



Thousands Of Miles Far Away - Thousands Of Ways To Be Closer

By Thanh Duong

A story of a Vietnamese city girl in Colombian farms in her journey of throwing away indifference and connecting to the core.

Taking a deep breath. I slowly dipped my toes into the smelly mud. Ew! “Come on, you can do it!” - I told myself. After putting all my feet down, mud was covered from my low legs to my toes. Lots of sharp shell pieces was lying on the bed. Walking very gently though, I had several cuts on my feet. I had to bow down, touched the mud under the burning sun for transplanting in a Colombian paddy field. My whole body was hurting and sweating. Why did I fly half the world to torture myself like this? I didn’t want to do it anymore!

At the point of giving up, I was astonished by a sudden laughter. Several Chibchan peasants were standing in another field with sweat soaking their clothes, chatting happily while working so fast and correctly to my great surprise. I exhaustedly transplanted for a day while they were likely to do it for their whole lives. What struck me was transplanting is only a small process in rice cultivation!

Noticing my shocked face, they gave me big smiles and asked something in Muisca. My friend translated for me that they asked me if I was tired. “Yes, I was weary but could continue working like you”. At that moment, I realized something was changing inside myself.

I was brought up in a country whose culture has been deeply influenced by agriculture. However, as a city girl, I can only imagine how peasants live and how hard it is to produce the food thanks to Vietnamese traditional songs and stories, especially stories of my parents and grandparents as they used to do farm work for a living. Regretfully, I didn’t care much about it. Food appeared before my eyes so easily and abundantly. I felt nothing when throwing food away if I couldn’t finish it until the day I lived as a peasant.

The more I undertook farming activities and talked with local people, the more I understood and felt grateful. The farming experience in Colombia with ICYE not only brought me a deeper connection with my family and my culture which contributed substantially in making who I am but also made me respect more the effort of peasants.

Day after day, I started to think about the core of human society - agriculture. Agriculture creates food. Agriculture puts human into interaction with the surrounding world. Agriculture makes humans resilient by providing both happiness and sadness. However, those who supply others, sometimes can’t even supply themselves. How can it happen like that to the people who bring all their blood, sweat, and tears to create something that we put into our mouths every day?

It was a starting point that motivated me to live more responsibly and take a deeper look at what is happening in the world. Ironically, thousands of miles far from my comfort zone was where I felt closer to myself, my family, my culture, and the life than ever before.