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My Junior High School: A Cozy Corner in the Highlands, Vietnam

I still clearly remember the freezing morning when I entered sixth grade and walked to my junior high school for the first time. As the earliest person who came to the classroom, my footsteps echoed softly in this quiet, unfamiliar environment. Except for my anxious feelings, I could not fathom that this place would become my second home for the next three years and that I would make a lot of new friends, along with bittersweet memories of my life there.

My junior high school was far from the lively hub of Bao Loc city, nestled in a serene highland area in the south of Vietnam. The school was hidden away from the busy streets, concealed deep in a narrow alley that was lined with towering trees. It was like a secret land, a place full of peace and knowledge. Looking through the stately, weathered, gray metal gate that proudly announced the name “Phan Van Tri Junior High School,” I was saluted by three separate rectangular buildings. Each of them was carefully protected by a bright red sloping roof that added to their dignity and harmony. At a far distance, the school looked like it was wearing a wheat-yellow coat, creating a vivid contrast with the cerulean sky and the leafy green foliage. After I followed the hallway and stopped at a room labeled A3, my classroom had a bucolic beauty, the pastel blue walls provided a calming background to a dusty, black chalkboard where our dedicated teachers present valuable knowledge every single day. The air was imbued with a comforting scent of fresh wood constantly flowing from the old, handcrafted wooden desks, which always held a deep meaning to my memory of learning. The classroom was shining and breezy since there was a large window on one side of my classroom. The window was like a gorgeous living artwork from Mother Nature, full of verdure and color. I could clearly hear the crunch of leaves falling and the chorus of nightingales from the outside. Due to its simplicity, the

classroom lacked essential equipment such as air conditioning or any technological devices. However, we, the students, were never hindered by unwavering determination and striving for our dreams. Unlike the United States and other countries, my hometown's educational system is designed in a unique way where we share the same classmates in all the same subjects. In addition, each class usually consists of about forty students, and we stay in the same classroom until we go to high school. Remaining in the same class gave us the opportunity to face challenges together and understand each other more. A really special thing is that in Vietnamese, we never have a concept called "classmate" because all class members became close friends since the first time we meet. To me, those experiences are truly special; they transformed my classroom into more than just a place of learning. It became my second home!

Time has flown by rapidly; it has now been four years since I left my town. The school days that filled me with joy and sorrow are partly vanishing with time. Still, the school remains there, silent and solitary, always staying with me along the way.