



HOUSE OF HOPE

By **ANITA RAHMA**

Anita Rahma and her family have lived and served in a slum in Jakarta for the past 12 years with Servants to Asia's Urban Poor (servantsasia.org) in partnership with VM Missions (vmmissions.org). rahma@servantsasia.org or instagram at [anitarahma101](https://www.instagram.com/anitarahma101)

Fitri's clothes were dirty, her cloth face mask was ginormous, and her nails had black dirt under them. She had some type of ear infection and there was a smelly liquid coming out of her ears. But she was one of our students and we could not cringe or hide away from her. The invitation is always to welcome such children—to welcome them and to view them as lovely children that God has made in His image. Beneath the dirt, behind the smell, and in spite of the apparent ugliness of poverty, these children are beautiful.

I moved to Indonesia 12 years ago as a single, female missionary. I came to join a new team that

had launched a year prior. Servants to Asia's Urban Poor sends teams to live and serve in urban slum communities, seeking to pray for and work towards transformation in such communities. We tie our well-being to the well-being of the communities we move into. As the prophet Jeremiah wrote, *But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare* (Jer. 29:7).

For the first year, I needed to be a learner. I had to learn the language, the culture, and how to survive in a slum. During that time our community faced a devastating fire (unfortunately fires are all too

frequent realities in slum communities), and then an even more devastating eviction. But I continued to believe that the Lord had called me to this city and to this people group. I learned that God was inviting me to meet Him amongst the least of these; I was finding Jesus in the slums.

Now, for the past 10 years, I have been living and serving in a new slum community. I met and married a wonderful Indonesian Christian man, and together we serve the Lord with our family and team on the outskirts of Jakarta, one of the largest cities in the world.

When we first moved to this community, we did not know how we should respond to the pressing needs all around us. Many of our neighbors make their livings through garbage collecting and scavenging for recycling. There are literally piles of rotting trash throughout the neighborhood, often burning, sending black smoke billowing in whichever direction the wind is blowing. Children grow up on top of trash; their playgrounds are old tires and whatever treasures the garbage brings today. Rats, mosquitos, scabies, and cockroaches are just part of life, co-existing with the humans who make their homes here. What could we offer in this place? How could we share Jesus' tangible love with the community the Lord had placed us in?

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We started trying things. What began as a daily coloring club with children in the community grew into a Monday through Friday kindergarten and after-school program. What started as being a good neighbor, letting children play UNO in our living room, has grown into "House of Hope." Currently at House of Hope, we have five Muslim women from the neighborhood working with our four Christian teammates. As we work together, we are able to teach over 100 children a day. We have a real focus

on literacy, helping children excel in reading, so that when they begin elementary school they have a head start. Without House of Hope, most of these children would not have access to attending kindergarten. We hope to lower the rate of elementary school dropouts and hope to encourage children staying in school until middle or high school!

Many students are like Fitri. Sometimes their clothes are dirty, snot covers their faces, and lice crawl in their hair. But the Lord has taught me not to cringe, not to shrink back from loving them. Because, in reality, I am also like Fitri. I am dirty, I am a sinner—I fall down and mess up. And yet the Lord loves me. The Lord embraces me. And the Lord wants me to do the same to Fitri and all the other precious children I get to encounter in this place. The Lord does not see me or these children as ugly—He sees us as His wonderful creations.

Over one billion people in our world today live in urban slum communities, which is a very overwhelming statistic. I am not very good at thinking about these large global figures; it can make me freeze as I consider the enormous physical and spiritual needs not yet being met. But I want to do my part to share Jesus' love and hope with the people in *this particular slum*, in this particular city. I want to "stop for the one," as Heidi Baker talks about in her book *There is Always Enough*. I want to see each person in front of me as an opportunity to love, as an opportunity to witness to God's kingdom.

House of Hope has opened doors for us over the past decade. It has allowed us to build relationships and get to know hundreds of families in this primarily Muslim slum community. We are able to pray for people when they are sick, share stories about Jesus, and even study Scripture together. And while we plant seeds and wait for the Lord to bring the growth, we continue to witness to Christ's love through teaching children to read and write.

Loving people is hard work. There are no shortcuts in compassion. It takes time, sweat, and immense patience. As the years pass, as I watch my two boys grow up here, I am in awe of what God has done. In this place the Lord has taught me so much—about trust, about community, about finding Jesus among

the least of these. I have been forever changed by my encounters with God in this place.

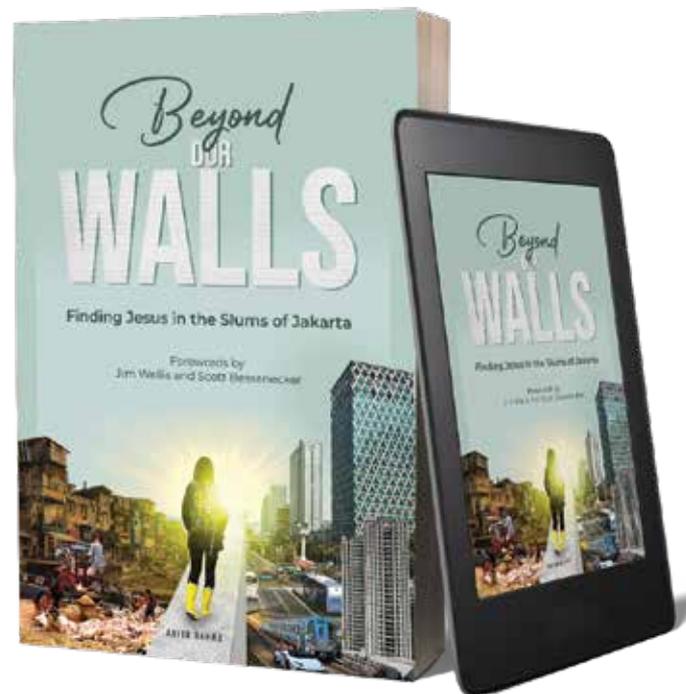
One day, early in our time in this particular slum community, there was a big rain storm. The wind blew one of the large asbestos tiles off of our roof (while asbestos is considered very dangerous in the West, in many parts of the world it is a cheap roofing option, much cooler than corrugated metal). Our first child was only a few months old. The rain started pouring into our house and we did not know what to do. Suddenly, from our window, we saw one of our neighbors grab a ladder and climb up to our roof. He had a big blue plastic tarp, the tarp that we actually had given to his family two years prior when their house burned down and the fire victims were constructing temporary tents as shelter. As the rain poured down, lightning lit up the sky, and the sound of thunder rumbled all around us, Bapak Rudi covered the hole in our roof with his tarp. It was his tangible way of showing love to our family.

So, wherever you are, whether in overseas ministry or not, my prayer is that you would dare to try to love as Jesus did.

This act has become a living metaphor for me. Am I, too, willing to love until it hurts? To climb the ladders of life—not rushing to find success or comfort— but ladders that lead to discomfort and perhaps risk? Like Bapak Rudi getting soaked in the rain in order to fix our roof, am I willing to get dirty? Because *there is no comfortable way* to serve in urban slum communities. While the needs are great, while 1.4 billion people in our world live in squalor, too often Christians seek shortcuts, want easy answers, desire magic wands to spread the Gospel and ease the pain of humanity at the same time. But that is not the way of our Savior. Our Savior came and *lived among us* (John 1:14), or as The Message puts it: *The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.* Jesus spent 30 years as a virtually unknown peasant in Nazareth (the slums of Galilee?), and only then did He start His ministry. A ministry of love that eventually took Him to the cross—for you, for me, and for the whole world.

So, wherever you are, whether in overseas ministry or not, my prayer is that you would dare to try to love as Jesus did. A love that calls us to pour ourselves out, to not cringe from the Filth of the world. A love that seeks out the least of these and realizes that in serving them, we are serving our Savior. And although we may not have easy answers or quick solutions, as we serve, we can cling to Jesus and trust that He is with us—even in the urban slums of the mega-cities of our world—and He is indeed Good News. ✎

LEARN MORE



This book is the poignant and painful story of a life lived in service to the urban poor. Read this, and you will be inspired to move out of your comfort zone and find Christ in the slums.

CRAIG GREENFIELD

Founder of Alongsiders International
Author, *Subversive Jesus* and *Subversive Mission*

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