

Vicky Tchong remembers 1999 and toasts Busa the cat and Pat Walsh and his book.

Dili, Timor-Leste. 28 August 2019

I was given 15 minutes to talk about something that took a life-time, so bear with me.

1999! The year the Timorese people swore that: *mate ka morris, ukun rasik aan!*

In Melbourne, we formed a Timorese Action Group to mobilise the Timorese community to cast our votes.

We made it abundantly clear that NOT one Timorese was going to miss out on their right to vote. We provided every means we could, thinking that if our compatriots inside the country had to risk their lives to vote, we in a safe country did not have any excuses not to go to the polls. We mobilised even people in nursing homes and transported the sick and the disabled to vote for our fate. It was the last chance for us as a people! We were determined to win the ballot.

On September 4, 1999, the day the result was announced, I got a call to go to Jakarta to join a think tank to prepare to build our new country. I was on my way to Jakarta when the result was announced.

I landed in Jakarta to hear the news of the massive displacement, and the looting and destruction that was happening in East Timor. Immediately, the think tank became the East Timor Humanitarian Group!

We door knocked all the foreign embassies in Jakarta, calling for an international peace keeping force.

At the same time, we received refugees, rescued hunted figures, found safe houses for the displaced, looked for missing persons, and cared for the injured who'd been burned.

When Maun boot Xanana was transferred from house arrest to the basement of the British Embassy, he gave me a bag of rupiah and said to use the money for anything the refugees needed. I said I couldn't carry the money around as I had to move from place to place to avoid the militias. He kept the money and said nothing.

A few days later, a colleague brought the same bag of money and said Xanana had asked her to bring it to me. (I was puzzled because of what I had said to him!)

She said, *Vicky we are all leaving Jakarta, what are you going to do?*

I said, *What do you mean?*

She rolled her eyes and said: *Vicky, the bird has flown from the cuckoo's nest!*

What? I cried. *It's not funny, what do you mean?*

So, Xanana and everyone else left for Darwin. I was left alone to team up with the RENETIL students to look after the refugees and repatriation (with that bag of rupiah, of course!)

A few weeks ago, Pat called to ask me to launch his book, and asked if I could share with you today an episode about a cat during the repatriation.

At that time, we did not have travel documents but after several rounds of negotiations, we were allowed to provide manifest lists of the people to be repatriated. Every 6 hours, 300 East Timorese refugees were checked in to board chartered flights to fly to Baucau at first.

During one of the check-ins, a little girl came running to me with a cat in a cage. She said the Indonesian immigration officer would not allow her to take the cat on board. I dismissed her saying, *Why do you want to take the cat, we are running for our lives?*

She said, *It is not my cat. The President has asked me to take the cat home.*

Oh, I said. That's a different story. It's our chartered flight, we take what we want.

So we went to the Immigration Officer, and I said to him, *Permisi Pak, this cat belongs to our President, it has to be repatriated.*

In an indifferent manner, he said, *The cat is not on the manifest list.*

Oh that's easy, I replied. I prepare the list. I will include the cat on the list.

I did not know the name of the cat, and I was not going to show the Immigration Officer I did not know the cat, so I wrote the name *Kay Busa Gusmao* on the list.

But the officer said the cat could not travel in the cabin with human beings, and the animal cabin was too cold. Maybe it could go on the next flight after they had prepared the cabin.

So the story goes on..... you can find out what happened in Pat's book! I encourage you to buy it so you can read the rest of the story.

I am more interested to talk about the author of this book: Pat Walsh! The way I knew him.

1999 is important and the Santa Cruz Massacre was a wake-up call, but without the extraordinary work done over many years by remarkable individuals like Pat Walsh, the world would not have opened their eyes and ears to the suffering and the cause of the Timorese people.

Initially, Pat was a lonely voice on what was happening in East Timor.

During the occupation, East Timor was sealed from outside contacts, any report of what happened was said to be propaganda. No journalist had independent access to report on the situation inside.

In those days, officials in Australia and elsewhere insisted that the Indonesian occupation was irreversible. The ALP gave de-iure recognition to the Indonesian annexation. That made it difficult for anyone to argue for our case. But Pat managed to raise public awareness, he became an expert on East Timor and East Timor became a household name in Australia.

He was and still is a resource person on East Timor. How did he achieve that?

In brief, I would say that it was due to his wisdom, vision and strong commitment, come rain and shine!

Pat once said that to progress the East Timor cause, one had to be very clear about the nature of the issue and to base one's activity on fundamental principles, i.e. human rights.

Advocacy of the East Timor cause had to be based on principles that everyone accepted and understood.

Pat reached out to the Timorese community in Australia. We were naïve and innocent, not ready for the sophisticated world. He baby-sat us and, with strategic advice guided us into the international world.

In 1985, Pat encouraged us to attend the UN Women's Conference in Nairobi. He organised three Timorese women and equipped them with information and answers to all their questions. The experience showed Timorese in the diaspora that they could play an important role in defending their people's rights. They went on to attend other conferences.

In 1990, two friends and I took off to Geneva for our summer holidays. Pat linked us up with an Australian indigenous NGO who had accreditation at the UN Human Rights Council and gave us some of their speaking time. That year, the East Timor case came close to being dropped from the HRC agenda but our effort helped turn votes around and keep East Timor on the agenda.

That was my first taste of diplomatic life. It laid the foundation for my role in Timor-Leste's foreign service today.

At the same time, in what he called an 'organic and creative process', Pat developed all kinds of contacts and networks including with the Timorese clandestine network in Indonesia.

Working in a small office in Fitzroy, he also promoted human rights in Indonesia and established *Inside Indonesia* magazine to help with that.

His many campaigns to raise awareness of the East Timor cause included auctioning Xanana's prison paintings to raise funds, the publication of Xanana's trial defense plea, a human rights award for Xanana, celebration of Xanana's birthday each year he was in prison, and even *Free Xanana* stickers that were plastered around the building in Vienna where the UN World Conference on human rights was held in 1993.

His family, Annie and their three daughters, also contributed a lot. I remember seeing Suzannah and Mayra dressed in Timorese cultural costumes. After Independence Patricia attended school in Venilale and Annie worked for many years in the NGO and education sectors. She and Pat support many Timorese kids to get an education.

Pat speaks Bahasa Indonesia, has a broad vision of Indonesia and helped us understand that the Indonesian Army, not the Indonesian people, were responsible for the atrocities in East Timor. This differentiation has been fundamental to reconciliation between Indonesia and East Timor. Let's applaud his work and vision.

Let me conclude with one last reference to the cat, Kay Busa Gusmao. He was an unsung hero of our struggle and, in his book, Pat give us a wonderful insight into his story.

Though he didn't live all his lives to the full, this furry feline should be written into our history books. The sacrifices he made with unjustly incarcerated comrades is an inspiration to all two-legged and four-legged creatures. Two great heroes, Jacob Rumbiak and Xanana Gusamo, attest to Busa's morale-boosting contribution in prison and to his place in Papuan and Timorese history, but this moggy has not been duly recognised. Pat has started this process. But does not Busa deserve some sort of memorial?

It is a great honour for me to declare *The Day Hope and History Rhymed in East Timor and other East Timor Stories*, written by our beloved Pat Walsh, officially Launched.

The book will make a great Christmas gift.

May God bless you all.

Viva Referendum Day!