

FROM  
TIMOR-LESTE  
TO AUSTRALIA

SEVEN FAMILIES, THREE GENERATIONS  
TELL THEIR STORIES

EDITED BY  
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**JAN TREZISE** grew up in Springvale South where successive groups of refugees and migrants settled in the surrounding areas. This early experience informed a lifelong activism in support of refugees.

Jan taught in both primary and secondary schools, and was the inaugural Principal of Gleneagles Secondary College in Endeavour Hills, Melbourne where many East Timorese families had settled. She has always been actively involved in her local community, welcoming and supporting refugees and migrants when the Enterprise Migrant Hostel was established in Springvale in 1970, setting up a program which linked local families to migrant families living in the hostel, later becoming a local councillor then the first female mayor of the City of Springvale.

Jan was president for 15 years of Friends of Ermera, founded in 2002 to provide educational training and mentorship in the District of Ermera. She has visited Timor-Leste many times, consulting with national and municipal education authorities, mentoring groups and individuals and assisting in the training of teachers.



*This book is dedicated to the brave men, women,  
and children of Timor-Leste who lost their lives  
in the fight for the independence of their nation.*



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The inspiration for publishing this book came from the members of the seven families who have shared their personal journeys with us and particularly their long struggle for their nation's independence. We thank them for their time, honesty and openness. By allowing us to document their inspirational stories and providing us with copies of their unique family photos, they have made an important contribution to the recording of Timor-Leste and Australian history.

The initial interviews of the family members were conducted over several months by students from Gleneagles Secondary College, Endeavour Hills, Victoria. The students documented the stories and provided us with the raw manuscript for the book. Without the support of the school and the teachers involved, led by teacher Lynne Moller, the stories might never have been documented. The students involved in the project were: Humna Aamir; Tome Correia; Jess Fitzgerald; Charlie Holmes; Nick Ilic; Joshua Kumar; Nehareeka Kaur; Andrew Lakshamalia; Kimberley Lofthouse; Lily Lunder; Kaelen McKinnon; Keisha Nathan; Vishal Panditharatne; Erin Porteous; Krish Rajavel; Nikitha Ramkumar; Zacki Rizwan; Chelsea Roy; Viranya Samarasinghe; Gita (Tirtani) Santosa; Khushi Sharma; Sean Silva; Emily Song; Nick Stamatopolous; Naomi Yong.

More extensive interviews to further explore the stories were conducted by Jan Trezise who went on to develop the manuscript. We want to thank Merle Mitchell and Geoff Trezise who provided the first edits of the stories.

The excellent curriculum kit which accompanies this book and ensures that it becomes a valuable teaching resource in our secondary schools has been prepared by Lynne Moller and Marilyn Davidson.

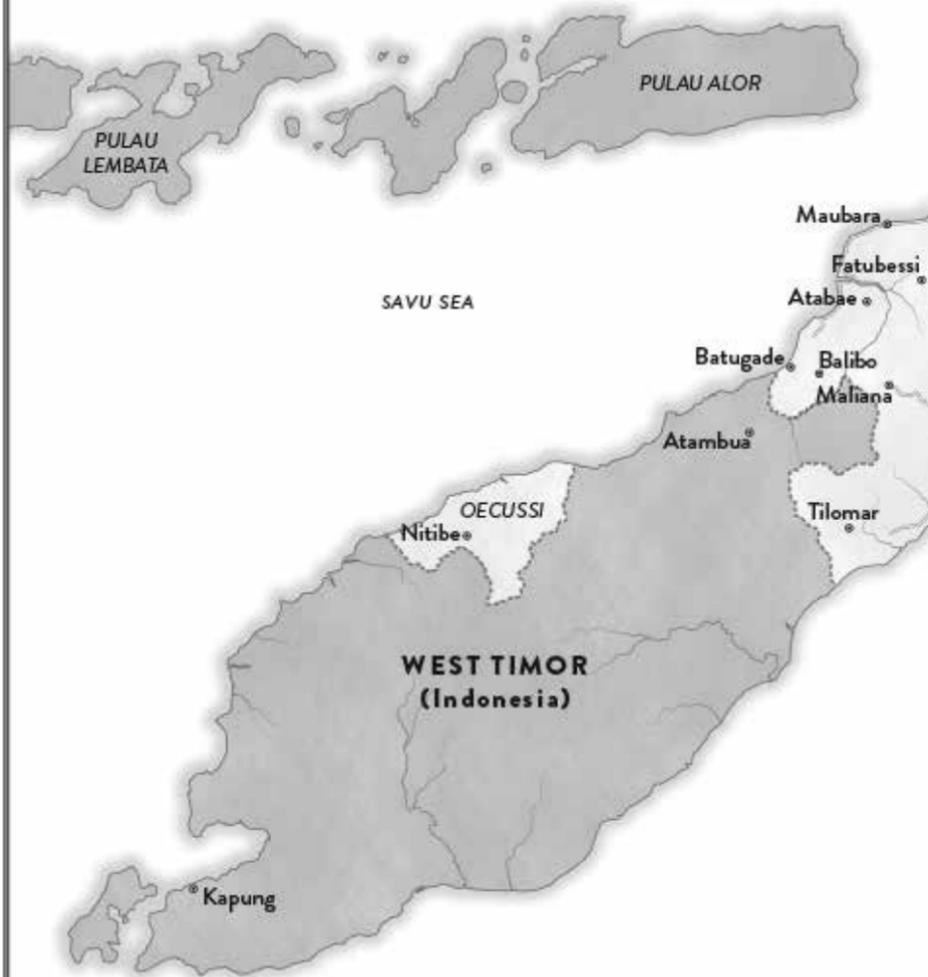
Catherine Lewis from Wild Dingo Press recognised the potential of the book and it has been a pleasure to work with her as she guided us through the publishing process.

The City of Casey has an active friendship link with the municipality of Ermera in Timor-Leste and has provided the funds to publish this book along with the venues and their staff assistance to enable us to appropriately celebrate each milestone in the interviewing, documenting, sharing, and launching of the book.

Jan Trezise, Melbourne, 2018

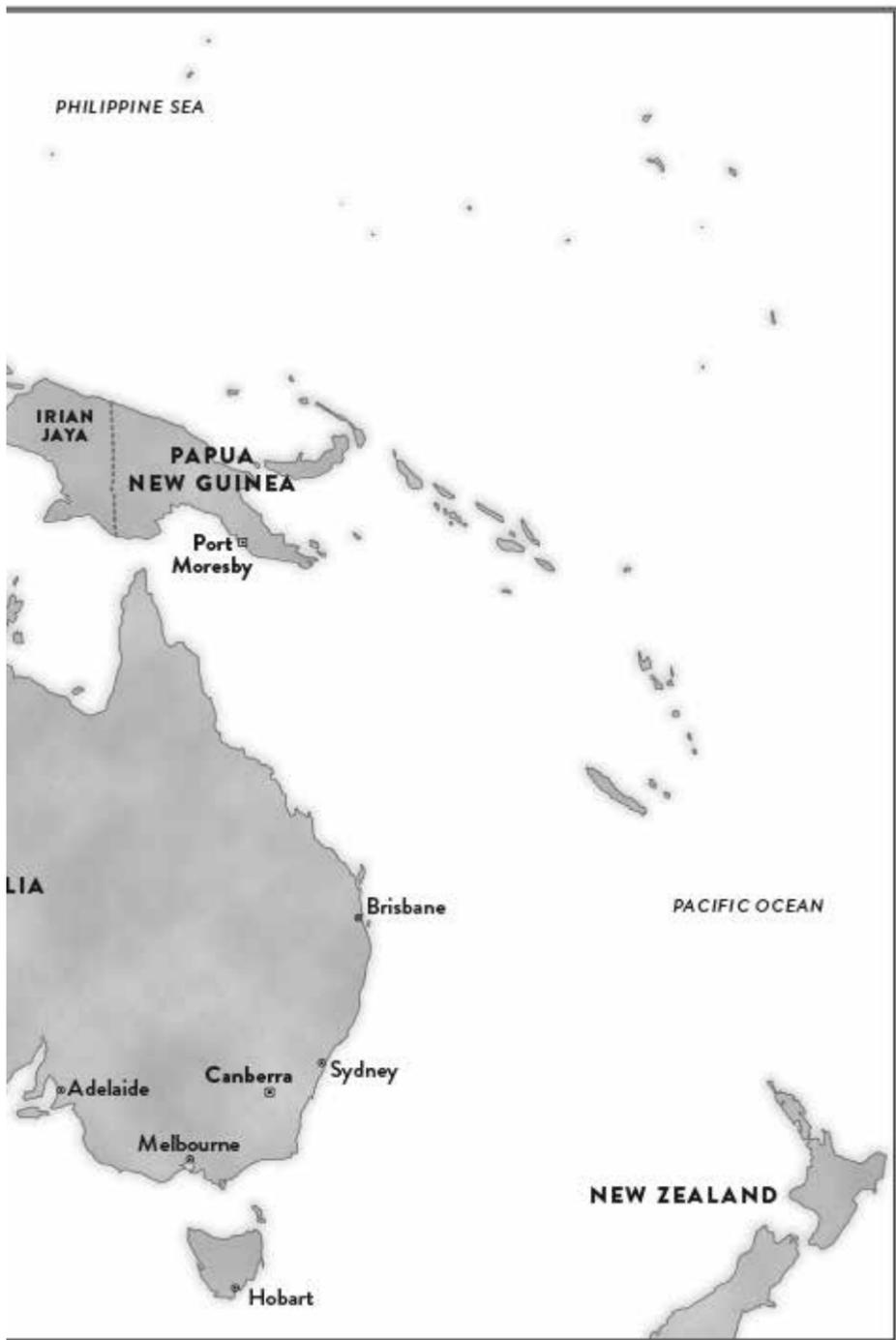
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**GOMES FAMILY**



## AMANDIO GOMES

When my father died and the war with Japan broke out in East Timor in 1942, I was very young and we were very poor. But my beliefs, along with the help of other people, allowed me to get through the tough times. It also helped that in East Timor everyone was friends.

I remember that at my school you had to cross a river to get to the college. Some people who were very clever called other people stupid, but they did not know how to cross the river. The people who were called stupid knew how to cross the river, and they would teach others; they were respected for this. So you see, you have to respect each other to have a good life because in one way or another, everyone has different kinds of knowledge.

I would like to ask you young people who are interviewing me today and will write my family story, that when you grow up, please love each other. Listen to each other and understand each other, have sympathy. If you don't, you will have an enemy everywhere you go and you will not be helped.

I am not wise—I just have experiences in life. So thank you for listening to me.



It is important to appreciate the history of East Timor and the fact that for centuries my country had been occupied by one foreign power or another. East Timor had been a Portuguese colony since the 16th century. Japan occupied Timor in 1942 and remained there until the end of World War 2 in 1945 when we returned to Portuguese rule once again. We were a Portuguese colony until 1975 when FRETILIN (Revolutionary Front for an independent East Timor) declared independence on 28 November 1975. Nine days later, Indonesia invaded.

In 1999 after 24 years of Indonesian occupation, the East Timorese were given the opportunity to vote for independence. They voted overwhelmingly in favour. In 2002 East Timor officially became an independent nation.

I was born in 1939 in Behau, Hatolia, a sub-district of Ermera in the south-western part of East Timor. My family was very poor, and my father passed away when I was about five years old, so my childhood was not easy. My family was poor because my parents were raising and supporting friends and relatives and other people who were having it tougher than us.

I went to primary school in Baucau but when the Japanese invaded Timor, my schooling was interrupted because we were forced to move from place to place around the island. My family finally settled in the capital Dili, and I continued my studies at Soibada College and then Dari Seminary. But at the age of 16 I had to stop as my family was struggling financially, so I found a job working as an interpreter with the Chinese-Timorese merchants.

During my time at school I had many great teachers but there was one Salesian priest, Father Abinal, who saw

something in my curious mind that lead me to become a mechanic at first, then an electrician. It was Father Abinal who encouraged me to pull apart engines and motors to determine the fault, then to fix it, and re-assemble them again. It was also Father Abinal who guided me in the right direction.

My first real job was working for *Camara Municipal de Dili* (Municipal Offices) learning to work as a government official for local council. It was there that I came to realise that the Timorese were not given an equal opportunity, and that there was a huge disparity in salaries and responsibilities between Portuguese and Timorese workers. So I decided to quit my job and started working with another government agency dealing with imports and exports, but realised that here, too, the Timorese were not recognised as equals. I complained and became quite vocal in my workplace, which is how I started forming my political views towards Portuguese rule.

I worked with a few different companies in different roles but kept being drawn to electrical and mechanical work, where I developed a good reputation. As electricity was always intermittent in Dili, the government put out a tender to overseas companies to deliver power to Dili efficiently and reliably. An English company won the contract but there was no one in Timor who understood how to manage and maintain these particular generators. So Manuel Carrascalão, a man of influence in Dili, recommended me to the government and I ended up going to England for over a year to further my studies in electrical and mechanical repairs. I remember the meeting with him quite well. I was still quite young and was sitting quietly among Portuguese and Timorese workers. I

am very thankful to Senhor Carrascalão who believed in me and trusted that I was capable of taking this huge opportunity.

Manuel Carrascalão had been a close friend of my father's and I am grateful that my father had such good friends who kept looking after me even though he had passed away so long ago. My father worked as a government official, and in that role helped many families so was well respected in the community. That's the thing about being Timorese: we look after each other. We understand the value and importance of community.

As for my competence in the English language, I had learnt that from an Australian couple who had retired to Dili after having lived there for many years during their working lives. At that time there were some Australians working out of Dili on the oil rigs as well as businesses that traded between Dili and Darwin. They were lovely people, and in exchange, I taught them Portuguese and Tetum.

Much later, I was approached by another friend of my father's, an Australian engineer who offered me work in an oil drilling company. Initially, I was in charge of maintenance of refrigerators and water pipes for oil drilling. But then I was given many roles and responsibilities in this company and was lucky to have good bosses who allowed me to use their machinery outside work hours. On my days off I would often take the tractors and tools and help the families in the community to build their houses and do general repairs.

*This diary that follows, keeps track of what happened in my adult life as I remember the hardships, the laughter, the fear and the sadness of my life and the events that were happening in my homeland, my Timor-Leste.*

### SEPTEMBER 1971

I sometimes despair for our future. My country should be our country, not someone else's! We must stick together, and we should be our *own* country! If Portugal recognised the Timorese as equals and we were given equal opportunities at work and study, then I think the Timorese would not be rebelling so much against the colonial power.

This was the year my youngest daughter, Carmelita, was born; so now we have another member of our family. My wife, Fatima, has had such difficulties with her pregnancy that I think it was a miracle that she and our daughter both survived. Fatima had a dream during the pregnancy of the Virgin Mary at the foot of her bed who said, 'You shall name her, Carmelita'. And so it was that Carmelita was born, joining her sister, Elizabete, the oldest. She was later followed by two brothers, Amandio and Bernardo—completing the Gomes family.

### DECEMBER 1971

Every day is tiresome. I am now working as a mechanic and machine operator in charge of keeping creeks and the sea clean, and today was no different. But when I arrived home, the sight of my beautiful darling wife, Fatima, and the smiles of my four children, somehow made my worries all go away. Their existence makes my days better—they support me; I adore them. As I sit in the rugged landscape of Timor and behold the stars, I wonder and reflect: *I love my family.*

### MARCH 1972

Today I vowed to myself to make my children's home a better place for them and for everyone! I don't want my children to go through what I did. The memories of my father passing

away too soon and the extreme poverty we all experienced as children still haunts me. I remember it all just as if it was yesterday—the piercing coldness whenever the sun went away, my only source of heat vanishing—the deep grumble in my stomach, the realisation that I had no father to learn from, no father to look up to. Then I remembered that even though times were tough in my childhood, we worked as a family and community; everyone knew one another, and most importantly, everyone united together. Despite the awfulness of those times, I consider myself to be fortunate to have lived through them.

#### **APRIL 1972**

Today, I finally mustered up enough courage to share my thoughts and my beliefs; I decided to pass on my opinions to others. As I prepared to share with my people, my family and fellow workers, I had a quick moment of panic and apprehension. Looking around hesitantly, I realised I was very nervous; but when my eyes focused on our community, the sight of our unity, our culture and our country, I was inspired. When I spoke, I found that I was not alone, that others, too, loved our country deeply and wanted independence from Portugal.

*My letters to the Portuguese government authorities have been answered by a very demoralising letter. It reads:*

Dear Amandio,

I am sure you are not happy to read this, but we have no interest in making Timor-Leste independent at any time in the future. Your words and thoughts

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do concern us as this country is and always will be a colony under Portuguese rule. If you have any further comments or questions, please write or visit us in Dili, where we can talk in person.

*On Behalf of the Government of Portugal*

To the Government of Portugal,  
If Portugal is not interested in allowing Timor to become independent, then the Timorese people need to be given equal opportunities and chances. We are not your criados (servants) and we demand equal respect and consideration. We are a proud people and deserve a better chance in life.

I have read your letter but still believe that my people and my country should have a chance to become independent. Some families have older members who were brought here from Portugal, but now they and their families see themselves as Timorese. I was born in Timor; my grandfather was also born in Timor. We are Timorese. Why are we still Portuguese if we live in and love Timor-Leste?

*Amandio*

### **WEEK 1, APRIL 1972**

By the time I have finished attending to my wife and children, it is usually too dark for me to write anything productive. This night, I have put my children to bed earlier so that I now have time before it gets pitch black. The electricity keeps failing in Dili; I don't know when the government is going to get this basic service fixed. I won't be giving away what I know is the solution to this problem unless I'm recognised and paid accordingly. They don't really seem interested anyway. Every day, anger starts to well up in me as I think back to the answers I have received from the Portuguese Government.

**WEEK 3, APRIL 1972**

I mutter and vow that everyone in Timor-Leste will be free, independent and treated equally by everyone. It is always the sound of my children that keeps me sane and happy. I make a promise to myself then to make sure my children never have to go through the same pains as I did through the hardship and struggles to keep our family alive and healthy. I have since received another two letters back from the Government of Portugal. I am so torn up about the last letter that I do not know how to respond. The letters and my reply follow.

Dear Amandio,

Your letters concern us, and we believe that you are confused. As this colony was founded by Portugal and is still being managed by the Portuguese, we do not see why it should become independent from Portugal. It is still under the rule of Portugal. We urge you to stop this nonsense immediately or we will need to act accordingly.

*On Behalf of the Government of Portugal*

To the Government of Portugal

I do hope to meet you in person to explain to you the reasons why my family and our friends believe in Timor-Leste as an independent country of love and laughter. We believe that no one is insignificant. People that you may consider 'dumb' may one day teach you something valuable. We believe that our people should have a chance to be free, a chance to manage our own country.

*Amandio*

Dear Amandio

You need to understand what we have told you several times: Timor-Leste will remain a Portuguese colony.

We have no interest in hearing your opinions and do not want to receive any more letters from you. To continue on this path will be detrimental to you and your family. Your views are not welcome or tolerated.

*On Behalf of the Government of Portugal*

#### **WEEK 4, APRIL 1972**

This cannot be good. The authorities are upset by my views. I understood that my views were not appreciated by them and was aware that some Timorese had been imprisoned recently for the same beliefs. Still, I thought it important to continue to fight the government.

But one day I was approached by a Portuguese engineer who had connections with the army. He sympathised with my views and advised me of the danger I was facing. He made me realise the impact my imprisonment would have on my family; and informed me that the PIDE (International and State Defence Police) was watching me closely which meant that I risked ending up in prison.

And so it happened. I am being 'encouraged' to leave my country or face imprisonment for my political views. The authorities have told me that I have a day to pack before I must board a plane bound for Mozambique, another Portuguese colony, where I am to be exiled but not imprisoned. In haste, I decide to leave my family behind because we have not had time to make plans before I am to be expelled from my own country! It is dusk, and I have stolen some time in which to write this journal. I leave at sunrise tomorrow.

A possible escape plan forms in my mind: my flight takes me via Darwin where I have been offered a job with an Australian company.

My plan failed. As I landed in Darwin, I met a fellow-Timorese with whom I shared my plan, only to find out later

that he notified the Australian police. At the time I thought he had betrayed me, but then I realised many years later when I migrated to Australia and met him again, that his actions were with good intentions: to save me from committing a crime against the Portuguese regime which also had contacts in Australia. And so I was found in Darwin and taken back on board the plane bound for Mozambique.

I managed, however, to jot down a few words while on the plane, exiled from my own country by some foreign and corrupt government. Feeling distraught at the time of departure, I felt that it was the end of the world and I couldn't help but feel guilty at the situation I put my family in. I had become interested in political action as a way of seeking a better future for my country, but unfortunately, my political views were not acceptable to the Portuguese authorities and became the reason for my exile.

What future am I providing for my family now? I think of my children and am reminded of my promise to keep them safe and make sure they don't ever have to experience the hardships and the loss of their father as I did. It also reminds me to be a good father and to be the good role model that I had wished my father could have been alive to provide to me.

I believed that a door may have been shut in our faces, but other doors will open and give us a chance. Hopefully, a new pathway will lead to a new future. Unfortunately, this time I had waved goodbye to my beloved country.

Upon my arrival in Mozambique, I had a visit from PIDE officers to make sure I had actually arrived and to ensure that

I fully understood my obligations including the requirement to report to the police every month about my work and my whereabouts.

### **MAY 1972**

Now I need to work really hard to make sure my family is allowed to join me in Mozambique because I do not want them to be left behind without my support.

### **1972-1975**

Mozambique is better than I expected. Our family is reunited and the company I work for has provided us with a nice home. I have met some other Timorese people who have also been exiled and we have managed to make some new friends. There is a lot of work for me as an electrician, and I really enjoy helping others in our new community. The people in Mozambique are very friendly and respectful—both qualities I admire. As my kids are young, they are just happy to play around. Seeing them happy makes me happy, and that cycle lives on.

Upon reflection, I remember that my maternal grandfather had also been exiled to Mozambique for wanting independence from Portugal. My mother tells me that he spent a few years in prison before being released to live in Mozambique. My grandfather is a descendant of the great Don Boaventura the *Liurai* of Same who led the famous rebellion against Portuguese rule, known as the Manufahi War of 1911-1912. So, it's in my blood.

My grandfather married an Indian/Mozambiquan woman and their two children, my mother and my uncle, were both born in Mozambique. The family later migrated

to Timor after the Portuguese political rule became less oppressive, and some Timorese exiles were allowed to return.

My life in Mozambique turned out to be a great success because I was finally being recognised both financially and personally for my skills and experience. I had an important job working as an electrician, collaborating in the great Cahora Bassa power transmission system (the largest hydro-electric system in southern Africa) that supplies energy not only to Mozambique but also to South Africa.

#### **APRIL 1974**

The most exciting and hopeful news comes from Portugal. The so-called Carnation Revolution (*Revolução dos Cravos*)<sup>1</sup> has resulted in the overthrow of the dictatorship in Portugal. It seems that even the Portuguese are unhappy with how the government was managing the country and their colonies. What now for all the colonies and Portugal? I am excited to find out.

There is trouble emerging all over Africa and I certainly feel it in Mozambique, and, of course, I fully support their right to be independent. As for Timor, it is difficult to get regular news. We are hearing that political parties are forming in readiness to elect a Timorese Government. I wonder what I would do if I were there now.

#### **JUNE 1975**

Being exiled was fate. Although it hurts to be separated from my country, I am grateful that my family is not caught up in the conflict between the political parties happening there

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<sup>1</sup> A peaceful military coup on 25 April 1974 that overthrew the Fascist dictatorship and ended Portuguese colonialism.

now. We could have so easily been caught up in the war that is tearing our communities apart. My heart aches as I hear news from Timor. Conflicts between the three major political parties are developing into fights in the streets and it is feared that a civil war could develop. This is not what I was expecting from my dear land and people. I hope that the political leaders can find some way out of all this despair. What is our future now? Will I ever be able to take my family back to our homeland?

I have managed to send money in a clandestine way to FRETILIN<sup>2</sup>. This group has also become a good source of news from my country. I even send money to some APODETI (political party that believed that Timor should integrate with Indonesia) members I had known when I became aware they were struggling in exile somewhere else.

### **AUGUST 1975**

I am happy to hear that other Portuguese colonies are having a chance at becoming independent, too, but I am fearful of all the conflict being generated in all these countries.

### **SEPTEMBER 1975**

It seems that Fretilin has a chance of winning the civil war, but I am hearing disturbing news coming from the border with Indonesia. Could they be planning to invade my country? What chance do we have against an invading force if Portugal withdraws from Timor?

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2 *Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente* (The Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor): a resistance movement that fought for East Timorese independence from 1974, and formed the first government after Independence, with Xanana Gusmão appointed its inaugural president.

## **NOVEMBER 1975**

Life goes on normally for us so far from home. Every day I go out and work to keep my family flourishing. Every month I keep reporting to the PIDE office to say I'm still here and working in Mozambique.

## **DECEMBER 1975**

The news from Timor is not good. The conflict between the three political parties continues to kill many innocent Timorese. The Portuguese are abandoning us at a very volatile moment in our history. Yes, we want independence, but Portugal, you cannot just withdraw when another country plans to invade; especially when for centuries, you have refused to train and educate us, to give us any chance to be anything.

Meanwhile, the people of Mozambique are celebrating their independence, and I am so glad to be here to witness such an auspicious occasion. If Frelimo (Mozambiquan Liberation Front) are able to overthrow the Portuguese, then I have complete faith in Freltilin being able to do the same. The similarities in our causes—of freedom and liberation—are all too much alike. The way things are going, I'm sure Timor will be independent soon but I'm just really worried about Indonesian intentions.

## **DECEMBER 1975**

Devastating news: Timor declares independence for a few days, only to be invaded by Indonesia, as feared. We have no means of communication, no idea of what is happening to our families.

On the day of the invasion, I heard the news on the radio. I could not get any additional first-hand information as it was

too dangerous for anyone to travel. We were despairing—not knowing if our family and friends were alive and safe, not knowing anything other than the complete horror we imagined.

The trouble has escalated in Mozambique, too. Mozambique's revolution is becoming dangerous. Now that they are independent, the local people are targeting the Portuguese and demanding that they all leave Mozambique. My family is again in danger, but once again my work saves me. The company I'm working for, *Atividades Eletricas e Associadas*, offers me a job in Portugal just as my house is raided by a Mozambiquan tribe. When they entered our house, it is obvious that they think that my wife is Portuguese, and because I'm working for a Portuguese/French company, they think that we pose a threat to the revolution. Luckily, our maids and cooks who were Mozambiquans, defended us and we were left unharmed but terrified.

I was not home at the time of the raid, but my wife and children were, and if our helpers had not intervened, I hate to think of the fate of our children. My wife recalls the cook standing in front of her, protecting her, and saying to the rebels, 'This family is good: this family has paid for my education, this family treats us with respect, this family is supporting many other families. You will not hurt this lady and their children; they are not our enemies.'

And so, our family was left untouched, but my wife grew very fearful as the news of Portuguese families disappearing became all too real. We decide it is no longer safe. I accept the offer in Portugal, and here we go again... We leave all my personal belongings to the maids and cook.

## **JANUARY 1976: PORTUGAL**

We arrived in Portugal safely and went to live with my sister, Otilia, in a small country town near the district of Coimbra. The Portuguese government had encouraged us to settle with the hordes of refugees coming from all the colonies, but we preferred to go where my sister was living. Otilia was married to a Portuguese man, whose family was from Redinha, the country town where we settled. We left Mozambique on a nice sunny day in summer and arrive in the freezing cold of a Portuguese winter. The shock to the family was not just cultural!

I continued to hear news from Timor via radio as well as from the steady influx of refugees. The war was devastating, horrific and there was still no news of our immediate family.

My new job took me to many different parts of the world some names of which I have forgotten! I spent time in Namibia, Angola, South Africa, Venezuela, Iraq and Israel. Because I was often away, and for long periods of time, I did not have the chance to participate in the flourishing Timorese community developing in the refugee camps surrounding Lisbon. The unexpected influx of refugees coming from all the troubled colonies claiming independence resulted in shanty towns developing on the outskirts of Lisbon which was where the majority of the Timorese settled.

Having a well-paid secure position on my arrival meant I was able to find a suitable house in the country town of Redinha to raise my children which, although not as luxurious as what we had in Mozambique, would do for now. At least there is no threat of any revolutions, and it is much better than what the Portuguese government is offering to the refugees

in Balteiros refugee camp; the situation there is appalling. At least here in Redinha, there are lots of fields for our children to play soccer in and to make new friends. It was sad for my family to have left the friends we made in Mozambique, but I felt it was necessary to give my children the best opportunities and to raise them the very best way I can.

### **1976-1985**

I am both relieved and happy to see my children fitting into this country and enjoying the luxuries Portugal has to offer. My boys are particularly skilful at soccer, a sport the Portuguese simply adore. Both have been offered contracts with the Sporting Club—the top soccer club in Portugal—which is quite promising at such a young age. My children have made many friends who will help them grow and flourish into good people. Although there are many differences between the cultures of the Timorese and the Portuguese, having one common language, the same religion and other customs, has resulted in my family's somewhat smooth transition to life in Portugal.

### **NOVEMBER 1976**

Not one day goes by when I don't miss my country, my Timor. While I appreciate the countryside of Portugal, what I yearn for is to be able to wander off and smell the robust smell of our frangipani and coffee plants, and to behold the astounding sight of our true blanket of stars. Where I am now, tall industrial buildings obstruct my view. I live and I'm happy, my family is safe, secure and cheerful, but no matter what, a part of me will always be missing my homeland.

News arrives with each fresh group of refugees. Every day, more and more, all bringing terrible news of the brutal

war Indonesia is raging in Timor while the rest of the world turns a blind eye to the atrocities my people are enduring. I can't imagine what horrible things can be happening to my friends and family, especially to those who are members of the Fretilin party.

My children are growing up in Portugal. I am extremely proud of them and how they have adapted to change. When I come back from work, I am always surprised to see them out and about, being curious and exploring with their friends, or relaxing and playing soccer. No matter how tough my day was, my children are always there to put a smile on my face.

The war in Timor still rages on. I try to put that aside every day, hoping for a letter that will tell me that Timor has become independent and the fighting settled, knowing very well that every letter we receive will contain sad news.

More and more Timorese are arriving, and now some are family. Most stay for a few years, only to move again, to re-settle in Australia. Portugal is not equipped to handle the refugee situation, so whenever possible, people are migrating to Australia. My wife and I are beginning to discuss the same move. We are not living in the shanty towns—and definitely would not want to—but it means we are very isolated from the rest of the Timorese community.

Finally, we received news from my wife's cousin who is offering to be our sponsor to migrate to Australia. Elizabete, my oldest daughter starts doing some research on that country: which town to settle in? We decided on Melbourne because of similar weather conditions to what we are now used to here, and the fact that my wife's family had already settled in

there. The family was excited about our new journey. Here we go again...

### **JULY 1985: AUSTRALIA**

It has been eleven years, eleven years that I have both loved and hated—loved living in Portugal, but hated the fact that I left my true home, Timor-Leste. Once again we must move, but sadly, not to Timor. Staring at the empty plane seat in front of me, I could not consider this move as an opportunity, but as a betrayal of my country, my friends and my family still living there. As I turned around, I was hoping my children would cheer me up as they always did; instead I was faced with only blank faces. Even though we were excited about going to Australia, it was heartbreaking to be leaving many good friends.

### **JULY 1985**

We leave sunny Portugal during a fine summer day, and arrive in Melbourne in what seems the coldest day we have ever experienced. It rained and rained and rained ... with gloomy grey skies that seemed to never end.

On our arrival, we stayed in a very humble flat—small and cosy but just big enough for all of us. We were met by family and reunited with many close friends from back in Timor—friends I had not seen or heard of since 1971. It was good to be in Australia. I felt straightaway that I had made the right decision: I know this country is the land of opportunities.

Now we must adapt yet again, put the past behind us and live in the present. The independent, multicultural nature of Australia will be the best place for a permanent home that I can find.

Since there was a strong Timorese community in Melbourne, especially around the Endeavour Hills area, I soon became involved in the cultural and political scene, joining the Fretilin political party, very excited at finally being able to do something about the lost cause of the war in Timor. I chose to join Fretilin because it seemed to me that it was the only party that was doing the most relevant work in relation to the campaign for independence.

We worked hard at fundraising, sending money to the party as well as supporting other members of the Timorese community who were working abroad to promote the Timor-Leste cause. These included people such as Jose Ramos Horta, who was particularly active in the US, and other members scattered around the world, especially in Mozambique and Portugal.

We also dedicated ourselves to educating the Australian public about the situation in Timor; we needed to re-establish that friendship between Australians and Timorese that had been forged during the Japanese invasion. The Timorese supported the Australians then in 1942, and now it is Australia's turn to support the Timorese.

My life in Australia became a life of work, family, friends, and the struggle for my homeland. I participated in all the protests and cultural projects including plays, while continuing to send financial support via Fretilin.

In 1998 I had the privilege of travelling again to Europe, taking a photographic exhibition that drew parallels between the Holocaust and the East Timor situation. This was a collaboration between the Melbourne Jewish Museum and the Timorese community both here and in Ireland. The exhibition travelled to several countries, including Portugal, and gained a lot of public attention.

When in 1999, Indonesia was forced by the UN to hold a referendum in East Timor for the people to decide whether they wanted to have an independent country or be part of Indonesia, my heart nearly stopped. I went to Dandenong to vote, alongside my friends and family; it was beautiful to see the majority of the Melbourne Timorese community there.

Overwhelmingly, my people voted for independence! What a time to celebrate.

After so many years, Indonesia lifted the ban on travelling to Timor and, although I had been expelled from my own country never to be allowed to return (by the Portuguese authorities), I was overjoyed to know that now I could finally visit my true home.

In 2000, I was invited to go back to Timor to work in rebuilding the nation. I was elated to go back to my beloved *Timor Lorosa'e*<sup>3</sup> where, as a UN official, I worked as an electrician and mechanic. On arrival, however, I was not prepared for the devastation. After the Timorese people voted to be independent, the Indonesian military took their revenge, torching much of Dili and many other towns and villages, and decimating the surrounding countryside. It was devastating to see my house in Balide and my house in Bidau both burnt down, as were whole towns and streets including hospitals, schools, clinics, shops, and any house with links to Fretilin or Falintil<sup>4</sup>.

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3 'Timor' derives from 'timur', meaning 'east' in Malay; and 'Leste' also means 'east' in Portuguese; and 'Lorosa'e' means literally 'rising sun' in the East Timorese language of Tetum but is also used to indicate 'east'. So Timor-Leste or Timor Lorosa'e both mean 'east east'.

4 Armed wing of the pro-independence movement, the National Liberation of East Timor, founded in 1975.

But it was very humbling to meet people who still remembered me and my work, some of whom I had helped while I was working in the oil drilling company. However, I could see just how much work there was to do now, and I was not so young anymore.

When I had left Timor in the early 1970s, the nation was having trouble supplying electricity reliably and efficiently. Twenty-five years later, in 2000, here I am working on the same problem. This time, however, my expertise and experience are recognised. It is just so sad that the country has been left in such a dismal state. But I must stay positive... We are independent, after all.

## **20 MAY 2002**

I am overjoyed to hear that my country's independence will be formally recognised worldwide. My daughters are coming from Melbourne to join me here in Timor for the independence celebrations. The whole country is in party mode; there are people from all over the world, and the Portuguese are proving to be amazing people, being so supportive of our new nation. We survived hundreds of years of colonisation and the most brutal of genocides, but now we are once again *Timor Lorosa'e*, Timor of the Rising Sun.

Australia is certainly home to me and my family and we are proud to be Australians, but we are equally proud to be Timorese. I can enjoy being part of both worlds and am at an age where I can watch and observe the development of both nations simultaneously. I think we still have a lot to learn from each other.

**27 JUNE 2016**

I have decided that after all the hardships Timor has gone through, it's time to get *our* story known. We have met with some high school students who were happy to help. They have listened and written up our story. Our family story is to be published in a book. Now we will have my family's part in East Timor's story known. Yes, we shall get our story out there!

God bless all of you. Be honest and love each other, for ever and ever.

*Now I have a few beliefs which I would like to share with you.*

We must respect each other.

I'm not wise, but I have a lot of experience in life.

Ambition and power can consume someone.

You have to feel proud when you try to be what you want to be.

My country should be free—everyone should have a right to be free.

I would like to ask you, young people, when you grow up, please love each other... Everyone should be loved by everyone.

Everyone is part of one big family, and we all should support one another.

## CARMELITA GOMES

*The three students who interviewed Carmelita for this project were moved to write her story in poetry form rather than prose.*

Entering the new world  
I was held in my mother's arms.  
Her hands running through my curls  
She'd kiss me on the cheek.

My home, my country, East Timor;  
Your small land and diverse culture.  
The people, the nature I adore,  
Forever one proud community.

I remember my father once told me  
That when you grow up on this earth,  
You must love one another, don't you see?  
He's a wise and curious man.

Like a book quote he would say:  
'We all must listen to each other  
And understand each other's ways'.  
His words are always so encouraging.

He's a fighter, a determined being  
And a man with many beliefs.  
But who knew we would be fleeing  
Suddenly from East Timor.

My home, my country, East Timor,  
Your small land and diverse culture.  
The people, the nature I adore;  
Forever one proud community.

Our country deserves more.  
Independence and freedom.  
It shouldn't turn to war  
Between our family and the government.

Timor to Mozambique,  
We were exiled from our own country.  
I was in a new place the next week,  
Staying there till I was four.

Growing and learning as time went by,  
Mozambique became our adopted home.  
My family remembered waving goodbye  
To their home, their country, East Timor.

Although only one year when we left,  
No one likes to lose something precious,  
Just like a mother torn from her son.  
Will there ever be a day we go home?

My home, my country, East Timor,  
Your small land and diverse culture.

FROM TIMOR-LESTE TO AUSTRALIA

The people, the nature I adore;  
Forever one proud community.

I remember looking at the new night sky  
In this hot tropical country;  
It gave me a feeling to fly,  
To dream and explore.

It was a chance to embrace  
What Mozambique would offer.  
To enjoy this new place,  
Its culture and people.  
Everything was all fine  
In little Mozambique until  
We had to leave quickly  
And headed straight to Portugal.

We left due to their revolution,  
And so, we moved again to a new country.  
To me it was all confusion,  
Just another adventure to journey.

I embraced life in the Portuguese countryside,  
And made many new friends.  
Dad visited so many exciting places,  
And shared his wondrous adventures with us.

Oh, my country, East Timor, my real home.  
What horror is happening to you?  
How your people, my people, must be suffering.  
When will it end? When can you be free?

Now I'm fifteen and Dad says best to move again.  
This time to Australia, so far away from all I know.  
So far away from all my friends.  
I try hard to feel excitement but then it hits me!

Immense sadness begins to choke and overwhelm me,  
Forcing tears to prickle behind my eyes.  
The first time I'm old enough to understand  
What being on a plane really represents.

This is not a big adventure anymore.  
I'm not four years old now, I'm fifteen,  
And this plane is leaving Portugal behind.  
I'm leaving all I know and all I understand.

When I took my seat on the plane to Australia,  
On 15 July 1985, thoughts of East Timor,  
Memories of Mozambique and Portugal  
Were flooding into my mind.  
What now in Australia?

We have now arrived in Australia,  
And I tell myself that I will make new friends soon,  
And be able to return to sharing the things I love  
with them.  
Off to English classes tomorrow, so let's see!

Armed with a smile and a bag full of books  
I was prepared for what would follow.  
Crowds of people gave me strange looks,  
I ignored them and walked straight ahead.

FROM TIMOR-LESTE TO AUSTRALIA

Upon arrival, I was filled with fear,  
A worry that I wouldn't fit in.  
It wasn't the most welcoming atmosphere,  
I was afraid of others being mean.

A room full of people who felt the same as me?  
We struggled to communicate,  
But somehow together felt free.  
It was our old memories that bonded us tight.

One look around the room, I tried to persevere,  
I finally had a sense of belonging.  
Everyone had their friends, but mine were not near,  
They were all on the other side of the world.

I was a shy girl, isolated and afraid  
When suddenly, a young girl approached me.  
My feelings of loneliness started to fade  
As she smiled and sat down beside me.

Our two worlds suddenly aligned,  
As she and I became friends.  
I didn't know someone could be so kind;  
Two girls, one country, and some memories to make.

She'd always smile and be so bright.  
Her personality always reminded me of home.  
We'd talk all day, even at night,  
When she came over or on the phone.

Upon arrival, I was filled with fear,  
A worry that I wouldn't fit in.  
Soon after, everything became clear  
New school, new friends, new me.

Now, I am happy.

*Written by Naomi Yong, Lily Lunder and Tome  
Correia, Gleneagles Secondary College, Melbourne,  
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