



Excerpt from *“Mimi the Sheep Goes to D.C.”*

Heidi and I arrived at the school and were greeted with hugs and smiles from Laura and her staff, all wearing bright orange T-shirts with the motto “Work Hard. Be Nice.” We entered the yard surrounded by walls painted with beautiful rainbows and murals.

“The play space must be enclosed to protect the children from the violence and turmoil that rages outside these walls,” Laura explained. “It’s nothing like where we grew up, Melinda.”

We all worked together to arrange the pumpkins and bring in the animals before eighty-five smiling, excited children bounded through the doors, many with their plush cheeks painted with bright rainbows. The children didn’t know what to think about Mimi at first; many had never seen a live animal of any sort. Some kids were curious about her, some were a little too eager to love her, and some were scared to death of her. Heidi would take the children’s hands and help them feel Mimi’s shiny, crimped white locks. One shy wisp of a boy whispered, “Awww, Mimi, you are soooo soft like a pillow,” as he laid his head across the fleece covering her wide back.

After the initial excitement had worn off, we sat the children down in a circle and read them some books and talked with them about where agricultural products originate. “Children, do you know where your food comes from?” I gazed across the sea of children, and hands sprung up into the air.

I called on a girl in the front row with a head full of braids, each with a brightly colored bead. She shouted, “The grocery store!”

“How many of you think she’s right?” Nearly every hand reached toward the sky. Heidi and I looked at each other with equally big eyes.

“Miss Heidi is going to hold up the picture of an animal, and you all try to help us figure out what comes from the animal,” I said as Heidi flipped through one of our books to find a picture of a cow.

“This cow gives us milk and meat. And Mimi here, what does she give us?” I reached down to part Mimi’s locks, hoping to give the kids a hint. Heidi encouraged a child from the front row to touch a ball of yarn. “Sheep give us wool to make clothes, and meat too. And what about these crazy goats? What do they give us besides a hard time?” Heidi gently tapped one of the goats on the nose when she noticed it munching on the shoestring of a little girl in the front row.

After a few seconds of silence, Heidi piped up and said, “Goats are actually the best! They give us milk and meat, and some goats give us fiber to make clothing, like mohair and cashmere.”

Heidi and I could see we had gotten the little wheels in their minds turning. Everyone, kids and teachers alike, was amazed to learn that only 1 percent of our population is directly involved in animal agriculture and 1 percent raises crops. Literally 2 percent of the population produces the food, while 100 percent of the population eats it.

All too quickly, our time with the kids was over. They kissed Mimi and the silly goats goodbye, gave us hugs, and marched out clutching their little orange pumpkins. We loaded up the livestock and said our good-byes, praying the truck would start just one more time.”



- Melinda McCall, *Driving Home Naked:
And Other Misadventures of a Country Veterinarian*