



Kangaroo Valley – Remexio Partnership

Back from East Timor

By Chris Nobel

Having recently returned from East Timor from a 2 week reconnaissance I find myself experiencing a gamut of thoughts and emotions. Many Australians know, at least to some degree, about the atrocities inflicted on the East Timorese over the past 25 years and Australia's complicity in that horror is now becoming more public. So it was largely as a result of deep shame that I have felt compelled to do something. But what? How can anyone help East Timor?

It transpired that Paul Turnock helped answer that question for me. Last year he witnessed the distress his wife suffered at the coverage of the post ballot rampages in East Timor and suggested that perhaps Kangaroo Valley Village could link up with an East Timor village to form a partnership. His wife Libby, active member of Amnesty for the past 10 years, set about gathering contacts and advice.

The advice given by those closest to the situation on the ground was "If you want to help the people of E. Timor, you must come over and see it for yourself".

Suddenly here was an idea that if implemented could turn an emotional state of shame and grief to one of hope and even joy.

So in May of this year, Libby and Maureen Magee, left the Valley for E. Timor and forged links with a subdistrict known as Remexio (pronounced Rem-i-shoo). Soon after Peter Stanton and his daughter Bella also flew to Timor this time to investigate the possible installation of a hydro electric power supply. Libby, Paul and I arrived in Dili in August. Celebrations of the anniversary of the vote for independence were occurring, the first congress was being held and the candle-lit streets were commemorating the deaths of their loved ones.

We were keen to establish contact with the people of Remexio and drove the 25 kilometres on the day of our arrival.

To build a partnership with the Village of Remexio, we need to build communication and trust and to do that the people must meet us and get to know us. With this in mind, I asked if I might spend a couple of nights in the Village. With my mosquito net and coils at hand, I stayed at the Chief's house with his delightful family. I was treated as an honoured guest. The experience of being surrounded by the children as they looked through my photo album and took my hand as we walked in the village will stay with me forever. The idea of the partnership offers individuals an opportunity to act freely without the constraints of Committee meetings and rules and to encourage people to find their own particular way to give. There are however suggestions that our small group would offer to members of the K.V community. In some ways our philosophy is best encapsulated in this statement by Lao Tse BC

*Go to the people
Live with them
Learn from them
Begin with what they know
Build on what they have
Be committed
But of the true leader
When the work is done
The task is accomplished
People will say
"we did it ourselves"*



The idea of "throwing money" at these people is not a long-term solution and although money is needed, it is essential that it be spent wisely. UNTAET, World Vision, and many NGO's (non Govt. organisations) will attend to major reconstruction of schools, health services etc. but a scheme of our size has the opportunity to achieve personal assistance that a bureaucracy could never do.

For example, Terry Hennessy, a maker of fine musical instruments heard that the E. Timorese love all stringed instruments

and are musical. He made a simple dulcimer and I took it to Remexio. The young people were playing recognisable tunes on it within minutes.

We intend to sponsor two young people to come to the Valley next year to learn how to make them, returning to their village with the ability to supply them to their schools. This method fits in well with Lao Tse's wise words.

We also took over with us some books in Tetun, The East Timor language which were enthusiastically received.

Members of the K.V community have donated a 4 wheel Landcruiser, trailer, tools, including a milling chain-saw and many other items. As we build on the relationship more specific items will become known to us and we will ask for support. Building a workshop would be an excellent step towards allowing the villagers to help themselves provided it be done with their guidance and expertise.

With all this is the sense of hope - of building on that which has been destroyed. The people of East Timor have proven to the world that it is not material wealth that is important - it is the honouring of the human spirit.

The Indonesian Govt and its military have done the opposite. They have violated the human spirit and need to be brought to account.

I draw the following analogy. Some years ago a young developmentally delayed woman in a group home in which I worked was the victim of sexual abuse at the hands of her stepfather. I had my suspicions for a long time but no evidence, police were called in and at last, steps were taken to protect this vulnerable young woman. When I spoke to a friend about this - a psychologist, counsellor, healer, I told her that I didn't want to hate this man - what could I do? Her answer was this "The man has most likely

been abused himself and therefore he doesn't have the normal boundaries. He needs to be shown, and made to respect, the boundaries". Indonesia is an abuser. As a country it too has been abused (at the hands of both the Dutch colonisers and the Japanese). The international community must demonstrate where both physical and moral boundaries end. We must be united in our determination to ensure this.

As members of a small community we can help these people in a personal way. We

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Australia to do the same.

Visit our Web site at:

www.shoal.net.au/~easttimor

and please feel free to contact the following people for further information.

Paul and Libby Turnock

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Peter Stanton

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Donations may be sent to

KV - ET Assistance Fund,

Commonwealth Bank, Nowra,

Account number: 10308695

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are gradually building up contacts and will be able to assist those people from the Valley who wish to travel to Remexio by arranging accommodation, transport and advice. We have names and addresses to which such items as clothes, soccer boots, balls can be sent.

Above all else, is the hope that our effort as a community in working together will trigger other communities throughout

Community Update on East Timor

Come and hear the latest news on our partnership with Remexio, and how you can be part of it.

Kangaroo Valley Hall
Friday 8th December.
8.00 pm