



## Timor Leste Newsletter May 2022



After two long years of covid lockdowns and closed international borders I am beginning to plan my return trip to Oecusse. I am excited but uncertain and a little intimidated at the thought of going back. Having spent so long away it is easy to remember the tough times – the derelict house, the dirt, the mosquitoes, ants, mice, scorpions and spiders which live with me, the heat, lack of clean water, bad roads, unreliable vehicle, poor communications, the noise ... and then I remember the wonderful, smiling people, the joy of giving, the friendships, the cries of Mrs Judy, Mrs Judy which I know I will hear, the excitement of the Games and so on. OK maybe one more time!!!



My first trip into Oecusse, in 2001, was via UN Helicopter. Since then I have gone in via Hercules, barge, ferry, car and most recently via the RAEOA's, (Oecusse Economic Region) Cessna.

This trip in will be with RAEOA's Cessna as the border with Indonesia is still closed due to covid and the ferry is out of action for repairs.



(Note the original van we bought for next to nothing, which was roughly what it was worth! I shouldn't complain though as it did get me off the bicycle and lasted for 18 months!)

One of the things I have been doing in my spare time of covid lockdowns and border closures (by the way who ever said that retirement was a quiet time???) is writing the book of my experiences in Timor Leste. I have far too much material as I have kept a diary, over the 20 years, writing a little or a lot each day! This means that when my memory fails on the details I have well over 3000 typed pages to skim through which turns out to be fascinating as odd bits and pieces I have forgotten crop up eg:

## **“Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2009**

*Welcome to another new day of peace and quiet in Oecusse, (ha ha) – it must be one of the noisiest places I have been in! Firstly the two roosters, which sleep in the tree outside my window welcomed the very early morning – about 5 am – with their crowing, each trying to outdo the other in terms of decibels. Then the human lung clearer started, how anyone hawks so loudly and deeply without their entire lung flying out and plopping onto the dirt I do not know. To add to that the motorbike which has to be revved up each morning for 30 minutes, the neighbourhood dogs which bark and growl at anything that moves and after yesterdays’ rain the frogs which just about break the sound barrier – they must be calling for mates as far away as Australia. Also the leaf raking, the women screeching, crying children, cackling hens and the background noise of waves breaking on the beach and the place is mayhem! By 8.30am I was exhausted and ready for a rest as by then, apart from listening to all the noise I had been visited twice by Goris, been to see Mrs Colo who somehow from way up in the mountains knew I was back in town so arrived down here yesterday, spoken to Julie who delivers my bread, fed Tango the dog which is surprisingly still alive and now completely toothless, visited Sela’s house and played with baby Anton, seen the other Anton, eaten breakfast and spoken to Zarus on the phone which resulted in me trying to find his sister who had actually gone to school already. I decided against my usual early morning swim as it does not get really light until about 7.15 and I am a little wary about swimming in semi dusk due to the presence of at least one crocodile in these waters!*

*The story of the crocodile goes something like this – in February a rather large crocodile arrived on the beach at the end of the main street. Apparently it was wounded so had probably been in a fight as it was the mating season. Anyway it sat on the beach for a few days even though Richard from the UN tried to tempt it back to sea with a few thumps from a large stick (Richard’s story. Eventually it headed a bit further up the beach where a rotting whale carcass became a feast and then once it had a bit of strength back it ate a dog which made the mistake of barking and obviously getting a little too close!! After this everyone decided that a crocodile on the beach was not such a good idea so they managed somehow to frighten it back to sea and it has not been seen since. Crocodiles are revered in Timor Leste so they are not be hurt in any way.”*



Every time I flick through the diary I come across snippets like this plus of course pages and pages on the work we have done! I also have a large collection of photos. Originally I carried a camera and 40 or so rolls of film each trip, thank heavens that gave way to digital and I was left with a lot of scanning to do – hence the series of coming and going snaps! Time for some culling, I have over 12,000 digital photos on my computer!

This photo, (2002), shows me waiting at the “Oecusse Airport Lounge” for the UN Hercules to arrive and take me to Dili.

## **Time to talk Politics (theirs not ours)?**

The long, drawn-out Presidential elections, won by Ramos Horta, have recently concluded. It will be interesting to see what follows the election. Ramos Horta indicated pre-poll that his first act would be to dissolve the current parliament which has another year to run, mercifully he seems to have changed his mind since then and has promised to get on with securing, better health, education and lifting the poor out of poverty! Even though he is not yet officially the President, the inauguration ceremony is on 20th May, he has made comments about not passing the

government's latest budget. Is he looking at helping Timor Leste step into the future with hope and good governance or does he have another, more political agenda? Who knows, we can only wait and see.

However, politics aside, Luis assures me GREENTL is ready and willing to get on with whatever is needed!

### Let's Talk Work.

GREENTL has obviously been relatively quiet for the last two years what with covid restrictions, floods, illness and the election. If all goes well and I do return to Oecusse by the end of May/early June we certainly have plenty to do. Luis and the team are excitedly planning for my return and to kickstart the program including:

- ✓ the GREEN Games, reintroducing the marathon
- ✓ build at least two fish ponds
- ✓ plan for youth activities in schools
- ✓ well rehabilitation
- ✓ pumps for vegetable gardens
- ✓ more bio-sand filtration units
- ✓ finalise the composting toilet, parts of which were lost in the floods.

As long as covid, dengue and the general mayhem of working in Oecusse go our way we will be busy!



**I have some funding to get all this going but of course always need more!!!**

Rotary have started shipping pallets once again to Timor Leste. With Epping Rotary and Epping Boys High School I have a load ready to go – uniforms, boxes of school materials, laptop computers, work boots and such like.

### Here I go again – asking for money!

**“A child without education is like a bird without wings.” –Tibetan Proverb**

**“Education will raise our children out of poverty.” Village Leader, Oecusse**

There are a lot of pressures on everyone at the moment – with floods, covid, increasing food and fuel prices, environmental disasters and multiple NGOs asking for donations. I am another one - asking for a small donation to ensure that all GREENTL has planned can come to fruition and to help several students continue their education.

With help from several donors the following two students have enrolled in Tertiary education. Until they begin work in their chosen field they will need financial assistance.

**Ima** has enrolled and begun her studies in Health Education in the Oecusse branch of UNPAZ (Universidade da Paz). The course is 3 years and on completion Ima is guaranteed a nursing position in Oecusse. She has enrolled, paid her first term fees, bought her uniform and a laptop computer. Over the next two and a half years she will need \$900US for fees, \$150 for uniforms, \$50 for shoes, \$300 for general costs such as backpack, pens, books, food etc. A total



of \$1400US (\$1940Aus at current exchange rate) should cover her expenses. Ima is the first of her family to complete secondary education so to go on to Tertiary level is a great achievement!

**Stephanie** has enrolled in the School of Environmental Law, Catholic University of Dili. The course is 4 years, her fees are similar to Ima's but add an extra year and extra equipment - \$1600US (\$2200Aus) should cover it.

Two younger students, **Marlie** and **Liam**, both in Primary school class 6, are covered until they leave Secondary school, thanks to a wonderful donor! I am also hoping to support **Leonie**, a very bright 7 year old who is in class 2 at Mahatta Primary School and **Idri**, Ima's brother who is in Upper Secondary School in Palaban, Oecusse, who wants to study mechanics.

There are many others who need help in buying school equipment – I have several wonderful supporters including my niece Tara, (who has a namesake in Oecusse) and a group of friends who meet for a meal in a local restaurant each Friday night and drop a few coins in my "Oecusse purse". This all adds up and goes towards school needs for several children. Even though it should be, an education is certainly not free in Oecusse. The cost of uniforms, which are compulsory, students cannot sit their exams unless they are in uniform, is often prohibitive, especially for poor families from the outlying villages!

I want to set up an Education Account to put funds aside for future requests. It will not be hard to find students wanting to go onto Secondary or Higher Education but not having the where-with-all to do so!



Young people in Oecusse deserve a good education, and of course a healthy lifestyle to go with it!

If you would like to make a donation the following list gives you an idea where the money will go. Any donation is very much

appreciated by myself, GREEN TL and the deserving people of Oecusse.

**My Wish List. (On top of what I already have funded.)**

Funds to help students to continue their education.

Extra funding for the *Youth-in-Action* GREEN Games 2022

Medallions for the Games

Any amount helps from \$15 for a pair of shoes, \$50 for a uniform to \$150 for term fees.

The Games in 2019 cost over \$30,000. After a hiatus of 2 years I expect these Games to be bigger! I am hoping for \$10,000 on top of what I already have.

400 individual pieces, \$860 in total

Donations over \$2 to the Sustainable Villages project are tax deductible:

Donate online by going to the Rotary Australia World Community Service, (RAWCS) website.

<https://donations.rawcs.com.au/Default.aspx?ProjectID=592&ReturnTo=4> (Sustainable Villages Oecusse)

Or via OzGREEN website, donate, choose East Timor.