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# The day the dentist came to town: a Balinese school receives its first mobile dental service

## **Abstract**

### Extract:

It is a Wednesday morning and Pengelatan Primary School is decked out in festive flags and an air of excitement. Each of the 450 pupils – including those in the kindergarten – is looking well turned out in freshly laundered uniforms and neatly combed hair. Some, in Balinese mode, wear a flower behind the ear. The carnival atmosphere erupts into applause when the dentist's van drives in. For almost all, this is their first encounter with a dentist.

## **Keywords**

dental care program

**The Day the Dentist Came to Town:  
A Balinese School Receives Its First Mobile Dental Service**

*A Centre Report*

It is a Wednesday morning and Pengelatan Primary School is decked out in festive flags and an air of excitement. Each of the 450 pupils – including those in the kindergarten – is looking well turned out in freshly laundered uniforms and neatly combed hair. Some, in Balinese mode, wear a flower behind the ear.



The carnival atmosphere erupts into applause when the dentist's van drives in. For almost all, this is their first encounter with a dentist. They line up procession-like, with teachers officiating - low-key, well organised. When the moment comes to step up into the van and have their teeth examined, excitement turns to nervousness. The dental paraphernalia – chair, drill, metal instruments, masked dentist, nurse in white – induces a moment of anxiety. But once in the chair, matters are in hand. A higher order of things prevails. The dentist performs the much needed universal task of examining, repairing, restoring, all in the cause of dental hygiene. Even the teachers have their turn at the end.

As each child solemnly emerges – no tears, very brave – he or she receives a tube of toothpaste and a coupon for a bowl of noodles as a reward. They line up at the noodle stand nearby. They have been taught how to look after teeth and the importance of brushing properly after meals.

Those who are not in the immediate line up for having their teeth examined are engaged in singing sessions. There is no time to get too nervous. Others are allowed to talk to the various members of the dental 'caravan'. These include a range of people who are responsible for the event. Primary amongst them is Madam Tutik Kusuma Wardhani, president and director of Kertha Usada General Hospital ('Kertha' means good, and 'usada' means healing in Balinese) - a private hospital in Singaraja, north Bali. She organizes for the dental van to go out to the schools of Buleleng province, of which Singaraja is the capital.



As the service is free of charge, costs are covered by bringing in local business. The provider of the toothpaste and noodles – the sponsor of the event – is Pt. Wings Surya Singaraja. The district manager, Mr Anthony, is in attendance looking on. Among several volunteers is Madam Tutik's daughter, Sylvie Yuliasari, who holds the microphone and compares the singing session among the children awaiting their turn. A graduate in hospitality from a Melbourne institution, she puts hers skills to effective use covering otherwise long hours of waiting and worrying. Bond University Masters graduate Naning Pranoto, whose charitable foundation coordinates this program, explains to the children what to expect and the importance of oral hygiene. She also organizes for the provision of library materials for children at the hospital.



Where government funding is inadequate or absent in community care, the local private sector and volunteers come together. The dental care program covering the schools of rural Buleleng is designed to fill a need. There is also a program for women's health that is organized by local networks – both social and business.

#### Centre interview with Naning Pranoto

#### Chief executive - Garda Budaya Indonesia Foundation

#### *Getting Personally Involved*

Naning Pranoto was born in Yogyakarta and now lives in Bogor. She is a freelance writer and has worked as a journalist and editor for Indonesian magazines since 1977. In addition to self-help vocational booklets, she has written 15 books (fiction and non-fiction) - her latest being *Creative Writing: 72 Jurus Seni Mengarang* (2006, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Jakarta: PM Pustaka). She has been an activist since 1982. In 2001, she graduated from Bond University with a Master of Arts degree in International Relations and Chinese Studies. Since 2003 she has been chief executive of Garda Budaya Indonesia Foundation ([www.rayakultura.net](http://www.rayakultura.net)), a voluntary charitable organisation. Besides her time-consuming work with the Foundation, she conducts creative writing workshops at university level in Jakarta and also introduces students to Chinese and Japanese studies. Naning Pranoto can be reached at [not@indo.net.id](mailto:not@indo.net.id).

#### *Centre for East-West Cultural & Economic Studies - What motivates you to engage in social welfare program like the Singaraja one in Bali?*

*Naning Pranoto* - It comes from love of life and people, particularly children. So, I am thinking, what is the best way I can do something useful for them? I know what I can do by myself is very small. So I seek support from various sponsors who can join in and stay loyal to the programs. But even with sponsors, it is still not enough to meet the necessities of many children's lives. I always endeavor to find support even if I often get rejections from potential sponsors. Rejections don't worry me. I continue to step forward. I look at it from the positive side. For me, doing social work enhances my own life. I am doing something worthwhile with my life, rather than being caught up with frivolities. I have been on this track since 1982 when, as a journalist, I saw a lot of suffering and privation. That was when I became aware of the need to get personally involved.

#### *Centre - What tasks do you do in Singaraja?*

*NP* - What I am doing in Singaraja is similar to what I have done elsewhere in Indonesia. This includes providing a program of health services for poor people, creative writing workshop for students, HRD [human resource development] workshops for apprentices, establishing a small library - we call it Taman Bacaan or reading centre - for children and village women. I conduct these programs with my team from Garda Budaya Indonesia Foundation. We have held about 2,500 programs for 22,150 schools and universities throughout Indonesia. All these programs have been conducted without government support, not even a cent. We are running these programs for free.

#### *Centre - What other projects have you been involved in?*

*NP* - I have published self-help books designed to improve young people's and teachers' capabilities in writing, both creative writing and academic writing, and guidance for the HRD. We distribute these book to schools and universities free of charge. Unfortunately, we have no funding to continue this project.

#### *Centre - Are there other projects you would like to do?*

*NP* - Yes, of course, I have a lot. One of them has been my dream since I studied in Australia. I want to write a book about Australia from perspectives that would interest Indonesian children, so that they may know about the real Australia and its people. As you know, politically, the Indonesia-Australia relationship has had many ups and downs. When there are strained government-to-government relations, there is an inevitable negative impact on people-to-people relations. Yet Australia and Indonesia are close neighbours. It cannot bode well for the future if people live in close geographic proximity but don't fully trust or understand each other.

So there is a crucial need for mutual understanding. I think a book about Australia written by an Indonesian, in Indonesian, can act as a golden bridge. The book I want to write and eventually publish in Indonesia is, in my mind, a bridge to develop harmonious relations through people connecting with one another. It will be an act of cultural diplomacy. I envisage the book to appear in two versions, one for primary and the other for secondary school students. Of course these books will not be for sale. I will try to get them distributed free-of-charge to at least 3,000 schools throughout Indonesia. Like our other projects, I will try to get sponsors.

Learning about Australia may not be a basic need like health care, but for the future generations it matters that we develop good relations with our neighbours. Indonesia cannot take for granted its security environment, be it internal or external. We are a big archipelago and we are poor. Building relations at the level of 'hearts and minds' costs nothing but the rewards are greater than those reaped from investments in material aid. Failures in material aid are everywhere – look at Afghanistan. Corruption is a problem with big dollar projects. But trust-building on a people-to-people basis provides a surer ground to build the future.

#### *Centre - What will help raise the quality of life of Indonesian people?*

*NP* - I think informal education is the key. In this respect workshops are helpful in developing skills in young people, showing them how to be independent and how to cope with globalization. Practical programs such as language courses, especially English, Mandarin and Japanese, help. So do HRD programs to give guidance on how to be professional. Writing workshops are important for creativity and innovation. They help open the mind and find ways to apply ideas in improving quality of life.

#### *Centre - How does your social work fit in with your fiction writing?*

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*NP* - People and their behaviour are the prime sources for fiction writing. People are the inspirations for writing. For me, to be engaged in social work is the same as swimming in an ocean of inspiration. All aspects of life are there to infuse my writing. I don't think I could write any fiction without participating in the realities of people's lives. Social work not only contributes to improving the lives of the people I come into contact with, but also helps me to learn about what it is to be human. This enriches my mind and spiritual development as well.

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