

'No perfume's as wonderful as fish'

By Frank Rasky
Toronto Star

"If you're born a Filipino, you're a born aficionado."

Gaya Cana was exaggerating a little when she delivered that pun in Notes From A Fishmonger, the column she writes for the Balita newspaper, circulated to Metro's community of 32,000 people from the Philippines.

Her regular customers at the fish department she manages at Ziggy's, on St. Clair Ave. at Yonge, are certainly not all Filipinos. Thanks to her enthusiastic guidance, though, they definitely could be classified as ardent seafood fans.

Gaya is a short, plump, cheery 33-year-old, who served her apprenticeship under Ellie Knight at the Ogamaw Fishmarket on Yonge near Summerhill and has since attracted her own following.

A crusader

"You can call me a seafood crusader," said Gaya last week as she served samples of her Filipino-style stuffed crab to appreciative customers, including her insurance agent husband, Lapulapu Cana.

"I realize that some Canadians are turned off by fish," she said. "They have a negative impression of something messy and smelly. I consider it part of my job to educate them and convert them."

"I try to help them understand that Canada is blessed with some of the best fish in the world. Even the Japanese import our matchless salmon. To me, no perfume is as wonderfully fragrant as the smell of fresh fish. It's as sensory as the smells, the colors, the feel of a great ocean."

14 children

She was born on one of the 7,000 islands in the southeast Pacific Ocean that are collectively known as the Philippines. And at the age of 10, she remembers helping her mother, Florentina, a fisherman's daughter, prepare Filipino seafood dishes — a combination of Chinese, Malayan and Spanish cuisine.

"There were 14 kids in our family, so we each had to take turn helping out," she says. "My mother was a very creative seafood cook and I guess I inherited her flair."

Gaya, a graduate in food management from the local Cebu College of Culinary Arts,



BORIS SPREMO/TORONTO STAR

Manager of the fish department at Ziggy's, Gaya Cana says "Canada is blessed with some of the best fish in the world." (Maria)

Sunday cook

taught home economics in the Philippines for 10 years. She says that Filipinos mostly enjoy salty and sour flavors. The favorite condiment of their nation of 50 million people is patis — a pungent amber liquid made from fermented and salted fish. And many of their dishes are

sprinkled with the tart juice of the limelike calamansi fruit. When Gaya moved to Toronto four years ago, the national dish she most missed was bangus (milk fish). It's a Filipino white fish, cultivated in ponds, which is usually stuffed with rice, onion, garlic and patis, wrapped in banana leaves, and oven or pit-baked.

However, Gaya enjoys experimenting with the 75 different kinds of seafood spe-

cialties she now sells at Ziggy's. The No. 1 bestseller is Restigouche salmon at \$6.50 a pound and the most expensive item is Dover sole, flown in the same day from the English Channel, at \$18 a pound. But she stocks a wide variety of other delicacies, ranging from fresh Prince Edward Island mussels to Newfoundland codfish tongues, from swordfish steaks to Hawaiian mahi-mahi dolphin.

Gaya's Filipino Stuffed Crab (Rellenong Alimango)

- 12 medium-sized live crabs (preferably female)
- 2 cups water
- 1½ tsp. salt
- 2 cups Unico sunflower oil
- 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1 medium-sized onion, finely chopped
- 1 pound frozen Luxury brand crab meat
- 2 tbsp. Lorenzana brand anchovy patis (fermented fish sauce available at Philippine Trading Centre, 1427 Queen St. W.)
- 6 ounces sweet Bick's relish
- 1 tsp. salt
- 3 tsp. sweet butter

- ¼ cup raisins
 - ¼ cup Del Monte sweet peas
 - 1 tbsp. calamansi fruit juice (if unavailable, use lime juice)
 - 4 eggs, well-beaten
- After live crabs are scrubbed and rinsed, place them in pot. Add the two cups of water mixed with 1½ tsp. salt. Cover and bring to a boil. Lower heat. Let simmer for about 15 minutes, until shells turn red. Drain and let cool.
- Remove crab meat from shells. Make sure you remove the whole cartilage. Save the shells.
- In a frying pan containing hot oil saute garlic and onion for about one

minute. Add the fresh and frozen crab meat, the anchovy patis, relish, salt and butter. Saute for three minutes. Stir in raisins and peas and fruit juice.

Fill crab shells with this crab meat mixture, mounding meat slightly in the centre. Pour beaten eggs over the top.

Fry the stuffed crab shells four at a time for about two minutes, constantly spooning the hot oil over the top until golden brown. Drain on paper towel.

Yield: 6 servings. Tastes best served with steamed rice and glass of Coco Lopez pina colada.