



The Value of Perspective

It was a beautiful moment, amid chaos. She stood in the late-afternoon heat nursing her baby in a quiet corner of a crowded community building, desperately awaiting some medical attention. When I lifted my camera, the baby stopped crying, looked at me and smiled.

For over a year, I have wondered how this girl and her sick baby are surviving the struggle that is life in Timor-Leste. I never caught her name, but I caught her story.

15 years old, and a proud mum despite the father of her baby being unknown; she was a victim of sexual violence. She lived with her mum and siblings. No father, he had died many years ago - a casualty of the Indonesian occupation.

Fascinated by my paler skin, she called me beautiful, and I sensed her acute embarrassment over the circumstances of her existence, which were as bad as I have ever seen.

As she waited for the nurse, stray dogs roamed by our feet. She likes dogs, they scare away the rats that burrow into her house at night.

She pointed out her house, just past where we parked the mobile health clinic. A small bamboo hut with a thatched roof. I could see through the doorway that the house was bare; a mud floor, no electricity, no running water, no toilet.

Through broken English she told me about her life. Each morning, she'd ration out enough food for breakfast and if they're lucky, she could put some aside for a small meal later in the day. Food has to last because it is difficult to find enough money to feed the children and pay school fees.

Life is hard, and over half of the Timorese population share this fight to survive.

There are the mothers who make clothing from pillowcases because they don't have enough garments to dress their family, the girls who walk kilometres for water only to find the well is dry, the elderly man who saw his family torn apart during the fight for independence, and the boys who love soccer, but have never seen a soccer ball.

Fellow Nazareth Outreach Participant Sara Ucci explained how over numerous trips to Timor-Leste you meet countless people and hear their stories, and you get to learn something different from each one.

"In 2013 I began to understand the concept of materialism, and I learnt that the place of your birth can determine your opportunities in life" said Sara. "While the Timorese people do not have as many luxuries or opportunities for education, and their living conditions are not the same, they do not see that as a barrier for them to achieve their potential. I learnt that limitations aren't real, and nothing is impossible" she said.

"In 2015 I learnt the value of perspective, and the value of organisations like the Good Crocodile Foundation who provide opportunities for the Timorese to seek support, undertake higher education, provide access to health facilities, develop their agricultural skills and small businesses. We learnt that we not only have human rights but we have human responsibilities. We all have the capacity to change someone's life. Every bit we contribute makes a real difference and although we can't do everything, each small step is one closer to breaking the cycle of poverty" said Sara.

Empathy is the trait that makes us human and it epitomises what we should all aspire to be.

Stepping into the shoes of those less fortunate and experiencing life differently demonstrates what empathy is truly about, and Nazareth Outreach Work provides an opportunity to do exactly this.

To read more about Nazareth Outreach Work, please visit www.nazareth.org.au.

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