

## August 2018

Well August has brought frightening new experiences & a slightly different direction!

### **Earthquakes = Gempabumi**

#### **School:**

School has currently returned to almost normal – a lot of classes are still held outside of classrooms, but we're back to almost full schedule.

We're discussing new education for students in Year 7, around tourism, but all in English, including field trips.

The 'plastic pollution' presentation is on hold until life as we knew it, returns to normal.

In June, I also began teaching English to 3 children in my small community here - they come to my house 3 evenings for 2 hours, they're learning reading, writing, listening & singing in English & they're reporting to their parents, they love learning with Miss Linda.

#### **PROJECTS:**

Community

La Chill Restaurant - Senggigi: So earthquakes have damaged many buildings in Senggigi – so the plan to educate there regarding 'plastic pollution' is now on hold until they're made the necessary repairs.

PPP is complete, and just waiting for Teacher to check the Indonesian language in it.

Though we're all concerned about & discuss the increase in plastic garbage in the camps, it has become secondary to getting aid to the people.

**VISA:** I celebrate the great things that come from earthquakes – extending my Visa this month was simple & I was able to pick it up on the same day. When I asked why the process was 'simpler & quicker' this month – they replied 'current situation'. I also learn that leniency is being shown regarding minor over-stays as many foreigners are assisting with aid etc.... ahh, common sense prevails.

Another great thing is free parking at Epicentrum Mall – in the hope of bringing the people back to a multi-level concrete building. I have been twice, though its nerve wracking, the building bears large cracks with large concrete pillars missing on the external part of the building. I now mostly go to Smart Club, a little further, but one level with very large doors close to checkouts for exiting quickly at the slightest shake.

As school was closed most of August, I put my energy into helping the people. School was delivering aid to North Lombok, so I went on 1 trip with them to ascertain the extent of the damage – I was horrified, overwhelmed & knew I couldn't do anything but help these people.

I learnt the government was doing very little, I learnt that due to tourism, they chose not to formally declare this a 'national disaster (and yet it is, of mammoth proportions), I learnt that foreigners are carrying the bulk of the aid responsibility, I learnt that these people who have lost everything, are the most generous, I see a young woman pacing & I learn, her children are still buried under the rubble, weeks after the earthquake which took their lives.

I have never seen, nor been involved in such a crisis, yet I feel blessed to be a part & honoured to be able to help in some small way. I experience the same trauma, there is no black or white, no Indonesians & Australians, no rich, no poor – we are all the same.

So after 3 major M6-M7 over 3 weeks, we had a lull, 9 days of aftershocks only, but we were learning to live with them & we spoke quietly 'we think it's finished'. It was a Sunday, we went to Central Lombok, spent a few hours with locals talking of our trauma, laughing at the little things, we were playing games and then WHAM, people running & screaming. The first, a M5.4 followed closely by a big M6.5 & for the 1<sup>st</sup> time in weeks, I felt I could no longer live like this, for several moments I just wanted out. Everything settled, everyone left, we sat & drank coffee to calm our nerves & I was ok again. We returned to Mataram, settled in for the night, yet there were warnings on FB, teachers were tagging me in the warnings & as I grabbed my emergency bag (which had been put away), I put my phones on

charge & within seconds my floor was rumbling, my home was shaking violently & I ran – we crouched down on the road, everyone in this community screaming & praying loudly to their god, Allah, a position I'm becoming too familiar with.

So 3 large quakes in 1 day, our 2<sup>nd</sup> M7 in 2 weeks & the most 'active' day.

I needed to understand why this was happening now, as the locals say 'never before', so I learnt about tectonic plates, magma under the earth's crust, volcanos, magnitudes & MMI scales, the ring of fire, the history of earthquakes in this region, land & water based epicenters, tsunamis & landslides etc. Something most people never need to understand in a lifetime.

And so we learnt that while the earth was calm, we were in action, getting food, water & shelter to those in need, we supported each other the only way we knew how, by listening, by talking, by trying to laugh at the silly things – yet fear was etched on everyone's face.

And so, the earthquakes kept coming though their intensity was decreasing, though we're vigilant. The local earthquake & weather app is constantly open on our phones, our conversations are only about how to help & where, who needs what, cost comparing, burying the dead & trauma healing.

The foreigners here created a Google Map, entered data of what village/evacuation camp, the contact or village chief & what they need, all colour coded – its brilliant. I open the map, not the red & orange (needs ASAP), record what they need, ask Haris (Yamaha) to make the call, we go & buy & deliver. Rice, water, noodles, medicines, water filters, baby's milk, tents, tarps, blankets & candy, books & pencils for kids. As most schools have also been decimated, kids are not attending any form of education – so we play games, we sing & dance, and we deliver education & trauma healing. For a few short hours, we forget the fear, the loss, the trauma & gempa (earthquake).

I have heard incredible stories, I have seen resilience beyond normal & I've experienced generosity from people who have lost everything.

As I work around school & Haris's work commitments, we try & deliver aid to 3 to 4 camps per week. This past Sunday took us to where most foreigners were saying 'too far', Sembalun, in the foothills of Mt Rinjani. We bought a lot of everything & as there were many reports of diarrhoea in this camp, we bought a lot of medicines, made many calls for tarps & water filters, we loaded the truck & we prepared for our long trip. But we awoke Sunday morning to a M5.5 & as we're heading into epicenter & landslide territory, we were feeling nervous, nonetheless we headed off with the men saying prayers as we drove out. Five weeks since the first gempa, and driving through 'ground zero', I still have tears.

We travelled hours traversing broken bridges, broken roads, landslides & we arrive. Immediately we were given coffee & lunch, we went to a makeshift school & played games with the kids & the Mums, we delivered to two camps, we saw the most incredible mountains, watched monkeys play, experienced the freezing cold at the summit, ate strawberries & arrived home late, feeling physically & emotionally exhausted but good.

Monday is here, and it's back to school.

And so August 2018 has been, I think the most life-changing month of my long life.

And so the news is, in a few short weeks I'm leaving Lombok & I have concerns about how I'm going to cope back in a land where no-one can comprehend my trauma, in a land where everyone talks rain & drought & not of Lombok, aid, fear, tragedy & sheer devastation, however.....