

Interview by Jemma Purdey with Kos Atma, Melbourne, 15 January 2014

BA, Engineering, Adelaide University, Colombo Plan, 1956

(Edited transcript)

JP: Well, Pak, what I'd be very interested in hearing from you is where you're from, where you were born, a little bit about your family background.

KA: I was born in a village in ... it's called Tagogapu, because there is a huge block of limestone – kapur means limestone – which was part of the Bandung Lake. Initially Bandung was a lake before the water cut a hole in the wall of that particular rock. Initially, there was a river on the other side but then the mountain, Tangkuban Perahu, blew up and dumped its top on the river, so it became a lake. There's a lot of stories about that, like, you know, sangkuriang stories.

So, my father and my mother just lived off the land. We had our own land, inherited from my grandparents, a rice field and a dry field. I loved it when I was a boy, and the highlight – even today I think it was the best experience of my life – was during the harvest when our parents were busy and we children were free to play. We used to cut the straw and make little huts. My mother and father were busy, of course, drying the rice and so on.

JP: How many siblings did you have?

KA: I was number four. So, the first one's still alive. She's 90 ... two? Yeah, 92, but she's not very mobile. Number two: he died during high school, during the Japanese occupation. That was in 1945. Number three died of breast cancer in 1970. Number four, myself. Number five: four years younger than me, he's a professor now in Bandung, ITB [Institut Teknologi Bandung]. Number six died of a heart attack when he was 54.

JP: OK, so six of you.

KA: Yeah. Anyway, so I went to primary school and so on and so on. But then we had to run away from our village, because soon after the Japanese were defeated – the British came back first collecting the Japanese prisoners – then the Dutch came back. And they're the ones that Mr Sukarno didn't want, so we had to run away from our village because we were only 24 kilometres from the capital of Bandung.

JP: How old were you then?

KA: That was in '45, I was eleven. Now I look back I think it was an exciting time, although at the time we went hungry and thirsty, and we had nowhere to live.

JP: Why exactly did you need to move? Was it because the Dutch were coming through looking for ...

KA: We didn't want to be occupied by the Dutch, that's all. And we were on the opposition side, the republican. My family, my brother-in-law, was armed with the bamboo – runcing, you know, the sharpened bamboo – all the villagers were armed with sharpened bamboo. With the speech from Sukarno, of course, but then the ...

JP: So in 1945 ...

KA: Yeah, yeah, as soon as the Japanese [left], we had to run away – in 1946. My brother-in-

law worked for the railway so we had a free passage on the train. We had to run away to a nearby village and then walk to the nearest railway station that still had trains run by republicans.

Our village, Tagogapu, was on the old road to Pirukata. And from there it was all winding through a tea plantation, then going down, then turn right up on the Cikubang, which is the river ...

JP: And how were you traveling? On foot or ...

KA: We were on foot, of course. We walked to a nearby village, Cikawung, but no train. Then from Cikawung, we walked again. And then the worst thing, the scariest, was that we had to walk on the railway bridge, the planks weren't that wide, and so high! And that's still the highest bridge, I think, if you go by bus or by car today. There are bridges everywhere in that area.

Anyway, there was a train from Sasaksaat, and then ... This is the whole family, my mum, my father, my aunty, brother-in-law and so on and so on. We went everywhere.

JP: What about the other villagers, other families from the village?

KA: We didn't know then. They had no way of getting away so they just stayed put. Oh, they went away from the roadside – not boarding but, you know, sharing a place, with a relative or friend, which is away from the main road.

JP: OK. So this is your journey.

KA: We only went that far away from our village because we had the means of going, because my brother-in-law had a free ticket, you see, for the whole family.

So we finished up in Garut, in Bayongbong, because the railway office, head office went to Cisurupan.

And it was funny because I saw this white [rock], rather like the view at Tagogapu, and I said, 'Why are we back?' And they said, 'No that's the crater of Papandayan.'

JP: You had that memory, as a little boy, you thought you'd gone in a circle.

KA: Yeah, I thought we went so far away, we went through middle Java and so on and so on.

JP: Had you ever been on the train that far away from home before?

KA: No, never, never! The first train that I went on – it was funny – was when my mother and brother-in-law took me, the whole family, to the zoo in Bandung. I was little then. It was funny because I said, 'Look Mum, why the trees are moving?' (*laughs*) I must have been very small, I think.

JP: So this was the first time you'd been on a long journey.

KA: Yeah, yeah.

We were afraid of being ransacked. I had never been as frightened as I was during that time but my cousin, he said, 'Don't worry. You go to sleep. I have a big sword here.' He had a Japanese samurai sword. But of course [we wouldn't be ransacked] because, you know, they're not interested in villagers like us.

Anyway, after we walked all day we caught the train in Sasaksaat, and then we stopped in Padalarang, for one week.

JP: With anyone you knew? Were there friends there?

KA: We went to Padalarang, because my brother-in-law's uncle lived there. But we didn't stop with him, I think, because we slept anywhere, on the floor, even outside. The weather is OK in Indonesia, you don't need blankets, so that was on our side.

We were there for one week in Padalarang, and then we decided to go on so we caught the train to Cikampek first, because to go to Garut we had to go the long way. You couldn't go from Bandung to Garut the short way, because of the Dutch.

JP: Right. You had to avoid them.

KA: The Dutch occupied Bandung and to go to Garut, for instance, you had to cross Bandung. We couldn't do that, unless we walked through Pangalengan, through the mountains, but we went by train to Cikampek, and then from Cikampek we waited for another train to go to Cirebon, Wopetuk, Banjarmasin, then Kroya, and then back again to Banjar – I don't know how many days. And from Banjar, to Cibuntu – there's no train to Bandung because it branches – then Tuga and Garut. Bayongbong is twelve kilometres from Garut to the south.

JP: OK, long journey.

KA: So then school started again and I went to Grade 4. But I was very good. I ...

JP: You enjoyed school?

KA: Well I was ranking number one. I didn't have to work very hard. Lucky. My mother was illiterate but she was very bright. She went to school one day, but she picked up the A B C, she knew that. And the reason why [she didn't go to school was because] my grandfather said girls don't go to school. Only her brother did. Her big brother became a school principal.

JP: All the boys got educated.

KA: Yeah, not very far. It was a five-year primary school, and then in one year or two years you become a primary school teacher. (*laughs*)

JP: Your mother was always, as you said, she was very clever.

KA: She was very bright. My father went to school only three years, he managed to, but we never had the newspaper or anything like that.

JP: Right. No books in the home. Your parents wanted you to have an education though.

KA: Yes. My mother wanted me to go to the school so I could become a clerk in the railway like my cousin. That was the aspiration that my mother had.

JP: Working in the railways, in an office.

KA: Yeah. Well, I mean ...

JP: Not working in the fields.

KA: Not working in the fields. Yes, not like them. Besides, I suppose, there was five of us, we couldn't split the land into five. Although it's quite sizable now, I mean for a house property. So we inherited coconut trees and things like that. I told my brothers, they must never sell our inheritance. Because ...

JP: You can't put a price on ...

KA: Yeah. There's hardly any land. I mean, the neighbours' land is full of houses now.

JP: Oh, because it's so close to Bandung city. Has it become a suburb now?

KA: The only person who built a house on the inherited land was my youngest brother. But I've pulled his house down now, because I bought that.

JP: He sold it to you?

KA: I wanted to buy it from him and he lived in it but then again he died and neglected his home so I pulled it down. The other brother, because he's in Bandung, lecturing, so he doesn't need to have the house. So only my sister but even she didn't build a house there, she had another block of land on the roadside.

JP: So there's nobody living there now?

KA: Oh, the neighbours. Along the side of our block, like that, is full of houses.

JP: Wow. Big ones?

KA: Because they couldn't anyway. You see, I'm here, my sister's on the other side, my brother died so there's only one brother and he's in Bandung. So I don't need it.

JP: So why do you want to hold that land? Why is it so important to you to keep it?

KA: To bury me! We have a family cemetery there. So every time I go there, I test the place, I lie down. I want it to be here between my mum and my sister, my favourite. I took a photo of our land there and say you bury me here.

JP: How many generations are there? Your grandparents are there, as well as your parents?

KA: It started with my grandpa, because before that it was a wood, you know. My grandpa was a contractor supplying firewood for the limestone furnace. Yeah, that was very good and ...

Now when I look at the mountain there – sorry I had to put that – but you can see ...

Pak Atma shows a photo on his phone.

JP: Yes, I can see.

KA: ... it's a very similar view from the balcony of my sister's place. But I grew up in the slightly flat land on the top, what I could see of the mountain. And I always asked my mum, I said, 'What's behind that rock, Mum?' I couldn't get an answer from her. But when I look like that, across from the back yard to the house, I think she should have said Melbourne.

JP: She said what?

KA: She didn't say anything, she didn't know Australia, but now, I worked out, when I look that way, it's Australia. Because I was curious what was behind that rock. Behind that rock is actually a hill and then you have a great big man-made lake, Ciburui, then more limestone on the other side. But keep going like that – you know when you fly to Jakarta they usually go across Java. It's interesting, yeah. It's funny, I said just behind the rock ...

JP: ... is Melbourne.

KA: Australia.

JP: Australia. But for your Mum though, that tells me something about her. She didn't travel either.

KA: No, the only travel my mum and my father did was during the evacuation, by necessity, or by force. I mean, we didn't have to go. My uncle wanted to go but his son had a nervous breakdown because at that time – he was eighteen, I think – he should have sharpened the bamboo. But he couldn't stand that so he had a nervous breakdown, otherwise he may get killed.

JP: You felt you were running from ...

KA: We were running from the advancing Dutch, that's all. But my uncle [didn't go], not because he didn't want to but because he couldn't. But he was lucky because the Dutch didn't collect him, they said you better go home, go back and work your fields. They didn't harm him. They were only looking for ...

JP: ... for the fighters.

KA: ... for the fighters, yeah. For the republican fighters. I mean, if you were a farmer or something like that ...

JP: We know that in the process of looking, sometimes innocent people ...

KA: Yeah, my cousin was shot dead because he was too late to leave and then he ran away from his place, across the road and was shot dead.

JP: Because he was running.

KA: Yeah. The sad part was that his body wasn't buried. Every time we were going to collect the body, I mean, we were scared. So I never knew.

JP: Was this before or after you ran, the family ran?

KA: We went to the nearby village before we went away.

JP: And he was killed then.

KA: He was killed on the day the Dutch came into the town. They only came in one day and then back again. They came from the mountain.

JP: Just sweeping through.

KA: Yeah, because we'd cut the road, we dug a hole.

JP: So your cousin died and then the family made the decision to go?

KA: No, that was the cousin who had become a teacher. He didn't find accommodation in the same place with my aunty and my mum, [he was] somewhere else. But he said, 'Oh, no need to go anywhere, they'll get you there.' And he was right. He didn't go away, he was there a few weeks and then went back to Tagogapu again.

So, you know, we had free passage by train.

JP: And your parents just wanted to get all the children away from any danger.

KA: Yeah. I mean we would be ... perhaps our luck would be ...

JP: But then again you didn't know.

KA: My friends who didn't go very far, I mean, they were all right. They went to school, the school was open straight away. I met them again when I came back. But it was my experience, this ...

JP: ... this exile. Yeah.

How long were you away?

KA: How long was I away? Three years, until the Round Table Conference, when the Dutch agreed to let Indonesia get the federation. After the conference, Meja Bundar, in 1950, that was.

Anyway, we came back. But during those three years so many things happened.

JP: What did your parents do for money?

KA: Well, my dad and my mum didn't have any income. We lived off my sister's husband's pay, from the railway. So we were very limited.

In Garut, I used to get invited by friends to their place, so when I went home I came back with one or two litres – we measured rice in litres – two litres of rice. So everybody was happy when I came back. I made a lot of friends in Garut so I came back with corn and things like that.

My brother was in Grade 1 ...

JP: Oh, your little brother. Yeah

KA: ... he's a professor now, and the other brother was still a baby, of course. And there was only one thing my father could do: on Sundays he took me to the mountain to get wood from the jungle – we had to buy a ticket to get a permit. And that was an all-day ordeal, because we walked for two hours, I think, to get to the top and then we had to collect and walk back again.

One day, I was so tired that we stopped on the roadside and dropped the wood that we carried – you know, with a pole, like that, and a bundle of wood here and a bundle of wood there – and there was pancoran, you know, rice fields, on the side. And there's the water, and we drank the water from the rice field. I mean there was no better thing to drink. And I saw this ... You know nangka?

JP: Yeah, jackfruit.

KA: Yeah. And you know when you eat the nangka and you get the *jirami* left, the not edible bit, it gets thrown away. Do you know what I did? I picked it up and I ate it. (*laughs*)

JP: You were hungry.

KA: I was as hungry as anything.

So anyway, we were in Garut and I went to Grade 4. And then my father died. He was so broken-hearted, he'd left his fields back home and he couldn't do anything else but that – it was a little farm, petani. So then he died, in 1947.

JP: Still quite a young man then.

KA: Yeah, he was 47.

He was 47, but he had – I'm not too sure – pleurisy or something like that. We had no medicine, you see. I mean, there was a clinic man – in Indonesia you have monthly clinic

– it was actually a male nurse, giving this postcard medicine. But no medicine [for my father] so cough, cough, cough and he died. We buried him over there, in Bayongbong.

JP: So he's buried there.

KA: Yeah, yeah. But he was lucky then, he didn't have to suffer further ordeals.

JP: OK. But then your mum was all by herself.

KA: Well, myself, my brother, Sudarna, and my youngest brother – three boys. So we lived off my sister's husband's salary. And my sister had two at that time.

JP: Two babies?

KA: Yes, one baby and the other one, I think, was one or two years. My sister was only 27, at that time. I always thought my sister was old but she was only 27. I'm 80 this year!

Anyway, to cut the story short ...

JP: So what else happened.

KA: When my father died my other sister was married and she lived in Purwakarta, she wasn't with us. And then she collected my brother Sudarna and took him to Purwakarta.

Her husband was a laskar. She met him when the Japanese were building a cement plant in my village – my uncle lost his land. He was very sad, but our land was not in the way, not needed. So, this fellow's from Bogor and he was working as a clerk in the Japanese thing and that's how he met my sister.

JP: So they were together when you were evacuated? They were already married?

KA: Well, my sister went to Purwakarta because he'd joined the Laskar Rakjat which had become the Badan Keamanan Rakjat, because we had no army as such. And then it became Tentara Keamanan Rakjat. Yeah, TKR for a while, and then later on TRI, Tentara Republik Indonesia, which is now called the TNI [Tentara Nasional Indonesia]. When we finally had independence they had to unite. The TNI is the joined [forces] for Dutch people and anti-Dutch people, the pro- and not, so it's a different thing.

JP: OK. So very strong links, then, to the laskar through that.

KA: Yes, yes. I had another cousin, he just died three years ago. He was my best friend, actually, he was four years older than me, or five years. When I was small he looked after me too. I missed him when he died. He was safe, he got shot, in here, by the Dutch.

JP: Was he laskar as well?

KA: Oh, yeah, yeah. And then he kept going and became army.

JP: And he was wounded.

KA: Yeah. But that was all right. Then he joined the army, of course, when it became the army. And then he was sent, evacuated, to middle Java or East Java, and so on and so on. But that's another story.

JP: After your Dad died you said that he was lucky because he didn't have to endure all these other ordeals.

KA: The railway office that my brother-in-law worked moved from Cisurupan, because they said if you don't move now, if Kroya is occupied by the Dutch then we couldn't get out.

So they moved to Purwokerto and to Jogja, but the percetakan, the printing section where my brother-in-law worked, moved to Purwokerto. So we moved to Purwokerto.

JP: So you all moved, with your sister and your brother-in-law.

KA: The one in Purwokerto was my cousin. Yes, the whole group. My mother and her sister, who was older, they always went everywhere together. And my cousins, my aunty's sons, there's three of them – one of them married my sister – the other two were also there.

JP: What was life like then?

KA: Well, as a boy, I didn't realise where the food came from, so I was in that town, it was a good experience. I went to school in Grade 4. [In Tagogapu] the basar era [teacher], he speaks Sundanese, but in Purwokerto he speaks Javanese.

JP: OK, of course.

KA: So we couldn't communicate with the teacher, we had to use Indonesian. But somehow – because I was always very good in mathematics and geography and things like that, and I was always very good in school – when we ...

JP: You picked it up, it was fine.

KA: Yeah, no problem, but it wasn't very long, only a few weeks and I had to move up to Grade 5. I moved up to Grade 5 and then the Dutch moved in, coming in from Cirebon, so we had to run away again, from Purwokerto.

So first we went up the hill and then we realised that up here, when the Dutch moved into the city, we wouldn't be able to get out. So we went back, on the same day, and I saw my schoolteacher riding a bike. We were walking across, with everything in bags on our back. We were short of clothing anyway. Yeah, after the Japanese occupation, we were carrying it on our back, no suitcase, nothing.

JP: No. So walking everywhere.

KA: Mm. And so we decided to move out from Purwokerto and we caught the last train from Purwokerto. The idea is to get to Jogja, but at that time there were bumi hangus, you know ... the scorch, what do you call it? Burn and scorch policy.

JP: Yes, scorch and burn.

KA: Scorch and burn. Yes. So we were on the train, full up, there was nowhere to sit, of course, it was all standing, on the roof and everywhere, and the fire, leaping, and the tower of the fire – I was so scared – from the burning station building. And the train wouldn't move. And there were planes above us, the Dutch planes. But finally the train moved.

Actually, there was a film about that *The last train from Jogja*.

JP: Ooh, and that's the train.

KA: My nephew said he saw that film. And then I said to him, we were on that train. 'Were you there! And Papie too?' 'Yes' I said. But his father couldn't remember well, he was much younger. So I wrote a little study for my nephew about my experiences during that time.

Anyway, during the evacuation ...

JP: The train started to move.

KA: Finally started to move, yes. And over there, there was fire.

JP: You must have been very frightened.

KA: Oh, yes. And of course the train was very overloaded, and then it stopped again because it was scared of the plane. Then Pak Kartomi – have you met him?

JP: Yes, some years ago.

KA: This is of there wedding.

JP: A photo. Great.

KA: Yeah, I went to that wedding, in Mornington, at the tennis club.

JP: Gorgeous.

KA: So, where was I? On the train, so we start and stop, and ...

JP: How does Pak Kartomi come in?

KA: How does Pak Kartomi come in? We had to stop at Notog, at the tunnel. And his place is near there. *(laughs)* He was outside, safe at his place.

JP: Hopefully.

KA: Anyway, finally we managed to get going and then they said the train couldn't get through.

JP: The tunnel.

KA: Not the tunnel. It couldn't get to Kroya, because Kroya was already occupied by the Dutch. This is Aksi Pertama [First Action], because they had two actions. Anyway, so we had to walk, we were offloaded. We didn't know where to go but the idea was to get to the republican area, away from the Dutch occupation.

So from Notog we walked, we stayed overnight, and the locals wouldn't let us stay. They said it was too dangerous, but finally we offered some money, so they let us stay overnight just on the floor, on the dirt. You know in middle Java the floor was dirt. And then the next day we walked again, south, and then we had to cross the river, by barge. What do you call it? Rakit, you know the bamboos stuck together like that.

JP: Yeah. It's like a raft.

KA: It is a raft, yes, kalibokor, you see. And then we finished up at Banjirmudau. So we stayed the night at Banjirmudau and the next day we walked on the rough road. It was a road but all the roads in Java, after the Japanese, after the war, were unsealed. The seal was broken, you know? So we walked to Gombong. And there was a train at Gombong.

JP: So your uncle was able to lead you, or somebody else was able to lead you, over all these rivers and roads?

KA: My father, of course, had already died, so it was my brother-in-law and my aunty, and the cousin, the other cousin. Because my aunty's two sons, whom we followed in Garut, they had already moved to Jogja, to Madiun. While the trains were still running they moved there but we were too late.

JP: You were a bit late.

KA: Yes. From there then, we finished up in Jogja, and then Solo. In Solo we stopped for a week and we slept in a school, in a school on the floor. And the water, of course there was a well. And then from there we said we better move to Walikukun.

JP: Why? You knew someone or ...

KA: Because the rice was cheaper and my brother-in-law would work in Madiun, with the railway. And Walikukun is midway between Madiun and Solo. I don't know what distance, maybe 30 kilometres.

JP: Do you remember what year this is? It must be '47 or '48?

KA: '47. And I went to Grade 5 there, and I was top of the class again, of course. Then changed to Grade 6, you see. And from there I took an exam to go to high school. I didn't come first, I came second, a girl beat me. (*laughs*) The girl was cleverer than me!

I was accepted to enter high school in Madiun. But then Mr Musso came. Have you heard of Mr Musso?

JP: You tell us about him.

KA: Mr Musso came back from Russia and told President Sukarno how to become communist. Anyway, of course the communists were always there. I mean the reason why we had the independence revolution, you know, the anti-colonial thing and so on, was because the communists were on our side. So Madiun became communist and I couldn't go to high school because of the trouble. It was not normal, there was fighting. Then Sukarno sent the West Javan tentara kantong, the pocket army from West Java, and they collected in Jogja. And they had no shoes, no clothes, not even guns, of course.

JP: No guns.

KA: And they used them to drive [out] the communists. And we saw them coming, we thought it was the postman, my mother came out and gave them a pot of tea. We thought they were going to stay. The communist laskar, of course they didn't fight, they just hid. So they went back to Danteng, which is the border between middle Java and East Java.

And then, about ten o'clock in the evening the village leader came. He said, 'Bapak and Ibu, I suggest you run away because this house is going to be attacked by the communist youth at two o'clock because you sympathise with the anti-communists, the Sukarnoists.' That's because we'd talked to the soldiers, because they were Sundanese.

JP: Oh, you kept landing in the wrong places.

KA: Two o'clock we packed our – well there was not many belongings, anyway. So, my sister, my cousin and the babies, my aunty we walked along – not the main road but there was a village road beside the railway line heading to a teak plantation – and we stopped at a place, the local lurah [village head], and we were given something to eat and drink. And, actually, the next block, a big block, was the property of Dr Wargiman. He was quite high up.

JP: In the republican hierarchy.

KA: Yeah, yeah. He was ... I mean, a doctor is pretty rare, right, a doctor of medicine. Anyway we kept going walking.

JP: Headed to Jogja?

KA: Yeah, the idea was to head to Jogja. And the whole day we walked. I mean, we started early, at two o'clock in the morning, and we finished up about teatime at the railway station at Kedung Banteng. But the buildings at the station were occupied by the soldiers who had just come back from fighting the communists. They were resting. So the captain, Captain Santoso, said, 'Hey you boys, let these grandmas and these tired people lie down there.' We couldn't sleep – I mean, there was no room so we sat up like that, resting anyway.

JP: But they welcomed you.

KA: Oh yes, yes. Of course, he became a top general, that fellow. He was lieutenant at that time. Yeah.

JP: Good man.

KA: The next day we walked again to Sragen, heading to Solo, you see, because in Solo we had relatives. And we could hire an andong, in Sragen. You know the andong? It's like the queen's cart with two horses. So we arrived in Solo, ten in the evening, and we stopped at a relative's. And from Solo we continued to Jogja.

JP: Oh, goodness. You didn't stay there? OK.

KA: No, only a week, because the office of my brother-in-law was in Jogja.

In Jogja – of course only a very short period in 1948 – I couldn't get to high school.

JP: Yeah, you were missing.

KA: Because it had already started, there was no room. So I went back to Grade 6 for a few weeks. But then the Dutch came, of course. We didn't stay long there when the Dutch came.

We were renting a place south of keraton, Gadin. All in one house, we rented there because we couldn't afford the one on the roadside, it was quite expensive. So the people who managed to rent a place on the roadside all came to our place because we were in the village. And we got stuck for, I don't know, several days.

And my cousin – this is my aunty's first son whom we followed to Garut, he used to live at Kutoarjo west of Jogja – on the day the Dutch bombed Jogja, he was at the railway station waiting for a train to go to Solo with his wife and daughter. His daughter, at that time, was just beginning high school, I think. Anyway, instead of going back to their house, because they had to cross the railway bridge, they went south, across the keraton, and joined us there.

And one day, on Monday, he asked me to accompany him to go back to his place to collect some stuff. And so we walked – early in the morning, six o'clock, or maybe seven o'clock – trying to skirt the keraton outside. And we were unlucky because as we entered the lane – we couldn't see, entered the lane – there were Dutch soldiers picking up all the able-bodied, all the men from the village. They called it membersihkan ...

JP: Yeah, cleaning up.

KA: Cleaning up. So all able-bodied people who could be recruited to fight were put in detention, in a school, actually.

JP: Right.

KA: And we were caught.

They said, 'Where are you going?' I think my cousin said the wrong thing. He said, 'Going home.' I mean that's true he was going home to collect some stuff but he didn't tell the full story. And the soldier said, 'OK you sit down.' They told us to sit down with a gun.

Then they said 'anak pulang', they told me to go. But I had no idea [where to go] because we were going to find a back way to his place, we didn't know which way to go, I mean he didn't know either, just said his place was over there so if we go that way we walk over rice fields or something like that. So I didn't know where to go. I panicked, of course, but in the village I heard one of the families speaking Sundanese, from Bandung, so I went in. And a woman was crying – the boy, her son, had been taken and I think the man too – and then she looked at me and said 'Who are you?'

Then she kept crying, and the baby. Anyway, a few minutes later I heard gunshot. It was funny, but I felt it here in my chest. And then, a few minutes later, girls were running around saying orang mati [dead person] over there, in the ditch by the roadside. So I went over there and it was my cousin. And he was still alive. He was lying like that, and he was hit here – I think the bullet lodged in the ear or somewhere – but he didn't die. It didn't hit his brain.

JP: Ohh. What did you do?

KA: I tried to wake him up, but couldn't, of course. His pipe, he smoked a pipe, you see. And ... ah ... I looked around, the soldiers were all gone. The detainees were walking on the road to the detention centre, so I ran back, ran back home and I told my ... and then I was stopped, told not to tell his wife. His wife and his daughter never knew, until they died, what happened to him.

JP: They just thought he disappeared, or ...

KA: I wasn't allowed to tell them. But I asked the two brothers and the brother-in-law and another cousin – they're four men – to collect him now, because he was still alive. They said, 'We'll get shot too!' So I had to respect my cousin and the brothers. They could have been shot, but the soldiers had gone. And then they waited until night. But at night, the Dutch soldiers staged their defence, they had machine guns, so we couldn't get near. We didn't know. We didn't know what happened to the body.

And then three years later, after we came home, I still hadn't told his wife ...

JP: What did she think had happened?

KA: I don't know. I was trying to spare her feelings. Just missing. And then his pipe turned up.

JP: His pipe?

KA: Yeah! At the office of the railway. It came back to his wife.

JP: Did it have his name on it?

KA: No, that was his favourite, taken from his pocket.

JP: So how did it ...

KA: The Red Cross collected the body, this unclaimed body, of course, so he was buried in an unknown cemetery, and we didn't know. I think they knew his name because he had ID, worked at the railway station and so on.

JP: But they couldn't locate any next of kin because you were all over the place.

KA: That's right, we were itinerant. And then three years later, after we returned to West Java, his pipe came back. Now they're both dead, the mother and the daughter. So they never knew.

JP: Oh. Sad.

KA: So only myself. So now and then if anybody wants to know, I tell them the sad story.

JP: So brutal.

KA: And that's the war.

And then at the end of '48, after the Dutch came, we stayed in a place near the railway station, for a while, and there's only one well and one toilet, and there's a tree of cangkudu. We stripped the leaves bare because for two weeks during the Dutch occupation – we were inside – there's no food coming in from the villages, they couldn't get in. And this uncle who was the schoolteacher, he sent us money.

JP: How did they find you? That's amazing.

KA: I think his son wrote to him. I think the Dutch were trying to get as normal as possible, as soon as possible with the mail and everything like that.

JP: It was all operating.

KA: Yes. Within two weeks, or something like that, maybe a bit more.

JP: Which worked in your favour because then you could communicate.

KA: Yes. The uncle, the schoolteacher, sent us money and then we could buy food! Before that we had no money.

JP: Just scavenging, just looking for food.

KA: Yeah. Well, I mean, the neighbours, a big house, they had choko but they didn't eat the choko so I asked if we could buy some.

JP: Why not.

KA: I was the able-bodied, because I'm safe enough not to get caught.

JP: Still young enough.

KA: Still a boy, and I'm able to carry things, buy things and so on and so on. The other cousin, they didn't want the children to do that. Too dangerous. But I had no father, my mother only, my big sister.

JP: You had to.

KA: My mother, she just hoped, you know, crossed fingers. The others were protected by their parents.

JP: So you took on this father kind of role.

KA: Yes, yes. And also, I was expendable, more or less. Right? The others were very protected by parents. So I was the one who went around everywhere. And you know, a

few days after the occupation, the bodies were just left on the road because during the night they come in and then out again. Insurgents.

JP: Raids.

KA: Yeah, raids. I think that's what the Dutch thought when we went out from Jogja. I think that's why my cousin was shot, because we said we're going out. And then what did you do at night, in here? Planting bomb? So I mean they're quite within a reasonable assumption.

JP: Yes.

KA: So anyway, Jogja was occupied so we all got together and then finally my cousin, who spoke Dutch – this is the son of the schoolteacher – he read somewhere that the people who evacuated from West Java, the Dutch army would return them home, free.

JP: Ooh.

KA: As normal as possible.

JP: Yes, they wanted everything to settle.

KA: Yeah, yeah. So my cousin applied and one day a big truck with big soldiers came in, like this. We thought we were going to get picked up, because they couldn't pronounce our name, because they came from Holland. Anyway, they said within a few days we will be transported back to West Java, via Semarang. So we went by army trucks, from Jogja to Semarang and from Semarang by train to Cikampek and Bandung. So we were happy then.

JP: Were you trusting?

KA: Well, Sukarno was in detention, the republic was finished. I mean, that's it.

JP: Just get on now.

KA: We were only in Jogja because we were following Sukarno, that's all. Just being, you know, supportive to him. But it was very good for me, personally, a good experience as a young boy.

And anyway, so this is not the end of the story. They took us in the truck, one day, and then we had to wait. The Dutch had to fight the insurgents in the villages and burnt all the houses beside the road. I couldn't understand, burnt the houses? Ah, well, I suppose they ...

JP: It was just punishment.

KA: ... the republicans, they can't use it. And they had to walk a long way anyway. *(laughs)* And then the bridge was broken down again so it wasn't ready. It was mended but they blew it up overnight. So we went back the same day, aborted. So the next day they picked us up again and then we had to wait to get the temporary bridge up again. Every night they get blown up. *(laughs)* They built the bridge during the day and overnight they're blown up.

And then we passed Muntilan. Well, there were bodies everywhere on the road, because they had to fight the insurgents, Bas Mudilah. And, yeah, bodies. But they're farmers. But of course, the Dutch were, you know ...

JP: They thought they were dressed up as farmers, they were really fighters dressed up.

KA: Yeah, yeah.

Anyway ...

JP: So you had seen a lot of death by then.

KA: Yeah, that's right. There was one because my cousin was shot. And he was still alive.

JP: But in the street.

KA: Oh, yeah, in the street, everywhere. In Jogja, when I was looking for vegies there were dead bodies everywhere. I mean, the Dutch left them there because they were not theirs. But any of their soldiers they picked up. But these, because they were the insurgents, they were unclaimed bodies. So in the morning there were plenty of bodies.

The sad part in Muntilan was that in the truck behind me the soldiers were laughing and trying to hit the heads of the dead bodies on the road.

JP: Oh no.

KA: And then the heads smashed. Pseuw! Can you imagine that? (*laughs*)

JP: No. No.

KA: Like smashed coconut, the brains everywhere.

JP: Ya, it was like a game.

KA: And of the course the lady in the truck with me was saying 'What? What?'

JP: Right. Frightening.

KA: Anyway, on the second day we managed to get through and we got to Semarang very late that night. In Semarang the accommodation was provided at the railway station, the railway shed, no bedding, but a clean wooden platform. And finally, the next day we took the train to Bandung.

And then I resumed my school.

JP: Good. In high school?

KA: I had to go back to take a test, so I went back to primary school, Grade 6 for a few months, and then after that high school. I was told by my teacher that I was the top of all the entrants entering high school in Bandung. Because the only high school was in Bandung, there were only three intermediate schools in Bandung.

JP: So did you travel in from the village.

KA: I traveled every morning. I woke up at four o'clock every morning because my cousin worked at the railway, and there was about six people walking from my village, Tagogapu. There was a train but not until about seven o'clock in the morning and my school started at seven o'clock so we woke up at four o'clock. My mum woke me up and made me something to eat, but I couldn't eat it, and then we walked with my uncle and my brother-in-law and so on. And not only me, also my best friend, the daughter of my headmaster, she also walked with me.

JP: Twelve kilometres?

KA: No. Bandung's eighteen kilometres from Padalarang but my village is five kilometres, yeah. So from my house to my sister's house, I stayed there because it's on the roadside, and walked, an hour, and then after that we bought a bike. We couldn't ride the bike anyway because of the climb, like that, but for going home, yes.

Anyway, so we got a train at six o'clock and we got to Bandung at seven o'clock but most of the time the train was late so we had to run through the market, Pasar Baru. And I did that for three years and then of course we had our final exam and then I got a prize for the high school final exam.

JP: What were your favourite ... You said you enjoyed mathematics and ...

KA: I was in B. Because you had A, which is – what do you call it? Sastra [humanities] and things like that. B is mathematics and physics. So I took that, because I wanted to go to technical school. I'm technical, not artistic.

JP: So you had that ambition?

KA: Yes, yes. But because it's ...

JP: Yeah, no money.

KA: ... and no father and so on, I looked for a scholarship. That's why I finished up at senior technical high school, because they awarded scholarships. Because the Indonesian government needed skill, because, you know, the skilled people were Dutch mainly and they went home. So there was a big empty thing.

JP: So they were giving out scholarships. You got one of those.

KA: Yes, and of course I was top of the class all the time so I went to senior technical high school in Bandung, in Jalan Doktor Wahidin, STM Bandung. There's only one. There was only three STM in Indonesia at that time, Jogja, Bandung and Surabaya. There's probably another one in Jakarta. And I did four years, and I ...

JP: Graduated with – what did you graduate with, some kind of ...

KA: No. A certificate. And then my friend said, 'There's this paper here. Look at this, invitation for fifty candidates, Colombo Plan students, ex-STM.' Before that it was from uni.

JP: Yes, you were allowed to just have a high school qualification.

KA: Yeah, from the technical side. And it was to be taught in English, a very quick course, a three-year course, in technology, Bachelor of Technology. And Adelaide had opened that. So this friend of mine, the son of my first teacher – it's not the son, actually, it's the brother, assumed like a son because the old man married the young woman and was too old to look after the son so the older brother looked after him.

So we both applied but I got it and he didn't. I mean, my marks were a bit better. But eventually he got one from Russia, a year later. But then again when he came back from Russia, and Suharto [was in power], he couldn't get a job. He was screened. So, anyway he got another scholarship to Belgium so it was OK then.

JP: This was about what year?

KA: That was 1956. 1956, I applied for the Colombo Plan scholarship, to Australia. There were fifty positions and I got in. And just before Christmas I arrived – first in Sydney, of course, but only in Sydney for two weeks and then we moved to Adelaide.

JP: Just for a second tell me about Sydney and what you did for two weeks.

KA: In Sydney we did training of English and things like that. And then we were taken to the shop, and so on, we were given eleven guineas to do shopping.

JP: Yeah? To buy clothing?

KA: Yes, I bought a suit. I still have the suit, I hardly used it. *(laughs)*

JP: So tell me, what was the reaction of your mother and your family when you got this scholarship and you were going to go away to Australia?

KA: Well, it was only my mother. She said, 'Australia's white Australia. Brown people like you can't get in there.' I told her I can. *(laughs)*

JP: They're telling me I can. Yeah. Had you thought about Australia before? Did you have much of an idea about what it was like?

KA: No, no. The colour prejudice didn't occur to me. My aim was the education. I didn't care if I went to the moon to get it. *(laughs)*

JP: Yeah. So you would have gone anywhere. You could have ended up in Russia like your friend.

KA: Yeah. In Russia or the USA, or wherever, but the Colombo Plan was opening. That was the one that saved me from the village. Yeah, Colombo Plan.

I came in 1956 before Christmas, we were invited to Christmas dinners and this and that, so friendly, and Australians opened their houses. Mas Kartomi, he came here in '55, a year earlier. So there were two groups, the first in '55 ...

JP: Yeah, a big group.

KA: ... and the second group. The first one is from university or something like that.

JP: Yes, they'd already started at university.

KA: But the second one was a technical scholarship, not to university but to technical colleges. And Adelaide University had a newly formed degree course in technology, so that was ideal. It was only a three-year course, while engineering was five years, you see.

JP: Yeah. And did you speak any English?

KA: Well, we had English training, a short course.

JP: In Sydney? Or before you left?

KA: In Sydney and in Indonesia too, we were tested in English. [We were] good enough to communicate – hello, good day, good morning, what ever. And in Sydney also we had conversation training.

JP: Very minimal.

KA: And then in Adelaide too.

JP: And in Sydney did you stay in some accommodation like a hostel?

KA: No, we were farmed out to families. I mean the idea was that you understand family life here. I was in Abbotsford. With a family – it was kind of funny because the mother was

tearing her hair with seven kids, or something like that, and the father was always drinking, and it was rather funny. (*laughs*)

JP: They don't sound like great candidates for a host family. Was it you and somebody? Did another Indonesian stay there?

KA: No. Someone from Singapore, they'd already been there a year. There was an outhouse with two rooms. You know, like a portable thing.

JP: A bungalow.

KA: Yes, a bungalow. So one room for me and one for him. But then again I was sent to Adelaide.

Their name was Tisdale. I visited them after a while. After the husband died everything seemed to be normal.

JP: And what was that like? Did they have children?

KA: Yes. The girls, Rhonda and ... What was the other one? Yes, I only saw them once, I think, when I went to Sydney, overseas, for a holiday with my wife.

JP: Was that quite ... how did that feel?

KA: I was a handy person. I helped the landlady with the garden and so on, I was very popular there.

JP: Very good.

KA: Weeding and this and that.

JP: Excellent. And how did you find the Australian lifestyle? Like our food and, you know, sleeping arrangements, everything.

KA: Well that was a bit hectic, unusual. Because next door seemed to be all organised, you know, everything like that. They were very unusual that particular family. But it was very good to see the ...

And one day I was woken up by the man 'Kos, Kos, Kos! Come on get your arms', he said. And it was the Red Sea, the Suez Canal fight. (*laughs*)

JP: Oh, right. How about the food? Tell me about the food a little bit. What did they eat in that home.

KA: Ah, they served me too much. With the hungry boys there.

JP: Eat, eat, eat.

KA: You know big chops and so on, I'm not used to it. I hadn't eaten meat much, couldn't afford it anyway.

Yeah. So we were sent to Adelaide. In Adelaide we did some English training and so on. And we had to do tests. Those who passed stayed in Adelaide, those who didn't were sent to Melbourne, to colleges in Melbourne, Footscray and like that.

JP: Right. Because you were actually going to the university where they had the technical course, at a different level. And you passed.

KA: Yes, I passed so I stayed there.

JP: And there were already quite a lot of Indonesians there, you were saying. Mas Kartomi was there.

KA: Yeah, only the year before. Mas Kartomi, in 1955, and then Gregory Tai and Sura Yinarna, Subagio, and others. We had, in total, 27 with me. I mean their group and my group.

JP: '55 and '56.

KA: 27 in '56.

JP: And do you stay in touch with many of those 27?

KA: Most of them have died. Well, I'm in touch with one now, Pak Helmi. You know Helmi.

JP: Yes, I know Pak Helmi.

KA: But Pak Helmi studied in Melbourne and he came in 1955, the same time as Pak Idris. I came in '56 the year after. Because there were only two sizable groups and after that only one or two.

JP: Yeah, a few each year.

KA: And then another few groups in 1970s or something like that.

JP: Yeah, it was a steady number but it was nothing like the numbers ...

KA: Yeah, that was a big lot in the beginning.

JP: Yeah, a big lot.

OK. So how did you find your course? Was it difficult with minimal English?

KA: Well, it was mainly technical, things like that. [I had trouble] but not because I didn't manage English or something like that. Girls were the problem.

JP: Distracting. *(laughs)*

KA: Yeah. So I had to repeat a few subjects. Chemistry was one of them. My chemistry was weak because I did very little chemistry in sekolah teknik. So yeah, it was her fault, I was introduced to her.

JP: And all her friends.

KA: Yeah, I picked one up and she became my wife, Christine.

JP: So you met quite early on, at university?

KA: Yes, on the first day. It was Margaret's fifteenth birthday, she invited all her school friends and I got to know one of them. And Mr Sastra married Carol.

JP: Who's Mr Sastra? I don't know him.

KA: He's from <audio difficult to hear> Sastra Dipraja – married Carol. Carol was Margaret's school friend. And myself married Christine.

JP: Christine. Both school friends of Margaret.

KA: Yes. And then a few others, of course.

JP: That's amazing. So anyway, you were having a pretty good time then, because you immediately met lots of people, Australians, Indonesians, parties.

KA: Fantastic. And then didn't study much. (*laughs*)

Have you heard of Ebet?

JP: No.

KA: Ebet Harusman.

JP: Ebet? OK.

KA: I shared a room with him and he wanted me to live with him at boarding places. He was very popular, he can sing. He was Bintang Radio, you see.

JP: That's right, yes. Margaret's told me about him.

KA: It was his influence that I was playing with the girls. Before that, of course, I would do study first and girls after.

JP: Did you play music as well, or sing?

KA: No, Ebet sang, I played only the calung, you know, the bamboo thing. Mr Nusbar's still in Adelaide, he's the leader of that group, from Padang. And if you see there's a few pictures here of him with Pak Kartomi and myself. And we played calung. And Pak Waswara – but Pak Waswara's dead. Have you heard of him?

JP: No? I may have, may have. Margaret may have told me about him.

So whenever you went to a party you'd just pick up your instruments and play.

KA: No. I did a bit of suling, the Sundanese flute. I managed eighteen songs. When I went to Indonesia I said this is the one, you know. I went to see Pak Ujo in Bandung, and things like that, to buy the suling. And then I asked the local schoolteacher to give me some lessons, so I managed eighteen songs.

JP: That's good.

KA: It's good for breathing, it's relaxing.

JP: So was this during your three years of study? Were you able to go home?

KA: Yes, after three years you have ...

JP: Oh, after three.

KA: So I went home in 1960, for a holiday.

JP: Were you married yet, or not yet?

KA: Ah ... yes. I was married in '59. But my mother, I didn't dare to tell my mother, but she heard it through Ebet because my nephew went to ITB and Ebet was teaching English.

JP: Oh. He assumed that everybody knew. Do you think he ...

KA: And Ebet told him that his uncle Kos married. So I told my mum.

JP: And? Wow, she wouldn't like that.

KA: No, I mean, from her point of view – because she's not educated or anything like that – she wanted me to marry someone from the village, locally, who she knows.

JP: So did Christine go back with you in 1960?

KA: No. Never.

JP: She didn't go back when you went home?

KA: No, no, because that was only a student ticket, it was only for myself. And we didn't earn any money yet. Christine went to teachers college but she didn't finish it, of course, because she got married. Not like Margaret. And Christine was very happy because she didn't have to study any more. She was a bit lazy.

JP: OK, so you went back in 1960. Had you already finished your degree?

KA: Not yet.

JP: Not yet, because you had to repeat a few things.

KA: No, some people had a five-year course, but after five years you get to go home for a holiday, that's the Colombo Plan.

JP: Yep. OK, so the visit you told your mum about Christine, everything was OK.

KA: Yes. So in 1960, I came back and finished the study in 1960.

JP: And at this stage were you already thinking that you and Christine would stay in Australia? What did you think?

KA: No. I had no planning whatsoever, like today, I just wait until the sun came up. I have no planning.

JP: The Colombo Plan was always that you had to go back after you finished but you were married so that didn't apply to you any more, did it?

KA: Well, I was ready to go back but you were allowed to have one year of experience. So I finished my study in 1960, Bachelor of Technology, and I could stay for another year, for practical experience. So I took a job – I took Christine there – at Radium Hill, uranium mine, underground. It's 70 kilometres west of Broken Hill, in South Australia.

JP: Amazing. Very remote.

KA: Yeah. I was the only electrical engineer because everybody else was running away because it was going to close down. So I closed the mine then in 1962, taking the cables off and things like that.

JP: What was that like, living out in the desert?

KA: Lovely.

JP: You enjoyed it.

KA: There was aluminium housing.

JP: Ooh, that's hot.

KA: Yes. I loved the dry creek bed. And you picnic on the creek bed. Sand.

JP: No water in it.

KA: No water in it. Yes. And the kangaroos, you know, we had to send someone to the airstrip before the plane landed to chase the kangaroos.

JP: You were used to kind of living a bit rough, weren't you, from what you describe about that time in your childhood.

KA: Oh yes, I didn't mind rough. That's why I like camping. So from Radium Hill the mines closed, and I went back to Adelaide. Then in '61 I was in contact with Daris, the Cultural Attaché, and he didn't press me to go home because I said I was ready to go home but I had a wife and two children. One was born in 1962. He said he couldn't help me with jobs. 'You go there and find yourself a job.'

JP: You just had to go there and look for it.

KA: But my friends were coming back here, like Mr Sastra and Mr Suriana, they're both very, what do you call it, patriotic. They went home and were disappointed. And Mr Helmi – I see him every day almost, he always nags me because he lost his wife too, she died. He's OK, he's got two houses here and daughters and a house in Bali. He was all right. He's an architect.

JP: Yes, he was also unhappy working there, he couldn't find a good job.

KA: He came back here.

JP: So you heard these stories and said well what am I going to do if I go back to Indonesia?

KA: Well, all these streaming back here, even Ebet came back here. Ebet went home with his wife Judy, for only a year, then came back again. He got a job with the ABC actually, Radio Australia. He was doing chemical study, but – not because he had no brain, he just didn't study. A lot of my friends got sent away because they were not up to scratch.

JP: So they got sent to Melbourne to finish?

KA: Some went to Melbourne. Many of them went home.

JP: OK. Because they were failing?

KA: Yes, failing. Something like twelve from Adelaide, we put them on the boat.

JP: Twelve from the 27, so almost half?

KA: No, that was outside the 27. The 27 were the ones who succeeded.

JP: Yeah. So it was tough, because, as you said there was a different structure, you had to do ... your English had to be a certain level ...

KA: And biologically, it's the age. Sending them here, some of them had girlfriends. In Indonesia it's a bit different, because of the culture maybe, but here it's free to go out with girls. That's quite a door opening for us, we're not used to it.

JP: And in that group with you a lot were coming straight from high school. Quite young weren't they – nineteen, twenty?

KA: Yes, younger than us. We were older.

JP: So a lot of challenges.

KA: That's right. Biologically they're not too mature, I suppose. In Indonesia, of course, you can't take out a girl without the consent of parents and everybody looks at you. This is before, it's different now. I don't like it now.

JP: So something made up your mind to stay here. Did you just find a job?

KA: It was mainly because my wife, Christine, was Australian, and then the kids coming, and no jobs in Indonesia. Chris was not that keen to go to Indonesia.

JP: And just your mum. You've got your mum in ...

KA: My mum. And my brother managed to get a scholarship from France. The other brother, of course, we had to help him quite a lot but ... well, my brother was a chemist, you see, so we opened a chemist shop for him.

JP: So the ties here were stronger, you had a wife, you had children, they were the priority.

KA: The children and the wife, yeah. And no demand in Indonesia, nobody asking me to go home and offering me a position. They're saying if you have plenty of money come home, you can give something, but if you want to look for a job, well, goodbye. *(laughs)*

JP: So you found something here. What job did you find?

KA: Well, after Radium Hill, I went back to Adelaide and then BHP offered me a job. It was the beginning of steel works in Wyalla. So I grew up with it and became the engineer in charge of electrical. And then one day I went to visit Mr Sastra, here in Melbourne. We were with the family, holidaying with them, because they had a bungalow, empty, in the back, for rent, in Heathmont.

I thought Melbourne was very good. My daughter was learning ballet in Wyalla, it's very limited, she couldn't go any further with the teacher. So, I was looking for something, a place where she could do ballet, and music for the other girls. Anyway, this friend, Mr Sastra's wife, Carol, said 'Here's a paper Kos, why don't you have a look?' And Rio Tinto had jobs.

I was going home on Monday, I think, but it was in the paper, so I rang up and they said come in for an interview then. So I went for an interview. I was interviewed by the chief electrical engineer, of Rio Tinto's consulting company – Doug Murna was his name – and he said, 'Oh, you're from Wyalla. What happened there with the lance winch?' And I said 'Oh, it kept breaking down, I had to fix it'. 'Oh,' he said, 'I designed that.' *(laughs)* And that's all. That's the interview and I got a job!

JP: Fantastic. You were just here for a visit and suddenly you got a new job. Amazing.

KA: Yeah. So I moved to Melbourne.

JP: What year was that, Pak?

KA: I moved to Melbourne in 1970.

JP: You had three girls now. How many girls did you have? Just two?

KA: Yes, the three of them, and a son, number two. All of them were born in South Australia. Wani was born in Adelaide hospital, Royal Adelaide Hospital. David was born in Radium Hill – oh, no, no, not Radium Hill, in Murray Bridge. The second daughter in Wyalla, and the third daughter in Wyalla. And from the three girls I have six grandchildren. There you are.

(Pak Atma shows Jemma some photos on his phone.)

JP: Look at that big family. Wow! Gorgeous, how beautiful. That's great. So six grandchildren.

KA: That's my first daughter, Wani, and her husband. Of course it's a long time ago, during their wedding. And that's the daughter and the son. They're 22 and 20. And he's in South America at the moment. He left last week, backpacking.

JP: Oh, good for him. Fun. And your daughter, where does she live?

KA: Prahran now.

JP: So also in Melbourne?

KA: Yes. Everybody's in Melbourne now.

There's my granddaughter.

JP: Oh my goodness. How old's she?

KA: Twenty.

JP: Beautiful.

KA: She just finished her studies, I think.

JP: So, Pak, during this time were you always regularly going back home to visit your mum and your relatives?

KA: I tried to. I didn't visit my mum when she was alive because of the children and so on and I was busy with work here too. But after I retired in 1992, and also my wife left me seven years ago, and my sister now is 92 so I'm trying to see them once a year.

JP: You've been going a little more frequently.

KA: Usually I go there at Ramadan time. Because everybody's together and it's holiday time.

JP: And what about your children? Did you take them back to Indonesia very much?

KA: No the children have their own life now here.

JP: But when they were smaller?

KA: Oh, only when they... we had a ... I think when they're smaller, yes, I took them home. Yes, it was quite an eye opener for David, I think, in particular. That was a long time ago. I've got some old photos here.

JP: Oh, good.

KA: I ... ah ... let me see. Do you live here, in Melbourne?

JP: Yeah, in Brunswick, I live.

KA: Were you always Victorian?

JP: Yes. Actually from northern Victoria, from a place called Kyabram.

KA: I know that. Oh, I love the Murray. I used to have a caravan.

JP: You'd go up to Echuca and roundabout.

KA: Yeah, yeah and the lake.

JP: Oh good. So this camping thing, that's what you enjoyed. Moving around, not being tied down.

KA: This is the only way to afford it. I mean motels are too expensive, a caravan is... I mean the kids always want to play.

JP: But you've always liked to travel.

(A message came on Pak Atma's phone.)

KA: This is from Pak Helmi. Excuse me, can I do this.

JP: Yeah, sure.

(Pak Atma sends a text message in reply.)

JP: So, do your children speak bahasa? Did you speak bahasa at home?

KA: No. I didn't because I thought it may confuse them.

JP: And because Christine didn't speak any bahasa, I guess.

KA: No, no. They're totally Aussie, my children, and that's it. When you're a kid you grow up local, with the local kids here. I didn't want to interfere with that.

JP: And what about religion, Pak? You were a Muslim but when you came here were you ...

KA: I was never a strong Muslim anyway, so we didn't ... so as far as religion was concerned it's not strict. Because there was a mosque behind the house, so I tended to go to Friday prayer.

JP: When you were a bit younger. But it's more of a cultural thing probably.

KA: Yeah, cultural.

JP: Observe all the holidays.

KA: Yes. I have a lot of questions about religion. Because it doesn't matter what religion you are, too much restriction, this for no reason whatever. Yes. Are you very religious?

JP: Not very. I am Catholic but I'm not very religious.

KA: Well Catholic. Muslim, I suppose, is closest to Catholic.

JP: Yeah, in a lot of ways.

KA: I mean, that's it, you just have to believe it. *(laughs)*

JP: You have to believe it but you're also, you're a little bit, you know, open to other things. There's different kinds.

You're obviously keeping in touch with some very close friends from Colombo Plan days.

KA: Oh, I ... yes, but many of them have already ... passed.

JP: As you say, they've died.

KA: Yes. I haven't seen Mr Sastra very much. I see *him* every day.

JP: Mas Kartomi.

KA: Because he's in a nursing home, I put music in his ears when I can. And I play golf with Mr Helmi.

JP: Oh you play golf, OK.

(Pak Atma shows Jemma another photo.)

KA: That's my sister, you see, last year.

JP: Oh, wow. That's great that she's lived to 92. Yeah, you have confidence.

KA: Not much of a life.

JP: No? Has she got children and grandchildren? She must have, she had those boys.

KA: And you know, the cats in this house are fed on corn.

JP: Corn? What, just raw? Or cooked?

KA: Cooked.

JP: Sweet, they must like it.

KA: They hardly eat any meat.

JP: They don't need meat.

KA: One day I went to the shop and bought chicken.

JP: Ooh. A treat for the cats.

KA: You've been to Bandung?

JP: Yeah.

That's great. I'd like you to send me some family photos. I'd love to have a photograph of your family, your grandchildren.

KA: This one? You loved it?

JP: Yes, I loved it. You can text it to me.

KA: Yeah, I can send it to you now, if you like.

JP: That'd be good.

(Pak Atma looks on his phone for the photo.)

KA: This is here in Melbourne.

JP: Three generations. Where does Christine live now, is she still in Melbourne?

KA: Mount Martha, I think.

JP: OK. Do you go back to Adelaide at all?

(Pak Atma shows Jemma another photo.)

KA: See, there's me trying my grave. That's my family's grave. It used to be my – I grew up in that spot – it used to be my grandfather's big house. This was the front yard.

JP: So you've got – everyone knows? You've got directions for people about how to ... where you're going?

KA: I've been asking my brother over there to make a map. Our relatives from Bandung, who don't have land, they just come without permission. They thought it was public. But this is my land. They didn't know.

JP: You're not there.

And so you'll pass this on to your children? You hope that they'll just keep it.

KA: I don't know.

(Pak Atma shows Jemma another photo.)

Here's my great grandchildren. They look Chinese, don't they?

JP: Give me a look. They've got very dark hair, it's because of how they've styled their hair.

KA: They look Chinese! The great grandchild of my sister.

JP: Has she got maybe some Chinese?

KA: No, the mother's not like that! The father's not like that.

JP: OK. They're just really dark, aren't they.

KA: When they were little they didn't look Chinese.

JP: And their skin's quite pale.

KA: I had some photos from when they were small.

JP: Your kids have got quite pale skin, haven't they.

KA: We live in Australia, look at my skin, it's pretty dark but here it's a different colour.

JP: Right. In the sun.

So, Pak, when you were here it was still white Australia policy and all of that kind of thing. Did you ever feel uncomfortable or were you made to feel ...

KA: No. Because the people who we met, they didn't ...

JP: You immediately moved in the circles ...

KA: No. We didn't know there was such a thing as the white Australia policy because it wasn't practiced here. I mean, it's only the government who didn't want to be swamped by the Chinese, I suppose.

JP: So the regular people ...

KA: ... not against the colour, were they?

JP: Yep. Interesting.

KA: I didn't feel any ... because everywhere I went, even when I was a student ...

(Pak Atma shows Jemma another photo.)

Here, when they were young, the three daughters.

JP: Oh. In Wyalla?

KA: No, here in Melbourne, at the lake, at Melbourne Lake. We were here a year before I built a house.

JP: You're very good having these all stored on here, all these photos. Did you digitise?

KA: Yes, I digitised all the photos. I'm looking for that ...

JP: Yeah, the one that you showed me at the front. So it's your wallpaper, or whatever.

KA: Oh, here it is.

JP: Yes, that's the one I want. Forward it, or text it, whatever.

(Jemma sends the photo.)

You'll probably have to tell me who everyone is.

KA: OK. So back row: Rumini (the youngest daughter), Wani (first daughter), David (son, second child) Melanie (number two daughter). Age-wise: Wani, number one; David, number two; Melanie, number three; Rumini, number four.

And then the front: Dakota ...

JP: With the glasses.

KA: D-A-K-O-T-A. The father is American. And then River ...

JP: River! Wow. Dakota and River.

KA: Yeah. This is number one boy. This is number two.

JP: And who do these belong to?

KA: They belong to Rumini. Rumini's sons. And the husband is not here. The in-laws are not there. *(laughs)* This is only the Atma genes, right? And this one is Mia.

JP: Mia! She's cute.

KA: The daughter of Melanie. Number two.

JP: Daughter number two. And who's the boy.

KA: And then ...

JP: Then there's you.

KA: Ben. Yeah, sorry, myself, the grandpa, Atma. And then Ben.

JP: And who does he belong to?

KA: Wani's son. Number one. And then Ruby, Wani's daughter. And then Jassie, Jasmine, just Jass. Mel's number one daughter. So there's the complete Atma.

JP: So David, no children.

KA: David, no children. He's not married officially. He has plenty of girlfriends, I think.

JP: So this is your extended family. And all in Melbourne?

KA: All in Melbourne.

JP: That's nice.

(Pak Atma shows Jemma another couple of photos.)

KA: That's myself, and Ben, and Ruby. That's the three daughters – Rumini, Wani and Melanie.

JP: Wow. Gee, you're right. Do they look a lot like their mother?

KA: No, more like me, I think. They got a bit of the nose from their mother. I'll show you the mother. Where's she? Yeah, at Christmas time she came with her husband. They're happy, I hope. I don't know where they live, anyway, because we have no contact. She walked out, and I said, 'Aren't you coming back?' She said, 'No.' She just left everything. Didn't take a thing. Oh she took the double bed. Important. *(laughs)*

JP: What did you sleep on?

KA: And that was an expensive bed, you know. \$2000. What do you call it?

JP: One of those good beds.

And Pak, so you had three jobs in your whole career. Is that right?

KA: Well, the first job was just work experience, with the mining. And the second job Wyalla. So in my working life I had only two jobs.

JP: That's pretty good.

KA: In Wyalla they wouldn't let me go, actually, but I said I had to for the daughters, for openings like ballet and music lessons.

JP: Yeah, you wanted them to have opportunities.

KP: Because Wyalla was too limited. Although I quite liked Wyalla. I was in charge there, I was running the steel works.

And then Rio Tinto, that was very interesting because I was training the consulting group.

JP: Did you have anything to do with Indonesian interests in the mining?

KA: Yes, I was commissioning manager, I was on site for a year, in Kalimantan, Kaltin Primaco. Yes, that was the best effort that I ...

JP: Was that the best year?

KA: ... as far as guessing what size a power station's going to be. Because I always had to guess. You know, I added all the little five kilos here, ten hundred kilos there, one thousand here and put it all together and put the magic figure, point seven whatever, dadadada, and finished up with a certain number, somewhere about nine megawatts. I

put two gas – no, not gas – steam turbines, five megawatts, in Tanjung Barat. Perfect, because they're running on nine point three, very efficient.

JP: Still there now?

KA: Oh yeah. The coal – two hundred thousand tons an hour.

JP: So you went to Kalimantan for a year to do this?

KA: Yeah, I was running the job.

JP: You left the family here?

KA: No, I took my wife. The children were already gone. That was my last job. That was in 1980.

JP: OK. So that would have been really satisfying to be able to go home and build something ...

KA: Yes, in the end I could do some ...

JP: ... give back.

KA: ... give back, yes. But of course the mines belonged to BP and Rio Tinto only for a fifteen-year contract. After that the government took over, the Indonesian government. Suharto time. President Suharto came to open it. That was the biggest mine, of course, in... And I had something to do with the construction of the iron ore mine.

JP: Where was that one?

KA: In the Pilbara, the first one. You know, near Dampier. And then, the second one, the diamond mine.

JP: Where was the diamond mine?

KA: Kununurra. I had to put power stations everywhere. And also the control system. I mean, everything was run by electricity.

JP: Yeah, so you were the first people in because they couldn't do anything without the electricity.

KA: Yes. Yes.

JP: So do you still – well, maybe you're not anymore – but were you involved in professional networks, associations of engineers and things?

KA: No, no, I dropped out completely, I'd had enough. When I left I just wanted to have a ...

What I love now is the environmental thing – I feel guilty, you know, with the mining you split the ground, you know, open up the ground. It's people leaving gaping holes everywhere.

JP: Even in 1990?

KA: Yeah.

JP: Yeah, and the waste and everything.

KA: Yeah. I reopened the Mary Kathleen uranium mining. I was the engineer in charge there when the mine reopened. It was closed, then reopened in 1990-something. And near Canberra, there's a zinc mine.

JP: Different varieties of mines. And anything else?

KA: Everything's the same as far as the electrical is concerned. You have to put in power stations, the lighting and all the machinery. All the machinery is run by electricity.

JP: So apart from going to Indonesia for that year, did you go anywhere else?

KA: Indonesia, only a short time, only one year.

JP: And for the other projects did you just leave home for some time.

KA: I visited the site. Usually we had a site engineer and so on. I was running the consulting office here in Melbourne, sometimes we had two or three jobs running at the same time.

Bougainville was very interesting. I was on site in Bougainville. I went on site to do trouble shooting because it was run by Baptel and there was some electrical trouble but no one from San Francisco could fix it and so they called me. I just sat there day and night watching, you know, measuring everything and finally I found it was a very unusual problem. The trailing cable was too long. You know, because a big machine, a big digger like that, was run on a cord.

JP: Really? You plug it in? Oh goodness.

KA: Yeah. But the cable was that size and it was too long. I discovered that from observing and measuring things like that. It wasn't known because most of the time they just kept plugging it in. So then I said they had to limit the length of the cable by so much. And my calculation was right. The mine was getting bigger and bigger but they kept just plugging it in.

JP: Right. And what was Bougainville like?

KA: I didn't think about it.

JP: So you were project leader?

KA: No, I was only trouble shooting on this project. But on anything else you just plan.

JP: Managing people and managing the project.

KA: You have to be able to guess how many people are needed for that and plan. But I used to manage the training program. And I had six or seven young engineers, very good.

JP: You enjoyed that, the teaching, training aspect.

KA: Yeah, I was chief electrical engineer, so I had some training programs because I was in charge of making sure that we had not too much of a gap, because sometimes you get too much. People the same age, about three or four, and they retire, you know, at 57, and then there's a big gap. I said we have to fill this gap here.

JP: So you're not left with a void.

KA: Yeah, yeah. A void of experience, because usually the experience is gone with the retired people. Today, of course, it's not so bad because most of the drafting is on the computer.

JP: That came on when you were there still, obviously, that computerised stuff.

KA: Yes, I bought the computers. Bill Gates came to our office trying to sell his machines. My daughter said, 'You had lunch with Bill Gates!' He shouted me lunch because he wanted us to buy his machines.

JP: And did you buy it?

KA: Yes, we bought thirty plus or something. Instead of drawing boards we started computer drafting. Here in Melbourne, Collins Street. My office used to be 95 Collins Street. But then it was pulled down, to build 101, and then we moved to 55 for a while and then we built our own building in South Melbourne, but we've sold that company now.

JP: Do you still keep in touch in some way with the company. Do they have an alumni association?

KA: The company's gone, they became something else. They have the old fogeys lunch. Too many of them are gone.

JP: So you retired, you weren't that old when you retired.

KA: 57.

JP: Yeah, it's quite young.

KA: I went to Queensland then. Packed a bag and moved to Maclean, a Queensland house. Lovely.

JP: Beautiful.

KA: Overlooking Mount Coolum. The water.

JP: And played golf.

KA: Played golf with a Scottish friend at – not the Coolum Hyatt – but Mount Coolum. I was a member of that.

JP: Wow. It's beautiful there.

KA: Do you know the place?

JP: I've driven through it.

KA: You know the <inaudible> parliament have built a dinosaur there.

JP: Apparently. It's ruining it.

KA: It's nice the Hyatt because it's not such a big building, like that, it's little houses.

JP: It's lower. It's a good golf course, I hear.

KA: Then my wife had that knee problem so we sold that one-par green but that was the best house. I loved that, it was a big house.

JP: But too many steps.

KA: Too many steps for her, only 24. Look at this house. So we moved to Twin Waters, only one step at the front and one at the back. *(laughs)* That was nice too, but I didn't like Twin Waters much because of the midges. They love me. She was OK, they didn't bite her. They bit me and then three days after, red everywhere. Midges.

JP: Yeah, midges. I don't like midges.

So Pak, do you keep any interest in Indonesia, like politics, and everyday current affairs?

KA: No. Not politics because they keep changing and they're knocking each other. And I say politics, too many tics. (*laughs*)

JP: What do you think about the economic development of Indonesia? Since you left, I mean, it's incredible, the changes.

KA: Oh, well, too many ...

JP: Too many people filling their own pockets?

KA: Yeah, everyone is struggling, trying to get into the ... become bupati, everything like this, so they can become ... have another ...

Yes, but to be clean – in education, you're more or less forced to stay clean.

JP: There's no money being offered. But in mining it's a different story.

KA: Well, I mean, my brother's in education, he stayed poor, of course. Do you know how much a professor in Bandung gets? 1.4 million rupiah per month. One thousand [dollars] is about ten million and a few hundred thousand. And my niece is a schoolteacher, headmaster, she only gets 1.4 or 1.3. That's why the police and so on take bribes.

JP: I know. And you had a brother who became a chemist, so he's got a business.

KA: Not a chemist, he's a professor in pharmacy.

JP: OK, so no-one's in business.

KA: He works in a chemist, dispensing, to get extra money, pocket money. (*laughs*)

No, because when I went to school, I designed myself to be a technical man, not university because we couldn't afford it, so I went looking for scholarships. And I said to my brother, here's a scholarship for an assistant chemist, so he just took my advice and took that. But when he finished his study he sat for the exam, with the high school, to enter uni and he got it. He won a scholarship and then he attended lectures and so on. Until Dr Hassan Sadikin, who was the head of his school before at Ranggabaran Hospital, learnt about it. He said, 'Sudarna, we supplied you with a scholarship.' So my brother got sent to Kalimantan for three years. This was the bond, you see.

JP: Which you were meant to have but you didn't.

KA: I was sent to be a teacher in a technical school in Sumatra.

JP: Oh, when?

KA: When I finished technical school. But I got this scholarship and they couldn't find me.

JP: You got this and it saved you.

KA: They're from the same education department. Because the other school was with the education department but the left hand's not knowing ...

JP: Not talking.

KA: But anyway, I was still doing the study. The only problem was when I got involved with a young lady here.

JP: Blame the ladies!

KA: It was culture shock. I mean here you are, the door's not locked.

JP: That's right.

Well, Pak, I'm just looking at my list of questions, but I think that we've had a really good chat and I know quite a lot about you now. *(laughs)* What a fantastic life you've had.

KA: There's no secrets in my life.

JP: Thank you so much for generously sharing your story about your childhood, as well. That's a pretty unique story you've got. So you said you've already written it down. That's good, I'm glad you've written it down.

KA: Yeah, I gave it to my children. They're not interested. *(laughs)*

JP: They're not interested! You're kidding.

KA: My nephew – he's an engineer and works for BP now – he was interested because he couldn't get anything from his father because his father was too small.

JP: Yep, it's good for his father too. Or is his father dead now?

KA: No, he's the chemist one.

JP: He's still around. Oh well, it's good for him too.

KA: He has his son and two daughters. Both daughters became chemists too. But the son's an engineer, a chemical engineer, from ITB.

But his wife, unfortunately, two or three years ago, she'd just returned from Mecca – you know from the pilgrimage – and she had a double stroke. And, just eyes, like this, couldn't talk. Sad.

JP: And so Pak, you said your family's middle class now because they've had these educations, good educations, and have these kind of middle class roles but they're still not earning a lot of money are they?

KA: No, because they're not in the government, say, like bupati, whatever.

JP: Or big business.

So when your mother was alive did you used to send her money and send money home for your brothers?

KA: Yes, yes. I did put some money in a fund, called the Kos family fund, and my brother put some money there. So if somebody died we'd send some money to them, just took it from that fund. But I haven't been putting any in recently, I have to top it up a bit.

JP: And do you own all the family land now?

KA: Actually, my sister's daughter, when she has a profit from the rice production, or coconut or bananas or tapioca, whatever, she puts it in and then there's always some money there.

JP: Sharing.

KA: Yeah. She told me I have some money, so much. Oh, I know that but ...

JP: Who manages the farm now?

KA: A share farmer manages it. We get fifty per cent of the product.

JP: But as you say, you're never going to sell it.

KA: I planted a lot of coconut trees when I was a boy. And they're there.

JP: Productive.

KA: When I returned from evacuation, my father had died so I was the man of the house. I was only in Grade 6 or 7 but I was good at digging things and planting bananas and so on. I learned from my uncle. My uncle taught me how to grow bananas and things like that. You know how to grow coconut? You get a mature coconut, an old coconut, and hang it under the trees, or somewhere, and then they shoot up.

JP: OK. Yeah.

KA: And after it's this high then you can bury it.

JP: So after you moved to Australia, did you always have a garden here, did you like to garden or was it just too different?

KA: Yeah, I always loved gardening, always plenty of things to do in the garden.

JP: Well, I saw you watering. It's obviously what you like doing.

KA: When I garden I have contact with the particular plant. And I say 'How do you manage to survive?' You know, we're so grateful to the plants that we ... It's amazing, isn't it.

JP: It's a different connection, what you feel, probably, to what we feel. Because they were giving you life, those plants that you had at home.

KA: Yeah. I don't eat much meat. Because it's ... I mean, my parents didn't eat meat at all. At one time my cholesterol got too high so I only eat fish.

JP: As you say, your diet when you were growing up didn't include a lot of meat.

KA: I'm diabetic so I have to control by sugar.

JP: Right. Hence the pavlova. *(laughs)* It's a treat.

KA: That's all right. Once in a while, it's OK. I have medicine, look.

JP: Have you got plans to return to Indonesia soon, or have you just been?

KA: I don't know. I'm at a loss, myself. I have no plans at all.

JP: You don't make plans. Just go with the flow.

KA: Over there, my relatives are gone too. No more Mum. See, before, you go home to parents.

JP: But you go back to the land. That's important to you.

KA: That's alien too, people I don't know living around. And another thing, they think because I come from overseas I have plenty of money, they expect to be given something.

JP: I'm interested that your grandson, Ben, has just headed off to South America backpacking. Has he ever been to Indonesia backpacking?

KA: He was in Vietnam but not Indonesia.

JP: (*laughs*) He needs to go there.

KA: Through Vietnam and finished up in Thailand.

JP: What! And he didn't go to Indonesia.

KA: He didn't go to Indonesia.

JP: You must tell him he's got to go to Indonesia. You must insist.

KA: In Indonesia he has plenty of relatives too.

JP: Yeah. I'm just intrigued that it's not in his mind.

You need to tell him all your stories and then he'll want to go.

KA: What else would you like to know?

JP: I think that that's fine.

KA: So yes, once a month we're in contact here. Lunch here.

JP: That's right. Margaret told me.

KA: On Sunday we're at Soni Saroto's place – his wife's originally Dutch. I mean the ones who stayed here all married a local here.

JP: Yes, that's how they got to stay.

KA: Yes. Suni Saroto's here. For instance, Mr Munir, his wife's also Australian.

JP: Which Mr Munir?

KA: The one that I play golf with.

JP: Are they Colombo Plan, these people?

KA: No, no. He came here, worked for the ABC. Not Colombo Plan.

JP: Oh, yes, I know him.

KA: Rudi Munir.

JP: Yep. And what about Soni Saroto?

KA: Soni Saroto came with me, same plane. Adelaide. But he finished up studying in Melbourne at ...

JP: RMIT, or somewhere like that? Or Footscray, you said.

KA: Footscray, yeah.

JP: Well, I'd love to meet him, if you've got his phone number.

KA: Yeah, I do.