

Ranu Dally Honored at TAA Fund-Raiser

Ranu Dally, a former JIS teacher and the founding faculty advisor of Tolong Anak Anak (TAA) was the guest of honor at a Jakarta charity dinner held in her honor to support TAA. After her receipt of an award for her service to TAA Ranu remarked, "How can I ever thank you enough? Thank you to JIS Alumni for making this day happen. It means so much to me..."

The following is excerpted from Ranu's speech during the TAA dinner in Jakarta:

Today we celebrate a unique part of the JIS curriculum, that of service. That we should celebrate is well in order, but I'd like to share some of my thoughts on how far TAA has come. We are about to enjoy a sumptuous dinner, but spare a thought for those flat sticky squares of brownies that my little ninth graders used to bake and sell to raise a few hundred rupiah to give to the children in the village next door. That was 35 years ago. That was when the seed was sown that has now grown into this glorious tree called Tolong Anak Anak.

I dropped an idea into young receptive ears, a suggestion that they might consider sharing a little of what they had with underprivileged Indonesian children. That was all that was necessary. The ninth grade class officers took over; collected clothes, shoes, books, toys and money and we took them to an orphanage. That was the beginning and the following year, this same group of students, now tenth graders, donated a considerable part of their earnings from a marathon race towards our charity. Meanwhile, the drama class, having staged a successful production of the Helen Keller Story, used the profits (50,000 rupiah was a lot of money those days) to buy guitars for a School for the Blind. Some time later the students from the school came to JES and performed for our students.

Names escape me now but I would like to acknowledge Scott Corwin, ninth grade class president, Robin Cox, treasurer, Megan Methven, Craig Flood and Geoff Raynor, who was sadly killed in a road accident when he was quite a young man.

The name Tolong Anak Anak came a year later. Winonah del Rosario remembers that as an eighth grader she was part of a group who wrote letters to Indonesian orphans as a kind of a pen-pal arrangement, with the help of teachers, Fatmawati Kurniawan, Kartini Noto-suwarjo and Sofyan Brugger. It was a wonderful relationship – the orphans received letters and our students learned a bit more English and plenty of Indonesian.

I remember asking Kartini if the name Tolong Anak Anak was grammatically correct. Should it not have been "menolong"? Her reply was – Ranu, you are telling JES students to help the children. Go, help the children – that's what I hear you saying. Tolong Anak Anak is perfectly correct.



Ranu giving her speech at the TAA dinner, where she mentioned students and teachers from over 35 years ago.

The original Tolong Anak Anak logo (now no longer in use) with its layers of meaning, was created by a tenth grader, Caroline ten Wolde.

I would also like to acknowledge the help I received from teachers and staff, among them Mrs. Ryan (eighth grade, PE), Pat Stephens (eighth grade, English), Rose Santoso (office), Heraty Rustawan (library), Mike Williams and Rukmawati Branting. Some of you may like to know that my son Nikhil has just been to see Rukmawati. She lives in a retirement home in Gloucestershire, England. She is 93 years old, full of life and energy now as she was 35 years ago, and bright as a button.

Looking back to the time when the Joint Embassy School became the Jakarta International School in 1978 – when, with excellent foresight, Denzil Widel, School Superintendent, introduced the International Baccalaureate into the curriculum, TAA played its role. It provided IB diploma candidates with a home grown outlet for the social service component of CASS.

Service has many faces and I would like to remember the other mentors who have shown our students how to understand a little and deal with the complexities of poverty.

Pak Hermann from Wisma Subud once helped us find a home for a goat – yes, a goat that a distraught JES mother was trying to get rid of. We took the goat to the Children's Village in Cipanas where it became the children's pet and lived happily ever after. It was Pak Hermann who said to our students – please, no guilt; come and see the children; play with them; give them happiness, but do not mix generosity with guilt.

Pak Hermann, Sister Rina, Sister Andre – all helped our students to understand what they were doing.

Of all our mentors, one person deserves special mention – Ibu Bakker. TAA members had a long standing and close association with her. Els Bakker lived in Pekayon, a village near Bekasi. We used to call her Mother Teresa of Pekayon. Ibu Bakker and her husband opened their doors and took in the victims of one of the most unpleasant side of child poverty – young girls forced into underage marriages, forced to consummate the marriages, otherwise their parents would have had to return the bride price. Ibu Bakker was anxious that we should understand that these parents were not wicked; they were poor. Over a period of two or three years and through several visits to Pekayon, our students saw first hand the destruction of a village, village life, and its resulting poverty and loss of values caused by “progress” – leaving people like Ibu Bakker to pick up the pieces. The Bakkers had, at any one time, 16 to 20 children living with them, mostly girls. Some had run away from home; some had just turned up voluntarily; others had been dumped on her doorstep by distraught parents.

We staged our first talent show, Talent Anak Anak, to pay school fees for Pekayon’s displaced children.

Before coming here I contacted a number of former TAA members, students and teachers, to ask not what they had done for TAA, but what they had received through TAA. I would like to share with you some of their responses:

Emmanuel Lammonier and the Yayasan Immanuel need no introduction. Emmanuel reflects upon his years with TAA and the weekly visits to the Sayap Ibu Orphanage, before deciding to develop his own yayasan.

Amit Khanna remembers how when he first came to JIS as a student, he came to TAA looking for friendship and found it in the camaraderie of a ragtag bunch of students who had no particular talent to show off, but who loved working together in this unfashionable activity called service. I had lunch with Amit and Lane Graciano in London, recently. I bring from Amit and Lane a lot of love and a heartfelt plea for a return to the small TAA projects that students can manage with minimum interference from faculty.

Stephanie Ribbe (quite chuffed about the fact that she had been TAA’s Bakesale Manager) says that she was not very good with Indonesian, but soon discovered that one does not need language to understand the capacity for joy in children. Working with TAA “opened unseeing eyes and unknowing minds.”

Alia Nurmohamed sees the bigger picture – looking towards an opportunity later in life, of going out to give humanitarian assistance, to disseminate awareness.

Oliver Kossack spent most of his TAA time drawing pictures for us. He now lives in Leipzig, an artist and art teacher. He told me that he had gained a great deal through TAA, but could not be more specific. Those of you who remember Oli will understand what I mean when I say that I could actually hear him scratching his head over the telephone.

Joji Montelibano danced in the first TAA talent show and then went on to dance professionally. He says that he remembers his first TAA talent show far better than he remembers his lines in Miss Saigon.

Elizabeth Stamp remembers the marvelous chaos that was the Pasar Gaja Putih, our jumble sale. A three pronged approach to service – help those with too much to get rid of their excess, to be sold to those who had less, in order to help those who had nothing. And she remembers the TAA book sale where her husband used to go to buy back the books she had donated.

And I will add my favorite – Enak Enak, the first TAA cookbook (we loved puns; they weren’t very good though), that massive tome that grew and grew because Elizabeth Hermann who compiled the book, hadn’t the heart to reject any recipe submitted by the students. We sold every copy of that book so much so that even Elizabeth did not have a copy left for herself.

Finally, I would like to read to you from a letter that I received from Paul Kent. Paul is a pediatric oncologist and now lives in Chicago. Paul was a very young man when he taught at JIS (1988 – 90) and he approached TAA with tremendous energy and imagination. Paul writes:

In 1990 I left teaching with a heavy heart, but with a commitment to help children most in need. This desire came directly from TAA. The real lesson of TAA came to me as I sat at the bedside of cancer patients and their suffering parents. The real lesson is that we are here to witness, to share, to become involved, to embrace this part of the human condition – not to “fix it” or to bestow happiness, wealth and comfort. At the Yamani Orphanage I was struck by how happy and loved the children were in the midst of extreme poverty. Many people fear suffering in others (and in themselves) because they do not know how to “make it better”. Being vulnerable to, and challenged by the struggles of ourselves and our fellows is the gift of connection; it is the gift of TAA; it is the purpose of life. The children of Indonesia touched us and changed our lives by allowing us to know them and see them as bright, individual spirits – the rest of the human condition.

God bless all the good work done by TAA. God has already blessed those of us involved.



Ranu with her TAA students in the 1975 Yearbook.