

DIARY ENTRY

January 31st 2018

Crikey, what a day that was!

I woke up in Hatobuilico listening to the rain thundering on the tin roof, the howl of the wind and the cracking of tin from roofing as it flew onto the ground.



Deb and I conferred. After 4 days of unrelenting rain, it was not looking like the torrent would subside and we needed to get back to Dili so Deb could catch her plane back to Sydney. We talked to the Frater and decided to leave after lunch.

By 1.00 we were in the car, Deb, the Frater, myself, 3 nuns and the driver. We headed off on the “better” road from HB but within a few kms, we found ourselves on the wrong side of a massive tree that had fallen across the road. We backtracked to the village and headed up the “new” road, not much better than a goat track. A very muddy goat track now! Almost halfway to the

old road we had a most stupendous bog and very clearly we would not be pushing or pulling ourselves out of it.



On the Frater’s suggestion, Deb, the 3 nuns and myself headed off up the hill in the blinding rain with massive wind gusts threatening to drag us off our feet, from the security of the tuft of grass where we were treading into the sea of mud. Deb asked if we should be going back and I said no, that we could walk to mana Rosalina’s house – which we did! We arrived, we were welcomed, we got a bit dry and we waited and waited and waited. Three hours later we heard whoops and screams and up

the hill ran hordes of young men, all totally soaked, coated in mud and wildly excited. The senior high school students had dug the car out of the mud and moments later it arrived at the door! Wonderment and I was reminded, this is Timor and nothing is impossible.

The driver had lost his nerve and it was now me in the driver’s seat. We headed on and what seemed like seconds later came to yet another fallen tree. Road blocked. As the children’s book goes, can’t go over it, can’t go round it, have to go back. Back we went and to the other back and new road from Querorema to Dili, goat track number 2. Very soon trying to get the car up a steep and slippery slope, I resorted to labour breathing and my own version of praying. Those that really could pray, did this. Many attempts and we were up at the top only to find that the side of the road had disappeared down the hillside and what remained was a sea of glassy mud, angled to the sheer cliff that tumbled down to the valley. Deb got out and walked in front, calling encouragement as the car inched forward, perilously close to the precipice, seemingly moving forward but also slipping more and more to the cliff. The nuns prayed again and the Frater said that God would assist me to do this, don’t worry. We did it, Deb clambered aboard again and on we went.





Soon the steam coming from under the bonnet competed with the pouring rain and I realised there was another problem – we had a heated radiator. Always confident, we stopped by a house and children came out with the bucket and water and we filled the radiator and then went on. From that point to Dili, it was neck on neck – would it be the everlasting deluge and the impact that so much water was having on the roads or would it be the dead radiator. There was certainly no-one else out that day to ask this question.

Enough! Suffice to say what is on a bad day a 6 hour drive took 16 hours. We crossed rivers, waded through mud, took more and more tenuous tracks, made our way under fallen power lines, under and over fallen trees and landslides and limped into Dili, stopping to refill the blessed radiator one last time when we dropped off 3 very clean and very grateful nuns.

But this is a story about Aileu! About 15 minutes from Aileu and now about midnight, the Frater said that we would stop in Aileu, see if we could repair the radiator and have something to eat. Where I thought? Everything is shut and anyway its constant storm. But this is Timor after all I remind myself. Have faith. We stop outside the home of a friend of the Fraters, a teacher at the local high school. All the family are out of bed and they greet us warmly. We were ushered inside and its dry and warm and we are invited to sit around a table and we are offered a magnificent meal of rice and vegetable dishes. It was simply marvellous and we were so grateful! We drink tea and hear about the life of the family, they ask us politely about our trip and we don't need to say much because the evidence is written over us in mud. We are exhausted and they were caring and generous. They try with torches and phone lights in hand but can't fix the car ... we bundle back in and on we go.



I have travelled through Aileu many times since, never without remembering the utter kindness of a family who got out of bed to the Frater's call and cooked a meal for 6 wet strangers and 1 friend.

Jude Finch



Frater Acacio, Jude and Deb at the airport the next day