



Miracle at the KK Cafe

Peanut milk can strengthen AIDS patients, heal gums, soothe chronic skin diseases, and prevent baldness, or so it is said. And it's found only one place on Earth.

By **Matt Smith**
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Its creators call it peanut milk. It tastes, unfortunately, exactly like its name. It is made from a secret recipe of just four ingredients: peanuts, rice, sugar syrup, and water. It contains 12 grams of fat per 8-ounce serving. It costs \$4.50 a half gallon. It is found only one place on Earth -- a tiny storefront burger joint in the heart of San Francisco.

But all of that doesn't begin to tell the story of this odd and wondrous brew. The inventors of peanut milk, Jack and Margaret Chang, call their drink a "miracle." Many of their customers at the KK Cafe, on Divisadero near Haight, swear to peanut milk's extraordinary properties. If they can all be

believed, drinking peanut milk prevents baldness, cures fatigue, strengthens AIDS and cancer patients, heals festering wounds, soothes chronic skin conditions, prevents colds and flu, clears up sinus problems, alleviates symptoms of menopause, reverses the effects of gum disease, and increases sexual stamina.

The Changs must walk a fine line in the claims they make for their peanut milk. "We don't want customers to think it ... will solve their AIDS or whatever. We're not saying it's medication," says the Changs' son Jon, who is trying to help his parents spread the word about their invention. "We're saying it's a beverage. It's a family recipe that we passed on."

Still, that hasn't stopped them from soliciting more than a dozen written testimonials from their customers, attesting to the powers of peanut milk.



BRANDON FERNANDEZ

Jack and Margaret Chang.

"I had no idea what amazing healing properties it held," wrote one woman with ovarian cancer, who said drinking peanut milk restored her energy during chemotherapy and kept her hair from falling out. "I know I will never want to stop drinking this wonderful peanut milk ... I really think it is a gift from God."

"I've had things happen to me that are on the cusp of being miraculous," says Terrence Todd, a writer and longtime customer.

"Any person who suffers *any* health problems should try this remarkable drink," another customer wrote. "This drink, in my opinion, has the potential to help countless thousands, even millions, of people."

The KK Cafe seems an unlikely place for miracles to happen. It is a nondescript little neighborhood grill that the Changs have run for almost 12 years. Jack and Margaret are a sweet and guileless Taiwanese couple; they are in their 50s, work 14- or 15-hour days, seven days a week, and seem to know most of their customers by name. The story of peanut milk began tragically, when the Changs watched Jack's beloved brother waste away from AIDS in 1992. They noticed that some of the customers of their cafe, not far from the Castro, were coming in with similar symptoms.

"I saw so many young people got this kind of disease. My heart is so sad," Jack says in his shy English. "So we always pray, pray to God, can we have some kind of ..."

"Wisdom," Margaret prompts.

"... wisdom to make something that can help them."

The idea of making peanut milk just came to him one day, Jack says, though it took him more than three months to perfect the recipe. "The peanuts make the juice not easy," Jack says, "because too much oil. And I make it not very good. Every time I make it, not successful."

He didn't want to just throw away his mistakes, so he drank the batches himself. "Every time I make and no good, I just drink, drink, drink," he says. But after a couple of months, he began to notice a curious effect. His chronic gum disease, so severe that he had to see a dentist every four months and take penicillin to control frequent infections, seemed to dramatically improve. His allergies, which had plagued him for years, also went away. And that wasn't all.

"Before, my hair every day drop on the pillow -- wah!" Jack says. "And since I drink this peanut milk, every morning I wake up, how come my pillow is cleaner? No hair! It stopped. It's very amazing."

The Changs began offering the drink to some of their sick customers. Jeffrey Fox, a neighbor, was the first to try it. "I had just started on my HIV meds for the very first time, and they were just tearing me up," Fox remembers. "It was just awful. I felt like my insides were burning up."

The peanut milk, he found, was soothing and easy to digest, and soon he was drinking about a quart a day. "For a period of six to eight months, that's practically what I lived on," he says. Fox doesn't claim that peanut milk is a miracle, but, he says, "it got me through my worst time."

Terence Todd, one of the testimonial writers, was another early customer.

"I'm a diabetic, and as you might know diabetics have a hard time healing," Todd says. After a fall in his apartment, several cuts on his shin had become infected. Doctors prescribed antibiotics, but after six weeks his condition still hadn't improved, and doctors told him it might be weeks before the wounds healed. Todd stopped by the KK Cafe, and the Changs suggested he try their peanut milk. They told him to drink about four pints a day. "Four days later all of the wounds scabbed over," Todd says.

Todd also credits the peanut milk for healing a burst blood vessel in his eye that sent him to the emergency room. The doctor took one look at his blood-saturated eye, Todd says, and told him, "That is the worst aneurysm I've ever seen." Again, the doctor warned him it would take at least two months to clear up. "I went to Jack and Margaret, and they said, "Oh, do the peanut milk.' I went back for my meeting with the doctors a week later, and they were all blown away. It had completely cleared up."

The Changs' testimonials are full of such tales. Sister Rosemarie had terrible scleroderma; the skin condition forced her to wear gloves to protect her cracked and blistered hands. The Changs suggested peanut milk, and the nun began drinking three pint bottles a day. She noticed a boost in energy almost immediately, she says, and after several months, "my skin cleared in what can only be described as a miraculous rate. Doctors, whose prescriptions and suggestions failed, were amazed at my recovery."

The Changs don't claim to know how their peanut milk can account for such stories. "We only know how to make. We don't know how it functions," Jack says. "We just know it gives everybody energy, and some kind of nutrition, and gets the immune system stronger. That's all we know."

Margaret, however, has her own theory: "How can this drink have this kind of power? God has blessed this drink. It's a miracle!"

Word of peanut milk has spread in the neighborhood, and Margaret estimates that 20 people a day come by to stock up. Still, you won't find peanut milk on the cafe's menu, and the Changs say they aren't looking for more customers.

"I can't have more people in, because I can't help them all," Margaret says. The Changs can only produce about 20 gallons a day, so their drink is doled out carefully to regular customers and those who need it most, often at a discount. "Some people have no money, and we just give it to them for free," Margaret says. "Sometimes we just charge them \$1 or \$2. Some of my customers say, 'You know, Margaret, you can't do that for everybody.' I know, but what can I say? We have that kind of heart, to help people."

And that, the Changs say, is why they are now looking for a business partner: someone who can help them produce it in quantity and market it beyond their little cafe. The Changs already have a brand name for their peanut milk. "Signs & Wonders" it will be called.

Beyond the product's name, the Changs will have to be careful not to suggest their peanut drink provides medical benefits. "They'll be in big trouble if they do," says a spokeswoman for the Food and Drug Administration, who reminds that any health claims for products distributed across state lines need to be authorized by the FDA.

Perhaps the Changs won't need to make any claims at all; perhaps their peanut drink will speak for itself. "Sometimes the people, they don't want to believe," Jack says. "But I always tell the people, 'You drink, you will know.'"

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