



DROP OF INSPIRATION EP54: SEED TO SEAL: HAPPY PILI TREE FARM

[Intro music plays]

Deidrene Joyce: Welcome to Drop of Inspiration. I'm your host, Deidrene Joyce.

[Music continues]

[00:00:07]

In April of this year, I got an email from Young Living asking me to come work for them. I didn't know much about the company or essential oils, so I did some research and the more I learned, the more exciting the opportunity seemed. Still, I come from a smaller town. The community is pretty tight knit out there and moving a few hundred miles away for the job made me pretty nervous. But, right before my first day at work, I got to chatting with this woman at the bank. I told her how I was nervous about my new job, my new city, and these new challenges, and she actually pulled out a bottle of Stress Away for me to try. When I told her my new job was at Young Living, we both had a good laugh. It was exactly the confidence boost I needed, because just three days later, I would be sent on my first assignment halfway around the world to the Philippines.

[Music fades out]

[00:01:03]

[Crowd of people talking fades in, airport alert noise]

Just landed at the, uh, Ninoy Aquino International Airport here in Manilla. [Sighs.] It's super hot, it's really crowded, um. I'm supposed to be looking for my driver ... [fades out]

[00:01:25]

The Philippines is a place of extremes. It's extremely beautiful, extremely hot, and extremely full of life. The country is made up of over 7,000 islands, 100 million people that speak over 100 languages, and over 52,000 plant and animal species, 20,000 of which are found nowhere else in the world. It's located in the Ring of Fire, where a continuous series of oceanic trenches, volcanic belts, and plate movements are



responsible for 75% of the world's volcanoes and 90% of its earthquakes. In the Philippines alone, there are 23 active volcanoes, with the most recent eruption occurring in January of this year. Volcanoes create this mineral-rich soil that allows plants to thrive. However, plants also have to be pretty tough out here: in addition to the volcanoes and earthquakes, there are typhoons, heavy humidity, a long tumultuous rainy season, [Soft music fades in] and year-round heat. It takes a certain level of deep-rooted resilience to survive in the Philippines.

[00:02:30]

The Philippines has experienced political and economic conflicts over the last several decades. These conflicts have threatened natural resources and the people that depend on them. By 2011, the country only had 7 percent of its original forest habitat remaining. There are 97 species of plants that are endangered in the Philippines, and there are many other species that are listed as "vulnerable," meaning that without reforestation efforts, those species will become endangered. One of these species is the Pili Tree.

[Music ends]
[00:03:05]

The pili tree, or *Canarium luzonicum*, is local to the Bicol region of the Philippines. The tree grows year-round. Its leaves are small and a rich green color, and it grows small fruits that transition from green to a deep purple as they ripen. It grows wild in the Philippines: in the mountains, alongside roads, and in people's backyards.

[00:03:29]

The pili tree is pretty incredible because every part of it can be used for something. Most people in the Philippines know the tree for its nuts, called pili nuts. They're shaped like almonds and are way tasty. People roast them and eat them, and sometimes put them in pastries or desserts. My favorite way to eat them is honey roasted.

[00:03:50]

The most precious product of the pili tree, however, is actually found inside the trunk. The tree produces a resin to protect itself from infestation and infection. To locals, this resin has been used as a fire starter, and sometimes, a bug repellent. Around the world, however, the resin is distilled into a fine oil called elemi which is used in high-end cosmetics and perfumes.



[00:04:15]

As people have discovered the amazing properties of elemi oil, the popularity of the pili tree has grown exponentially. But locals haven't always benefited from this amazing resource. Farmers in Bicol generally lack the education, infrastructure, and facilities to profit from the treasure trove that literally grows in the backyard. The trees were being cut down and harvested at an alarming rate to keep up with the demand of foreign markets. What's more, foreign buyers were paying so little for the elemi resin that many local farmers weren't able to sustain their livelihoods.

[00:04:52]

Cosmetics and perfumes containing elemi sell for an average \$50 for a 3 oz bottle, while farmers were making less than 50 cents for a full pound of elemi. This a problem because Bicol is already one of the poorest regions in the country, and the local economy relies heavily on agriculture.

[00:05:08]

Another problem is that many farmers chopped down pili trees and harvested the resin without replanting. This not only contributed to deforestation, it also cut profits and quality. In actuality, the older a pili tree gets, the more abundant and high-quality the resin and pili nuts become.

[00:05:28]

The pendulum was swinging toward endangerment for the pili tree, and it desperately needed someone to give it a push in the other direction.

[00:05:36]

Rosalina Tan: [From pre-recorded interview] Hi. Hello. I am Rosalina Tan, from Philippines! From the beautiful islands of Philippines. Um ...

[00:05:46]

Deidrene Joyce: Rosalina is in her 70s, just about five feet tall and is always on the move. She's been a lifelong advocate for the environment and organic farming. Rosalina cares about the environment because she cares about the people who live in it.



[00:06:00]

Rosalina Tan: You know, I like to help those farmers who are helping themselves. I want to teach them: you know, this is how you have to take care of your environment because your environment will also take care of you, uh. It will give you dignity also. I also want the farmers to have dignity. The owner... the, the, the field... the pride that they are doing, doing something good also. That they are contributing to the environment conservation and that will make them feel, uh, more dignified.

[00:06:33]

Deidrene Joyce: Beginning in the 1990s, Rosalina recognized that harmful agricultural practices were affecting the quality of life amongst locals. Pesticides were unregulated and overused, and there was little attention surrounding sustainability. Many common farming practices tended to be wasteful and polluted the environment, causing a lot of vulnerability in native species.

[00:06:57]

So, Rosalina began researching organic farming practices and started talking to anybody who would listen to her ideas: university professors, government officials, family, friends, neighbors, and even strangers.

[00:07:11]

Rosalina Tan: [Insects chirping and forest sounds] You know, especially if you plant, you see how the plant grows, it makes you so happy! Then you share it. Oh, it makes you so happy. So I have to talk to people, and actually, [Motorcycle passes] I become very, uh, noisy about this. I keep talking about this. And some people tell me, you better keep your mouth shut! Or you'll be found in the kangkungan, kangkungan is the, in the field, uh. You'll get lost in the field.

[00:07:38]

Deidrene Joyce: She helped pass agricultural legislation with a group of likeminded people and hasn't stopped fighting to make sure farmers get a fair chance.

[00:07:46]



Rosalina Tan: Knowing something and not doing anything about it, I, I'm not that kind of person. I have to really steel up something.

[00:07:57]

Deidrene Joyce: When she discovered elemi, she became excited about its resilience and its many uses; she started buying barrels of the oil at higher prices so that local farmers producing it would receive a fair wage. In these first few years, she had more oil than she knew what to do with. Here is Rosalina talking about collecting elemi, and how it took a lot of hard work to convince people of its worth—people including her own daughter!

[00:08:20]

Rosalina Tan: What I did is I keep buying from the farmers, the oil, because I don't want them to stop producing the oil, because I don't want them to pollute, pollute the, the creek with all this waste they do not make it something useful. So, I keep buying even though I do not have any product. So, at one time my daughter saw my, their warehouse is full already. I'm using up their space. She was, was a little angry with me, "Mommy, what are you doing with all this pili! You don't know what to do with it and you're eating up my space for other products!" I said, "No, I'm doing a lot of research, you see? I have many friends who love my product.

[00:09:00]

I think the only thing that go her interested is, one time, there are two ladies—elegant, elite—and they came to the office. And they were so happy they found me because my products, I do not sell it in the market. I just sell them to friends, to the Rotary, to skip away, or sometimes I give it away. So, I think they received it as a give away from some friends, but they tried to look for it in the market, they couldn't find. So maybe they asked around and when they finally found me they are so happy! When they were in the office buying a lot, my daughter came, "So, who are these ladies? Who are these ladies?" [Poignant music fades in] "So, you see, you didn't believe me but other people believe in me you see. They are buying a lot. So my daughter finally took notice of the product."

[00:09:51]

Deidrene Joyce: Rosalina had big dreams for pili and was eager to show the world the versatility of this Filipino product. At this point, it was mainly a one woman show:



she would go to international health, beauty, and agricultural conferences hoping that her

story would fall on the right ears. Before long, Rosalina found herself surrounded by a small circle of people who were excited by her vision for organic farming and sustainability in the Philippines. Some of these people would become the team of passionate and knowledgeable farmers that would help her establish Happy Pili Tree Farm: a farm that would produce high quality elemi resin and provide good paying jobs for the community. A key player on Rosalina's team from the very beginning was Yana.

[Music fades out]
[00:10:35]

Yana: [From pre-recorded interview] Yeah, I grew up, um, with a pili tree in the backyard. I grew up eating pili nuts, I grew up eating pili pods, uh, I grew up knowing this resin, because we use it as a fuel, starting, you know, when we cook, though I never knew we could derive oil from it. So it's very exciting for me. So, when I learn about the product, I was really, really excited about it.

[00:10:58]

Deidrene Joyce: Yana is a proud Bicolana. Her family is in Bicol, her community is in Bicol, and after speaking with her for just a few minutes, I could tell her heart is in Bicol, too.

[00:11:09]

Before meeting Rosalina, Yana's story was very typical of Filipino workers of her generation: facing economic hardship, she was forced to leave her family and home to seek job opportunities in more urban parts of the country. Many Filipinos in her situation end up having to leave the country for work. In 2013, approximately 10.2 million people of Filipino descent lived or worked abroad, making Filipinos one of the largest diaspora populations in the world. This is incredibly hard for many Filipinos, as the culture is very tight-knit and family-oriented.

[00:11:47]

So, the problem you have is that people are being separated from their families for months to even years at a time, and jobs and revenue are lost in those specific towns as people move on to other places. It can make you feel homesick, and even stuck; it's hard to miss the ones you love. Yana is fortunate enough to be among the number of



folks who didn't have to leave the country. She did, however, have to leave Bicol for Manila. Flights to Manila are expensive, so Yana had to ride the bus for 10 hours one

way—that's 20 hours total—just to visit her father and family maybe every three or four months. Here's Yana with what life was like before she found work with Happy Pili.

[00:12:28]

Yana: Normally, before, when I was still in Manila, the capital of the Philippines, it'd take me, say three months before I am able to see him. So that's quite long, he's already 62 years old. My mother passed away three years ago, so it's best for us all to be able to see him most, um, more often.

[00:12:51]

Deidrene Joyce: When Rosalina met Yana and learned about her work ethic, her passion for her community, and her participation in environmental advocacy groups, she made Yana the General Manager of the Farm. Yana is a total powerhouse. She's young, but don't let that fool you-- if you need something done, Yana is the person to ask. She's really good at her job, and now, she gets to see her family more often; her visits have gone from every few months to every other weekend.

[00:13:18]

Yana: It's a turn for me, um. I'm able to provide better for my kids. Now, this is some good news for, for my family as well as for my friends, 'cause I'm actually able to uh, purchase, not exactly, I'm starting to pay for, for my new house. The place, I can take you there, it's just probably three minutes away from here? I've been telling my friends, like for 10 years I've been working in Manila and I was not able to get myself and my kids our own house. And when I transferred, and I took this job and there! I'm actually pay for my own house, I've been renting for, for more than a decade. Right now, I'm investing. I'm able to pay for my own house. And my father is very happy about it.

[00:13:56]

Deidrene Joyce: Another addition to Rosalina's team was Jaymar. Jaymar is a super stylish guy: he's always wearing these fresh baseball caps, and he's always singing or humming. He's the head farmer at Happy Pili Tree Farm. Like Yana, Jaymar grew up in the Bicol region. He loved the forests, fields, and farms so much that he attended and



graduated from an agricultural college to bring modern farming practices back to his home.

[00:14:23]

One of those practices was the proper technique to tap pili trees for resin without harming the tree.

[00:14:30]

Jaymar: [Recording done on Happy Pili Tree Farm, sounds of rustling grass and tree leaves] The important thing that you can tap the tree, the materials. Measuring tape [Sound of showing the measuring tape], mallet [Sound of showing the mallet], and the knife [Sound of showing the knife]. Measure from the ground, we measure 60, 60 centimeters [Sound of extending the measuring tape, pushing aside leaves], here, and we cut 15 centimeters [Sound of extending the measuring tape], horizontal. Here. So. First one, we can cut—using mallet. [Repetitive thuds from tapping the tree, pause, more tapping]

[00:15:11]

Deidrene Joyce: Jaymar's knowledge and skill in indigenous farming practices are so impressive that Happy Pili Tree Farm has him sharing this knowledge with other local harvesters. This ensures that pili trees aren't harmed and that local farmers benefit economically from this environmental expertise.

[00:15:29]

Rosalina continued to bolster her operation with other talented and committed people. She believed they were growing and harvesting the best elemi resin in the world. However, [Music fades in] most buyers of elemi were still purchasing at the cheapest possible prices. For Happy Pili Tree Farm to succeed, they needed buyers that believed in quality and sustainability the same way they did.

[00:15:51]

Around the same time that Happy Pili Tree Farm was established, Young Living's Seed to Seal standards were making waves in the world of essential oils. Seeing themselves as standard bearers committed to the values of traceability, sustainability and quality, Young Living was looking to partner with farms as dedicated to these principles as



they were. It wasn't long before Young Living was introduced to Happy Pili Tree Farm.

[Music tempo picks up]

[00:16:16]

They were a match made in heaven. Rosalina and Happy Pili had a buyer, a big buyer, that shared their same standards. Young Living also brought their decades of research and expertise and worked with Happy Pili to continue to innovate and improve their operation.

[00:16:33]

Now the farm was really producing the best, most sustainable elemi in the world.

[Music fades out]

[00:16:40]

Yana: [Branches and leaves rustling and being pushed aside, birds and insects chirping] K, so the thing about Pili, so, um, this is a wilding. So what they do, so the fruits fall off and then it grows out so. All the seeds of this, um, it cracks here. [Man talks in the background in Tagalog] So for all the pili nuts it only cracks in here, in this part. K, so probably this area is soft, so that it can go out and then germinate. K? And then it grows out, so those are the nuts, and then you can eat it, you can try later. I found another one there.

Deidrene Joyce: Yeah, almost like almonds?

Yana: Like almonds, yeah. And taste like almonds. Maybe sweet, there's a sweet taste to it. [Walks through the brush] Um.

[00:17:17]

Whenever you plant a tree, you determine your mother tree. So, you choose which ones give the best fruits, the biggest, the best fruits, and then that's gonna be your mother tree. So, all the wildlings, or the seedlings from that you gather, and then that's what you, you plant. Cause there are other pilis which do not grow fruits, others which just have resin but no fruits—

Deidrene Joyce: So you just pick the best one?



Yana: The best one and that's going to be your mother tree.

[00:17:41]

Deidrene Joyce: Only seedlings from the best trees-- the ones that produce the best resin-- are chosen to be propagated. These trees are meticulously tracked through geotagging. Geotagging is the process of using satellite technology and geographic markers to record information from individual pili trees. Jaymar and his team not only geotag the plants at Happy Pili Tree Farm, but they go out in the forests of Bicol and geotag all the pili trees they can find as part of a massive reforestation effort. They keep track of how old the trees are, how often they're tapped, if there is any disease or infestation that needs to be treated, and any other data that they can record to ensure that this vulnerable tree can once again thrive in its native habitat. This process also provides data on when the best time is to tap for resin.

[Thudding sound of tapping a pili tree]

[00:18:28]

The resin collected from these tappings is then distilled and produces the high-quality elemi unique to the farm.

[Tapping, readjusting and brushing leaves aside, then tapping fades out]

[00:18:36]

They still had one major problem though. There wasn't a large-scale distillery accessible in the Philippines. This meant that they had to ship all of the resin overseas to have it distilled. It was a huge cost that took money out of the community and made it more difficult to ensure quality.

[00:18:58]

Recognizing that meeting their high standards could cost more than some farms could afford, Young Living recently developed a grant program that would provide money to farms to update facilities and practices. Happy Pili Tree Farm was a perfect candidate, and now, because of a grant from Young Living, they have their own state of the art distillery—the only one of its kind in the Philippines.

[00:19:21]

Yana: We saw the machine, we were all in awe. First time that we've seen something like this, and we are very sure that we would be able to [Rustling plastic] extract a



bigger volume compared to what we have been. Of course, um, thing is, um, it will cost us less. It's very costly to just be, um, sending over the resin to abroad and then have it tested over there and have it distilled over there, and then when it comes back to the Philippines, not only that it cost us so much to send it over, but for testing and

distillation, it's gonna be very pricey. So that's not a good option for us. So, we thought, why not purchase the distillation machine, get the people trained, and then do the distillation here?

[00:20:05]

Deidrene Joyce: Here's Jaymar and Yana walking me through the distillation process.

[00:20:09]

Yana: [Recorded in the distillation facility at Happy Pili Tree Farm, birds chirping and calling in the background] Now, um, we're going to be turning this thing on, press, alright, and that will be the time that the mixer inside our distillation vessel starts working. Alright, so it's heating, it's mixing, doing its thing down there.

[00:20:21]

Jaymar: Do we, up in the ... the ...

Yana: The condenser.

Jaymar: Down to the ...

Yana: Down to the separator glass, yeah.

Jaymar: The separator.

[Recording cuts forward to another part of the interview]

[00:20:30]

Yana: We took, we take out the oil from the machine using this 2000 ml, um, beaker and then we pour the oil right over these, um, this, um, stainless steel bucket. Then after that we have to leave it overnight, [Sound of touching the metal bucket] just to ... there are instances when there is, um, water mixed on occasion. Just leave it overnight, definitely the water is going to settle down there. And then, after that, the next day what we do is we take out, we could use a beaker, or that we just simply pour um, the contents from here, from the beaker, and then use the funnel, [Metal tapping



on metal as Yana adjusts the funnel there. Alright, just pour it right there. [Sound of pouring oil] So, what it's gonna do, is that it's gonna separate the oil from the water. K? So the oil's gonna stay up, and then later on, you'll see that, uh, the water's gonna stay. See there? OK, and then just leave it tight there. Then we'll take out the water.

After that, one we have the pure oil, we have to put it inside the, uh, this bottle, this, the barrel, and that will be the time that we take out some samples as well to be sent overseas for testing, and then when it pass, that's gonna be the time we ship, uh, the finished product.

[00:21:47]

Deidrene Joyce: As the pili thrives, so do the people. It's symbiosis: as people find new ways to take care of the environment, the environment takes care of the people by providing them with a plethora of resources, including elemi.

[00:22:02]

Rosalina Tan: Of course, in the Bible it say, I give you nuts for your food and the oil for your healing. So this is my vocation, I will not look for other thing, I will just look for the pili. This is my calling, you know? Now, at present, in Bicol region, we call it "the tree of hope" because Bicol region, uh uh, Bicol region is actually very poor. Because always, always battered by the typhoon. It's always, there's always typhoon so. But the people here are also very resilient; even after typhoon, OK. Start all over again. It's like a cycle. But now, we can see already, we see the opportunity is there, when you know how to take care of the trees, and the nature, take care of each other—then everything will be alright.

[00:22:51]

Deidrene Joyce: Here's a lesson I learned when I was with Rosalina and Yana: you will always leave a Filipino home with a full stomach and a full heart. In the Philippines, despite extreme gaps between wealthy and poor, everyone gets a seat at the table. People like Rosalina are actively trying to implement that concept into everything they do. For them, being a good neighbor is a lifestyle.

[00:23:14]

Yana: It's just, it's just in us. Or, that is how we have been raised. We have been taught by our parents, our grandparents, that we have to look out for each other. That's very common to us.



[00:23:24]

Rosalina Tan: It's a passion, and uh, I think that's what makes me going. You know, you have a mission and a passion. At 70, most of my, my senior companion, they are

just playing mahjong, going to movies, eating, eating. But I said, no, no, no, that's not my life.

[00:23:42]

Yana: Yes, some of the Philippines, like most of the Philippines, are not really well off, [Poignant music fades in] but you see the love, you see the caring, and these people are very, they lead a very simple life, but you know that as simple as it may seem, they are actually happy. And I think that's what's important. It's not the amount of money, it's not how much you've gained, um, thought the years of working. But it's the happiness, the simplicity of life. If you be going to sleep well, because you know that even if your life is simple, you're able to help out your, your fellow man, you're able to help out your relatives, I think that's just, that's important. It's the love, it's the caring.

[00:24:21]

Deidrene Joyce: The connection.

Yana: The connection, yeah. That's it.

[00:24:25]

Deidrene Joyce: In June of this year Young Living made it official.

[00:24:37]

Matthew French: [Recorded at the Young Living International Convention held in Utah, echoing in a large convention center over microphone] The practices of the Happy Pili Tree Farm align with our Seed to Seal standards and commitments. Their mission to place people at the center of their process is a value that we deeply admire and are pleased to share with all of you.

[00:24:49]

Lauren Walker: [Continued from Matthew French] Young Living is proud to be a part of this amazing project. We have eight corporate farms that Young Living owns, and eight partner farms. And we're about to add one to our family. So we are happy to



announce the Happy Pili Tree as the ninth and newest Young Living Partner Farm!
[Crowd cheers and applauds]

[00:25:12]

Deidrene Joyce: The audience at convention loved the story of Happy Pili Tree Farm and Rosalina, Yana, and Jaymar. [Applause and cheering fade] It was an exciting day for everyone.

[00:25:23]

Watching this story unfold was special to me because my own family is from the Philippines. Even though I grew up in the United States, my parents made sure that those Filipino roots were planted deep. Seeing how my fellow Filipinos are taking care of the environment based on cultural beliefs that we share made me feel like I could be a part of something bigger, and that making the world better can happen one small step at a time.

[00:25:50]

I got to visit my aunties, uncles and cousins while I was in the Philippines-- a lot of these relatives I haven't seen in almost 19 years. My favorite part was spending time with my kid cousins: these super sweet, [Sounds of children playing] super funny grade school age kids named Uwi, Johan, and Bono. They were on summer break and they treated the whole world like it was their own personal playground: [Sounds of evening crickets and a creek] they climbed trees to get mangoes, and we splashed in rivers and natural pools. We took these long walks when it cooled down in the evening and ate halo-halo while they teased me about how bad my Tagalog was. It was pretty magical to see this part of the world through the eyes of a five-year-old for a few days. [Deidrene Joyce and the kids singing together in Tagalog, then Deidrene Joyce laughing]

[00:26:32]

I was amazed to see that so much of my family's history has been physically preserved. Life in the Philippines is pretty different than what I'm used to in the United States, but there are some things that are the same. Our neighborhoods are growing to reach all parts of the globe: people are traveling further from home than ever before, and we're interacting with more people than we could ever imagine. Taking care of your neighbors and neighborhood is something that I have been grateful to experience in



all sorts of places: from rural Oregon, to urban Los Angeles, to these small towns in the Philippines.

[Music fades in]

[00:27:18]

When I was with my cousins, I had this big smile on my face the whole time knowing that there are people like Rosalina, Yana, and Jaymar who are not only taking steps to make things better for their community now, but they're also planting seeds to ensure that future Uwis and Johans and Bonos can keep climbing trees and wading in rivers and making the world their playground for generations to come.

[00:27:43]

Partnerships like the one between Young Living and Happy Pili Tree Farm are making this world better, a little bit at a time.

[00:27:51]

So, thanks to the people at Happy Pili Tree Farm for helping me get in touch with my roots and showing me what the future of farming in the Philippines can look like. Thanks to Young Living for letting me go on the trip of a lifetime and letting me collect these behind-the-scenes stories that showed Seed-to-Seal in action. Thanks to my aunties, Tita Let and Tita Marife for being my guides during my long overdue family reunion. And of course, thank you to everyone listening for being a good neighbor and giving these stories a home. Until next time, I'm your host, Deidrene Joyce.

[Music plays for several measures, then fades out slowly]

[00:29:14]