



## The Roslin Orphanage: Our Journey Budi Soehardi

To all members and guests of the Rotary eClub of the Southwest USA:

Indeed it is a great pleasure and an honor for me to be able to get connected with you all. Thank you for this opportunity to share some of our activities regarding who we are, what we do, and how we ended up as part of the CNN Heroes program.

First of all, I do not consider myself a hero. However, I am happy to share what we have been blessed with for the last decade.

I did not seek nor know about the CNN Heroes program but a friend of mine from Canada got the idea after visiting our orphanage. Her idea was supported by another friend and it ended up with CNN calling me!

Anyway, things started while having dinner in Singapore in 1999. During that dinnertime with my wife and children, we were watching a television broadcast about the suffering of refugees in East Timor. These were hard things for us to see - we enjoy a good life, a good home, good meals and good family quality time. From what we saw, my wife and I got an idea of how to help the refugees. We were seeing some children in a family of seven, having to share a package of instant noodles with some vegetables taken from the garden (like tapioca leaves and others). It was hard on us to watch that scene, but it made both of us decide to shelve plans to go somewhere exotic for our vacation, and instead visit the camps highlighted in the broadcast.

Ultimately, we decided to build an orphanage, and developed a [website](#). Here is part of the introduction:

"This site is dedicated to the beautiful children of East & West Timor who have suffered so much in recent years due to war, displacement and socio-economic hardship. It is our quest to provide a loving environment to orphaned children so they may have the opportunity to blossom and give their laughter and talents to the world."

The full story of our trip to the refugee camps can be read at the [site](#). (One quick correction: on the site, it refers to the trip as having happened in 2000, but we went in 1999.) The following is part of that story.

### **Our trip to East Timor in 1999**

When we first traveled to East Timor, we had no plans at all to build an orphanage. But on our way to the refugee camp, we could not ignore the incredible poverty along the road. It struck us that while it is easy to help those you know, or those you think of as your own people, the word, "help," holds much more power when it doesn't matter who it is you choose to help. Based on what we saw, we decided to build an orphanage.

How did this begin? I mentioned before that my wife and I first began thinking about this one day during dinner when we saw a news report about East Timor refugees. That night, we talked about what we'd seen and prayed for them. I mentioned to my wife that in forty days, I would have my vacation leave from work, and perhaps instead of a regular vacation, we could visit the refugee camps and take things they might need.

That same night I started working on an email to my friends to let them know about my plan and the trip to the refugee camp. I didn't finish writing the message until 5:00 the next morning, six hours after I started.

The first response was an hour later at 6:00. This friend (an Indonesian Chinese who is now living in Australia) was willing to give me money to get things going: US \$2000 to support the trip. We did manage to collect used clothing, toys, food supplement, baby equipment, shoes, blankets, etc. In total, about one ton of goods was collected in Singapore, and this brought on a new problem: How can we take all we had collected to Timor?

We tried to calculate how much money would be needed just to transport the goods by plane and by ship. Then a friend suggested that I contact a person who is a station manager of Singapore Airlines, a very good company with its cost management. Perhaps they could tell us how we can ask for the very big favor of transporting the goods at a reduced tariff.

With God's blessings all things are possible. We not only got a reduced tariff, but we were given 100% free to send them to Jakarta. In Jakarta we bought many more goods like soap, toothpaste, candies, eggs, instant noodles, snacks, baby milk powder, medicines for external use, green beans, sugar, and a lot more.

Still, we faced the problem of how to get all we had bought and collected overland to the refugee camp locations. Another friend mentioned to us that his brother is high up in a shipping company, so we contacted him and another miracle was given to us.

He did not talk much nor asked us many questions about what we were doing. He just asked us how much cargo we needed to be transported. I told him we had about six tons from Jakarta, and he told us that he would make sure that we would be given at least ten tons of free cargo

space. From Jakarta to Timor is about fifteen hundred miles! Praise the Lord for the help which came just in time for our trip.

It seemed that blessings and opportunities to serve were cropping up wherever we went. During the trip while we were transiting at Surabaya and saw a group of Indonesian army personnel who were returning home after fulfilling their duty in Aceh in 1999. We saw that they were sharing a bowl of meatball soup for three persons. I asked why they were sharing and they said they had no money, so I asked them to get a bowl each and I would pay for it. It was such a pleasure to get to know these soldiers. It turned out they were from West Papua, which is a special place for me and my wife - the West Papuan city of Biak is where we were married.

My wife and I, our three children, a volunteer from London, and six employees traveled together to Timor by ship. It took us three and a half days to reach the port of Tenau in West Timor. At Kupang city we bought lots of rice, green beans, sugar, instant noodles, corn, flour, cough syrup, Malaria tablets, eggs, and more. The final stretch included fifty-one hours without any sleep at all and the help of twenty-five people, day and night.

We left with two trucks (14 tons each), both full, and two other vans on a journey that normally would have taken five hours. With the loads we were taking, though, it ended up taking a full nine, grueling hours. As we got close, we went to a Catholic church for directions, and two pastors escorted us to the locations.

We did all the distributions by ourselves, directly to the refugees and nothing ended up missing. It took us from 1:00 p.m. that afternoon until 9:00 p.m. that night, without any rest.



**Top left: Captain Chan Weng Kong and Captain Yong CS of Singapore Airlines were pushing the goods to be sent to Timor Refugees. Top right: Christine, Tassya and Angky posing with the East Timor Refugees. Bottom left: some of the food and milk for the refugees. Bottom right: Eggs from Jakarta, all the way to the Timorese refugees.**

The locations were very well known as places where people were killed and where militias were operating. With God's protections we were feeling so secure and nothing ever happened to any of us - at that time my son wasn't even four years old.

The trip back was quite scary, as one of the truck ran out of fuel and we had to stop in the middle of nowhere in the dark with no food or water. At about 3:00 a.m., God sent us a truck with a good-hearted driver. Another miracle happened, as he not only stopped for us but was willing to share some of his fuel, which gave us enough to get to a fuel station. Praise the Lord!

With the fuel problem, the return journey took about eleven hours. We reached Kupang city where we washed our faces and then made our way to the airport to return to Jakarta via Bali with Merpati airlines. We made it to the airport with only five minutes to spare.

We arrived in Jakarta at 10:00 p.m., drink some water or hot chocolate and then we all went to bed. We slept nonstop for many hours. It was the first time in twelve days we had slept properly, and woke up the next day at 2:00 the next afternoon.

Flying back to Singapore was a particularly nice trip, as Singapore Airlines gave us each a seat in first class!

I believe that if you are willing to do something, you can. We started with no plans after seeing the television report, and completed the trip to the refugee camp with everything arranged in forty days, and the trip itself taking twelve days.

What I have just told you is only the first part of the story that has shaped our lives. It became clear that what was needed was a place for the children we met to live safely, and that is what prompted us to build the [Roslin Orphanage](#), which was completed in 2002 and has been a home to forty-seven children.

We can only do our best to see that the children are educated, but what happens inside their hearts must be a result of their own decisions. There have been so many hurdles and difficulties in running the orphanage, but we continue to believe that problems can be solved. Each child is behaving, interacting and doing things so differently than how we found them. Their attitude inspires us to maintain our focus on their upbringing.

It is a privilege for me and my wife to be able to experience firsthand what it means to raise and care for so many children. When the children are sleeping, we discuss problems at length to try to find solutions. Both of us must act on our instincts and also work as a team to figure out what we need to do for these children of different ages, even though we do not have a proper background in education or child psychology. One of the toughest parts is figuring out how to teach these children their school

subjects. This is what we really need some help sometimes. My father-in-law has joined us, and he patiently guides the slower children with the school subjects that challenge them. We have found that talking with the children about what we experience together has helped slower students, sometimes by giving them extra time for their studies while other children help with their chores.

Seeing these children learn and be happy makes us very happy, and that is the best kind of reward for what we have done.

---

Rushton's comments:

The CNN Heroes program has the tagline, "Ordinary People, Extraordinary Impact" and a quick glance through the nominees makes it clear that those up for the award are an impressive and worthy crowd! If you feel that Budi's project is worthy of your vote for Hero of the Year, you can do so (and learn about all the nominees) at the following page:

<http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cnn.heroes/>

Do so soon - the voting ends this Thursday, November 19, (6 a.m. U.S. Eastern Time). You may vote more than once, by the way. For me, it was great to be able to support the work of a true Rotarian, and I encourage our members and guests to take a look at the page and consider doing the same.