in reading about life in China from an American author's humorous, insightful perspective.

Patricia Spork, independent book reviewer
<http://www.patriciaspork.us/>

A recipe: take the redneck Michael from North Carolina, the beautiful Jan from Australia, and the calico cat Picasso from Hong Kong; mix well together, and get a loving family. Michael and Jan meet in Hong Kong, fall in love, and now live in China. Jan is a master teacher, and Michael is an excellent and enthusiastic teacher, who also inspires his students. (Name any other teacher who does a Godfather of Soul song-and-dance-number for his students!)

Michael is the writer in the family--the excellent writer in the family. This is his sixth book, that, like his other books, receives praise by readers and book reviewers. (He writes so good and colorful that you will swear he has Irish roots. But wait, he takes the name LaRocca to honor his stepfather [not mentioned in ebook]; his biological ancestry is Irish. To further substantiate his Irish roots, Michael writes that he knows every local beer in China and prefers one to Budweiser. Blasphemy?) Michael's writing style appears easy, casual, and friendly. He writes as though he is telling his Chinese adventures to you over a cup of coffee--that is, his exciting adventures. Michael loves life, and has a natural, gentle, good-natured humor that repeatedly bounces out of his writing and into your lap. (If you have read Michael's other books, you should be pleased that he has traveled on Life's road from Angst to happiness.)

Many of the articles in Who Moved My Rice? appear first in Mad About Books, which evolves from a monthly to weekly free newsletter. (This Web site should be of interest to all writers and book lovers.) Michael writes about what he sees, feels, thinks, and does in exotic China. These articles are invariably seasoned with humor. And humor can be an unexpected but delightful surprise!

A few examples. Michael never meets any Indian food he doesn't like. When he asks about the price of food in Shanghai, he writes that they ignore him in two languages. At one place, Michael careens off the comedian's wall with the statement that Jerry Jones and Bill Parcells are hated by all human beings (who knows, perhaps some critters, too?). When writing about Xinchang, Michael tells you, "Putonghua, literally translated, means The People's Language. We were so

far in the sticks that the people didn't want to speak it." The hint of more humor is in some chapter titles: Signs You Might Be In China; Signs You Might Be A Cat; and Signs You Might Be In America. Even though Michael's humor always bubbles over, he has a serious, philosophical side. He, for instance, wants to know why the best-selling beer in Asia is Pabst Blue Ribbon? I'm up to this challenge! Perhaps it's the cheapest imported beer, thus the biggest profit after resell? And, then, there are Michael's immortal words: "...life's too short to wear bad underwear." (God, why didn't I think of this!)

When you're in China, life is also too short not to mix with the natives. This is where *Who Moved My Rice?* excels just a travel ebook. After all, Michael doesn't just visit China--he lives there. Picture yourself in a shopping district in a large Chinese city where the stores have signs in Chinese but you can't read Chinese! Just to shop for your needs, whether you look for a particular brand of cat food or a new ball cock for your toilet, leads to adventures. And your travels take you to a number of places where Chinese have never seen anyone White in person. Your wife is beautiful, tall, and freckled, and you have very curly hair and a red beard. This makes you a traveling freak show; your looks are so different from the Chinese. Michael even creates a sensation at the barber shop. What would you think if a crowd gathers just to see you get a haircut and people want your cut hair!

Just when you think you've had all of the excitement you can take, Michael and Picasso chase a rat around their apartment. That's right, the now famous calico cat and Hong Kong's SPCA Calendar Girl for three days in 2002 is not above chasing a nasty old rat. And then Michael even gives you a tip for catching rats. What's the tip? Read the ebook.

Besides excitement, Michael has surprises for you. He hasn't had a bad meal; whether at a street stall or in an upscale restaurant. And he hasn't eaten any tainted food! (Apparently he will eat anything put in front of him.) Additionally, Western culture has infested China. A speaker system at a bus station plays traditional Chinese music with erhu, flute, and pipa, but the tune is Maggie May by Rod Stewart. Moreover, China now has skyscrapers, Pizza Hut, McDonald's, and KFC (clearly modern Western perversions).

In short, you can learn a lot about China without ever going there. You say, "Well, duh?" Yes, I know it sounds mundane. But after reading the ebook, you'll know whether or not you should even consider going to China. (The answer for me is No . Many adventures for Michael would be trials for me.) If you go to China, your trip can be enhanced by the appendix to this ebook. (Before you read *Who Moved My Rice?*, you may want to go to the Web site *Who is Michael LaRocca? And Why Should I Care?* You will see photos of Michael, Jan, and the famous Picasso.) But if you never go to China, your pleasurable reader's trip there can be very inexpensive via this ebook. I urge you to make the trip!

Robert Clyde Moore, novelist (*Oddball Squadron*, coming July 2005)

P.S. I applaud Books Unbound for the great layout of *Who Moved My Rice?* and the easy-on-your-eyes reading background.