

Luke's Train Ride

Garth N. Jones

LUKE HAD A DREAM. When I first married his daughter Marie, she warned me that he believed dreams were a form of personal revelation. But it was not until the summer of 1952 that I first experienced one of his dreams. Luke and I and Edward, his nine-year-old grandson, took a trip to Yellowstone National Park. Luke dreamed that the crudely built log hotel where we had just bedded down for the night was going to burn down. At one-thirty in the morning, Luke bolted upright in bed. We hurriedly packed our bags and drove twenty miles through the dark until we finally found lodging at a primitive motel. I never learned whether that hotel burned, but I'd wager extremely high odds that it didn't.

So, late on a March day in 1961, when Marie hesitatingly informed me that her Dad had had another dream and I might not be too pleased about it, she was right. It seems Luke had dreamed that he and his wife Dolly would soon be taking a trip around the world. En route they would stop over in Indonesia for a three-week visit with us. Marie and I and our three children lived dangerously in Indonesia. This new nation, established in 1945, was desperately poor. During the 1930s, when it was still a Dutch colony, the entire country was ravaged by the Great Depression. Then during World War II, the Japanese army of occupation ruthlessly exploited the nation. To win independence, the Indonesian nationalists fought a bitter five-year war against their former colonial masters that ended with a peace treaty signed in December 1950. In spite of victory, Indonesia was still far

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from being a unified nation. Ethnic and regional rivalries were exacerbated by Islamic revivalism and intrusive Communism. The nascent civil war brewing in early 1961 erupted five years later into an abortive Communist coup. Nearly 600,000 people perished and tens of thousands of Communist sympathizers and suspects were imprisoned in Gulags.

As a U.S. foreign service officer, I assisted the Indonesian government in establishing a viable subnational government. I understood the tenuous political situation and could feel the tensions building between the political and religious factions. For four years I had criss-crossed this far-flung archipelago nation and had witnessed firsthand the agonies of nation building. Three decades of confusion and chaos had pushed community after community back to primordial conditions. I heard reports of a *santri* (conservative belief) Muslim village attacking a neighboring *abangan* (indigenous belief) village, killing over one hundred people, mostly women and children, all because the *abangan* village elders resisted building a mosque.

In the cities inflation was rampant. Food and other necessities were scarce and expensive. Through shrewdness and much good fortune, my family and I learned to survive by surreptitiously securing sugar, flour, rice, cooking oil, gasoline, and kerosene on the black market. Chinese merchants miraculously provided these products—at a price. Arab money dealers eagerly exchanged American checks for nearly worthless Indonesian rupiahs. This corner of the world was neither a safe place nor an easy place to live.

Luke knew nothing about the treacherous world to which I had brought his only daughter and three choice grandchildren. I had hoped to maintain that ignorance, but now that would be impossible. He had his revelatory dream, and I would be part of its “promise.” What Luke’s dream didn’t tell him was that just a few weeks before he and Dolly were to arrive in Indonesia, our house had been plastered with signs in both Indonesian and English saying, “Go home you American Dogs.” I had learned that our lives were in jeopardy and neither the Indonesian government nor the United States government could guarantee our safety. Luke’s visit would be the Jones’ *Gotterdammerung* in Indonesia.

But even if Luke had known the situation in Indonesia, he would not have been dissuaded from fulfilling his dream. My father-in-law was the quintessential nineteenth-century American. He accepted unquestioningly the pervasive notion of America’s “exceptionalism” and had adopted Herman Melville’s philosophy that “We Americans are the peculiar chosen people . . . the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of liberties of the world” (*White-Jacket*, New York: Rinehart Publishers, 1967, p. 15). This was Luke’s destiny, and so plans went forward.

He was a methodical man, minimizing risk by meticulous planning and attention to detail. He drafted plans for his trip around the world with the same kind of precision used by bored peacetime generals to plan their war games. He left no room for error or serendipity. One day stopovers were scheduled for Seattle, Fairbanks, Tokyo, and Hong Kong. He allocated two days each for Bangkok and Singapore and three or more days for important cities in India and Egypt. He and Dolly would travel the entire distance on Pan American Airlines because Luke didn't feel safe on any foreign airline.

As expected, Luke and Dolly arrived in Jakarta on schedule. Marie met them at the Kebayoran International Airport. She had traveled to Jakarta on a UCLA contract team Chevrolet carry-all truck with an Indonesian driver. After sundown travel in West Java was not safe because the *Darul Islam* (fanatical Muslims) were staging revolts in the region along her route, so the three hundred mile trip took her two full days. She had made arrangements for overnight accommodations at the U.S. Government Staff House. Although this was contrary to government regulations, she had no other choice. Hotel rooms were extremely difficult to find.

Marie's problem was now to find a way to bring her parents in blissful innocence safely to Jogjakarta. This was not an easy matter. Unwilling to put her parents at risk on a two-day automobile trip with hotel accommodations a virtual impossibility, she decided to go by plane.

Marie is a quick observer and master of human behavior. Where she learned this unusual capacity is hard for me to say. She can out-bargain the natives. She knows when to cry, when to shout, when to laugh. Somehow she managed to secure three tickets on an Indonesian Garuda Airline flight to Jogjakarta—without paying under-the-table money.

At that time, Jogjakarta was supposed to have airline service once a week, but the flights were not dependable. Sometimes all the booked passengers would be summarily dismissed to make space for some Indonesian general and his entourage. This happened once to me, but I managed to get back on the plane when I showed the aide to the general my stamped epistle from the secretary general of Home Affairs urging government officers to accord me special privilege. Marie had this letter, but when her plane was commandeered by Chief of Staff General Muhammed Nasution, she chose not to use it. Instead, she used her female wiles trained and sharpened in the Jogjakarta bazaar to keep their seats on the flight home.

General Nasution, a great figure in Indonesia and a strong anti-Communist, was extremely courteous to the three Americans. When the plane landed in Jogjakarta, the general and his staff were greeted with full military honors. I grabbed the luggage, stowed it in my offi-

cial black Ford station wagon, and joined the motorcycle-led entourage to the heart of the city. Luke and Dolly were impressed! They were unwittingly accorded the ceremony and protocol of a visiting foreign ambassador. Hence, rumors flowed in and out of official Jogjakarta circles that Marie's father was an important American official.

For the rest of the visit, Marie took complete command. The next three weeks were packed with activities. The distinguished state senator from Utah was given a reception attended by over one hundred leading Indonesian citizens. He met Sultan Hamengku Buwono IX and a multitude of other government officials. For three consecutive evenings we hosted dances with native entertainment from the principal ethnic areas of Indonesia: Java, Sunda, Sumatra, and Bali. Luke and Dolly were escorted to the sultan's palace, to ancient sites of Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms, and to hill stations or mountain resorts for relaxation. They had little free time. Marie was loved and respected in Jogjakarta, and her countless Indonesian friends helped make her parents' visit memorable.

When it came time for Luke and Dolly to resume their trip, another problem presented itself. The flight from Jakarta had done nothing to assuage Luke's morbid fear of flying. He was convinced that no Asian could master the skill of piloting an aircraft. He dreaded the thought of returning to Jakarta on an Indonesian plane. And he had seen enough of the congested traffic on Indonesian roads to know that he did not want to travel that distance via automobile. The matter was resolved in his mind when he reported to the family at an evening meal that he had had a dream which emphatically revealed that a train was the only way by which he and Dolly should return to Jakarta and continue on their trip around the world. I was to work out the details.

For help I contacted my dear friend and Indonesian counterpart Lt. Colonel Warsito. I would need military assistance to secure three reserve train tickets on the early morning Surabaya Express. Warsito was an extremely likeable and accommodating person. He accompanied me to the busy train station where he had no trouble buying three first-class tickets. Although he was pleased with this accomplishment, I noticed some agitation on the part of the ticket agent. I could see that he was not as optimistic as Warsito that all was "on track."

Two days later, we were ready to board the Surabaya Express. The name "Surabaya Express" was a misnomer. The train didn't go anywhere near Surabaya (a city some three hundred miles to the east), and it wasn't an express. It was a remnant of a line used in Dutch colonial days. In the 1920s, the Surabaya Express averaged sixty miles per hour over seven hundred miles of track. Our train would average

at best twenty-five miles an hour over three hundred miles of track. Sometimes it took a day and a night to make this distance. One could never be certain what kind of locomotive would pull the train. Sometimes it was the president's special diesel-electric engine; other times it was a 1930 oil-burning steam engine; but too often it was an 1890 wood-burning steam engine. As the locomotive rounded the bend to the Jogjakarta train station, the rising smoke signaled old wood-burning steam engine.

Seating would be in short supply since the ticket agents invariably oversold the number of seats, but I had anticipated this probability. Beginning about four hundred yards ahead of the train station's passenger loading platform, I strategically placed eight Indonesian students along each side of the track. As the train slowed, each of these young students leaped into the first carriage and raced to occupy empty seats. When the train stopped at the station's loading platform, I felt confident that we would have at least three reserved for us.

Marie and I carefully shepherded Luke and Dolly through the pandemonium to the first-class carriage. Inside all the seats were taken, and the corridor was almost filled with standing passengers. But there, in the middle of the carriage, were four of our student friends occupying four seats. They graciously arose one at a time to seat Dolly and Luke and their grateful teacher. Marie remained behind in Jogjakarta to take care of our two sons. The remaining seat, on the aisle, they gave to a young soldier.

We carefully loaded the luggage on an overhead rack where we could keep an eye on it and settled in for the ride. As the train was about to pull out, an Indonesian man with his wife and two small children showed his train tickets to Luke and demanded in Indonesian that he and Dolly move. I quietly told Luke not to move and spoke to the man in broken Indonesian, "I do not understand the Indonesian language." Then I opened up my briefcase, took out a book, and began to read. The Indonesian (assuming all white people were Dutch) spewed out vile epithets against Dutch colonialists.

I had noticed our first-class coach was manufactured in 1890, as the stamped markings on the couplings indicated. American soldiers in France during World War I ridiculed just this kind of four-wheel carriage. The seats were rattan, and the windows were covered with movable louvers. It was first class only in the sense that there was ample fresh air if the train was moving.

This train was not equipped with air brakes. Sitting on the top of nearly every small carriage was a small man with an upright wheel between his legs which he violently twisted according to the number of steam whistle signals sent by the engineer. Stopping the line of car-

riages was as jerky and noisy as starting, and far more dangerous. If these brakemen did not coordinate their efforts well, a carriage or even a series of carriages could easily jump track. Seldom did the Surabaya Express make a run to or from Jakarta without at least one of its carriages derailing, because of either faulty braking or wheel flanges spinning off. If a wheel flange came off, the carriage was slowly dragged to a rail siding and left, along with its passengers and cargo. This had happened to me several times, and I'd learned to quickly abandon the carriage and bribe the conductor for a seat on the tool box located between two carriage couplings. If this didn't work I'd bribe the engineer for a seat in his engine cabin.

Other alternatives were possible, such as riding in a carriage loaded with chickens, goats, or peasants. But the stench generated from such concentrations of living creatures brought on stupor or nausea in a very short time. In several instances, I joined the soldiers on one of the two armored flatcars in front of the steam locomotive. The fresh air was worth the risk of attack by some *Darul Islam* brigands.

So with considerable puffing and smoking of the engine, the Surabaya Express pulled its six carriages from the Jogjakarta Station on the morning of 10 June 1961, at 7:00 A.M.. We were only one hour late. Soon we were traveling along at thirty-five miles per hour, which I could compute by counting the number of carefully spaced telegraph poles we passed in one minute. At this rate the train would reach Jakarta within ten hours or so. "This isn't too bad," Luke commented. "We can manage. Marie packed us a big lunch, and we have a gallon of water. Our pioneer ancestors traveled under worse conditions." Dolly didn't comment. Luke was fascinated with the undulating rice fields set against the backdrop of smoking volcanoes. Dolly preferred the clean environs of her Provo home set against the backdrop of Mt. Timpanogas. Nevertheless, she never closed her eyes and took in all that she saw.

After about thirty-five minutes, the train halted abruptly and people streamed down the hills to board the six carriages. Before, our carriage corridor was only loosely packed with people standing or sitting on their luggage. Now it was densely packed. Luke angrily spoke up, "Don't they ever limit the number of people?" I told him they never did and by Indonesian standards there was still a lot of people space. And I reminded him to watch the suitcases carefully the next time the train stopped because they had a way of vanishing.

With more people and luggage aboard, the train reached its maximum speed of thirty-five miles per hour even more slowly than before. It was now rocking to and fro as the track bed became increasingly uneven. Several people became nauseated and fitfully lost their

morning meals. The stench was intense, so we opened the louvers on the windows. The train slowed to twenty-five miles per hour as it struggled up a slight incline. Smoke from its engine filtered into the carriage.

As the train rounded a steep bend, the countryside ahead stretched into view. The tracks twisted their way through a broad plateau guarded by two beautiful smoking volcanoes. Rice fields terraced the hillsides from the valley floor to the top of the steep apexes. I was apprehensive since this was the kind of country where Indonesia's lawless elements and insurgents often hide. The young soldier sitting with us told me that a month before a band of rebels had blown a train engine off the tracks. Many of the passengers who weren't killed in the wreck were murdered by these men. Luke and Dolly knew nothing about this kind of cruelty. All they saw was exquisite beauty and exotic people laboring on their small plots of land. They were dazzled by the shades of green laced with sparkling streams, and spotted here and there with splashes of red earth. It was a fantasia of beauty and quietude.

In time Luke and Dolly got used to the stopping and the starting, the loading and the unloading. But they never got used to the beggars: naked children with distended bellies, lepers with grotesque hands and feet, yaws victims with no noses or ears, blind men led by pitiful children, mothers with filthy, whining children. They never got used to the black flies that swarmed over the stations, fed and rested unmolested on the beggars' faces, and blanketed the vendors' glasses of tea. When these unfortunate souls saw our three white faces looking out the train window, they whimpered and begged more incessantly. Periodically, I would toss out a few Indonesian coins to divert their attention. Luke and Dolly were rather sickened by the ensuing struggle as the people flung themselves onto the dirt to retrieve the small coins. Finally in exasperation Luke exclaimed to me, "Don't these people ever stop having babies?"

"No," I responded. "They believe children are gifts from God." He never mentioned the subject again.

After about four hours, Luke became very restless. "Don't we ever get off?" he asked. I explained that if he left his seat, he would probably lose it. "I've sat in one seat for twenty hours." Another time I stood on top of my suitcase for twelve hours. In both instances I could hardly move.

Luke replied, "I can believe it."

In time the carriage was so densely packed that virtually no bodily movement was possible. Luke was experiencing extreme stress as he tried to flex his short arms and legs. Dolly remained poised and remarkably cool tempered.

At one stop an intense argument erupted between several of the passengers and a woman who had barely managed to board the train with her infant child and several large pieces of luggage. The passengers sneered, "Why didn't you hire a buffalo cart? There isn't enough room for you, your kid, and all your rubbish." The atmosphere became explosive.

The peasant woman began to cry. This was the first Indonesian peasant woman I had ever seen cry. She looked plaintively toward Luke, who was at a loss how to respond. I said to him, "If you move a bit to let her in, it will be extremely cramped, but under the circumstances there may be no alternative." I talked it over with my Indonesian seatmate and he agreed. The tension of the standing passengers mounted, but they quickly agreed that there was no choice but to permit the peasant woman to sit on her luggage the best she could.

The woman was all smiles as she stretched out on top of her luggage, with her head only about eighteen inches from Luke's face. She jabbered incoherent thanks in both Javanese and Indonesian and immediately began to assemble an assortment of precooked food—ghastly looking and terrible smelling stuff—from her bamboo luggage. The food was heavily flavored with a sauce derived from putrified fish which Indonesians regard as a delicacy.

With wide smiles exposing her betel nut black-stained teeth, she generously offered Luke large portions of food which she dug out of the containers with dirty fingers and plopped on banana leaves. She licked her fingers between each handful. Luke placed his hands to his face and smiling said, "No, no. I've already eaten." The peasant woman did not give up easily. She insisted that Luke eat the food, shoving it near his nose. Luke still refused, so she ate each item with great relish and made sure those around her knew that she was willing to share her meager food with the old bald "Dutchman" who was so kind to her when everyone else was rude. Her prattle further incensed the packed passengers.

The peasant woman continued to stuff large globs of rice and other food in her mouth and then to chew strenuously with loud smacking noises. Saliva streamed down the corners of her full lips, and she wiped it away with the thumb and forefinger of her greasy right hand, then cleaned the entire hand by vigorously rubbing it throughout her stringy black hair. At the same time, she would sedulously move her body, exposing her ample breasts and full stomach. She was uncouth, a *perempuan kasar*, totally unlike the typical Javanese peasant woman who, in spite of limited formal education, is always courteous and polite.

She had barely finished eating when her infant started to fidget. She quickly removed the child from a sling on her side and exposed its

bottom to a small clear space on the floor between her legs, where the female child promptly relieved herself. The peasant woman cleaned the anal area with her left hand and replaced the infant in the sling. The infant kept whimpering and crying so the woman laboriously undid her upper garments and exposed her full left breast within two feet of Luke's head. She removed the child from the sling and placed its head to her breast, where the infant hungrily sucked and slobbered while the mother stretched and reclined in gratification—cramping Luke even more tightly in his window seat. Luke was steadily losing precious space to this repulsive person, but he tried to handle the situation with decorum.

About seven hours out of Jogjakarta Luke was obviously in great distress. "Where is the next big station?" he asked. "I need to go to the bathroom. Don't these people ever go to the bathroom?"

I looked at my watch and told him it would probably be two to three hours until we got to Chirebon where there was usually a forty-five minute stopover while our train linked up with another train. If I only need to urinate, I told him, I usually use the entrance door. I warned him, though, to be careful of the wind direction. If it was more than that, it would be more difficult. I told him I had relieved myself on moving trains in fits of diarrhea attacks.

Luke frowned at this suggestion and emphatically replied, "I'll wait."

Then Dolly leaned over and explained to me, "Dad has a prostate problem. I think you had better help him, even if it means that he has to relieve himself from the moving train or against a wall at a small station like the Indonesians do. He cannot wait. He's scheduled to have an operation when we get home, but I'm concerned about him now."

With this bit of information, I quickly decided what we should do. I asked the Indonesian soldier to protect our places and instructed Dolly to put some of our belongings on our vacant seats when we left. Luke and I would try to make our way through the crowd to the door at the front of the carriage. Luke was only five feet five inches tall, but he had the bulk of a football tackle. Such a massive two-hundred-pound physique may be useful for tossing eighty-pound bales of hay all day long, but it is a handicap in trying to move through a sardine-packed corridor of tired and resentful people.

I led the way, cajoling in the Indonesian language and asking forbearance. Finally, we reached the end of the corridor and got to the carriage couplings. The mission was a failure! People were standing astraddle the couplings in very dangerous positions and there was no room for Luke. Each side entrance door was completely filled with stacked luggage and precariously perched on top of each of the piles

were toothless betel-chewing peasant women. Even the floor, between the legs of standing passengers, was jammed with small children. Luke could either urinate in his pants or on top of the children.

He decided to wait until the train reached the Chirebon switching station. He and I laboriously returned to our seats, which surprisingly were not taken. The soldier had guarded them well.

The repulsive peasant woman could sense something was wrong. She rummaged in her luggage and soon made a massive chew of betel nut which she offered to Luke with much fanfare. Luke was again flustered and didn't know how to refuse the unwanted gift. The young soldier came to his rescue—he took the chew of betel nut and promptly gave it to an old woman who was sitting across from him. After that everyone settled down and the carriage was quiet except for the rhythmic clanking of the train as it descended from the plateau region. Even the smoke cleared from the cabin, and fresh air brought a measure of relief to the jammed situation. This relief did not last long. Luke looked straight at Dolly and in panic explained, "I must do something. You know the doctor said that if I did not relieve myself frequently my bladder might rupture."

After this distressful pronouncement I stood up and said, "Follow me. I understand that there is a toilet of a sort at the other end of this carriage." (The toilet was actually a hole in the floor.) Again I briefly discussed the matter with the faithful soldier who warned the repulsive peasant woman that an emergency existed and she had better behave herself.

As I moved into the corridor, a tall young Indonesian spoke to me in broken English: "Do old gentleman need help?"

"Yes," I answered.

The young man, who was a student at the University of Indonesia at Jakarta, spoke to the people immediately ahead of him, and the message spread up and down the entire corridor. Bodies twisted and stretched to provide openings for his two-hundred-pound body while the railroad carriage lurched and swayed over its rough rail-bed.

Panting heavily and sweating profusely, Luke reached the toilet door. Out of luck again! Luggage was stacked five feet high in front of the door and squatting on top of the pile was a small old peasant woman. With no comment, the peasant woman struggled to the floor. Three young Indonesians then bodily lifted Luke over the barrier. Relief at last!

About five minutes later, the door opened and we could see just the top of Luke's head over the stacked luggage. The same three young Indonesians pulled him back over the barrier, and as he reached the

top of the luggage pile, the passengers in the carriage exploded with applause and gleeful cheers.

The tension inside the jammed carriage dissipated. Luke was no longer that ugly, colonial Dutchman, relative of those responsible for so much misery in this country. He was a human being, with real needs! University students traveling in the carriage informed the passengers that these three Americans were friends of Indonesia. The young white man had provided much economic help to their country. The peasants understood.

By late afternoon the train was cautiously making its way over a roadbed flooded from recent rains and silt-clogged canals. If we derailed here, the consequence could be tortuous delay. Strong, young passengers with light luggage would probably walk out of the trouble, using the flooded railroad bed as a walkway. Older travelers and those with lots of baggage would have to wait for repairs or rescue. I'd gone through this sort of disaster once, and it had taken me eight hours to walk to dry land. I staggered into the train station at 2 A.M.

So I apprehensively kept an eye on the level of the flooding over the tracks and counted off the markings on the kilometer posts. As the sun set, I breathed a sigh of relief. The train had crossed the flooded plain and again was on dry roadbed. It was rocking away at its maximum speed of thirty-five miles per hour.

Other passengers also sensed relief, since they knew the arduous trip was about over. As they disembarked at their respective stations on the outskirts of Jakarta, they smiled and nodded to Luke and Dolly. Indonesians respect age, and these two were obviously remarkable.

The Surabaya Express arrived at Gambir Station in the heart of Jakarta at 8:30 P.M., about on schedule. It had averaged the remarkable speed of twenty-five miles per hour. Luke was the last passenger to leave the carriage. He had tears in his eyes as he watched the repulsive peasant woman dicker with three coolies who placed her primitive luggage on their heads. While they were getting the luggage arranged, she adjusted the sling at her waist carrying her sleeping child, and with a proud nod of her head toward Luke, she vanished into the milling crowd.

This time Luke's dream came true. He and Dolly completed their world tour and safely returned home to Provo. Some years later, Luke looked back over the eighty years of his life. He had taught school in a log cabin; he had freighted; he was a postmaster; he served a mission; he enlisted in the Navy when he was fifty; he spent ten years in the state senate; he was a successful businessman who faithfully served his church. He had also lived through years of overwhelming poverty. But nothing opened his eyes or his heart as much as that train ride across Indonesia.