***Prompt 2 - Every person has a creative side, and it can be expressed in many ways: problem solving, original and innovative thinking, and artistically, to name a few. Describe how you express your creative side. (350 words max)***

One barely used bar of soap x 70% occupancy rate x 300 hotel rooms x 365 days = 76,650 bars of soap wasted annually in a hotel in Jakarta. This was the reason I founded Bumi Bersih, an organization that strived to make our Earth more sustainable. Gathering eight friends, we started our first project recycling used soap bars from hotels.

We scoured the internet and found a method to recycle soap by boiling it to remove bacteria and re-molding it until cooled. The results of our first batch were encouraging. However, after attempting to upscale the project, we realized having only two stovetops hindered our production speed. Hence, I was on the lookout for a different solution.

Inspiration struck one day as my dad and I went out for lunch. We stumbled upon a cafe that specialized in hand-made chocolate bars. Sitting down, we got a clear view of the chocolate-making process. Crushing cocoa beans then adding sugar, water and milk, a viscous liquid was formed and molded into bars of chocolate - a process perfectly applicable to soap! That night, I called my friends and arranged to meet the next day.

We hunkered down in the kitchen and set off to work. The methodology was straight-forward. We collected then disinfected our families’ used soap bars. Using graters, we shredded the soap, then added chlorine and water. We mixed them together until the soap diluted and strain the solution into the molds. Repurposing cake presses traditionally used for Indonesian layer cakes, we flattened the clumps, shaping them into bars.

The real difficulty lies in the preparation. The ratio of water to soap adjusting viscosity, the amount of time spent disinfecting, the conditions that allowed the soap to set - all important details that were fleshed out through trial-and-error. After a week of experimentation, we emerged victorious with the perfect batch. One successful pitch to the Intercontinental Hotel later, our small project was surprisingly accepted and implemented.

Creative thinking entails unconventionality. That serendipitous cafe inspired a solution to a seemingly irrelevant problem. It was creativity that resolved my problem and allowed me to contribute, however small, to a more sustainable future.