Selfplace

I was born in Vietnam in a small village called Binh Gia. This was also where I was raised, developed, and learned to understand about what is life. Even though it had been five years, I still remember everything in detail of this place. It had changed a lot when I came back last year. I know these changes were for the good, but I guess it was me wanted this place stay forever the same. Just from the big street to my house in a short distant, it was so different. More houses, bigger road, new peoples, and much more, I was not expecting this to be changed like that, but I know I am also changed. As I kept walking down, I was touched by a strong fragrant of the flower from the café tree. Yes I had found it, a similar smell of spring that I had every time I walked on this road when I was little. I also found my favorite store still standing at the corner of the road. It is now much bigger, but I saw the owner still there. At the intersection, if I turn right and walk little more, there is my house, but if I keep go straight, it is the rice field.

Suddenly my heart started bouncing, then my stomach, I don’t know why, I thought I was the feeling of missing home and I am standing on it right now. The rice field, the rice field… the wind just passed by. This was all I wish that this place still hold. Then I continuous walking to my house, all of the mixed feeling was now the tear in my eyes. Standing front of the door, closed my eyes, I was picture my house in my mind for a second, then I started to walk inside. Taking each step, I observing around the house, the rusted door, the two small trees, Jesus statue, the fence… it were all the same. They looked older for sure, but I glad to see them like that, because this is my home and they are my “home”.

Sitting on the chair in the front yard, I looked over across to the left, the tamarind trees standing tall. This was where all the kids in my village gathered to play game from morning to evening when we have time. I heard that the owner wanted to cut the tree down from the year I
lived; thankfully they did not do so. I guess they also missed the kids who played under the tree, and the noise we made that keep this village always come to life. One of my friends said to me: “If someone want to take these tree down, walk over me first or I will take them down. The trees are our life, are our friend. I don’t let my friend down”. And we did do what we had said; it was the tamarind tree at the corner that had cut down. One week before the cut day, we all standing front of the owner house and tell them not to cut it down. Our parent yelled at us what in the world that we doing such though crazy thing and the tree was down no matter what. The whole week we all went to the “tree”, sat there and tell each other about how great that we had the tree. Being just little kids, we all forget and had try to find new place to play, which is the tree across to the left of my house. Under these trees, we had played with it shadow, even rain or really hot day, we try not to missed a day under these tree. We ran, we cried, we fight… it watched us all. Under the tree, we are free from our parent, from the harden world to being a child free spirit that we all have once in our life. The tree was not just a tree standing there for us to watch, not just standing suffer from the weather for us. It was much more than that. It was our memories, our childhood, our love, our own stage of develop… to the little kids and to a person who trying to find herself like me. I want to go back.

The tree was our first option for the sunny, hot day, but the rice field was our number one place for the rainy day. Many of us had worked in the rice field to help the family. Little like us usually worked at the rice field from morning to afternoon in summer, older people used to worked until the sun set around the year. Under the hot and humidity weather, I could see the sweat ran down along the dark and austere faces, but they never wailful a word while doing this. Why? I understood a part of this were because their family, a big family. If we did not have the rice field or working at the rice field, many of us were not even exist today. Some people was
joking said that our job is putting your butts to the sky, and I know there were two meaning behind this joke. “God” giving them the hard work that everyday they have to bend and carried a burden of life on their shoulder, and also how embarrassing to have your butts up while working on a lowest and a poorest job. At the same time this carry another message of being a strong and stand tall as a tree. Even “God” had give us the hard work, we did it and never give up. The butt up the sky was the way to showed the world that we did it, don’t challenge us, also you gave the job that we put our butt to your face. We took the break at the afternoon. We would gather and share lunch with each other. Then some went straight to take a nap, some will started the conversation or sing. That was our ordinary life scene. It were difficult times for us to be able to fulfill our lives, but it were also the most simple pleasure or happiness time we got, but now it was hard to get back.

The field stick with us as a means to earn a living and where the wing of childhood dreams that we had promised each other. When it rain, we will gather each other and ran to the field. We catch up fish, frog…take it home for our parents to cook and ran back to the field to play. We will hide inside the pipe bunkers and write our name on it. When the rain had stopped, we would stay there for a little bit, telling each other stories, usually the news around the village. Then telling each other dream, some want to own the rice field, some want to be a doctor, business man… but it always change every time we talk about this. By telling each other dream, we had promised silently in our heart to one another that we will become visible and noticeable person, then come back here, at this field. At that time, I think famous was the definition of become visible to other, but I guess it had changed to me and hopefully to the kids in the village that be a helpful and a good person to this world will make you visible… As the wind passed by, we all silence, I guess everyone had the same though as I did. What is front of us? What is our
future? I let the wind take me away; I let it free my spirit. I let the wind carry me away as I sitting on the chair like they always do. I glad it came to take me back to my memories and it is the answer for my question, who I am and where do I belong to.

When I was moved to America, I hope I could make this to be my second home. Still now I don’t really consider Boise is my home yet, maybe because all I have to do in here is go to school every day and work for my living. I was so busy that sometime it was hard to breathe, “that I myself am just an ordinary fish a swim in a confluence of swirling current” like Richard Ford felt in “At Home. For Now” (182). I do think that I getting to know this place more, and more that I kind of miss it every time I go somewhere else. I figured I have been here long enough that my feeling about this place had changed in time. I think Boise becoming my second home though, but I don’t really think that I am belonging to this place. I also had gone to different place like Las Vegas, Korean, and some place in my country.

I had chance to visit Las Vegas after my high school graduation. It was a great experiment. It was really crowded and full of shimmering lights in Las Vegas. I had walked by for one hour through many stores, bars… As I was walking on the street, I was attracted to the people, to the architecture of the building, to the light, and to the “game”… suddenly I felt there were a lot going on around me that gave me the headache. I felt I was smaller and aced between the crowd. I got lost and I was scared. Then I thought about my home, Boise, I never been to this before. I never got scare when I was lost in Boise, because I know this place, because my family will find me, and because I never had the feeling of being smaller in here. I think Las Vegas is great place to visit, but to stay or live. It was not in my list, or I’m not even visible in their list. So does Korean and other places, they were nice and beautiful. They were fun and a lot of experience, but I don’t really think them belonging to me either. As a tourist they were more than
perfect of a “place”, but I considered them as more in physical term of a place. I think if I stay there long enough like I did in Boise; I would fall under its spell. Why? Because right now I’m still a stranger to them.

“Am I a stranger?” I love the feeling of safety, but to these places I’m feel like a stranger to other, and I don’t like that feeling at all, and I know it was my problem. I feel safe when inside I think I know the place like it is in my hand. I feel safe when my family and friends around me in the place, and most of all, I feel safer when I found myself belong to it or it belong to me. What I wanted to is integrated with the place and the people of that place, but sometime I feel like I had try so hard that at the end I became one of “them”. I’m not myself anymore. I lost the true me, when I facing these problem, home always my safety ground. Thinking about home, I usually see myself be a youngest kid at home. Everyone at home always protected me, and supported me no matter what I did. At home I don’t need to change to be other, and I think my family don’t even wanted me to change. Looking out the window I saw the wind passed by the tree, I let it take me away my thoughts. I asked me the same question, who I am and where do I belong to?

I’ve been far from home for 5 years, and I just found out what is really home for me. Everyone has our own definition or distinguish between physical spaces from an emotional sense of place. Because I had chances to stay in several places, it helped me to understand more about the concept of home. But also from here, I understood more about myself, who am I and where do I really belong to. Like Sanders in “ Homeplace”, she wrote, “It has taken me half a lifetime of searching to realize that the likeliest path to the ultimate ground leads through my local ground” (177). It took me five year to realize it.
I realized it. I just did as I writing this reflection on these places. A “Selfplace” was what I did, I guess. It did not come easily, because I’m just an ordinary young girl who lives in a simple life that I had choose. I choose to learn from the past, live my life for today, and experience the future. Of course there will be time when I am struggle, things did not come smoothly, and not perfect as I wanted just like when I wrote this, but they were all alright at the end. I understood a part of myself now.

Today when I opened the window in my room while I was finishing this, the wind passed by, and carried me away again, but this time I had the answer to the question I had asked for a long time. I found home and found it in my true self.