

Tuoi Tre

Isabelle Müller tells the story of Vietnam through the memories of a mother.

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From journeys through the highlands to stories of Vietnamese mothers, author Isabelle Müller shares her perspective on Vietnamese culture and people through the experiences of someone living between two cultures.



Author Isabelle Müller at the exchange event - Photo: MAI NGUYET

At the talk show "Vietnam Through the Eyes of Two Cultures" on the afternoon of October 12th in Ho Chi Minh City, author Isabelle Müller recounted her journey of discovering her mother's homeland, family memories, and experiences that helped her gain a deeper understanding of Vietnam.

For her, culture is not only found in landscapes or customs but also in the daily lives of the people.

Isabelle Müller understands Vietnam through simple things.

Isabelle Müller said she particularly enjoys trips to remote areas of Vietnam, where life is still difficult but offers unique experiences:

"I'm not someone who can really enjoy life in big cities. I only feel a love for cities when I return from trips to remote areas."

Through the photographs taken during her journey, the author introduces the mountainous landscapes of Northern Vietnam, the tea hills, terraced rice fields, and the lives of ethnic minority communities. She is particularly impressed by the efforts of many generations in creating these terraced rice fields, and reminds those who enjoy Vietnamese rice to appreciate the labor behind each harvest season.



Isabelle Müller shares stories about Vietnam through her experiences living between two cultures - Photo: Wiki

Besides nature, everyday details such as the early morning pho vendors' calls, chickens running around the houses, or meals prepared in local families also left a lasting impression on her.

"I often realize that Vietnamese people are truly content with what they have. This is a quality we have lost," Isabelle Müller said when comparing her experience in Vietnam with life in the West.

A Vietnamese mother and the motivation to pursue education

Behind her journey of discovery in Vietnam is the story of her mother, the inspiration for many of Isabelle Müller's works such as *Loan - From the Life of a Phoenix*, and *Daughter of a Phoenix - Hope is My Path*.

At the exchange, she recounted that her mother used to work on tea plantations when she was young to earn a living. Due to poverty and limited educational opportunities for women at the time, her mother was unable to attend school and had to teach herself to read and write.

Her mother's story became the motivation for Isabelle Müller to pursue educational activities. She shared: "That's why I really want to dedicate my efforts and passion to education. Because if everyone receives a full education, they will better understand the richness and diversity



Isabelle Müller's works are connected to the life story of her Vietnamese mother and her journey to find her roots - Photo: Ho Chi Minh City General Publishing House

The journey of writing about her mother's life spanned many years. Isabelle Müller said she had heard her mother's stories since she was 6 years old, but when she tried to write at 16, she realized she didn't have enough experience to convey the story. Later, she continued to search for materials, returned to the places where her mother had lived, and met with relatives she had lost contact with.

In 2018, she met an elderly woman who had lived in the same village as her mother. The woman still remembered Isabelle Müller's maternal grandfather, a hunter who used to share his hunted birds with the villagers.

The encounter moved the author as she realized that the stories her mother told were still preserved by those of her generation. Isabelle Müller believes that both Vietnamese and European families want to provide a better future for their children. However, differences in traditions and living conditions make access to education in rural Vietnam difficult. She believes these differences reflect cultural differences, while also praising the creativity and adaptability of the Vietnamese people.

Book and Cultural Experience Program

The Ho Chi Minh City General Publishing House and Hotel Grand Saigon (Saigontourist Group) have jointly launched the program "A Glimpse of Vietnam at a 5-star historic hotel," with three main activities aimed at connecting books with cultural experiences, helping tourists learn about the history, culture, and people of Vietnam:

- Launching a postcard set inspired by the history of Hotel Grand Saigon on Dong Khoi Street.
- Developing a Ho Chi Minh Cultural Space, displaying books and related materials.
- Organize regular quarterly reading culture activities, including workshops, talk shows, and interactions with authors and speakers on the history, culture, tourism, and cuisine of Southern Vietnam and Ho Chi Minh City.



The exhibition space displaying books and documents about President Ho Chi Minh contributes to bringing reading culture closer to tourists - Photo: M.N.



The Ho Chi Minh Cultural Space digital platform contributes to expanding access to cultural and historical documents for the public - Photo: M.N.