

My Experience in Jinping

By Andrew Lai



If you think you are reading a story of an immigrant, you are.

To be able to set-foot on my motherland was my life long impossible dream came true. You see, after teaching English and Mathematics in a Malaysian high school for five years, my life journey took me to USA. I got a day job and went to university at night. I progressed to be a cost engineer then the chief project accountant in the engineering and construction industry. I spent all my vacation time doing volunteer work in organizing summer youth camps, encouraging high school kids from immigrant families to focus on education and stay out of troubles. One must give back to help others.

In the year 2011, a friend told me that CRRS needed volunteers to teach English in Jinping, a remote mountainous town in China. It has been my passion and my dream. This was my third time joining the trip.

After taking 12-hour flight from San Francisco to Hong Kong, then to Kunming, the morning I woke up in Kunming Hotel to prepare an 8-hour bus ride to Jinping, a question arose in my mind: Did I make the right decision to come here?

As soon as I met the students in Jinping on our first day, all my doubts disappeared. I was back to do my most passionate job: teaching. As days went on, I became totally captured by the moment when I was leading the theme song, Proud of You by Fiona Fung. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=520_dg-Hx0w). My eyes welled up with tears as the song progressed. As the students reached the crescendo of a catching lyric “I can Fly...”, suddenly I felt like a father, lifting up my little son. I could hear him yelling, “Daddy, I can fly...I can touch the sky...!”

You can watch the video; we can tell you the story. But words cannot describe it. You have to experience it yourself. As the song continued, tears rolled down my cheeks. I was no longer a song leader. I was just singing along without voice coming out of my mouth. I was choking back tears:

I can fly
I'm proud that I can fly
To give the best of mine
Till the end of the time
Believe me I can fly



I'm proud that I can fly
To give the best of mine
The heaven in the sky...!

Looking searchingly at the faces of the students, I realized we were doing more than teaching English. We were giving them hope, opening their mind to see: the sky is reachable.

No one had ever given them such encouragement. But in the short time we stayed with them, we gave them more than words of encouragement. We did that with our action, with our attitude and with our love. Did someone say...It is more blessed to give than to receive?



All students in China face tremendous pressure in their final year of high school. They will take what they so-call university entrance exam. The result of this exam will affect their life-long career. Going there to teach them English, we really were offering help so urgently needed by them. I was overwhelmed by how much they appreciated us. Since Jinping is a farming community, most of our students come from families of farmers. This means they are from the lower income group as compared to those living in the cities. They would thank us profusely for the pencils, pens and papers we bought for them from the local stores in Jinping.

Students, who lived near the school, would rise up early in the morning, to help in their family farms before they came to school to learn English. Others, whose home villages were too far from school, were allowed to stay in the school dormitory. To these students, education is the only way they can break the family cycle of poverty. Not only they appreciated us travelling from a distant land to help them, they were amazed we actually came here with no other motive but to help and to love them. We could sense that they wanted to thank us a thousand times. But they didn't need to...their spirit, their smiles and their tears said it all.

One day, the theme of the day was "Love". One of our young teachers taught the class the famous passage: "Love is patient love is kind". I was really touched when the whole class went forward to recite the whole passage with hand-motions. Later a student told me that she had never heard about "love" being described that way. This was a confirmation that we did more than teaching English: We gave them hope and showed them unconditional love. If the whole world practices what we taught, it would

be a world living in harmony and peace. There will be less suffering and poverty. It is good for both USA and China.

Flying back to my comfort zone in California, I realized that I had just done an unusual “涼水工程”(the name of the English Program). Oh, it is not about engineering. It is about connecting bridges and building a brighter future. We personally had received more than what we gave to the Jinping students. All the young people went with us told me that they had a life transforming experience. Why wasn't I surprised? Can you go to a country, rich with 5,000 years of history, and not come out being transformed? Are you not moved by the sincere gratitude expressed on shy but smiling faces, with tears rolling down? You can take my whole world away but not my Jinping experience. It is too precious. It is to be kept for a whole life.

Without any hesitation, I encourage you to go. Words cannot describe it. You have to experience it yourself.

Go!

