

# THE COMMUNITIES of Indonesia

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HOOKED ON ORCHIDS

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DEN KINDERSCHUHEN

KASTENSYSTEM AUF  
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When there was an earthquake in Bantul I decided to go and help. The devastation there struck me, and will remain with me for the rest of my life. Not only did I realize that I could help, my experience there has given me direction for my life. I now know that even one person, no matter how young, can make a difference.



Xiomara

On May 27th 2006, while I was graduating from high school, an earthquake measuring 6.3 on the Richter scale struck just off the coast of Central Java. The Bantul Regency was the worst affected area, with more than 5,761 deaths and hundreds of thousands of people left homeless. When I heard about the situation I knew I had to do something. I had a friend who had been working in Aceh after the tsunami, and I knew help from the government would be slow and limited. As usual, the immediate relief was quick, but now, seven months after the earthquake, the people are still living in rubble, reminded daily of the tragedy that took place.

I wanted to do long-term relief work as people quickly forget that others are still suffering, when it disappears from the news. Luckily, I knew Alison Chester, who initiated The Bantul Kindergarten Project, and is also affiliated with the registered non-profit organization M.U.M or Manusia Untuk Masyarakat (People for the Community). After the earthquake, Alison and Amber Breen went up to Bantul to see how they could help with immediate relief work. Having seen the extent of the damage, they decided that a long-term project was necessary so they formed The Bantul Kindergarten Project. I was thus able to work with them.

During the earthquake, most of the kindergartens, along with everything else, were badly damaged or completely destroyed. Classes took place in tents where the temperature often rose to 40 degrees Celsius. The kindergartens got less attention than primary and high schools as people considered them less important. When I visited these kindergartens I could not believe it. The tents were hot and some were stuffed with up to eighty children in one tent! These tents were pitched where the old kindergartens had stood, still surrounded by the rubble that hadn't been cleared away. It was a similar situation with people's houses. They were living in inadequate temporary shelters or tents. They were unable to move on and try to forget about the disaster because they are always surrounded by the leftovers of their past. By these bricks and stones and cement blocks which are also constant reminders of all the death and suffering. This shattering of lives happened in less than a minute, but will take years to rebuild.

Not one person was left unaffected, every person I met had a story to tell, and each one was just as painful to hear as another. A man lost his wife and grandchild. The kitchen fell on a woman's mother. One man didn't find his mother's body until three in the afternoon, ten hours after the earthquake struck. One woman told me she had lost seven members of her family in those fifty seconds. There was so much pain everywhere, and these people were getting almost no help!

The first kindergarten to be built by the BKP was Al-Fatah kindergarten in the sub-district of Imogiri. Since Al-Fatah, the BKP has managed to complete the building of four more kindergartens, and has six others currently under construction. The BKP was lucky enough to host a visit from supermodel Petra Nemcova and photographer Lailani Johnson. When they saw what was being accomplished they contributed generously towards building more schools.

At this point in time our growing concern is housing. There are still hundreds of thousands of people living in tents or in inadequate shelters. With the onset of the rainy season, housing for these people is now of drastic importance. In Bantul we can erect houses with bedeg (woven bamboo) walls, cement floors, brick base, and tile roofs, in less than a week.

These houses can withstand the heaviest rains, and are earthquake resistant as natural fibers sway instead of collapsing. Although temporary, they will be strong enough to last for the next six to eight years. The BKP is now concentrating on raising money for these houses as well as building kindergartens. Amber lives in Bantul and knows those who are most in need.

**"...years for their lives to return to normal..."**

I was shocked to see just how little had been done in the way of housing. True, there are hundreds of thousands of homes to rebuild and it's a massive job, but it's a job that needs to be done now. That is why I was determined that on my return to Bali, not only would I raise money to build more houses through the BKP, but I would also bring to the attention of the people that what happened in Bantul is not over. These people are still living in terrible conditions, everything you read in the news is true. There are many organizations working to help, but the enormity of the situation means that most people will have to wait years for their lives to return to normal.

I have been pleasantly surprised with the reaction that I've received from the people in Bali. There are a lot of people, young and old, who want to help but just don't know how to do it. For that reason I have been able to collect money to build more temporary houses, and hopefully I will be able to continue this not just for a few weeks, but until the people there no longer need so much help. And until I reach my goal of 100 houses. It's a big number, but I know we can do it! ■

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