

The Aroma of Hope

by Treva Wygle

Join me on a journey, far far away, to a people rich in culture but poor in hope. To a land, not like our own, with a tribe of people who live simply as subsistent farmers. Gently tucked away in the Ailao Mountains of the southwestern Chinese province of Yunnan, you will find the Hani people. They are said to be about family, hard work, laughter and giving.

Now I take you on another journey, somewhat closer to home. There exists a tribe of like-minded and like-hearted people who are dedicated to making a positive difference in others lives. These people are your neighbors. Like you, they are parents, educators, professionals, students and laborers who desire to look beyond themselves and make a difference in the world.

The Hani Coffee Company was formed by a handful of common people with an uncommon belief that life is found by giving it away. So a teacher, a lawyer, an aid worker, and an administrator all started on a journey to be a part of something bigger than themselves. "Life's got to be about more than just working, playing and accumulating, right?" proclaims Dave Bollenbacher, Executive Director of Kids Across Cultures (www.kidsacrosscultures.org). "It's why we started Hani Coffee Company."

The Hani Coffee team is a humble group of men and women with a vision and the heart to see it through. Although there are many volunteers that make up this team, Craig Scoville, Dave Bollenbacher, Lance Battenfield, Wes Bishop and Russell King have been essential at different stages of this process. They have invested their time and efforts in being a blessing to the Hani people and to providing a great cup of coffee that represents hope and friendship between two cultures.

"Yeah, we love coffee, but, what we're really all about is caring. We want to make a difference in the lives of a people that seem to have been forgotten. We're about more than just offering a premium product. We're about investing in people. Our passion has been to bring Hani villagers clean water, accessible medical care, adequate nutrition, and better educational opportunities," explains Scoville.

The Hani (pronounced Ha Nee) are the poorest of China's recognized minorities, but they are a people rich in culture. It's a culture the Hani Coffee team wants to see flourish, not changed.

Over ninety percent of the Hani live scattered across the Ailao Mountains between the Mekong River and the Red River (Yuanjiang). It is stated that they are descended from the Yi people. The dwellings of the Hani are usually two or three stories high, built with bamboo, mud, stone and wood. The Hani people usually build their villages on the south slopes of the mountains. A village comprises from ten to as many as 400 households, which are typically related by blood ties.

Situated in the subtropical climate zone, the area inhabited by the Hani people is blessed with a mild climate, abundant rainfall and fertile soil, providing an ideal condition for the development of agriculture. Viewed from a distance, the stockaded villages with their terraced fields, bamboo forests, and "mushroom style houses," make a tranquil rural scene. The terraced fields are a thousand year old culture with the Hani people. The multiple terraces, give a stepped appearance that follows the natural contours of the escarpments.

Since the Hani people mainly engage in agriculture and due to their rich farming soil, this enhanced the vision behind the Hani Coffee Company. The Hani team wanted to do something for the people of Hani and transform communities without changing the culture. The combination of the teams love for coffee and the Yunnan Province, in China, being so rich in agriculture and farming was a good start in the right direction. Along with the idea to offer the Hani a sustainable business opportunity that offered them

job skills while also utilizing their hard working farming traits, were the perfect mix for forming Hani Coffee. A coffee company that helps others!

Thus a journey began to search for the perfect coffee bean...! "A year of research took us to the city of MengLian and the introduction to Mr. Hu," tells Scoville. "Mr. Hu was and is an intricate part of Hani Coffee." Mr. Hu is a knowledgeable and educated man specializing in agriculture. He was invited by the local Chinese government to do research and to enhance agriculture in Yunnan Province. He has been growing and improving the coffee bean for over twenty five years. Upon meeting Mr. Hu, the Hani Coffee team knew they could trust in him to deliver the highest quality coffee that they were in search for.

"Upon meeting Mr. Hu, we were quick to work together. A trusted relationship was formed for us to purchase high quality product from local farmers under the supervision and expertise of Mr. Hu," shares Scoville. Once this was set in place, the journey to capture the perfect flavor was set into motion.

Coffee has become a more and more popular drink; it's not just a "cup of joe" anymore. "It's all in the roasting," explains Lance Battenfield, Hani Coffee team member and coffee roaster. "The unique flavors of coffee come from good farming soil, using quality beans and the approach of roasting. I love coffee and over the years, my fascination with coffee led me to experimenting and creating my own roasting technique," shares Battenfield. It's this mastered technique of roasting that gives Hani Coffee its unique robust sweet buttery taste that people love so much!

Coffee roasting coaxes golden flavor from a bland bean. It takes heat to spark the chemical reactions that turn carbohydrates and fats into aromatic oils, burn off moisture and carbon dioxide, and alternately break down and build up acids, unlocking the characteristic coffee flavor, according to nationalgeographics.org.

"The beans for our signature roast come from the terraced mountains of Southwest China. Our team works alongside the Hani villagers who helped grow and harvest the beans," explains Battenfield. Coffee grows on a tree and is originally considered a type of fruit. The coffee cherries are picked by hand in the field and carried up the mountain to be hauled for processing. To get to the core of all the flavor, each cherry bean must be stripped of all its skin, pulp and parchment to reveal the inner raw bean. These raw beans, called green coffee, are then hand inspected and shipped to the artisan roaster for the final touches in creating the unique flavors of Hani Coffee. "Lance works his magic roasting the beans, he has really made it an art," proudly says Scoville.

With every delicious cup of Hani Coffee, lives are being changed! "Through buying and enjoying Hani Coffee, you help provide jobs with a fair wage enabling local villagers to provide for their families," explains Scoville. "It's not just about a great cup of coffee but about the lives, families and communities that are being changed through the opportunities provided through the Hani Coffee Company and relationships with the Hani people."

The team has established an office in Kunming that is home to 5 of their China Team members who are dedicated to bringing the great taste of coffee to Erath County as well as China. Annie, Chinese, is the administrative manager and pretty much do-it-all person, Julie, Hani, is the bookkeeper, health care and nutrition trainer, Lydia, also Hani, is head of sourcing of products, sales and packaging, and Tim and Molly Heinze, Americans, operate as sales and marketing managers. "We have a great team! Not only do they do a great job at processing our coffee but also give back to the community through educating the people in ways that will better their lives and environment," adds Scoville.

Hani Coffee Company is making a way to enrich the Hani people by partnering with others to provide better medical, educational and, clean water opportunities for them. "We've seen firsthand how

love and compassion have changed the way our Hani friends see themselves and their world," shares Scoville.

The Hani team believes that education is a large part of what enables change, and one of their goals is to educate young people on the realities of HIV and AIDS, a devastating problem in the area. "Through various demonstrations, games, charts, and pamphlets the students were able to learn all about HIV and AIDS and how it not only affects the body, but what they can do to prevent it. It is our hope that these students will share and live by what they've learned. We are so grateful for the opportunity to be a voice on this important issue," explains Scoville.

For several years Hani Coffee has served with friends from Texas to host an English camp at a high school a few hours outside of Kunming. The camp acts as a platform to connect with students and teachers. Each class has between 50 to 60 students and lasts 45 minutes. "During the week there is much joy, laughter and fun as we work together to encourage and build a learning foundation amongst the students, says Scoville. The team has over the years been able to teach hundreds of classes and work with more than 1200 students. The team agrees that it was a good time of exchanging ideas, providing encouragement, and building relationships.

In addition to education, clean water is another important goal of the Hani Coffee team. Volunteers from Texas joined with the local Hani Coffee team to go and serve the people of this area. They worked alongside families from the village, tapping a freshwater spring, and installing a water supply pipe and tanks. "We hiked up the mountain with the local farmers and tapped a freshwater spring and piped the water about 5 kilometers down to the villages," explains Scoville.

The Hani Coffee team continues to learn and grow in the adventure to bring great tasting coffee to you and also to China, while making a difference in the lives of the Hani people.

Although tea is the most common beverage enjoyed in China, middle-aged Chinese are acquiring a taste for our beloved aromatic beverage, coffee. The Hani Coffee Company, not only brings this amazing tasting coffee to Erath County, but also is establishing a name for themselves throughout the Yunnan Province, as well as cities like Beijing, Shanghai and Chengdu, where they also offer their great tasting coffee.

So next time you are in the market for a fresh bag of coffee for your morning wake-up call, consider Hani Coffee. You too can join in the journey of making a positive difference in the world and planting a seed of hope with each delicious sip you take. Hani Coffee may be purchased by visiting www.hanicoffee.com, or from our local partners, Veldhuizen Cheese in Dublin, or Wiseman House Chocolates in Hico.

"So, next time you smell the brew of our exquisite coffee filling your home, take time to stop and thank those villagers who worked hard to provide it and know that you have helped bring about the "Life Change" we desire to see happen," expresses Scoville.

Remember...It's not just java...it's a journey!

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