

# The Story of a Pair of Shorts



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On the day the Japanese fighter planes attacked Pearl Harbor, Kusno was given a pair of shorts by his father. A new pair of shorts branded 1001, made in Italy.

Kusno's father did not know anything when it came to politics. He did not know what impacts the attack on Pearl Harbor would have on the world. While everyone else around the world - who even only understood just a tiny bit about that subject matter - would frown at the slightest mention of the events on that fateful day; either because of vengeance and anger, or because of worry, Kusno's father only smiled. All Kusno's father knew was that he had to purchase a new pair of shorts for his son whose other shorts were all old and outgrown, and the man had succeeded in doing just this.

At that time Kusno was only fourteen years old. He was a fresh graduate of the People's School<sup>2</sup>, and now he wanted to apply for a job. The fact that he now had a new pair of shorts made him feel, as though he was a new person, and he was optimistic that every door would be opened for him. He wanted to find work as soon as possible in order to prove to his family that he was a grateful son. All in all, Kusno's family was quite happy like never before. The news about the attack on Pearl Harbor did not affect those who were simple at all.

This proved the truth behind an ancient saying: "Big leaders want to make wars while the ordinary man wants to live in peace!"

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Yet, Kusno did not find work as fast as he had hoped to. The people at the offices which Kusno had applied to all knew about the attack on Pearl Harbor and its

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<sup>2</sup> People's School or *Sekolah Rakyat* was the only kind of school ordinary, lower-class Indonesians could attend during the Dutch colonial period. Graduates of this school had a minimal mastery of both arithmetic and literacy.

effects. For this reason these people were not willing to employ anyone new. Looking up at the skies, Kusno could see dark clouds gathering and in between those clouds it seemed as though the Angle of Death suddenly appeared.

Due to the scarcity of job opportunities, Kusno was forced to degrade his ambition from becoming a secretary to a receptionist, until he found work as a security guard, earning ten rupiahs a month.

. Kusno's father was extremely unhappy at the prospect of his son being a security guard like himself. Would this mean that everyone of his family was to go on becoming security guards for many generations to come? He certainly never imagined that. Yet, like many other villagers in a similar situation, Kusno's father turned to God. He realized that although man tries very hard to achieve something great, everything depends on the Almighty One.

Kusno worked diligently, but as time went by, the color of his shorts began to fade away because it had to be washed so often. Every month that he worked he hoped to be able to buy himself yet a new pair of shorts, but his salary was not even enough to buy himself a decent meal. So, his worry grew with every wash.

Kusno's every thought revolved around the pair of shorts that his father had bought for him. What would happen, if the shorts suddenly became old and thus not suitable for him to wear any longer? Day after day he prayed to God pleading for the sun to always shine so that his only shorts would not get dirty. If by chance it would rain, Kusno whose heart would than be full of worry like a mother whose son was about to be drafted for a war.

In his desperation Kusno began to calculate.  $1 \times 1 = 1$ . Yet what would  $1 - 1$  equal to? He could not think straight. Even more so when his monthly wage would not be enough to buy soap used to wash his shorts, which were grubby.

No, it was not Kusno who wanted the war to take place, he only wanted to lead a simple life free from the agony and worry that he would not have any shorts to put on the following day.

Nevertheless, the big leaders, or at least so it seemed, were unearthing problems by their desires to sacrifice themselves, some for the sake of democracy and others for the prosperity of the Great East Asia.

Kusno did not know the meaning of democracy and he felt very attracted to prosperity when in fact he was thinking of his shorts. For him, prosperity meant a new pair of shorts. Thus, he welcomed the Japanese soldiers with open arms. Like so many

of his countrymen, Kusno once again felt optimistic at the prospect of freedom and democracy. Kusno continued to live in the hope of one day soon being able to buy a new pair of shorts. This went on for three and a-half years. However, like the wish to achieve freedom swiftly, the hope for a new pair of shorts faded away. When the last bit of hope had finally left him, the pair of shorts, which his father bought for him did not even resemble one anymore. The cloth that once had been white in color, was now all black and therefore unfit to be worn by a security guard. When Kusno found the courage to speak to his employer about this matter, the employer in turn scorned and humiliated Kusno. In fact, the humiliation was so bad that Kusno felt useless and utterly unhappy.

For several days after that occurrence, Kusno still turned up for work. However, the embarrassment that Kusno felt as a result of his employer humiliating him continued to grow and eventually became unbearable causing the man to resign.

The day subsequent to that of his resignation was extremely bleak for Kusno. However, now at least, he was free from the embarrassment that had been on his face for a long time. He knew that more bleak and frightful days were still ahead. Yet, the young man believed that God would be kind and merciful to him.

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One day Kusno had a severe headache. He knew that the pains would subside, if only he filled his stomach. For two consecutive days, he had not consumed anything but the leaves and bark of a tree. He had been at the brink of selling his shorts branded 1001 in order to buy something edible. This thought too was quickly forgotten. If he were to sell his shorts, his hunger would only be satisfied for a little while, yet what would he have to cover his genitals with? Once he even considered stealing other people's property, yet God said, "Thou shall not covet thy neighbor's goods". For many generations Kusno's family had been very God-fearing.

Kusno ended up not selling his shorts, not stealing other people's property, regularly encountering migraines and living on the leaves and bark of a tree. He continued living, though in misery, yet with a sense of pride.

There was nothing left to say about the pair of shorts branded 1001. Like Kusno, it was destined to disappear from the face of the earth one day. Would Kusno and his shorts end up disappearing together?

Nevertheless, whatever the case would be, Kusno would not lose hope. He was born in misery and lived in misery. Even though the shorts branded 1001 would

eventually become a dust cloth, Kusno would still struggle against the misery, if only to get a new pair of shorts.

Even so, Kusno was puzzled at why the war was still going on and in fact he felt victimized by it.