HEBRON ACADEMY

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Driving Miss Ruthie

by Jennifer F. Adams

Photos courtesy Ruth Scarpino

THE FIRST THING YOU NEED TO KNOW IS THAT RUTHIE IS GOING TO HATE THIS STORY. "I'm not perfect. I was not the perfect student. I fought with my teachers. I wasn't on honor roll until my senior year when I didn't have to take a math class. I was tutored every week for three years by Miss Ferrenbach and Ms. Shore and Ms. Leyden so that I could graduate. I got a D every year in math and I had to work *so hard* for that D. People learn differently in different situations and to think that we only honor people who learn in a standardized manner, who test well in a standardized manner, really gets to me. I don't *want* to be recognized. I don't tell people I'm a Fulbright. They say, 'Where have you been for a year?' and I say, 'Oh, I was doing research and teaching English in Malaysia.' Most people don't ask after that."

THE SECOND THING YOU NEED TO KNOW is that Ruthie is outspoken, intense, funny, tenacious, smart, opinionated, challenging, articulate, resourceful, hard-working, dramatic and courageous. Once you've met her, you don't easily forget her.

Here's a brief résumé. Ruth Scarpino graduated from Hebron Academy in 2004. Born and raised in Maine, she came to Hebron via Breakwater School and North Yarmouth Academy. While at Hebron she played field hockey, swam and ran track. She was a four-year mainstay of Hebron drama and played in-your-face Rizzo in *Grease* her senior year, a part that somehow seemed written for her.

THE THIRD THING: Ruthie is Jewish. She recently spent 10 months teaching English in Kijal, a small *kampung* (village) in Terengganu, the most religious state in the Muslim country of Malaysia. Last summer she asked Julie Middleton, her Hebron theater coach, to spread the word that she needed books to start an English language library at her school. Several of Ms. Middleton's colleagues sent books and received a fat packet of thank you notes from Miss Ruthie's students in return. Voluminous letters from Ruthie followed, and we began to wonder—as she herself put it—"How did a little Jewish spitfire from Portland end up in Malaysia?"

Miss Ruthie's 4sc1 class. "They were the top of their grade and gave the boys a real run for their money. In short these girls are brilliant."

Boys and girls at school (in fact at all Malay academic institutions) have a mandatory uniform. Boys must wear a white collared button-up with short sleeves, green trousers, a belt and white sneakers. The girls' uniform is not nearly as light and breezy. All teachers and female students wear a two-piece dress called *baju kurung*. A *baju* is best explained as a ten-pound potato sack with less ventilation that covers women from the neck down. It has two parts: the shirt and the skirt. The shirt begins at the neck, above the collarbone and extends to below the knee. The skirt sits just below your ribs and ends when it hits the floor. Under a *baju* girls are expected to wear sleeves on their arms and legs that are literally tubes of fabric that cover their skin. *Bajus* are not tight or form-fitting and are made to hide the body rather than reveal it.

To top off the uniform, you have the head scarf which must cover your breasts and usually ends somewhere close to your belly button. The head scarf is not required by Malay law, but it is socially unacceptable for women in Terengganu to be bareheaded. This change happened over the length of my lifetime. I work with teachers who as girls used to wear shorts and have uncovered hair. In discussions I've been told that they "used to be bad Muslims and were going to hell" but now they see the error of their ways.

Co-operative education Let's back up a little bit. After Hebron, Ruthie went to Antioch College in Ohio. "I chose Antioch because it was focused on creating social change and also very focused on self education and the idea that if you want to learn, you will," she said. "The joke is that you go to Antioch and they open an FBI file on you because it's so incredibly liberal. My entire freshman class protested the Iraq war and half of us got arrested. There's a jail underneath the Washington Monument. I bet you didn't know that! Every four months we left on co-op. Antioch was the first co-op program, I think, in the United States. You study for three or four months and then you go off for three or four or five months. You're always leaving and you're always coming back."

Ruthie was based in Ireland for her first co-op experience, working for a non-profit organization in Galway that was unable to pay her. She ended up taking a door-to-door sales job to cover her bills. "It was completely commission, so if you had a bad day you lost money and if you had a good day you came home with 60 euro," she said. "I had a lot more bad days than I did good days."

Undaunted, she went to England for her second co-op stint. This time she was placed in an activity center in Cornwall for people with mental and physical disabilities of all kinds. The center had a working farm; a zip line, rock wall and rapelling; an arts center; a wood shop and a garden. "I was there for five months and absolutely loved it," Ruthie said. "It was one of those experiences where you work so hard that when you fall asleep at night you don't remember your dreams, but it was so much fun that you just don't care. The patrons were amazing and gave me an entirely new outlook on life. We were working with adults with Down Syndrome, adults with multiple sclerosis, accident victims. Their take on life is to just live to the best of their abilities, every day they possibly can."

In Germany on her third co-op, Ruthie and her best friend Gabriella Ruiz suddenly found themselves completely dependent on their own resources. They had done everything they were supposed to do. They were legally hired to work in a language agency in München, they had sponsorship, they registered with the police. When they got to München, the ex-patriate American who had hired them asked us what other work options they had. "We figured out that he wasn't looking for two American girls to work for him, he was looking for two American girls who would be willing to do *whatever* he wanted to be taken care of, and that's not who either one of us is."

With about 300 euro between them, and expenses of about 80 euro a day, they went to the train station. "We found a warm little corner and made friends with a guy who gave us free gummy bears and we staked out the bathroom. Through connections and friends Gabriella and I were put in touch with the Jewish community in Köln." In Köln they were offered German lessons, two meals a day and a bus pass in exchange for helping out in a fourth grade classroom. It was Ruthie's first teaching experience. "My German was dismal. In my first class there

was a nine-year-old boy who was speaking in German and I said, 'Nein, sprechen English,' and he banged his fists on the table and said, 'Nein, sprechen Deutsch!' I said, 'OK, sprechen Deutsch!' Needless to say, I learned German really fast, although it's what we call 'strasse Deutsch'—street German. Why? Because we learned it on the street."

Her final Antioch co-op was in Quito, Ecuador. The north of Quito is considered second world, but south of Quito is decidedly third world and dangerous. "South of Quito kids die of influenza, they die of diarrhea, grown women die in the street and no one can do anything about it. It is so incredibly poor," Ruthie said. "We lived in the most dangerous barrio, Cincos Esquinos. We lived next to *the* drug lord and behind the chop shop. No one walked out after sundown; lots of people got shot. I worked for a mission called CENIT that was started by a group of revolutionary nuns. When Ecuador's economy plummeted in the 1980s, there was a lot of child prostitution, a lot of child drug running, a lot of issues with AIDS and sex and drugs that were not being addressed by the Catholic government. These nuns decided to address it, and the Vatican excommunicated them. They ended up being privately funded and opened up their own school for free. If you want to enlist your sons in this school, you have to enlist every daughter you have. Now they have a gynecologist who comes in twice a week and doctors who come in three times a week. They have floating health programs in the markets, taking kids to the dentist or doctor for free, and they have educational programs, also in the markets, for kids who never get the chance to go to school because their families are so poor. As soon as you can walk and talk you're selling corn, you're selling chicken, you're selling *whatever.*

"When I first arrived I taught in the classroom, working with kids who were seven or eight and had never been in a school situation before and at that point it was the hardest thing I'd ever done. And then they put me in Mayorista market—the biggest market in the south—and on a slow day we had 50 kids. On big market days, Thursdays and Fridays, we had 100 kids, 110 kids."

Ruthie and her colleagues put together lesson plans that included singing, dancing, games and fun, and then went through the markets collecting children. "So you'd walk up to people's parents—you're a *gringa* in the middle of this market—with two kids in either hand, and you'd say 'Hi, my name's Ruthie and I'm working for CENIT,' and they've heard of it but they are really wary. You're a strange girl and you're with their kids. But maybe their cousin goes and their mother is so happy that she doesn't have to take care of them that next week you get two more kids and the numbers start building. The next time you show up you have kids waiting for you.

"So I did that and I loved it. I also did jewelry programs with the women. The center provided the beads. We also did tapestry making and painting. The mothers could come in and learn how to create these items, then they could sell them at the market to provide supplementary income, which is really cool.

"Ecuador was the first situation where I found third world poverty—people living in their own fecal matter; so much poverty that it was inescapable. It controls every part of your life. You have ten kids because five of them will die. Kids die from parasites and dysentery. No one knows what an iodine pill is. No one has *seen* an iodine pill. You sit back and you take a big gulp and say, 'All right, this is where I'm living.' You do everything you can to make a difference in someone's life."

The F-word Ruthie is an accidental Fulbright—she applied almost on a whim and nearly turned the grant down, feeling that the judges must have made a mistake. "Antioch always had a high number of Fulbright Scholars and no one ever really hinted that it was prestigious or that it was really a big deal," she said. "It was always "We have more Fulbrights than the Ivy Leagues," and I thought, "Yeah, that's kind of cool, I get to go to another foreign country and do some cool stuff!" It never occurred to me that it was anything big. My friend Gabriella was applying and I thought: why would I turn down this chance to go to another country and do some community outreach and make a difference somewhere else? So I applied, and really had no idea what I had actually applied for. And then I got it and my mother said, 'Congratulations. I didn't think you had a snowball's chance

Malaysia is made up of 13 states; nine of them have sultans and four of them have governors (put in power by the British). Malaysia became its own nation in 1957 but did not become economically wealthy until they discovered oil 15–30 years ago.

By law, to be "Malaysian" is to be Muslim, however this law ignores the vast Indian and Chinese communities that have lived in Malaysia for centuries. Due to "affirmative action" laws, Chinese and Indian Malaysian citizens can be "overlooked" for jobs and acceptances into university. This practice is not only accepted, but is explained by the Chinese and Indian populations as a means of giving the Malay Malaysians a "fair chance to get a job or go to college." (When I heard that I almost vomited—and had to sit, smile and swallow...yuck!).

There are a handful of cities. Kuala Lumpur and Melaka (colonized by the Dutch) are two hot spots for western tourists on their way to the Islands. Very few tourists travel to the east coast of Malaysia, instead choosing to stay in the few cities where they can sport tank tops and shorts and shop at massive malls. My Malaysia—the Malaysia I know and live in—is the exact opposite. The biggest city in Terengganu is Kuala Terengganu and is about the size of the town of Norway [Maine] minus the supermarket and the fast food chains. What's left? A bank, a few markets, a Chinatown that sprawls three whole blocks (with one store that "traffics" booze illegally) and a post office! Bright lights—big city...not.

This is what inland Malaysia looks like. It is very, very green, with a large number of rice fields. My *kampung* was a fishing village so it looked much different.

Malaysia is a tropical paradise. Monsoon season is from November to January, and the remainder of the year is hotter than hell. Truth: I've never been hotter in my entire life than I have the last eight months in this country.

Kijal is 3–6 hours away from Kuala Terengganu. Without stopping the ride should take 2 1/2 hours on a bus, however due to constant breakdowns and multiple stops/breaks for food, prayer and stuffing the already-full bus with random people who stand or sit on your lap it can take a while.

Kijal is a very small *kampung* (village) a solid 30 minutes from anything. There is nothing to walk to and nowhere to go. The *kampung* is lived in by fishermen and factory workers. They live in traditional Malay houses built from wood and propped up on stilts (to keep the house from washing away when monsoon season hits hard). Houses and property are passed down through family, and very few children in Kijal ever leave the *kampung*. Girls traditionally marry between 19 and 24; if you're unmarried by 30 you are written off as a spinster and care for your parents until their deaths—usually never leaving your parents' home. Thus women can spend their entire lives in the same town, in the same house, never experiencing anything new or different.

Authority is the prized possession of all men. The father is the head of the house, and anything of any consequence depends/begins and ends with his word. Once the father dies his power is given to his sons and they become the "man of the house." If an unmarried daughter wishes to travel, buy a car or open a bank account she may only do so with the permission of her father or brothers. If the woman is married she must ask her husband, as she is his property and belongs to him.

Malaysian food consists of two staples: *ikan* (fish) and *nasi* (rice). *Ayam* (chicken) and *daging* (beef) are also common, while pork is *haraam* and against Islam. Malaysians traditionally eat six very big meals a day and from what I can tell have the metabolisms of Olympic runners. If I ate the amount of rice plus veggies and fish they eat six times a day I would weigh 500 pounds. They, on the other hand, are quite petite people and constantly tell me that I am fat and should diet, even though I've lost 30 pounds since my arrival. My massive weight loss can be explained in two ways: I've had worms three times and the Malay diet has no dairy and is very lean. Despite the lack of fat in their meals it is very clear that there is a deficit of proper nutrients. Most Malaysians die at around 60 and have extremely high diabetes "stats." My students who appear to be around 10 or 11 are actually 14! You can imagine my shock when I learned their age!

This is Nasi Kerabu, my favorite Malay meal. It's made with rice, fish and lots and lots of spicy chili! A special leaf is used to dye the rice blue, and it is only found in Malaysia. Yum!

in hell.' She didn't mean it like 'you're an idiot,' she meant it like 'you have no idea what you are getting into, Ruthie!' And then I ended up in Malaysia and I understood. Half the kids who were with us were Ivy League kids, they had been to Exeter or prestigious schools or came from families where their father was a Fulbright, his father was a Rhodes Scholar; families full of doctors and lawyers and heads of multi-national corporations. *My* dad is a mechanic and my mother ran a printing company and I'm from *Maine*. I went to a college that didn't have *grades*."

The road to Terengganu Ruthie arrived in Malaysia for her orientation just days after the cease fire between Palestine and Israel ended. The mainstream media there—television, newspapers, and so forth—carried interviews with Malaysians asking them what they would do if they met a Jew. The answer, "Kill them." She had certainly run into ignorance and anti-Semitism before—at NYA someone taped a swastika to her backpack—but now she was afraid for her life. "I had a choice to make: accept the fact that I was scared and stay, or go home. Naturally I stayed. No one knew I was Jewish and I had to keep it that way."

Ruthie found creative ways to keep her faith private. "In Malaysia, the first question they ask you is how old you are. The second question is: 'Are you married?' because a woman's status is based entirely on whether she's married or unmarried. And the next question is: 'And you are Christian?' And I always said, 'No, I'm not Christian.' 'Well, we know you're not Muslim, you're not Buddhist, you're not Hindu,' and there's a pause, and they ask, 'What are you?' You just respond 'I'm a free thinker.' And they say "Oh, but you believe in God?' and you say, 'Yeah, OK, sure, sure.' And that's OK because as long as you believe in *a* god, you're functional.

"Censorship was a huge thing. I'd talk on the phone and I couldn't say 'Jewish,' I'd say 'Jword.' I couldn't speak any Yiddish. But I don't have to declare *what* I am to be *who* I am. In America everyone declares it: 'I'm short, I'm tall, I'm fat, I'm thin, I'm Christian, I'm Jewish, I'm straight, I'm gay.' It's part of our culture; uniqueness is something we covet. In Malaysia, uniqueness is not at all desirable. Sameness is the ideal. Everyone wants to be like everyone else. No one wants to stand out in a crowd. No one wants to raise their hand. And in some situations it's actually paralyzing."

Community in the kampung Ruthie was the first foreigner in Kijal and she had a very hard time breaking into the community. "I was in every way, shape and form an alien," she recalled. "Malaysia is not a country, culturally, that discusses issues. You're in a society where everything is censored, you don't question authority, where children don't have their own opinions because they simply agree with whatever the person older than them said, whether or not they think it's right. Living in a country where no one has a formed opinion that is in fact their own was infuriating.

"I'm a very verbal person. I search for intellectual conversation. I search for challenge, I search for interaction, and I was in a society where women were not supposed to be educated or have opinions. I was an anomaly, and because of that I was terrifying. People were scared of me. Men were horrified that I was there. Women were horrified that I was educating their children. They were scared that I was going to damage them, that I was going to spread my immoral, immodest, American ideas in their safe little bubble. There was never

Once a month (but usually more often due to living in the middle of nowhere) I organized programs for the hostel students who lived at school. I did tie dye, no-bake cookies, movie nights... you name it. One month exams were so stressful that I decided to have a water balloon fight! Naurally, the boys and girls had to have separate fights and I counted on having 30 or 40 kids and ended up with nearly 100... (there were more girls than boys). Here are the boys—before they got their balloon fight on!

ever a conversation between anyone that said 'Hi, we are scared that...' or 'Hi, we are concerned that...' or 'Hi, we have issues with...' because no one confronts anyone. In order to have a confrontation you have to have an opinion, which no one will admit they have."

She persevered, however, and was accepted first by the students in the hostel where she lived. "For the first few months they were in my apartment 24/7, making crafts, listening to music and playing games. I taught additional hostel classes until May when 'more important subjects' (like math—boo!) took my time slot. The kids weren't impressed either. They went from having scavenger hunts, 'English directions' Twister and whatever else I pulled out of my sleeves, to an extra two-hour period of sitting at a desk and doing calculations.

"Like at Hebron, the girls and boys have separate dorms, however unlike Hebron they are divided by gender for everything. Male and female students sit on separate sides of the canteen, and they have separate washing stations, entrances and food lines. Boys lead prayer and go to mosque at the appropriate times. Girls, although allowed in the mosque but separated from the men, pray in their rooms in the dorm. Although both boys and girls are allowed to play sports (because SMK Kijal is not a religious school), boys are provided with a coach, uniforms and ample and organized practices, while the girls must ask teachers to observe practice while they coach each other in the muddy part of the field that is unused by the boys. I'm sure you can imagine my horror and disgust.

"Whenever I had the chance I coached the girls' field hockey team, much to the disdain of the male coaches who told me 'girls can't play hockey.' Just to piss them off I coached the girls as I was coached at Hebron. I made them practice stick and ball skills and forced them to run, since they usually slowly walked to the ball. When the state competition rolled around and the girls invited me to attend the male coaches were not pleased, and the fact that the girls won four games in a row to win states almost blew them off their feet. While the girls were hugging, screaming and going crazy, I was given a 'nod' by the boys' coaches and ignored for the remainder of the day. Truly one of my favorite moments since arriving."

Ruthie grew close to her mentor, Saliza Othman, and was essentially adopted into her family of ten brothers and sisters. They invited her to their home to celebrate Hari Raya, the end of Ramadan. When Ruthie left at the end of her grant, Saliza's family pooled their money together and presented her with a Malay *songket*. *Songket* is a traditional Malay textile—often made

Because all American woman are blonde-haired and blue-eyed, most Malaysians respond differently when they find out I am from the USA. One day over *nasi ayam* (chicken rice), another ETA's mentor insisted that I must be of Arabic descent, because of my brown hair and brown eyes. Despite my explanation that I have Italian heritage she asked, "Was your father Arab?" "No." "Was your grandmother Arab?" "No." Exasperated, she said, "Well it must be that your great-grandmother was Arab and everyone forgot it." I figured that it was probably not the best time to out myself as an Italian Jew, thus explaining my dark hair and olive-ish skin tone. This weekend once again I was asked if I had Arab lineage, and was informed that Arab women were the holiest and most beautiful women in the world and that as a member of this category it's my duty to marry and have 13 babies. And once again I thought to myself, "If only you knew I'm a Jew! Ha!"

Houses on a river during monsoon season. In the winter all the storms cause runoff which turns the water brown. In the spring and summer it's usually very blue or green.

Coming from Maine I used to think that I was prepared for all kinds of weather. I can drive a stick shift in snow and ice; I've lived through ice storms; blackouts that last a week and I'm used to random changes in cold fronts, hot fronts, you name it. When my students talked about monsoon season I would listen while privately thinking, "You want bad weather? Try a blizzard in February." I was so wrong! Last week I experienced my first monsoon rain. The sky was literally black and when the heavy clouds of doom finally opened, getting rained on felt like I was being clubbed like a baby seal. These weren't cute little raindrops—these things could knock out a bear. In an hour my school's bottom floor was flooded. The roads washed away and most day students stayed home because there was no road to walk to school on. All of this happened in less than 60 minutes. I can't imagine what it's like in November and December when it rains like that for eight hours every single day. I now understand why houses that would be used for timber at home are propped up on brand new stilts every year, and why school is closed for the first two official months of rainy season. Even if they had school, no one could get there!

Classes in Malaysia are very limited. Due to lack of funds, my students have no art or music classes and only the advanced students get the opportunity to work in the science labs or audio-visual room. Half (or more) of Kijal's student body cannot read or write in their own language, let alone English, and it's accepted or ignored by teachers and administrators alike. There are no grades in the Malay school system. All students take a series of standardized tests throughout the year and the results from said exams substitute as grades. Students who test poorly, or have issues reading and writing, fail by default and never have a fighting chance. Many kids who would have test modifications due to learning differences and dyslexia in America are ignored and never get the help they need to succeed.

As part of my grant here I am doing a case study on dyslexia and learning differences and have been allowed by the government and my school to use modified testing for one student, who is dyslexic by American definitions. If my work with her is successful I will submit my case study to the government and petition to expand the definition of learning differences, and supply modifications to a larger population of students. Currently to be L.D. in Malaysia equates to having Down Syndrome. If I can actually motivate the government to look into modifying their legal definition of dyslexia I can die happy. Horace Mann, the founder of Antioch College, once stated, "Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity," and I think this qualifies.

Since arriving at my school I've started an English pen pal program, a slew of fun hostel activities, tutoring sessions, a million English competitions and the Literacy Project. It's amazing to see the growth and improvement in my students. Eight months ago they couldn't tell me how they felt let alone answer a verbal question in English. Now their mouths run faster than mine, they are able to hold a conversation and have gained confidence ten-fold. I feel that very little of their improvement has to do with me; it's their hard work and dedication that has brought them this far and I am proud of them and all their efforts. Anyone can talk, but it takes a certain level of focus and a desire to learn to improve—and they have.

with gold—worn for weddings and traditional ceremonies. "It took the wind right out of me," Ruthie said. "It changes your whole value system. It's funny, because that's how I was raised. You take care of your own. It's a military thing, it's a Jewish community thing. You can contact any Jewish community in the world and they will help you out any way they can. I grew up in those kinds of communities, but I've never lived in another society that functioned in that manner.

"Islam wants to claim that it's independent of Judaism and Judaism wants to claim that it's completely different from Islam, but they are *so* similar. They have the same 'take care of your own' philosophy. If someone is part of your family you bend over backwards for them, it doesn't matter if they're a complete stranger, you open your doors, you open your homes, you open your hearts. That's amazing. It's absolutely amazing."

Replaceable Ruthie One thing Ruthie has learned with all her coming and going is understanding when it's time to leave, although sometimes it's difficult. "I want to be replaceable," she said. "If I can teach you a skill, I should be replaced by that skill. If I teach you to read, you don't need me when you can read yourself.

"That was the thing with Malaysia. I walked into a school that had never had an adequate English program, where most of my students were illiterate in their *own* language. The school system is so standardized that it doesn't matter if you fail all your tests, they still move you forward because there's nothing to do with you. There's no tutoring, no extra help, no checking in with teachers; it doesn't exist. I started a literacy program, getting books and tutoring. I was up until 11:00 every night in my room or in

My first five weeks in Malaysia were split between Kuala Lumpur and Kuala Terengganu. In both locations I searched for *bajus* and appropriate clothing for my school. After learning that the cheapest way to get new clothing was to make it, I bought fabric and went with three friends to see a seamstress. All of us ordered three or more outfits and got fit and measured for our new clothes. When we went to pick up our orders the seamstress asked why we all were getting *bajus* made. Thinking nothing we told her we were new teachers and needed *bajus* for school. Without batting an eye she asked, "You're not converting?" She thought we were new converting Muslims!

the cafeteria working with students, doing the basic literacy work that in America you're doing in the first and second grade. At the end, my students wrote me thank you notes. Ten months ago they couldn't have. That's what I wanted. I wanted to teach them a skill so they did not need me any more, and that happened, so I feel like I've done my job and I can leave and I'm proud of the work I did. But to put yourself in situations where you are not permanent is awkward. You need to be prepared to just pick up and go at any point where you are no longer needed, and you have to know when that is. And it's hard, leaving people. You've made connections, relationships, you find family, and saying, 'You don't need me any more, I'm going now,' hurts. And you do it to yourself!"

The road beyond Ruthie came back to Maine in November. In January, she and her family spent a month on a kibbutz in Israel and then she moved to New York where she will explore long-held interests in art and theater, and possibly make a difference along the way. "I'm going to pursue art and theater and social activism. I'm interested in how art and theater can be used to create social change. I want to get involved in art collectives and community work and art programs for underprivileged youth. If I don't do this right now I'm going to regret it for the rest of my life.

"I'm going to be poor, I'm going to be broke, I'm going to be asking my mother to mail me food, but I'm going to be happy. I'm happy with the choices I've made, I'm happy with the roads I've taken. I don't have $40 in my pocket right now. I don't have a bed and I'm living in a sleeping bag, but I don't need 12 pairs of shoes to make me happy. I don't need a Versace bag. What I need is to know that I'm proud of myself, to be pursuing things that will make me feel fulfilled. Making a difference makes me happy. And education makes me happy. Art and theater make me happy. So that's what I'm going to do."

This is my mentor Saliza Othman. She is not only one of the few English teachers I met who could speak English, but she also actually loved to teach. She has become one of my closest friends and is a true kindred spirit.

Miss Ruthie's Class 1 Indah. "The students in this class threw me a going away party and made me cry! These are the girls who decided they were not going to miss class just because the boys locked us out and went to gym. They removed the glass from the windows and the girls and I, *bajus* and all, climbed through the classroom window! The boys came back and didn't know what to think when they found us inside!"