



My Heart sees their Hearts

Once upon, and the time is now, there lives a woman named Fanny-Min in a small village in the Hong Kong countryside. In her house lives Fair-and-Healthy. Here she is, telling her own story.

The business Fair-and Healthy (short for Fair Trade and Healthy Food) may have grown under my care but in a way you can say it planted itself. I had never done any trading in my life before and had never dreamed of it: I simply did not have the basic tools for the task. As for Fair Trade, I had never heard of it till I was invited by a friend to visit the Hong Kong Fair Trade Fair in December 2005. To be exact, it was 16th December, the last day of the Fair, and the last hours, too.

Even though I saw Fair Trade logos everywhere at the fair, they did not really say too much to me then. My attention was more drawn to the displayed products and samples at some of the leftover stands – in particular, one where I tasted crispy Banana Chips, delightful Dried Mango Slices, and aromatic Mango Puree. I was impressed by the fact that they were organic or natural products with no harmful additives, something rare in Hong Kong. Now, Stephen, my other half, loves yummy snacks and is a health-

freak. Yummy and healthy snacks would simply be irresistible! So the 'Healthy Food' foundation of our business-to-be was laid.

The Fair Trade part came later. I learned more about what lies concretely behind the Fair Trade concept on the next day when we marched from Victoria Park to Central under the BAYAN (People) banners of some of the Filipino Fair Traders, in protest against the WTO. I listened to the Fair Traders' stories of sweat and tears and blood. My heart saw their hearts. The wish to join the Fair Trade movement, in whatever way I could, was born.

I placed the first order, a mini-order, two weeks later. It was partly for self-consumption and for sharing with friends, and partly to give to a local farmer friend who has a small shop and a list of phone-order customers. I was pinning all hopes that he would take up the cause, but it turned out that he only had the time and energy to do what he had been doing. So I decided to find another way to help the

Filipino farmers and Yunnan tea planters. I started my own business.

I got back part of our Fair-and-Healthy goodies from our friend's shop, ordered a few more items, and started to promote them from our home-office. On top of my pile of other work files, I added a Fair-and-Healthy file. I worked on my meagre Excel know-how and created a system for phone/fax/email orders from relatives and friends.

It was not hard to find customers for our goodies. In fact, two days after our first shipment arrived, a friend had already come to take home 10 packets of Mango Slice, 5 packets of Banana Chips, 5 packets of Ginger Chews, and one packet of Mascobado Sugar. She enjoyed the taste so much that she wrote a long email to all of her friends, to which I answered with a poem entitled 'Eternal Dreamer'. A week later, the first e-orders came. News was spreading among friends: our goodies were yummy and our price was fair.

Nevertheless, despite our initial success, I kept hoping for some existing organisation or someone more capable to take up the promotional task in a more professional way. Our products were reaching out to a circle far too small to make the trade sustainable, yet I did not feel I was ready for a breakthrough. As time went on, however, I began to learn more about how to estimate costs, how to set realistic prices, how to order, how to ship, and so on. I was growing. And the business was growing with me. I finally made the conscious decision to continue.

Sunday, 27 August, 2006, was a big step: we started to sell our Fair-and-

Healthy goodies to the public, at Hong Kong's biggest farmers' market. In the beginning, we did not have much of an idea of what to bring, or how to display the goods, not to say how to run the whole thing. But with every market day, we became more proficient. After a month or so, we began to see returning customers. We also started to work closely with non-profit groups.

We had started off with three types of tea from China and five products from the Philippines – virgin coconut oil, Mascobado sugar, banana chips, dried mango slices, and mango puree – now we have a range of over 20 products, including banana chips in three flavours: natural, Tex-Mex (chilli), and pizza!

Stephen, my Project Manager, has skilfully converted our guest room into an air-conditioned 'warehouse' to hold our 'bulk' goodies. When my sister visited from Los Angeles in the summer, she had to sleep in our un-air-conditioned living room! Yes, the business has been taking up a lot of our time, energy, and living space, too. But I enjoy it tremendously.

I especially like dealing with our Fair Trade partners. At times, there may be frustrations of one kind or another, phone lines may not be working, emails may not be read... but no matter what, whenever I communicate with my suppliers, I always feel a sense of warmth and trust, and a sense of solidarity on the Fair Trade road. I feel as if I knew the farmers and the workers across the miles. And that is a great feeling!

Each one is unique. Our tea supplier, Danyun, is always ready even though we are only a mini-mini customer. Southern

Partners & Fair Trade has such a human touch: I feel like a member of their big family. With Panay, which normally ships in terms of tons but sends us small amounts on request, we have worked together to develop a product: Ginger Chews in dainty 80g packets. Today, Ginger Chews ranks among our star products. I have heard that these little brown packets are making their way into other overseas markets. I feel so proud of them!

I am happy to be able to bring healthy and yummy food to my customers. I find fulfilment in doing research on health issues to answer their questions. I love seeing old and new faces at the Farmers' Market, customer-friends coming by to give us feedback or to simply say 'hi'...

I hope one day 'Fair Trade' will become a term as common as 'supermarket'. I hope Fair Trade products will reach the hands of more people. I hope to do some advocacy in schools so that more people, in particular the younger generation, will learn to look at not only the price when shopping, but also at whether what they buy is healthy and fair. I hope customers can see into the hearts of people who grow their food.

HOW TO BUY FAIR-AND-HEALTHY

- Visit the FM International Resources stand at Tai Po Farmers' Market, next to Tai Wo Road Fire Station (KCR East Rail Tai Wo Station), every Sunday, except the first in each month.
- Visit the home-office, G/F, 41, Tin Liu, Ho Chung, Sai Kung, Tel 2791 9771
- Email Fanny-Min Becker at FMIR@netvigador.com for a list of goodies available.

Photo of Fanny-Min and Stephen on page 11 courtesy of Florence Tong.