

ilous region from all over the world. Every team has included at least two members of Robin's family. A number of Acehnese also help at the clinic. "Bang Hanifi lost his wife and children and his entire extended family. Isnyadi, a 16-year-old boy, lost his father and brother to the conflict, his mom to the tsunami. He's the only surviving male in his family. He came to the clinic asking to trade work for food for his family. We pay to keep him in school half time. He is brave, full of love and life."

"There are no orphanages. The children are taken in by the extended family, even if distant. Old people, even wandering cats, are taken in by lost, hungry people. A quality of love, a new spirit, was born of the tsunami."

Robin chokes up as she recalls standing on the beach at Meulabouh, littered with children's sandals, behind her a mass grave and the only building still standing, the mosque. Later they took some orphans to the beach for the first time since the tsunami. "They looked around and saw the destruction of where their homes had been. They put their feet in ocean and were quiet. Half an hour later they were running

and playing. Children want to be joyful even with nobody left." Robin is impressed by how the Acehnese have pulled together. "There are no orphanages. The children are taken in by the extended family, even if distant. Old people, even wandering cats, are taken in by lost, hungry people. A quality of love, a new spirit was born of the tsunami."

Robin's booklet, *Clean, Safe, and Calm Childbirth*, is given to all midwives and surviving pregnant women. Eighty percent of all the women and children died. "Men were sometimes able to save one child. One man came in with a baby who looked like one month, but was 6 months old. The father climbed a coconut tree and saved his child, but there was no breast milk, so the baby was starving to death. We started an IV, and now the baby is fine."

"It's hard to find a mother who hasn't lost a baby before the tsunami, mostly to tetanus. The vaccine has to be refrigerated and there is none here." Robin says she found one midwife using a pair of blunt school scissors to cut the cord. "We introduced cord burning to the remaining midwives. It's clean, you don't need instruments or boiling water, just candles and banana leaves under the umbilicus as a guard. Malaria is rife, new cases every day. If we don't keep the clinic open, people will die for sure. They can't get to hospital, but they can come to the clinic to get a malaria injection. We send our team out to the tent villages every night. They see as many sick people as they can who can't get to us. It's a huge responsibility. The triage care volunteers are seeing 40-100 patients a day, eating sardines and rice, and not complaining."



Deja, Robin's daughter, embraces children from Aceh.

A second massive temblor struck, March 28, 2005, while the second Bali team was in Aceh. "I couldn't reach my staff for 17 hours," Robin says. "We didn't know if they had attempted to evacuate the coastal zone. Their hand phones were not picking up. When we finally got through, they were really traumatized, waiting for the tsunami to come again. In the village a woman in her 60s died from fear. The quake shook the clinic for 7 minutes, but there were almost no buildings left to fall down on people."

Two thousand tsunami survivors live in tents within walking distance of the clinic, but there is only one road from the coast and it's not good enough to evacuate large numbers. "My staff were worried that I would have to evacuate them, but each one offered to stay longer, even though their lives are in danger. When the second team came back, their faces were shining. Some are going back already."

The latest quake has set everything back. "People were beginning to envision a future without wives, husbands, children, parents, home. They were planning a nursery to replace all their fruit trees lost in the tidal waves. They didn't act like zombies anymore. Now people are back to staring blankly. You hand them water or rice, they will eat. If you don't hand them food, they will just sit and be hungry."

Robin says the crisis is not over in Aceh. "The survivors are homeless, but for tents and military barracks. These are the lucky ones. But 'internally displaced people' without a village are outsiders in their own country. We got a clinic going and must try to keep it staffed." She admits that the Bali clinic is under-funded with so much energy being poured into Aceh. "We have a bigger work load now in Bali. When I'm in Aceh, I will have no email contact. I won't be able to do fundraising."

While Robin has one ear turned to Iowa, the other ear is tuned to Bali, and it's time to press that ear to the belly of the woman in labor and listen to the fetal heartbeat. She says, "I've been so busy this week with babies a-borning that I'm not packed."

Before we lose contact I ask, "How can you live with birth and death every day?"

"When you cry that much day after day for weeks, you let go of layers of stress. It really helps. People hold you and cry, total strangers, especially if they have lost everyone. I feel like part of the solution. It's the most inspiring work a person can imagine doing." □

To become "part of the solution," visit www.robinlimsupport.org or call (641) 472-3880 to make a donation.