

A Short Tobacco Day

Sergio Sanchez
FLOC Associate Member
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It was a cold morning
Still dark,
Before the sun came out
And the sounds were silent

I was dressed
Old shoes
Work pants
A long sleeve shirt
And a hat
With my head inside it

It was me, my mom, my dad, my cousin, and other people
Families and friends
All together
We made a group
From about five to ten

They were humble, angry, needful, hopeful,
Committed, accustomed, smart, serious, drowsy,
Ready, hungry,
Young and old

We all got on the van
Piled up sometimes
We all got on the van to go
We arrived at the field with rows to be suckered
That meant we had to clean the plants
Of shoots between the leaves and stems

I was dry
But as soon as I stepped into the course
It was time to get wet
The first hand I placed on a plant
Sent drops of ice cold water piercing
Through the garments I was wearing
To my skin
I hated that first splash of water
I still shiver to this day about it
From inside
From somewhere deep within

I couldn't say anything about this yet
It was still too early to admit
Besides
Everyone else felt the same

You could feel the presence of people's muscles and emotions getting tense
When they placed their first hands on a plant

I heard it
And I knew
So I kept it to myself and proceeded
To run my fingers through the glue
I mean the leaves and stems that left
The worst of any sticky residue

I was never the size of a plant in height
And the leaves constantly touched my face
As I reached high into the plant
The smell of pesticide tobacco smothered me
In place
The smell was like celery sticks and car emissions
Being blown straight into your face
Only your whole body absorbs
Like it's mouth to mouth resuscitation

Pesticides
Directly to your pores
If you wiped your lips with your tongue unknowingly
You most certainly got a taste

And as the day went on
When the sun reached its peak
Fresh air was gone
All there was
Was more tobacco, stronger pesticide, and worse heat

Sweat was why everyone was now soaked
To get through with my course quick
Was the only thing I hoped

It was like running inside a giant pipe of propane gas
Not trying to breathe in the fumes
Holding a lighter in hands that would light
If I stopped not being through

The pressure was on me to finish
Me and the whole crew
At this point
At the end of every course
I could feel my organs rejecting the abuse

Some coughed
Some vomited
Others pounded on their heart
And closed their eyes
When it skipped several beats
Or totally stopped working for a few
Others felt their head throbbing
From their body temperature raised like a fever

This is why I never smoked
Or understood why people smoke as a leisure

When time came to leave the fields
Everyone was somber
There weren't any smiles or any horseplay
Even from the younger
No one said a word
After all
We know
Tomorrow's day would be longer