

September 4, 2006

Dear

I am writing to THANK YOU for supporting me during my trip this summer to Indonesia, and to tell you a bit about what it was like and how I've been changed.

The Itinerary I left early on the morning of Saturday, July 8, flying from Wausau to Milwaukee to Kansas City and then to Los Angeles, getting a wonderful view of the Grand Canyon (first time in my life) along the way. It was also my first time in Los Angeles, where my wife Laura spent her early years. During a 12 hour layover in LA (I had purchased a cheap ticket that got me there too early) I got some reading done and visited with Roger, who would be my roommate on the trip and who also arrived at the airport too early. The 20 sponsors who were on the tour all met each other at the departure gate late that night. Early Sunday morning we took off for my first trip across the Pacific, landing in Taipei, Taiwan 12 hours and 35 minutes later. After a three-hour layover we flew another five hours to Jakarta, then boarded a bus for a 2.5 hour ride to Bandung, arriving at our hotel at 5:45pm local time, 5:45 am WI time on Monday, July 10. That's almost exactly 49 hours of travel! I was certainly tired, but really excited to be on the island of Java, Indonesia, on the opposite side of the planet!



Evelin greeted me at the first project (in Bandung).



Viddy (left) and Renali helped me make a gift bag at the first project (in Bandung).

I will briefly summarize the rest of my trip here. It did not go fast for me—each day was so packed with memorable experiences that they seemed like weeks for me. On Tuesday we visited the headquarters office for Compassion International in Indonesia, getting a wonderful, inside look at how they help children deal with poverty and become Christian leaders. We also visited a museum and musical show that exhibited the angklung, a musical instrument that is unique to Indonesia and is related to the marimba. On Wednesday we visited the IO-887 Compassion project in Bandung, and were invited to the homes of some of the project participants. On Thursday we drove back to Jakarta, flew to Surabaya, and drove to Malang, circumventing a man-made mud flow disaster that had killed 70 people the day before. On Friday we visited two projects, IO-767 and IO-865, as well as another home of a Compassion child. At IO-767 I was greeted by 12-year-old Arie. I later learned that his sponsor had cancelled his monthly support in January, and now Laura and I are sponsoring him in addition to Susiamiyati! On Saturday we drove to a water park, where all the sponsors met their sponsored children. I was able to spend six hours with Susiamiyati, learning a lot more about what she is like and how Compassion has helped her. It was wonderful! On Sunday we attended church in Malang, drove to Surabaya, and flew to Denpasar, on the island of Bali. On Monday we visited IO-736, high in the mountains of Bali, and again were invited to visit a home. On Tuesday we got to shop in a traditional market. I bargained in Bahasa! (Bahasa is the predominant language among the islands of Indonesia.) That afternoon we enjoyed swimming in the ocean near our hotel. On Wednesday we began our trip home, flying from Denpasar to Taipei and then Los Angeles, arriving around 8:00pm local on Wednesday, August 19. I stayed overnight and flew Thursday morning back to Wausau, arriving in the early evening.

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Clinton (left) and Arie (lower right, blue and red shirt) at the first project in Malang. Arie (12 yrs old) is the boy we've begun to sponsor. His friend Clinton wants to be a science professor!



Susi and I shortly after meeting at the Jawa Timur park in Batu. Yohanna (far left) was our interpreter.

The Visit The day spent with Susi was a delightful one. We walked around the park, which boasted a museum, a theme park, a reptile garden, a bird zoo, and a large swimming area, and we talked much of the day through an interpreter. We also raced on go-karts! I learned many things about Susi that I hadn't discovered by her letters, including: her brother's name (Antonius, 10 years old); her parents' occupations (they both work on a rubber plantation); that she plays the guitar and sometimes helps to lead worship; that she visits the Compassion project three times a week; that she lives in a Muslim village but hasn't experienced any persecution (except a Muslim friend of hers keeps urging her to abandon Christianity); that her father built their house out of wood; and

that she wants to go into the tourism trade. She is a friendly young woman and loves to laugh. She has a gentle voice, but insists that she is very firm when bargaining to buy groceries for her family in the market! We really enjoyed the chance to get to know each other better.



Renatalia greeted me at the second project in Malang.

Compassion International I was very impressed by the work of Compassion in Indonesia. They have a long-term development approach; Compassion is not a relief agency. They partner with local churches, so each project has a pastor representative, a project director, a number of adult volunteers, and usually between 100 and 200 children. Each project meets in a church building. The primary aim of Compassion is to improve access to education, so they pay the children's school fees and provide extra tutorials in subjects not well covered by the schools, including English and computers. They teach the children about good nutrition and serve them lunch every day. They train the children in good hygiene and distribute items such as toothbrushes. They take the children on occasional special outings such as the zoo or a local swimming pool. Finally, they teach the children many Bible

lessons and songs and urge them to attend church on Sunday to ground them in the Christian faith. I have personally witnessed how they do these things, I met the people who make it happen, and I even helped serve a couple of lunches! I saw how the donor money is distributed, and I interviewed the children to get their perspective on how Compassion has helped them. I can definitely promote Compassion and be their advocate with confidence because I have seen how they are serving the Lord and blessing these children with integrity and with a long-term, thoughtful approach. One way we can pray for them concerns disasters such as the earthquake in Yogyakarta, where a dozen of their projects were damaged and several sponsored children were killed. They are trying to do relief work there, but they have no experience with such short-term efforts and they covet prayers for wisdom and for provision.

What I Learned As I look over the journal I kept on the trip, I can see there were a number of things the Lord impressed upon me. First, I was reminded again about the importance of prayer. It plays a central role in the lives of Christians everywhere, and as I prayed with the Indonesian Christians I was both impressed by the authenticity and earnestness of their prayers as well as moved as I heard them pray for us. I marveled at how God uses things like poverty and human suffering to cause people to rely on Him alone. We pray that they would be released from poverty, but they might actually be worse off spiritually if they became better off financially. When I compare myself to the Indonesians, I can sense my own spiritual poverty despite my material prosperity.



Edi greeted me at the project in Bali. He became "King of the Frisbee."

Life Means So Much by Chris Rice

Every day is a journal page / Every man holds a quill and ink / And there's plenty of room for writing in / All we do is believe and think
So will you compose a curse / Or will today bring the blessing? / Fill the page with rhyming verse / Or some random sketching?

Teach us to count the days / Teach us to make the days count / Lead us in better ways / That somehow our souls forgot
Life means so much

Every day is a bank account / And time is our currency / So nobody's rich, nobody's poor / We get 24 hours each
So how are you gonna spend? / Will you invest, or squander? / Try to get ahead / Or help someone who's under

Teach us to count the days / Teach us to make the days count / Lead us in better ways / That somehow our souls forgot
Life means so much

Every day is a gift you've been given / Make the most of the time every minute you're living...

Secondly, I was reminded to take each day as a gift from God. Within the nine days we were there, a gas drilling accident created the mud flow disaster I mentioned earlier, and a tsunami along the southern coast of Java killed more than 400 people (we were hundreds of miles away, on Bali, when the tsunami hit on Monday evening). Many of those killed were living in poverty, and none of them knew which day would be their last. As I reflected on this, I renewed my commitment to regard each day as a gift from God and to make the most of the time He has given us.

I was very impressed by how warm and friendly the Indonesians were. We were warmly greeted and welcomed wherever we went! I also renewed my commitment to write letters to our sponsored children. They really treasure the letters and photos they receive (we asked a number of them to show us their letters, and they had all kept them carefully preserved). We heard a sad story from one family, where two sisters were sponsored, but one received many letters and the other only received one. So we're committing ourselves to write more often and encouraging others to do the same. At the end of the trip, I learned a difficult lesson after losing my camera (I probably left it on the plane) with all 145 photos in its memory. As I've made various fruitless attempts to recover it, I've struggled with feelings of deep disappointment. But this wasn't a photo reconnaissance trip; God did a work in my heart and the hearts of the children independent of whether I could bring back photos. And as it turns out, one of the Compassion employees on the trip took 1,953 photos and sent each sponsor a photo CD with all of them. The pictures included here are among



The mail sorting room at Compassion Indonesia headquarters in Bandung. I put an arrow on the mailbox where our letters to Susi are placed. Every sponsor letter is translated and sent to the child's project.



The sponsors and their sponsored children, at the Jawa Timur park, July 15, 2006.

them. When I reflect on the lost camera I realize that I too often judge events in my life based on how much material blessing I either gain or lose, and I forget that it's the heavenly treasure that really matters.

So thanks again for helping to make this trip possible! I really appreciate your generosity to me and your commitment to world evangelization. May the Lord bless you as you continue to serve Him daily.

In Christ,