



Federica's Story April 2010

Article by Federica on how she became a volunteer with MiFan MaMa

Last spring, when Julie Martens invited me for a morning coffee at Starbucks in JinQiao, I was sceptical, but I nonetheless accepted. Was it going to be about the sale of some homemade necklaces or about the presentation of a Chinese version of a Folletto vacuum cleaner? Fortunately, it was about neither of these. Julie had summoned a few friends to inform them about a project called "MiFan MaMa".

In the wake of enthusiasm that Julie was able to transmit to me, I decided to join the project. But also accepted because I was immediately captured by the idea of facing a bitter aspect of China's reality, diverse from the one we expats are used to facing living in our happy islands in HongQiao and JinQiao.

Just a few weeks later, having organised together with my untiring fellow volunteers the monthly food stock, I found myself in Tony & Julie Martens' car, ready to set off for the long journey and, what is more, willing to be baptised as a novice at Lao Wang's orphanage.

Meanwhile whilst I was drinking tons of coffee, Tony told me how this splendid project came about: 'Today you will meet Mr. Wang', he said, 'he is the one we should thank; he transformed his carpentry shop, lying on the edge of the city of Fuyang in Anhui province into an orphanage. Divine inspiration? Maybe. It all started when a flood virtually destroyed the business he was devoted to.'

Hours seemed to pass away very slow for everybody while I, maintaining a vigil eye, tried to keep the driver attentive. Tony then added: 'Nowadays the orphanage hosts about 200 children, some of whom are disabled adults. And then there are the personnel that, living there permanently, manage the whole thing. The orphanage mascot is a child who is just 40 days old! But I'm warning you - you will see many sad things and, at first, you might be overcome by a feeling of discouragement. That's what happened to most of us. But it won't last long, I'm quite sure. A small hand, simply a small hand, will end that. It will get close to you and hold your adult hand without any hesitation, maybe to lead you inside the Orphanage building. There, among a few tables, young children rejoice, thanks to simple recreational activities. To get in touch with this delightful reality will help you feel more at ease. The smiles of the community members will soothe your heartache. That's what I experience each time, even though I'm a man and an old hand at these kind of trips.'

After a bit, when we were close to the orphanage, our car bouncing and jolting due to the pits along the road, Julie said: 'I remind you that thanks to the money we collected this month we were able to buy rice, powdered milk, diapers and hygiene products. They will be enough for 20 days. I also have some cash that we will use to buy 1200 eggs once we get there. We had great support this month! Hopefully, we'll be able to collect the same amount of contributions over the summer period!'

As Julie said these words, the car stopped in a small square and my gaze was suddenly struck by the scene in front of us. The orphanage personnel were unloading a blue truck on which I could read the writing "MiFan MaMa". It arrived there a couple of hours before us. A few bags of rice were already being collected by the older boys and taken into the orphanage ready to stock the food storehouse. A box of fruit lay on the ground, and the truck driver gave an orange to a small child, who looked at it as if he were holding a gold nugget!

Five minutes later we were introduced to the orphanage community. Enquiring gazes lingered on everybody's faces, especially on those, like mine, who were new to the community. The happiness of that moment, the joyful shouts and the children jumping up and down out of contentment dominated the scene. At that moment I felt my trousers being gently tugged. I turned back and saw a little boy stretching his hand towards me. Without hesitating I took his hand and I let him lead me to the dormitory, treasure chest of all his secrets. As we crossed the threshold, our steps reverberated among the walls and the aligned beds. I held back my tears that were almost to gush in plentiful streams, while a delicate orange fragrance lingered in the air. We glanced down watching our hands joined together. The child held my hand tighter while a beam appeared spontaneously on our faces. We remained there for a while, lit up by a sunbeam radiating on us.

Information: MiFan MaMa is a non-profit organisation. All financial contributions are managed with transparent accounting and are employed exclusively to support the MiFan MaMa mission to better the quality of life and to give a future to the children and needy groups in poverty areas of rural China.

If you want to know more about our initiative and why we chose our name, we invite you to contact us. For those in the Italian community interested in donating or willing to volunteer to help with our projects, please contact Federica at federica.cina@hotmail.com.