

Chandra

Harris Smart writes...

Chandra MacDonald is the 17-year old daughter of Karim and Rashidah MacDonald who are respectively the principal and a board member of Bina Cita Utama School, the Subud school in Central Kalimantan, Borneo.

In 2010 I taught creative writing at BCU and Chandra MacDonald was one of my students. At the start of the term she told me that she was going to write a series of portraits of young people she knew in Central Kalimantan.

She would show what difficult lives many of these young people had, but how they also showed the Dayak spirit of *Iseng Mulang* (Never Give Up). Chandra stayed faithful to her intention as the resulting collection of stories testifies. One of the stories is included in this issue of Subud Voice.

Chandra is in many ways a typical teenager. She loves to play her guitar and ride her motorbike. She is extremely popular. She knows EVERYONE in her age group between Rungan Sari (where she lives) and Palankaraya (the capital of Central Kalimantan).

Sometimes it is impossible to approach her parents' house because of all the motorbikes parked around it. And this is not even to mention her vast network of international contacts.

At the same time, she is extremely sincere in the practice of her religion which is Islam. And she already has, at age 17, a profound sense of service to her fellow human beings, what we call in Subud the spirit of Susila Dharma (charity, the humanitarian impulse). This is mostly expressed through her attention to the lives of others in her age group who are less fortunate than herself.

There are many young people affected by extreme poverty in this part of Kalimantan who lead desperate and troubled lives. For example, there was one boy at the BCU school whom I often noted for his particularly friendly and cheerful disposition. It was through Chandra that I found out that this boy (who is on a scholarship at the school) eats only one meal a day, the free lunch which is given to him at the school.



Chandra (extreme right) with friends from BCU School – Christie, Fenny and Iga, all in Dayak costume. (Photo by Pak Deny)

Family relationships of the poorest of the poor are often troubled, with many broken marriages, or parents forced to live apart by economic circumstances.

Children are often separated from their parents or other siblings and lead lonely lives of economic hardship. Such circumstances are vividly presented in Chandra's stories.

Chandra's service to these young people takes various forms. As well as just being with them, taking an interest in them, and supporting them emotionally, she also often arranges for money to go to them by drawing people's attention to their economic plight. She teaches them English, which greatly enlarges their opportunities in life, and she even finds them employment.

One of the saddest stories in her collection is the story of Herni (included in this issue of Subud Voice), but fortunately it has a happy ending because Chandra helped to find her a job in the library at BCU school which has totally transformed this young woman's life.

Our hope in Subud is that our children and grandchildren will increasingly show human qualities such as kindness and service to others and Chandra is a good example that this can come true.

So I am very happy to have played a part in supporting Chandra to produce her first book. I have a feeling it will not be her last. She wants to be a teacher and a writer. Chandra's story about Herni follows... ▶

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Herni

Chandra MacDonald writes about Herni Listiani, one of the stories from her collection *Iseng Mulang (Never Give Up)* which deals with the struggles of young people to cope with the difficulties of life in Central Kalimantan...

In the beginning it was just her mum, dad, older sister and Herni herself. She was born in Tampah, a village in central Kalimantan and lived there for three years then moved to Palangkaraya until she was five.

Then they moved to a transmigration village at kilometer 38, joining many other poor Javanese transmigrants, including her grandma and grandfather who were already living there.

Herni went to primary school in Trans, the transmigration settlement. This was when the third child was born, Dimas, Herni's younger brother.

Herni remembers fights happening regularly in her house at that time.

When Herni was 9 years old, they moved to a Bali village near Tangkiling, to look after the house that belonged to a foreign man. Living there was tough. Herni remembers never having any money, and rarely having even rice to eat. She said they went hungry a lot during that time. Herni and her older sister, Herna, saved up once, and bought rice with their savings.

Once while living there, her parents had a fight. Herni's mum had a large sword with her, and her dad kicked a cupboard and all their rice fell on the floor, ruined. Sometimes Herni's mother would take her emotions out on Herni and Herna.

When they moved back to Trans, the fourth child was born, another boy. Her parents stopped living together. Herni's mum and Herna, her older sister, moved to Sukamulya, a village near Rungan Sari, because that's where Herni's mum was working at the time as a maid. And Herni lived with her father and two younger brothers, being the mum of the house at a very young age of 12.

To get from Trans to her junior high school, Herni had to ride a bicycle for seven kilometers, and sometimes she had to walk. To make sure she got to school on time, she would leave at five-thirty every morning.

The Family Is Breaking Up

The day Herni had to move in to the one-roomed house

with her mother and sister, she was very sad. She felt like her family was really breaking up. But she needed to help her mother work, and provide for themselves. When Herni was 14, her dad moved away for work and all contact with the family stopped. The fifth child, a girl, had already been born at that time.

Things weren't easy on her mother either though. Her father returned for a visit and not long after, when she found she was pregnant with their sixth child, she became very depressed. She didn't want any more children, and her husband had left again. She didn't have any money and didn't know how she would raise another child.

Sometimes her mum was so upset she would go out of control, Herni remembers. Once Herni's older sister, Herna, was nursing the youngest sister when her mum started attacking her. Herna ran away with the baby, scared.

Once Herni was almost hit with a shovel; things at home were not peaceful. All her younger siblings had to live with her grandmother because her mother had to work to support the family.

Despite all the drama at home, Herni graduated from junior high school...

Despite all the drama at home, Herni graduated from junior high school with very good grades, and was ranked second highest in her school.

Because Herni's mother was already supporting her older sister to go to senior high school, Herni was told that it was unnecessary for her to continue her schooling as the family needed money and it was better for her to find work. Herni was very upset about this.

She felt sad that her sister was being fully supported by her mum to go school, but Herni wasn't even allowed to continue. She was jealous, too; she felt unloved. She started saving, and working with her grandmother, packing soil into sacks to sell. She told her mum that she had some money, and that a family in Rungan Sari would help her go to school and her mum said it was up to her.

The school Herni went to wasn't as good as her sister's high school that was 12 kilometers from Trans, but she was grateful to be able to go to school at all.

A house (one room wooden hut) was built and a much needed second hand motorcycle was donated from a very nice Subud Perth lady.

Things still weren't easy. Money was still scarce. Herni and her sister started working after school, nights and weekends as maids in Rungan Sari. Their father still hadn't returned. ▶

Her Mother Leaves

When Herni was 16, her mother remarried got pregnant and moved away, leaving behind all her six children, taking no responsibility. Before she left she wrote a note for Herni to give to the Subud family who had been helping Herni through school, saying that she had left, and she hoped they would look after her children. Herni was shy at first to ask for help and shy to tell them about what had happened, but she didn't know what else to do, they needed to eat, and without help, that was something that wasn't possible. Herni and Herna sold cake at their schools to try make some extra money to live on.

Then the worst happened. Herna, Herni's older sister who was the one everyone had expected great things to happen to, got pregnant. Herni's mother was horrified, since she was the one who had been given support all the way through school and then the sister just threw it all away.

Once the mum had left again, Herni's father finally came home. Herna went to live with her in laws, so at home it was just Herni and her father looking after the four youngest children ranging from three to eight years old. They would take turns with the house work and cooking.

In June 2010, Herni graduated high school with the rest of her close friends, almost all of them going off to university; making Herni the odd one out. She had dreamed of going to university but then when the time had come, she couldn't afford it. She was offered a job 12 hours away, and moved there, but didn't stay long as she felt sorry for her father looking after all of her younger siblings alone.

A Job for Herni

Then she was offered a job at the Subud school in Rungan Sari, working as the librarian. She accepted this job and recently started working. She had always had a passion for English and loved learning it at school, so



*Herni Listiani in her new job as librarian at BCU School
(Photo by Chandra MacDonald)*

sometimes when there's a quiet time at work she sits there and teaches herself English by reading.

She is a lovely girl, with a lovely helpful nature. Her life hasn't been easy, and her dreams haven't come true. But she is still young, and determined. She doesn't know what the future will bring, but she hopes it will be bright so she can help her poor family, and be happy. Recently her sister and baby have returned home, to live with Herni and their father. More mouths to feed for them, but Herni says that having the baby around, is a constant inspiration to her to try her best in life and not turn out like her sister. She also wants to work hard to help her sister give her son a better life than they had, and also a better life to the children she might have when she gets married.

PS Since this article was written, Herni has expressed her wish to become a Subud member, and is attending applicant meetings. ◆

POEMS BY SOFYAN ARMYTAGE (1922-2004)

In this issue we include some short poems by Sofyan Armytage. One of the best of Subud poets, his work was rarely explicitly "spiritual", but rather casual and unpretentious notes from everyday life.

Sofyan was a Spitfire pilot in the Battle of Britain. On his first time out against the enemy, he was shot down over the English Channel. He told me that as he was coming down in his parachute, he was shocked to see he was wearing odd socks. More poems on pages 17 and 21.

Spitfire

My wheels last touched a Kentish field
in forty-three – I am a different me
from him who played among the clouds
with tingling nerves.

That admirable toy that lifted my young limbs
above the world gave me a taste for flight
but now, when I take off, my antiquated frame
remains behind. ◆