

THREADS OF LIFE

May 2011 newsletter



A Machi cloth from Fais island; motif maker, Rambu Ana Hamu in Sumba, and master weaver Ompu Okta from Sumatra

Dear Friends,

As mentioned in the last newsletter, Threads of Life and Jalan Jalan Asia Tours are offering a [two week journey from 19th September to 3rd October 2011](#) to Bali and Yogyakarta in Java to meet weavers, dyers and batik artists, and to explore the culture and traditions surrounding the textile arts in Indonesia. We had a good response to this tour and only two spots remain. If you are interested, please contact us as soon as you can: jean@threadsoflife.com

As promised in the last newsletter, we have more news of our new project in the Batak area of [Sumatra](#), with the story from the February field trip. The weavers Pung found were mostly older women living in the small hamlets around Lake Toba. Though beautiful, these communities are virtually deserted. Parents have sought a better education and a better life for their children than they had. These children, when grown, have found jobs in Jakarta or Surabaya. As the villages decline, so is the Batak culture. Elsewhere, Threads of Life has found that offering women a good income from staying in the village empowers them to choose between the big cities and their village. Our aim is to create the same opportunity in Sumatra.

Our February field notes documents Pung and Frog's watery trip to the upper Kapuas River in West Kalimantan, Borneo. Threads of Life is expanding our reach in [Kalimantan](#) and

March also saw Jean and William accompanying Wenten to [Guam](#) in the western Pacific to hold an exhibit at the University of Guam. For several years now, Threads of Life has been working with the sociology department's Bali field school, recognizing in the challenges faced by the Chamorro of Guam and other Pacific island peoples the same struggle to balance identity, tradition and livelihood that we see in the communities where we work. This field note documents Wenten's experience and reflections on his time in Guam.

While in Guam we meet with Dr. Donald Rubinstein, an anthropologist and faculty of the Micronesia Studies Program. From 2004 to 2007 Donald along with a young man, Sophiano Limol, led a cultural revival program on the 2-kilometer-long island of [Fais](#) in the Federated States of Micronesia. The important ceremonial machi textile from Fais was chosen as the focus of this revival. Machi are made from banana stem fibers and decorated with a supplementary pattern of hibiscus bark. Textiles very similar in materials, design and motifs were made on the Indonesian islands of Sangihe and Talaud, located between the Philippines and Sulawesi. For ritual reasons, the weavers cannot sell their textiles in Micronesia, but need to sell their work to supplement their subsistence income. Only half a dozen pieces are made for sale each year and Threads of Life is now representing this extraordinary work in our Bali gallery. Anyone interested in purchasing a piece should contact us directly: jean@threadsoflife.com

seeking to develop weavers and handicraft groups further upstream than those we currently work with around Sintang. As Pung notes, the traditional people are wary of outsiders, many of whom have come to seek heirloom objects for the antique market. Pung expects it will take several visits to some communities before people will start to trust us and our intention to support the contemporary expression of tradition.

In March, gallery staff Iluh, Desak and Lia had their first field trip. They went to [Sumba](#) and had a great time meeting all the weavers whose work they have been marketing. Recognition of how hard the weavers' lives are compared to their own was humbling, and gives them a new perspective from which to talk about the textiles.

In April, Wenten and Willy visited Belu in [Timor](#) and wrote about the renovation of the Sonap Biru traditional house in Loo Neke and the ritual held to inaugurate this house. They were particularly impressed with a textile Mama Rosa wove for this ceremony, and discussed with her the rituals and offerings associated with access to the clan house and the oiling process for threads prior to red dyeing.

We have many field trips going on in May and June. Visits to Sulawesi, Timor, Lembata and Flores will all result in field notes in the coming weeks, and another newsletter in the near future.

Until then, best wishes,
from William, Jean, Pung and everyone at Threads of Life and the YPBB Foundation

On Threadsoflife.com

Threads of Life is a fair trade business that utilizes culture and conservation to alleviate poverty in rural Indonesia. The heirloom-quality textiles, baskets and crafts we commission are made with local materials and natural dyes. With the proceeds from sales, we help weavers to form independent cooperatives and to manage their resources sustainably.

WHAT WE DO

This section explains the breadth and depth of our work. Behind the beautiful textiles seen in the gallery are months of [field work](#) each year [supporting women's weaving cooperatives](#) through [fair trade](#), [revitalizing traditional textile techniques](#), and [conservation efforts](#).

FIELD NOTES

Keeping people informed of our ongoing work in the communities is important to us. Every time our staff return from a field visit their experiences and observations are turned into a [field notes](#) slide show. Over time a rich archive of these will build up for visitors to browse through.

INDONESIAN TEXTILE ARTS

Fourteen slide shows explore the traditional [textile arts](#) from across the Indonesian archipelago while introducing the [weavers](#) and their [cooperatives](#), and the [materials](#), [natural dyes](#), and production [techniques](#) they employ.

OUR TEXTILES

Detailed descriptions, cultural references and photographs with high-resolution images [catalog](#) a varied and exciting sample of the best textiles produced by the weavers' cooperatives associated with Threads of Life.

OTHER PRODUCTS

Traditional links between livelihood, culture and nature are expressed through some of the world's finest [basketry](#). Diverse [cultural arts](#), including pottery, woodcarving and bead work, also retain a remarkable vitality. [Books, music and DVDs](#) illustrate and entertain.

CLASSES, TOURS and UPCOMING EVENTS

The [classes](#) offered at the gallery on the history and diversity of Indonesia's textile arts are an excellent way to gain a new level of appreciation. News of any tours, events or exhibitions we are offering is also to be found here.

HOW TO PURCHASE

Threads of Life sells its textiles, baskets, or other cultural artifacts through its [gallery in Ubud](#), Bali, and occasional overseas exhibitions and sales. Books, music and videos are available online.

THREADS OF LIFE TEXTILE ARTS CENTER

Jalan Kajeng 24, Ubud, Bali 80571, Indonesia

Open 10 am to 7 pm daily.

[Click for directions](#).

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YPBB FOUNDATION

YPBB stands for Yayasan Pecinta Budaya Bebal and is the name of the Indonesian nonprofit that the Threads of Life business is partnered with in its community work. [Read more](#) about YPBB's projects and funding.

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