



Bondia

Baguia

Newsletter 18 - September 2013

Australia Timor-Leste Friendship Network

Friends of Baguia is a member of the **Australia Timor-Leste Friendship Network Inc (ATLFN)**, which aims to promote communication between the government of Timor-Leste and the Friendship groups in Australia. Derarca O'Mahony has been the Victorian Facilitator for the Network since its inception in 2009, and this year she was elected the National Convenor of ATLFN.



In May, Derarca and Adrienne James (FoBaguia Vice President) pictured above, had a meeting in Dili with **Mr Jorge Teme, the Timor-Leste Minister for State Administration**.

They discussed the activities of the Network and presented Mr Teme with a list of over 30 Friendship groups in Australia who are members of the Network. Mr Teme expressed his thanks to all the Australians who are supporting the communities in Timor-Leste.

www.austimorfn.com

Reflections by Meagan Lowe

No two visits to Timor-Leste will ever be the same. Everywhere you go the signs of change are present; new buildings constructed, old buildings weakened and ever changing landscapes. Having taken three trips to Baguia over the past four years, I have been lucky enough to witness some of these changes, along with many continuing complex and ongoing challenges. I hope to share with you some snapshots and reflections from my experiences in Timor-Leste.



Amé & Meagan with Aleo & Esla

I first visited Baguia in September 2009 with my mum, Judy, and friend, Jane. Baguia in 2009 was gripped by a severe drought. The landscape was dry, dusty and in some ways reminiscent of northern Australia – not too surprising, as it's only a 1 hour flight away. Women were walking hours every day down to the river to collect water for drinking, cooking and washing. Despite the hardships and isolation the people we met were welcoming, gracious, generous and inspiring.

By mid-2010, Baguia was experiencing some radical changes. Drought was replaced by flooding rains and mobile reception was now available. When a student's mobile rang out in class I found it surreal thinking that this event, common the world over, was so new in Baguia. This change has made it possible for locals to seek outside help in emergencies, and to contact friends and family from far and wide. Mobile internet brought the wonders of email and Skype.

The lingering wet season in 2010 (and more recently in 2013) played havoc in small communities heavily reliant on agriculture and the one precarious road linking Baguia to the rest of the country. We experienced this first hand when trying to return to Dili – wading through a flooded river and navigating a landslide before reaching the truck that would take us down the mountain. Poorly maintained roads and a lack of bridges is an enormous issue in Timor, one that will be expensive, slow to resolve and difficult, given the mountainous terrain.

Two and a half years passed until my most recent trip – February 2013 with my friend and fellow committee member, Amé. The changes in Dili were particularly noticeable – a shiny new waterfront (with free WiFi in one part!) and growing population - but also very distinct signs of disadvantage and poverty the further you go from the centre of town. During this most recent trip to Baguia we were kept incredibly busy checking up on a variety of Friends of Baguia projects. We also spent much time with Leo and her family as they continued to mourn the loss of John. We walked with the community as they grieved the loss of another four community members during our stay. It was a visit tinged with sadness at times, joyous fun and games at others, and discussion on the next steps for Baguia.

Being part of a friendship group, and having the opportunity to return to a place like Baguia, has shown me the enormous value and strength of the friendship growing between the

individuals and communities of Baguia and Stonnington. These are relationships which extend over and above barriers of distance, language and time and strengthen as we continue to work together for the community of Baguia.

Paulino's Story

Indonesian invaded Timor Leste on 7 December 1975 and 12 days later I was born on Mt Matebian above Rufagua village. My older sister had died the year before I was born.

Like everyone in this tumultuous time, my parents went into hiding living under rocky outcrops high up on the mountain. Their simple home was used by the Falintil guerrillas to store supplies. We spent 3 years living on the run in the mountain, before we moved down to Baguia town in 1978 as part of the ceasefire. We lived with my mother's grandparents and I went to Baguia Catholic Primary for 4 years. My father's illness became worse in 1980 and when he was seriously ill he defied the Indonesian laws restricting movement and walked back up the mountain to die in his 'spiritual home', my cousin found him under a cliff a few days later. My younger brother was born later that year, but there was little food available, due to the Indonesian occupation, and much disease, so he died at 2 years.

As a young boy I was always wandering around, even though this was forbidden under Indonesian rule. My uncle was a Commander in Falintil and my grandparents were persecuted and put in prison. My mother worried for my safety, so in when I was 10 years my uncle took me to Baucau to live in the government orphanage.

The first 18 months in the orphanage were good as we had food and were treated well, but then there was no government supervisor to organise everything, so the 20 girls were sent home and the remaining 32 boys had to fend for themselves. Some food was given to the orphanage but whoever got there first cooked it for themselves or small groups and those who arrived later got little or nothing. The High School was a 10 km walk; so many boys stopped attending school. I had to get up at 5.30am, get washed and dressed and cook rice for breakfast. We didn't have enough plates and spoons, so I just drank from a plate! I left at 7am for school – I had to run as much as possible to arrive at 8am. School

ended at 1pm, but as it was a long hot walk I didn't get home until almost 3pm. Then if there was food, I would cook rice for lunch. I used to buy a carton of cigarettes and then sell single packs to local people to get a small income to buy food. I could only visit my family once a year as there were no trucks past Laga, which is still more than one day's walk to Baguia. In the holidays I would work on the small farms weeding the corn and peanut fields to earn money for transport and clothing. The government paid for my school uniform and fees.

I, Paulino Dias Mariz, persevered and finished High School in 1996!

I went on to Primary Teachers College in Dili. I funded my study by buying Indonesian-bred white baby chicks in Dili and paying my cousin in Baucau to feed them. We could sell them after 1 month which gave me a small income of about \$20 per month. I graduated in 1999 - the year of the **Referendum on Independence** from Indonesia! Fr John asked me to teach in Baguia, but I

received no salary, so after 6 months I went to Baucau and had a market stall selling household goods. However I saw many kids working at the market who were not getting schooling, so after 6 months I decided to return to teach in Baguia.

In 2001 there was a lot of conflict and a lack of teachers in Quelicai on the other side of Mt Matebian, so Fr John asked me to work there for 3 months, which turned into 7 years! In 2005 I met Angelina who came from Baucau to manage the orphanage (at Fr John's request!) and we married in 2006 and I finally came back to Baguia in 2007. Now I work at St

Joseph's Junior High School in Baguia and also teach at the Computer Centre. My wife works at Baguia Kindergarten, which Friends of Baguia fund. We have 3 children aged 1 to 5 years, and also living in our home is my mother (now 60 years), two of her sisters, my maternal grandmother and 6 dogs.



**Paulino, Meagan & Angelina
with baby Marilelia**



"Hello Mrs Judy, how are you? Mrs Judy halo saida? Toba diak? Mrs Judy hanoin Aleo ho Eta? Bainhira Mrs Judy mai iha Baguia? Ami gosta los! Obrigada"

Hello Mrs Judy, how are you? What are you doing Mrs Judy? Sleep well? Mrs Judy, do you remember Aleo and Eta? When will Mrs Judy come back to Baguia? We would like it very much! Thank you.

Email from Aleo and Eta (both 12 years old) to Judy Lowe

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