

THREADS OF LIFE November 2012 Newsletter

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Dear William,

It's been a busy couple of months since our last newsletter. The end of July and the start of August were taken up by a mass cremation in Ubud. The extravagant ceremony with which the dead are honored in Bali is cheaper when performed communally. Most villages hold such cremations in 4 or 5 year cycles, and Ubud's time was this year. With so many of our staff from Ubud, this meant a month with little field work. The week after the cremation was the Muslim Idul Fitri weeklong national holiday that celebrates the end of the Ramadan fasting month. A further week later, the whole of Bali celebrated the 10-day Galungan holiday, a religious festival dedicated to the ancestors and the victory of dharma (the true nature of all beings and the world) over adharma (disturbance and conflict). We could then start traveling again, and ran field trips to Sumatra, Sulawesi and Sumba before the end of September, and to Kalimantan and Savu in October. Field Notes will be uploaded for these trips in the coming weeks and highlighted in following newsletters.



Ubud Writers and Readers Festival 2012

At Threads of Life, we aim each year to bring something special to the Ubud Writers and Readers Festival, one of Asia's top literary festivals, that is held in early October. This year, we brought a group of musicians and dancers from the Lake Toba area of northern Sumatra. The Harunguan troupe performed two ceremonial dances, two traditional songs, and a narrated slide show to an audience of 200 who crowded into the street in front of the Threads of Life gallery.

The dances are used as offerings of respect to the spirit world, to neighbors and guests. and to the earth. The Sawan

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About Threads of Life

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



Donate to The Bebali Foundation

Threads of Life's nonprofit partner, the Bebali Foundation, works with the same communities as Threads of Life to support cooperative development and environmental sustainability. The Bebali Foundation trains weavers in the establishment and maintaining of credit unions,

Pangurason dance is performed with porcelain bowls balanced on the shoulders, elbows, wrists, and head. The dancer, Rita Sianturi, is a young woman from a lineage of women charged with performing this ritual purification dance. The singer, Bonita Simbolon, had a powerful and emotional voice with which she delivered traditional songs chronicling lost love, and heroism in the war of independence from the Dutch. Hendra Golion Siregar, the troupe's leader, told the audience how hard it was making a living while maintaining these traditional performances, but that the appreciation received at events such as the writers festival inspired them to keep working. For many of the younger troupe members, it was the first time they had ever performed outside the Batak Toba region.

For the past two years, Threads of Life and the Bebali Foundation have been working with Toba Batak weavers to restore the region's natural dye tradition. This work is being generously funded by the Dutch Embassy in Jakarta.



The Tirta Tawar Holy Spring at Umajati Retreat

It may seem strange from a Western cultural perspective that almost two months of work could be disrupted by religious ritual and ceremony in the way outlined in the introduction to this newsletter. As organizations committed to exploring how indigenous peoples can express their culture and identity and make a sustainable living doing so, Threads of Life and the Bebali Foundation are interested in engaging with and resolving these challenges. We see our responsibilities to the community around the Umajati Retreat in the same way, and within the same framework of culture, nature and livelihood.

Fifty meters (150 feet) past the front gate of Umajati, the single track road dead-ends at a pair of temple gates. Beyond the gates a steep flight of steps descends twenty meters (60 feet) into a forested ravine to a sacred spring and bathing place by a narrow river. Every morning and evening, villagers from nearby Petulu come here to bathe and collect drinking water. It's not that they don't have running water at home, it's that they prefer to wash and drink from here. As a sacred spring it has a shrine where holy water is collected. Colorful processions come to the spring to collect water, marking the start of local temple ceremonies. The priest of the shrine, a young man who has unusually been a priest since he was a teenager, says that the waters are healing, and that is why so many people come here.

and the sustainable cultivation, harvesting and use of dye plants. Its groundbreaking dye plant and dye recipe identification and documentation is the backbone of ongoing work to safeguard endangered indigenous weaving traditions, and the livelihoods they represent, from extinction. To support the Bebali Foundation, please donate at www.bebali.org via Give2Asia, PayPal, or bank transfer.

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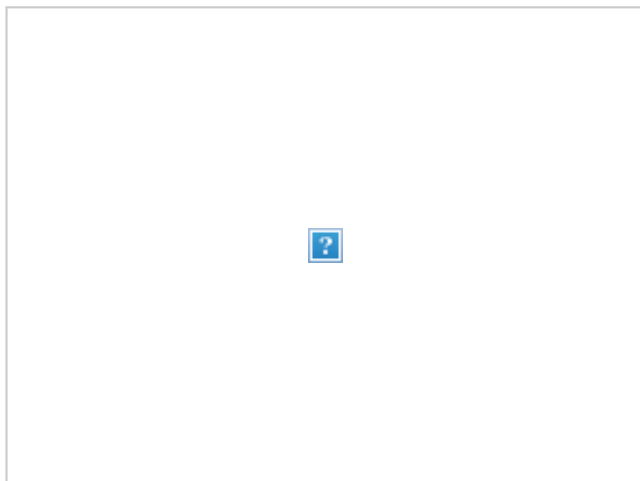
As the spring's nearest neighbor, at Umajati, we feel a particular responsibility towards this place. Though used for purification, it has been plagued with litter. Bathers bring shampoo in little one-use commercial sachets that are discarded after use, usually into the river. Since opening, Umajati has placed trash cans at the spring, which we empty weekly, and holds monthly river clean-up mornings with all our staff and the village youth group. Environmental education takes time, and we don't expect people to become aware of their litter habits overnight. But we have learned from our other fieldwork that change requires a long term commitment. As long as we are carrying away more shampoo sachets than are being discarded, we are ahead of the game, and in so doing we are helping a whole new generation see the worth of keeping this beautiful spot clean and sacred.

To learn more about Umajati Retreat visit: www.umajati.com. Umajati Retreat offers a 1-bedroom house at USD 190 per night, and the 2-bedroom house at USD 245. Weekly and monthly rates are available on request.

Amsterdam Tribal Arts Fair 2012

Many thanks to Finette Lemaire of the Gallery Lemaire in Amsterdam and organizer of the Amsterdam Tribal Arts Fair 2012 for her promotion of Threads of Life and the Bebali Foundation at the Fair, and for raising EUR 1,700 to support the foundation's work.

Learn more about the fair at <http://www.gallery-lemaire.com/mainframe.asp?f=special>



**TEDxUbud:
Weaving a new approach to poverty alleviation**

Forum KTI 2012

In the June newsletter, I mentioned the [TED talk](#) I had the opportunity to give in May. For me, the highest acknowledgment I received for that talk was an invitation to give it again in Indonesian in front of 400 participants at a two-day forum for community leaders, NGOs, development professionals, donors and senior government officials working in eastern Indonesia. The forum's host, the BaKTI Foundation, is a visionary networking organization that gathers and disseminates information and best practices, cutting across disciplines and

through the boundaries that stop the beneficiaries of development from talking directly to those delivering it. It was an inspiring two-day conference.

See <http://www.bakti.org/en>

Best wishes,

William

from William, Jean, Pung and everyone at Threads of Life and the YPBB Foundation

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