

Interview by Ahmad Suaedy with Koesmarihati, 3 January 2014**BA, Engineering, University of Tasmania, Colombo Plan, 1963**

I am from Madiun, my father was from forestry (civil servant), he really loved his nation so that he provided lots of songs related to national forestry. My father studied forestry in Bogor. But when I was born I was in Bogo, my father went to Madiun, when Indonesia gained independence my father went to Bandung in forestry then passed away in 1951. Then I went back to Madiun when I was in the third grade. My mother said that he was the most honest person.

The third grade in Madiun, Kartini school other kids were in top school. My mum knew the headmaster. My math score was always the highest. Sometimes there were 6 questions and one was made especially for me. I thought there was no headmaster as enthusiastic as Mr Suratmo. My worst score was English. When I wanted to go to Jakarta, it was too late, I went to Australia alone as well. I graduated from high school in 1961 then went to Australia. My headmaster enrolled me there, he knew I would not enrol myself. The most beneficial aspect was that I could send money home.

In Bandung, we studied in Santa Yusuf, had to pay school fee, my father was also from there. He imagined that his children had to study regardless of anything. Only my brother went to junior high school. Junior and senior high schools were not a problem, 7 children lived in grandma's house. My mom worked in printing company owned by a relative. Mum often brought papers and we helped her. Many of my grandma's children were successful, so they could help my mum.

I faced difficulties when I was in Australia for the first time. In Jakarta, my relatives sent me to Australia because they were proud of me. I was in Jakarta for a short time. When I was in Madiun, I was accepted in UI majoring medicine. Before I was in Jakarta, I went to study on my own. I went to Australia also by myself because I was late though we had the same medical check up. I didn't know why I was late.

In Australia we were taken care of by a Jewish family. Until now we still keep in touch. Students aged 17 years old coming there were still rare. At that time, there was a journalist from Yogja who wanted to write a book. Under his guidance we learned many things and we didn't face any difficulties, our math level was still high. We underwent matriculation then entered university, if we failed matriculation we went home, we said it was high school, but they said it had to be that way, had to go home. We showed our competence by getting high math score. We succeeded that way. We also had an English teacher here, so we departed October-December.

I was at University of Tasmania. Those from big cities felt sad at that time. But it wasn't sad for me, I was always with my friend from Kediri. We didn't realize that there were only two female students in engineering that were us. We became news in the local newspaper in Hobart.

The most difficult was chemistry. But it wasn't a problem if we had to do the questions. We joined English classes but there was no English test. As soon as we started, we joined. There were 6 jobs in the female boarding house. In the first year, there were two though the 6 others were in one room. At that time, men and women couldn't live in the same place.

It is not engineering if economics wasn't included, if it's only engineering it would be science school. But technology combined with economics is engineering. We couldn't go home for 3 years before we got the degree. We worked 30 weeks earning enough salary. In the first year I worked in the Sing

Company making screws. I was sent by the university. The people there looked at us and rejected us. Then we went to our professor, they said that if they rejected our people then we would sue so that their subsidy was taken. Then they accepted us. I was the 38th woman engineer to graduate in Australia.

There were many from Indonesia, Mrs Nani had been in ITB since third year. The first time we joined orientation activities, I was asked to climb a building and hang my underwear and bra, all clapped. People came from across the university and there were many woman in the university. Then in the first week we had to do workshops, I was asked to find blue clothes, but there was none fit us, I wore jeans and came late and they laughed at me, and we were written in the wall by *krismaters*. But I when I worked in Sing company, there were two woman beside me asking in English, “this is a turning point”. We broke a custom [of only employing male engineers] so that we became popular. At the end of the year, there was an event, our professor asked us to dance. We were often tricked in university but as time went by it was okay.

I worked in hydro. I worked as engineering lady but there was no rule about the salary and it wasn't open for females. In that year, our salary was good so we could be rich. After coming back to Indonesia I married Hendri Suwondo, from the Ampera ambassador batch. We were married in Bandung. After one year in Bandung in 1967, I returned to Australia in 1968.

Interviewer: It is said that in Nation Electricity Company (PLN) is your achievement.

It wasn't hard in PLN, actually I met Arif Sunandar, there was a contact with New Zealand. I searched for information and meet Mr Haru Sunandar if I am not mistaken, Kusnawato was a friend of my father. His father was from North Malang and mine from South Malang. There was no test to enter PLN in Kalibata Jakarta. After a year, I went back. I said to him at that time, “You said you wanted to dedicate yourself for your country, but in fact you went back to Australia because of the salary”

At that time, the interest in bank is 17% each month, my salary if I am not mistaken was only 6000. Then a friend bought a house. My parents agreed that I should return to to Australia. At that time, I left Australian in 1974, two years after that my husband went with the Ampera ambassador batch. I had been an engineer since 1965. The second time in Australia, I also worked a long time. My employer didn't want me to go home.

[But despite protests to the immigration department], we went home. Dealing with the Australian way through Indonesian embassy was so big, Australia wasn't willing to grant a permit to anyone easily, even the Minister would be fired by doing so.

PLN changed into Telkomswedida, actually I graduated from communication and my electrical knowledge should be strong, but when I was into Telkom it depended heavily on communication. The technology development in Telkom was better than in PLN. If we didn't update Telkom, we would be left behind.

The second time I lived in Australia, during 1968-1975, my second child was born. I had three sons, going home.

In Bandung, my husband was an architect, but he wanted to move forward. As time went by, I became upset, we took loans from everywhere. He formed his own company, but the contact was so difficult, [we thought] maybe more capital would make it more developed. It wasn't certain, sometimes suffering financial loss. Often loss, added by 2 children as burden.

My grandchild was a university student, the second got married last June, the third got married last week. The first was in BTPN, once worked in Motorola Mastel, Samsung, now in a bank. The second is in Australia and has a clothes shop. The third is a MA graduate from Unpar. Then went to TPNG then Koleps. After the second year, I no longer send him money. He said it wasn't only mum that could dedicate himself to the nation. He is now working in USA.

As soon as I got back here, I had just given birth to my child, and there was a new rule that an employee giving birth got days off outside her load, the first leave could be taken during the sickness. I was paid over the year. My friend said, you didn't have to resign, just take leave. The second leave wasn't paid.

Before Telkom, I worked with a Dutch company, Kabel Indo. I didn't feel comfortable, we fought during 11 months, my salary was 300 thousands. But, sometimes we didn't [get paid]. The one teaching them is me. All foreigners had cars, I didn't have one but I was picked up. After 11 months, I left and started at Telkom.

My last position was Telkom Development Director, then the first Prime Director in 1995. When I was in Telkom, I was borrowed by the governor because Telkom was monopolized at that time, as their right hand. In Telkom, my salary was 300 thousands, and with consultants fees my salary reached 5 million. The position of director is fate, appointed by development director by Mr Susilo.

I retired in 1995-1998 because I was 55 years old.

A consultant said, "Kus, after you retired, you worked for me" then I said I didn't want since I wanted holiday.

Five years after joining him, in 1999 the government issued new policy related to regulation.

[Trs: General discussion of details of her position and telecommunications regulations]

I moved here 2 years ago, but it wasn't my plan. I worked hard to meet my old friends. Then I was reflecting, what can said about the scholarship?

The scholarship was great, if I wasn't accepted into university, it would have been difficult. So now, we are cut by the government, they are afraid we become too liberal.

But, the way we speak is different, when I was still in Telkom if the head hitting the table, I did too.

I was never late for work, but we do something that has suddenly finished in its own. The togetherness is lacking nowadays.

We try hard to fix the system, but opposing the mainstream is difficult. Here, we have to always teach the young. It can be said as the training for the young.

Interviewer: What is your other uniqueness?

Trismiati Harsono is also unique, Jonatan is almost the same as me. He was from Tasmania too, and now is the head of trading stuffs. He married to an Australian and she became Indonesian, she once wrote I am not just any wife.