Jose’s Story

An animated documentary

Directed by Wendy Chandler

Produced by Wendy Chandler & Jose da Costa

Written by Wendy Chandler & Jose da Costa

A co-production Australia & Timor Leste

Parasol Productions & Dili Film Works

One Line Synopsis

One man’s inspiring story of hope, resilience and survival, amidst the brutal fight to free East Timor.

One Paragraph Synopsis

In 1995 at age 18, Jose Da Costa arrived in Darwin, Australia, on a leaky boat with 17 fellow refugees from war-ravaged East Timor. In his short life, Jose had witnessed half his family die of starvation, his murdered father’s body hanging from a tree, the 1991 massacre at the Santa Cruz cemetery and had been imprisoned and tortured by the Indonesian military. Now living in an independent East Timor, Jose is finally free to tell his inspiring story of hope, resilience and survival.

One Page Synopsis

Jose da Costa was born in the jungle of East Timor in 1976. His family fled there for three years after the brutal invasion by Indonesia. After witnessing half his family die of starvation and his murdered father’s body hanging from a tree, Jose left school and lived on the streets of the capital, Dili. He was 10.

At age 14 Jose joined the clandestine resistance. In 1991 Jose participated in a pro-independence march to the Santa Cruz cemetery. Over 250 Timorese were massacred by the Indonesian military as they entered the cemetery. In the aftermath Jose was imprisoned and tortured.

In 1995 at age 18 Jose was one of 17 recruited for the operation “Tasi Diak”, meaning “good sea”. Their mission was to tell the world about the human rights violations inflicted on their people by the Indonesian military and their fight for freedom. After a terrifying journey lasting 6 days in a tiny leaking boat, they arrived in Darwin in the Northern Territory of Australia.

As a refugee in Australia Jose completed school and earned a Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Teaching degrees. At the same time he actively spoke in schools and to community groups in an effort to create an awareness of the issues facing his country.

After East Timor became independent in 2002 Jose returned to his hometown of Baucau. There he laid eyes on his mother for the first time in 20 years.

Today Jose is happy. He is a married father of two, building a house for his family in an independent East Timor. Jose finally has the freedom and voice to tell his story.

Jose’s story is an inspiring tale of hope, resilience and survival.

About East Timor

The people of East Timor have suffered some of the worst human rights violations in modern history. It is estimated that of a population of 800,000, up to 200,000 were killed during Indonesia’s 25-year occupation.

East Timor is a country in [Southeast Asia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southeast_Asia), about 450kms north of Australia. It comprises the eastern half of the island of [Timor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timor), the nearby islands of [Atauro](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atauro_Island) and [Jaco](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jaco_%28East_Timor%29), and [Oecusse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oecusse), an [exclave](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exclave) on the northwestern side of the island, within [Indonesian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indonesia) [West Timor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Timor).

In the 16th century East Timor was colonized by Portugal who made little investment into infrastructure health and education. After the fall of the Portuguese fascist regime in 1974, the new government began to dismantle its colonies. Political parties began to form in East Timor resulting in a brief civil war. On November 28, 1975, the dominant party Fretilin (the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor), made a unilateral declaration of independence. Two weeks later Indonesia made a brutal US arms backed invasion and declared East Timor as its 27th province in July 1976.

During the occupation Timorese groups fought a resistance war against Indonesian forces for the independence of East Timor. In 1991 their cause captured world attention when Indonesian forces opened fire on a memorial procession at the Santa Cruz cemetery in Dili, The procession was both honouring and protesting the death of Sebastio Gomez, a young man slain by the Indonesian military. Over 200 people were killed in the massacre.

Under strong international pressure, Indonesia’s successor to Suharto President Habibie held a referendum about the future of East Timor in 1999. Overwhelmingly the East Timorese voted for independence. In retaliation a campaign of violence and terrorism was carried out by Indonesian-backed paramilitaries who murdered an estimated 2000 people, raped hundreds of women and girls, displaced three-quarters of the population and destroyed 75% the country’s infrastructure. The education system was a major target, most schools were destroyed.

An Australian-led international peacekeeping force returned the country to stability and in 2002 the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste was finally recognised as an independent state.

Ten years on East Timor remains one the world’s poorest nations. Approximately half the population is illiterate. Many of stories of those who lived through the most tumultuous times are locked within their memories. Unlike what many of us take for granted, these people have little ways, to express, create, and share these thoughts and stories.

About Dili Film Works

Dili Film Works is based in Timor Leste (East Timor). It is Timor Leste’s first film & television production company to receive finance for a feature film, and to have its short films accepted into an international film festival.

Dili Film Work’s mission is to establish a sustainable film & television industry in the fledgling nation.  It is currently in production on East Timor’s first feature film, feature film, A Guerra Da Beatriz.  The film has been sold to SBS Television Australia, The World Movie Channel, and has an Australian DVD distributor.  Dili Film Works will distribute the film in Timor Leste.  The film was honoured to be one of only five films to receive major support from the Global Film Initiative in 2011.

Dili Film Works currently employs over thirty people, is providing on the job training, and is leading East Timor’s struggle to tell its story through film, and to bring it to the people.

Director’s Statement- Wendy Chandler

2011 I was invited to East Timor to give animation workshops at Dili Film Works. The initial idea was to talk about my most recent animation project, the animated documentary series, “Heirlooms”, and in doing so, give the students a different perspective on how to creatively tell stories. What resulted was a rich collection of ideas that planted the seeds for a new collaborative animated documentary series, between myself and Dili Film Works. “Jose’s Story” is the first film to be produced.

I have always been interested in telling factual stories through the abstracted world of animation, by exploring digital techniques and a visual language that cannot be expressed using live action methods. Anything and everything can be animated, the creative limitations of the medium is only restricted by the person who works within it. Animation has the capacity to take the viewer beyond the representation of the external world into an exploration of emotions, thoughts and feelings, thereby communicating perspectives and insights that can’t be documented by the live action camera.

War, occupation and poverty has meant that most Timorese have been cut off from the outside world and have had very limited educational opportunities. Many Timorese people have lived through unspeakable daily traumas, events that are unfathomable to people living in the developed world. Animation is therefore an ideal medium for Timorese people to visualise not only their physical experiences but also the psychological affects of these. In doing so the process has the capacity to take the Timorese filmmaker on a cathartic journey of creative expression, and in turn the viewer, to a deeper level of interpretation and understanding of their world.

As a western filmmaker one of the biggest considerations in making “Jose’s Story” was how to work fairly with Dili Film Works. As a poor nation the Timorese people are vulnerable and for those from developed nations who work with the them, must do so with and informed ethical framework. Making films about social justice and human rights means little if the relationships with individuals and communities, whose stories are being told, are not respectful, fair and equal. Throughout the production I worked very closely with Jose to ensure his story was told from his point of view. As such Jose is the co-author and co-producer of the film.

Raising money for to produce short animated films is difficult in the wealthiest of countries. In a country like East Timor, it is even harder to justify arts funding when education and health services are still well below standard, no matter what the benefits are in terms of morale and national pride. In order to establish sustainable creative industries, East Timor needs help, financially and in skill building. What needs to emerge is East Timorese films from their point of view. But as the stories do emerge, like “Jose’s Story” they will not only be engaging from the point of view of having an insight what these people have endured but also from the inspirational resilience that made this tiny nation win the war of independence. A resilience that is sure to inspire and resonate universally.

About Jose da Costa

Jose was born just months after the Indonesian invasion of East Timor. After his father was murdered for his work in the resistance movement, Jose left school and lived on the streets of Dili. At 14 he joined he clandestine resistance and fought for the freedom of his country. In 1995 he escaped to Australia where he gained a university education. Jose returned to East Timor after it gained independence in 2002.

Jose is a founding member of Dili Film Works and has directed a short documentary, ‘Salvador’ that has been widely acclaimed in East Timor.  Jose is currently co-producing A Guerra Da Beatriz, East Timor’s first locally produced feature film. Jose is also one of East Timor’s leading actors having played key roles in many local and international productions including the Australian/Cananadian mini-series “Answered by Fire” and feature films “Balibo” and “A Guerra da Beatriz.”

About Wendy Chandler

Wendy Chandler is a lecturer and Doctor of Creative Arts Candidate at the University of Western Sydney. Wendy has written and directed a number of films projects, which have screened at prestigious international film festivals and have won many awards. These include “Union Street” and “Vengeance” which both won the Australian Film Institute award for Best Animation. Wendy also produced and co-directed “Heirlooms”, an animated documentary series for SBS Television. “Heirlooms” premiered in competition at the Annecy International Animation Festival and later won the BAF Award for Best Television Series at the Bradford International Animation Festival in the UK. As part of her DCA research Wendy is currently working on an animated documentary series, which explores the personal experiences of the people of East Timor during the bitter fight for independence.