



Joli Dachi (below right) and some of his young charges from Villa Warna Warni | all photos Amber Jones

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# VILLA WARNA WARNI

BUILDING HOPE OUT OF HARDSHIP ON NIAS ISLAND BY MARA WOLFORD

**Joli Dachi is the founder of Villa Warna Warni**, a non-profit orphanage serving destitute and abandoned children on his island of Nias, Sumatra Utara, Indonesia. Joli's brother, Anton, is operational manager and undisputedly one of the world's best backside tube-riders. The Dachi family owned a losmen on the beachfront at Sorake Point for decades, and the boys grew up surfing the perfect waves in front of their home. Growing up surrounded by foreigners also led to the boys being inundated with novel ideas and remarkable language skills, while providing a unique manner of seeing the world and an understanding that change can happen. The story of Villa Warna Warni is one such change.

"I first worked for the Red Cross on reconstruction projects after the December 2004 tsunami that was followed in March 2005 by a devastating 8.6 earthquake that flattened the island," says Joli. "After three years, the Red Cross left, and I worked for SurfAid on water sanitation and village sanitation issues. Both of these jobs took me back into very isolated villages that

are accessible only by foot. The poverty I witnessed devastated me."

Joli's father was the last reigning king of South Nias before the Japanese quashed the culture and enslaved the island's population during World War II. Joli is still culturally regarded as the king of Nias, Anton the prince, and the two are accorded the respect, as well as the burden of this position. Their obligation is to serve their people, and the men take this responsibility to heart.

**"THESE KIDS NEEDED HELP AND AN EDUCATION, AND I OWE THAT TO MY PEOPLE"**

"I met Tini and Felix Härter from Germany in 2013. I took them diving and surfing, showed them around my island. They were very kind people, so I shared my dream of helping the children of this island. I wanted to build an orphanage on family land where I could house, feed and school poor children from isolated villages. Sometimes they lived with a single mother who could not support them; sometimes the families were torn by

mental illness, death or divorce. There was no medical care available, and often not enough to eat. These kids needed help and an education, and I owe that to my people."

The couple agreed to help Joli and, after returning to Germany, raised the funds necessary by asking friends and family to donate, and then held a benefit concert for the project. Joli was astounded when \$15 000 landed in his account. He began construction immediately on a large piece

of family land. He would send photos of the work accomplished, and his partners would resupply funds. In a place where goodwill projects can easily go astray, Joli completed construction of the bedrooms, kitchen and study hall within 10 months. Then he began on the farm that would sustain the operation.

School fees, uniform and material expenses are extremely onerous for Indonesian families and poor children often end up devoid of the

education essential to a successful future. It is very difficult to find any type of real employment without a high school diploma. Competition is fierce in this nation of 267 million people, with one of the lowest median ages in the world at 27 years. Joli took the first six children into his orphanage in 2014. There are now nine children plus Joli's own four children, including his youngest adopted son.

When the children become teenagers, some move on to Medan for their higher education, into a partner Catholic orphanage where their duty consists of helping with the younger children living there. To date, 17 such success stories can be counted.

"Felix and Tini send me a quarterly stipend for expenses, and I found a way to cover the rest myself. I bought five hectare of land near Lake Toba, on mainland Sumatra. It was planted with hardwood. I paid the extra taxes to the forest commissioner that allowed me to farm the wood crop. That wood built the orphanage. I replaced the hardwood with orange trees. Those oranges provide two harvests per year and bring our operation



an extra \$10 000 per year. On Nias, I farm pigs. Pork meat is a luxury at \$7/kilo for live animals, and is only consumed for special occasions: engagements, weddings and funerals. At the moment, I have 19 pigs and two sows ready to birth. The sales from the livestock cover the rest of our costs."

The day-to-day running of the farm and orphanage is a full-time job, in which everyone partakes.

"Every day, we wake the kids up at 5am. We make them breakfast, they wash

the dishes and clean the common areas before they make their beds and clean their bedrooms. We all load into the Kijang and I drive them to school at 7am. They get home around 1pm, have lunch and everyone sleeps until 3pm. Then the chores start. The farm we've built sustains most of our needs: rice, fruit and vegetables, as well as the pigs. The boys are responsible for cleaning the pens, feeding and watering the pigs every day. The girls harvest the vine we traditionally feed our livestock on Nias. Other kids are assigned to

the rice paddies or tending the gardens. My wife Julie, her sister, my mother, myself and my brother Anton all work alongside the kids between 3 and 6pm.

"At 6pm, they shower, eat dinner and wash up afterwards. At 7pm, study hour begins. Anton is responsible for tutoring them with their homework, and each night, they must answer three questions pertaining to their studies at hand. Anton makes sure that they're taking their schooling seriously. We really only want to invest in children who are

willing to work hard in order to improve their future. If they are willing to work, I have made a contract with each of them to support them financially through university. One of our original children wants to become a doctor. She's now studying in Medan and will come back to provide medical care to our people. Another wants to become a teacher. They have promised to bring these skills back to Nias. The way I see it, this is one way I can improve the lives of all Nias people, and that was my original goal."

Local vines are harvested and used to feed the livestock, which in turn helps fund the orphanage | Amber Jones



Anton Dachi, operational manager and backhand tube maestro | Brent Bielmann

