

Justino Valentim: 1954-2014.
kind mentor, compassionate leader and champion for culture.



Justino often sat on the porch of his modest home in his shirt, pants and rubber sandals, while his family pottered around him preparing the day's meals. From Justino's spot on the verandah facing the main road leading into Lospalos, he would frequently welcome locals, and as well as many visitors from around the world, including researchers and other cultural experts. Despite perceptions of a humble family man, he, like most older Timorese, had lived a turbulent life, and had a unique and inspiring story to tell. The way younger members of his local community tentatively cared for, listened to and respected this kind mentor, compassionate leader and champion for culture highlights the importance of remembering his story. There is no doubt many '*ema kik*' (little people) made admirable contributions toward their people and the future of Timor Leste, yet often their stories go untold.

Born in 1954 in Titalari, Lautem District, Justino Valentim spent his early years in search of knowledge, pursuing formal education. He trained as a school teacher, but was only a young adult when Indonesia invaded his country, resulting in rampant poverty, large scale violence, injustice and insecurity overshadowing the prime of his life. Sr. Justino played an important role in Timor Leste's fight for independence and undertook many risky activities in support of the resistance. Indonesian military personnel knew of his activity and frequently visited his home during these times, but he managed to survive, with the support of his family and community who cleverly hid him from harm. He was a proud father of 9, as he and his wife Ermelinda Pereira agreed to have six sons together to create their own small resistance army.

After independence, Sr. Justino served in the public sector in various roles including educational and district administration. He was an influential and committed advocate for the promotion and protection of his Fataluku heritage, founding the Council for Fataluku Culture. He played an instrumental role in the ongoing development of Fataluku as a written language, and in his later years, led a research project with NGO Many Hands International, to document endangered Fatakulu cultural knowledge and practice. Justino proudly promoted this heritage to a wide range of audiences, including presentations in Lospalos and Dili sharing the research project results and representing Timor-Leste at UNESCO events in Indonesia.

In 2014 the Fataluku community grieved Justino's passing, although they can take comfort in his legacy. As an inspiring teacher, philosopher and gifted orator, he was dedicated to nurturing the younger generations of his people. The benefits of contributions toward his culture, community and new generations of Fataluku people will not be forgotten, nor will the many *ema kik* throughout the nation, whose aspirational contributions have had a profound impact on Timor Leste as we know it today. This photo provides a glimpse of the characterful husband, father and grandfather that was Sr Justino; his humour, charm, vitality and wisdom beaming through his smile.

Story by Many Hands staff Amy Stevenson with input from Lucia Pichler, Holly Schauble, Kim Dunphy, Nelinha Pereira and Ildefonso da Silva and published in Palazon, D. (2016). Timor Rungaranga, Blurb books