

Rosalie Sword wanted to live somewhere where she could take it easy. Her daughter agreed that the Mornington Peninsula might be perfect.

"I wanted a small garden and somewhere low-maintenance. Kirsty imagined a place near the beach, a place that looked over the bay. She wanted somewhere quiet where she could come and relax," says Rosalie of her daughter Kirsty, the former First Lady of East Timor.

Rosalie's move to Rosebud in 2000 marked an incredibly challenging time in her life. Her husband Brian had recently passed away and she'd just returned from helping her newly married and pregnant daughter settle in war-torn East Timor. Rosalie wanted to get away from the bustle of Melbourne and find somewhere peaceful to live.

Her son, Michael, and his family had already escaped Melbourne for the more family-friendly setting of the Peninsula,



Rosalie with her family, son Michael, daughter Kirsty and Kirsty's 3 children



so, for Rosalie, it was a natural destination. When she couldn't find a home with the views she wanted, she called on her arborist son. "Because of his work, he knew the streets that had the good views, so I bought land on one of these streets and built my house" recalls Rosalie.

And that's how the Peninsula began playing host to the First Lady of East Timor, Rosalie's second-born, Kirsty Sword-Gusmao. It sounds glamorous, but those who know the Swords, or have read Kirsty's autobiography *A Woman of Independence*, understand just how rocky the path has been.

With a theme reminiscent of a Dr Phil episode, but with a happy outcome, Rosalie's life changed when her daughter met and fell in love with Timorese political prisoner Xanana Gusmao

while he was incarcerated in an Indonesian jail.

Since those days in the '90s, much has changed for Kirsty and the country she was helping to free. Xanana was released, they married, East Timor gained its independence, and Xanana became the President (he is currently waiting to hear what his role will be in Timor's new parliament). During her time as First Lady Kirsty gave birth

to three sons and continued to run the Alola Foundation, a non-government organisation she formed to assist Timor's women.

As for having time to relax at her mum's home, well, when Kirsty does return to Australia she's usually so occupied giving fundraising talks (including one held last year at Toorak College, which raised \$18 000 to fund students in East Timor) that she rarely gets to put her feet up and take in the view.

"Usually Kirsty will fly here, then fly interstate with a packed schedule and I look after the boys," Rosalie says, smiling. It's obvious that though three young boys would instantly replace the peace and quiet of Rosalie's home with slight chaos, Rosalie doesn't mind a bit, although

she's thankful for the local attractions. "The boys love the playgrounds here, especially the one in Sorrento. They love the maze and we always end up going on the ferry to Queenscliff," says Rosalie.

Rosalie's involvement with East Timor has continued to grow since her first visit in 1999, just months after the destruction and violence that followed the vote for independence. The Timorese are still dealing with the tragedy of 1999, and the previous 25 years of occupation, but there are now different issues facing them, and Rosalie is reminded of these during her twice-yearly trips back to East Timor.

"It's the thing of going backwards and forwards," she explains. "When I go back to East Timor, I see the terrific need of the people and the tremendous need for education. Having been a teacher, it breaks my heart to see how poorly resourced the schools are, and what little chance the children there have for a really good education compared with the worst, the poorest, of Australian government schools."

Rosalie's focus on education led to the establishment of links between Timorese schools and local schools through the Friendship School Project. "Woodleigh School, Dromana Secondary College, Vale Street Primary, Mt Eliza Secondary College and St McCartens have been linked with schools in the Lospalos area," explains Rosalie. The project raises funds to provide workshops for teachers and supplies them with ideas and resources for teaching.

Between launching new curriculum for the Friendship School Project and recovering from a five-week visit from her Timor family then school holidays with her two Australian-based grandchildren, Rosalie has been checking her mobile phone. She's waiting for a text message from Kirsty in Dili with June's election results. It's yet another life-changing moment in all their lives, yet whatever the result, whether Xanana Gusmao becomes Prime Minister (as expected) or not, Rosalie will be there, helping her daughter and the children of East Timor.

by Jayne D'Arcy

Footnote:

Xanana Gusmao was re-elected Prime Minister of East Timor just after this article was written.

Since 2000 the Mornington Peninsula Shire has been linked with Lospalos, a tiny, difficult to access, town on the eastern point of East Timor. The 'Friends of Lospalos' group meets monthly in Mornington and runs fundraisers to support projects in Lospalos, including last year's 'Evening with Kirsty Sword-Gusmao'.

To support Lospalos, stock up on East Timorese coffee when you're at any Mornington Peninsula Shire Office.

Call David Price on 0418 752 093