

ANTÓNIO'S STORY



António with his mother Jacinta



Helping with MMET teacher workshops
and practising for Music examinations

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On August 30, 1999, the East Timorese people voted for Independence rather than autonomy under Indonesia. The results of the ballot were announced by the UN on Saturday, September 4. António was with the choir in the Church at the time, and when the announcement was made they all cried, then most ran to the hills. António was caught and herded with others towards the wharf. He remembers....

“They pushed all of us onto a truck and they took us to the port. There were many people and it was a disaster. They came up and looked at us angrily and pointed guns and told us to beware of what we say. They were threatening us. I didn't know what to do – my mind was completely lost and I thought it was the end of my life. We slept in the port for two nights and they placed us near the water so that we would get wet when the waves came. We were dirty and they put grenades next to us and we knew they could bomb us at any time and we were not able to sleep. They bombed some of the shops and they robbed some things from the shops and we sat and watched them. In the morning we tried to come back home and they said if we dared to walk out from there we would get killed. They were pointing guns at us. The military was laughing all the time. Laughing at us, and spitting at us.

“In the morning there was a ship to come, and they said we'd better go on that one so all those Timorese people were pushed onto that ship and they shot a lady next to me as we were walking towards the ship. That lady was screaming as she was bleeding and they pushed her into the water and she drowned. I saw that; I was shocked, but what could I do? I just prayed silently. We ended up in West Timor but they treated us so badly. They cooked things and spat in it. They threw us onto the ground – there was no where to stay. It was so cold. But we thought we had to do this for our country. We were there three weeks and then we got back to East Timor.

Coming Home

“When we got back all we could see was smoke – no houses or buildings. All was destroyed. We got back home again and mum was there and she was so happy to see us and we wondered if it was all over or if it would start all again. Mum was hit by the militia and she was with an elderly lady and they were protecting the house. They said to take anything but just leave the house intact so that we could live. She told them not to take the holy statues.

“All we could say was that we arose from the dead, because people didn't know whether other people were alive or dead. There was no information. Everyone cried when we found that people were alive. We showed each other how much we loved each other. We had nothing left but it didn't matter if the family was alive. The old people were sad. I played the organ. On Christmas Day everyone just cried because of all we had been through. We did not know what we were going to face. Most were sad because they lost their family or their house. But everyone thought it was all in God's hands. We knew we had to push ourselves to something better for the future.

“As I was playing the organ I thought that all I needed to do was give God all my life, even though we had the pain and we can't forget. We all had terrible nightmares.”

(as told to Susan Connelly in 2005)