

# Teaching the young to love and respect Mother Earth

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By Khabil Kiram

Earth is alive. It bleeds, sweats and cries. The trees are its lungs, the rivers are its veins, the sea is its flesh and its inhabitants - the flora and fauna - are its tissue.

These inhabitants flourish the ecosystem and nourish the Earth to keep it alive.

Humans are of a different kind of beings. We are new. While the Earth depends on its inhabitants to live, we depend on the Earth.

We plow through its lungs for cash, clog its veins with waste, tunnel through its flesh for oil and consume its tissues to live; greedy and ungrateful for Mother Earth's offering.

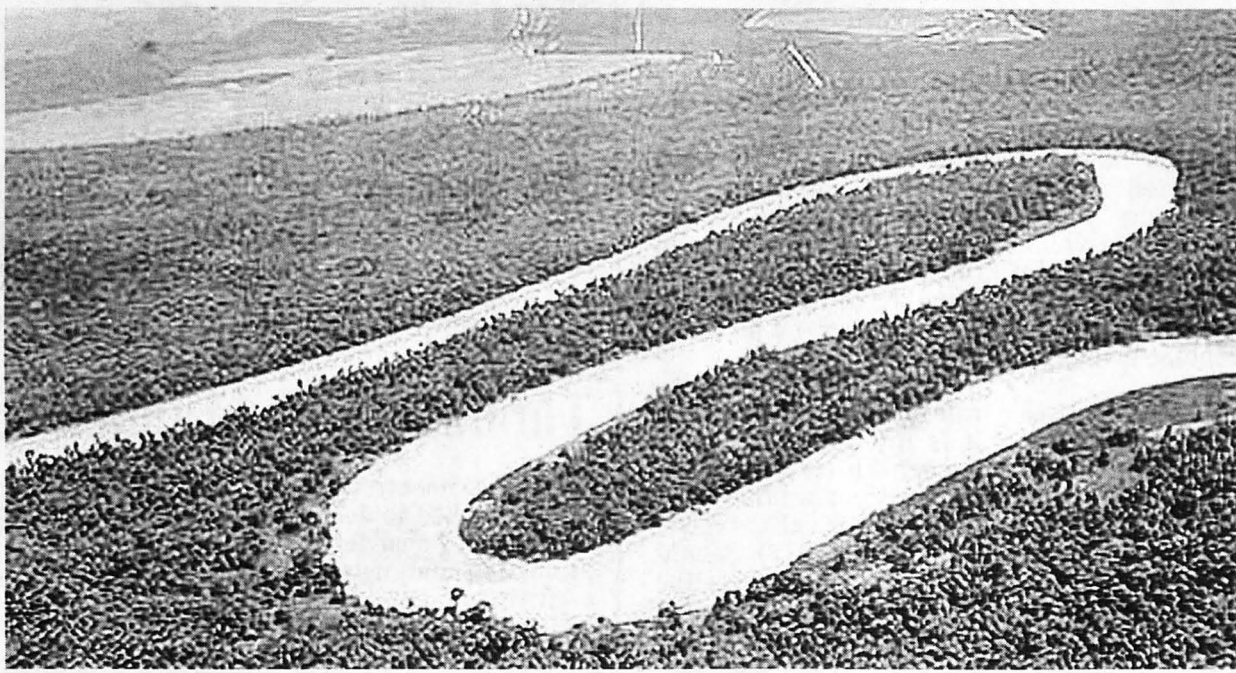
We are a lot like cancer - a disease caused by mutated cells on the Earth's body. But we were not always like this. We were all once symbiotic. We relied on the Earth without being excessive. We lived harmoniously within it, taking only what we needed and leaving what we did not.

In Sabah, our ancestors survived by settling next to the sea or rivers. Their predecessors are still here, living deep within the jungle, always next to a river.

"I respect the Sabah culture. They have a culture that is in tune with the environment," said Ai Kinoshita, a member of the Japanese Overseas Volunteer Cooperation (JOVC), who has lived in Sabah for the past two years.

"Human lives will always benefit from the environment," said Ai in Malay, complete with a Dusun accent.

Ai, 27, works closely with Sabah Parks at Crocker Range Park to educate the new generation on how to preserve the environment. They include four primary school pupils and one teacher from five schools around the Crocker Range to educate them to keep the rivers



Kinabatangan River.

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and jungles clean.

All of these schools are located within the indigenous community of Sabah.

Her work focuses on education administration and research of catchment areas along the rivers of the Crocker Range.

Ai's work is part of the River Environmental Education Programme (REEP) which is an activity under the Borneo Biodiversity and Ecosystem Conservation Phase II (BBEC Phase II).

BBEC Phase II is an initiative by Sabah Parks and Sabah Biodiversity Center with the cooperation from Sabah Environmental Action Center (EAC), Japan International Cooperation Agency, the

Environmental Department, Water and Irrigation Department, Sabah Education Department and University Malaysia Sabah (UMS) and it is organized and implemented by the Penampang District Office.

Crocker Range Park is also under nomination for Crocker Range Biosphere Reserve (CRBR), Man and Biosphere (MAB) under UNESCO. The nomination was applied for by the BBEC Phase II initiative together with Sabah Parks and Sabah Biodiversity Center.

All of this is to study our close relationship with our rivers in hopes to generate an action plan that can be achieved by students and the community



Kinoshita

to preserve and protect the rivers.

"These (indigenous) communities have a wealth of knowledge on how to co-exist with the environment through their culture and history. We can learn a lot from them," she said, adding that this culture should be carried down from generation to generation.

She said we could all benefit from the convenience of money but the most important things in life cannot be bought.

"You can't buy family or friends, the good heart and the support of others, culture and tradition that is inherited from history, knowledge of co-existing with the wild.

"I believe our lives cannot be complete if we only think of ourselves.

"I'm not relating this to Malaysia alone. Japan is also going through the same thing," said Ai.

Ai has learned a lot from her two-year stay in Sabah; ideas and memorable experiences that she will bring back to Japan when she leaves in June.

"I hope to find ways to help promote a culture that incorporates living peacefully with the environment that is respected and based on the teachings of our ancestors," she said.

Another similar initiative to BBEC Phase II is also conducted by the Global Diversity Fund (GDF) in the Ulu Papar area, including Buayan and Kionob. GDF conducts research, training and social action to promote agricultural, biological and cultural diversity around the world.

The villagers of Buayan and Kionob are trained to collect data that include GPS mapping of its surrounding jungle, video and photography training, monitoring of traditional medicine and the needs of the community, just to name a few.

GDF's main goal in Ulu Papar is to raise awareness on how to fully utilize jungle resources by compromising its value.

These are just a few examples on initiatives to help educate people from all walks of life on our home's health.

This growth of awareness among the residents of Earth is especially apparent among the Y Generation who are now mostly in their 20s. When the newer generation are educated too, there is so much more hope left to cling on.