
Letters from Yogya

by Glenda Adams

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I must have been lying on my bed in Jogjakarta on 26 February 1963 as I read James Mossman's *Rebels in Paradise: Indonesia's Civil War*. On that day I copied into my notebook this passage:

It was a world seen through a taxi window, a world I could describe but not understand. Before my journey was over I thought I had seen below the outermost layers of this ancient society. Now I am not so sure. What I saw only suggested the existence of further layers too fine for a visitor to dissect. I think I learned less about the Sumatrans in the end than I did about myself.

I also wrote out Shakespeare's sonnet 143, 'Lo as a careful housewife runs to catch / One of her feathered creatures broke away'; the words of an Indonesian song popular at the time, 'Oh kasihku, mengapa menangis tersedu' - My love why are you sobbing; and a passage by an Indonesian writer, whose name I omitted to record, that begins, 'Demikianlah hebatnja revolusi. Kemanusiaan-anku kukorbankan. Dan sekarang ini - djiwa dan ragaku sendiri' - such is the intensity of revolution that I sacrifice my humanity, and my own body and soul.

That blue-covered notebook with the rough, lined paper was intended to be my record of life and times in Indonesia in 1962 and 1963, when I was a student of Indonesian and Javanese language and literature. I kept copious notes on words and language use, and was even beginning to understand something of the politics of language. Nevertheless, those eclectic passages so carefully transcribed probably reveal more about the transcriber than about the world around her.

These days my efforts to record life and times are more chaotic and quixotic. Instead of a notebook I keep a shoebox,

into which I toss items that I intend to think about one day. Recently I consigned to that box a couple of paragraphs from *Harp*, John Gregory Dunne's new book of essays about his life as a writer and traveller.

Here is the first:

Exit is what the writer thinks from the moment of his arrival. How do I get out? Is there a plane to ... just some capital with a hot bath and a cold beer bottled by someone other than the local caudillo's second cousin from diverted USAID funds. And clean towels and water that does not need to be boiled or cured with Halazone The plane to Paris unfortunately leaves only every other Thursday.

That was the kind of traveller toward whom we foreign students in Indonesia in the 'sixties felt a certain superiority. They came in to the country, for a few weeks, months, even years, sat in the Hotel Indonesia (the only 'international' hotel in Indonesia at the time) at the bar or around the swimming pool with other foreigners - businessmen, diplomats, journalists, and the occasional tourist - pronouncing upon events taking place beyond the walls of the hotel and, in spite of their material comforts, usually complaining, about indolence, inefficiency, unreliability, the drinking water, and even the horses - too small, I heard one visitor say.

'Don't compare,' Dr van Naerssen, the Dutch scholar who set up the Indonesian department at Sydney University in 1958, used to say as he introduced us to the mysteries of other cultures. 'See things in their own terms.' (And thus he was able to be content in Sydney, after a lifetime in Europe, never expressing disappointment that Sydney was not Paris.)

In Indonesia, we students - from Australia, the United States, France, Japan, Sweden, Yugoslavia, the Philippines - felt we had a mission beyond our official endeavours in language, history, political science, anthropology, and so on. With what we considered our heightened sensibilities we felt we blended in admirably with the local scene and were helping to break down the barriers between East and West.

While some of the foreign students were well off, funded in hard currency from their home countries, many of us received our stipends in rupiah from an Indonesian foundation. Mine at the time was Rp 3000 a month, the equivalent of three American dollars on the black-market-about the cost of a milk shake and a swim at the Hotel Indonesia, indulgences we could not choose to submit to anyway, since the hotel accepted only foreign currency.

In Jakarta we stood at the kerb flagging down the crowded buses and bemos, instead of taking taxis or getting picked up by private cars with chauffeurs. Once in a bus, to get it to stop, no matter how shy you might be, you had to call out, really shout, '*Stop pinggir*', meaning literally, 'stop at the kerb'. Many of the passengers liked to pronounce it 'stopping here', mimicking English and producing a satisfying pun that worked in every way and gave me pleasure every time I heard it.

That was when I began to comprehend the Indonesians' agility with words and the flexibility of the language.

Recently, in 1986, I had a chance to spend a few days in Jakarta and Bali. All kinds of barriers appeared to have been broken down since I had been there as a student. Most obviously, tourism had become a major industry, with the accompanying high-rise hotels and air-conditioned shopping malls.

At the airport, the young customs official not knowing that I could understand, beckoned to me and said, 'Ajuh, Nenek' or 'Move it, Grandma', and he was not calling me grandmother out of respect.

Twenty-three years earlier, in Jogjakarta, I had sat tongue-tied in the living room of a venerable, seventy-three-year-old grandmother, a greatly respected Javanese woman who had helped to develop the Taman Siswa schools in the region. I had difficulty understanding her, partly because Javanese with all its complex levels is difficult for a foreigner, and partly because she spoke so softly and in such a refined way that I could not hear. I sat looking at the floor, hoping that my silence and shyness would pass for politeness and respect, leaving the talking to my friend, one of the daughters in the family I was living with. I shall call her Tini here. Our hostess urged me to drink my tea, saying '*Mangga, mangga*', in Javanese: and indicating the glass on the

table before me, but I still waited for Tini to take-up her glass before I touched mine. I was trying hard to be an ideal Javanese woman, to do things the right way.

In Javanese terms Tini was unruly and thought to be a little too quick with her retorts. In the bedroom we shared in her family's house in Jogja she smoked cigarettes and spoke in Indonesian and English about life and love in a tempestuous way. Yet she was able to switch to *krama*, formal Javanese, using just the right phrases and gestures, when she met a friend of her father or one of her professors or sat with relatives at the wedding of a cousin. In Tini's closet the valuable *kebaya* and batik kain she wore on these formal occasions lay in heaps, while in her sister's closet the *kebaya* hung neatly, facing in the same direction, like soldiers, and the kain were pleated and folded and lined up like books on a shelf.

To account for this rebel in their midst, the family said that Tini went out too much, *terlalu pergi*. She sang with a jazz band and a choir, was involved with a Muslim theatre group and with the productions of a well known, young Jogja poet, who was staging plays and reciting his poetry. *Ia sekarang kurus karena ia banjak pikiran*, the family used to say. She was getting too thin because she had too many thoughts. Yet when she sat mending her clothes and singing - Javanese songs, Sumatran lullabies, western popular songs, Italian arias - her voice calmed everyone down.

Tini's family, a religious, Muslim family, saw to it that I learned how to behave at weddings, how to move discreetly, how to serve tea to visitors. They showed me how to outline the traditional batik patterns in hot wax on the cloth. They urged me not to rush about (westerners seemed always in a hurry), to stay home when it was too hot or raining, and not to go out alone. (I had already taken buses through Sumatra and been reprimanded by a policeman in one village for travelling without a chaperone.) They took me to the all-night performance of the Ramayana at the temple at Prambanan, and to the Hari Raya Wesak festival at Borobudur.

Sometimes they asked what I missed most from home. So absorbed was I in my life there, it seemed I missed nothing; yet

once I found myself describing cheese in some detail and with some enthusiasm, not an item available in Indonesia. Tini's older sister - I'll call her Nunu here - sensitive, kind Nunu, bought gallons of milk and tried to create a cheese for me from scratch. After several days' work she produced a little bowl of yellow flakes, which were truly wonderful to eat. Once she went to the trouble of procuring the wheat flour sugar and milk to make a cake, western style.

But through it all there was the learning of the languages, Indonesian and Javanese. 'Don't say it like that,' Nunu used to rebuke me gently, '*Begini sadja*. Better to say it this way', as she tried to change my rough phrases into beautiful sentences. The emphasis then was on being thoughtful and tactful in word and deed.

One writer, a Javanese, told me that he was careful not to use too many Javanese words when speaking Indonesian in Jakarta in case he offended non-Javanese people by appearing too Javanese in a country where, out of a total population of ninety million at the time, fifty million were Javanese, and the less populous groups feared their dominance. This man took care to use *dapat* for 'can' rather than *bisa*, a Javanese word that had entered Indonesian. In Sumatra I was reproached for using *omong*, a Javanese word for 'talk' instead of *tjakap*, 'pure Indonesian', and one friend tried to have me say *apakah kabar anda gerangan* instead of the common *apa kabar* as the equivalent to 'how are you?' Foreigners are fond of stating that Indonesian is easy to learn, implying that it is not a serious language for study - no verb to be, no tenses, no conjugations, with adverbs and adjectives that attach themselves in fluid ways to all parts of speech - and some even believe it reflects a simplicity of thought.

At Sydney University, where I taught Indonesian after I returned from Java, I saw my colleague, Hedwig Emanuels, a gifted teacher and linguist, teach a hundred students sitting in tiers in one of those lecture theatres to count to ten thousand in their first lecture of the year. By the end of the first hour he could write any number on the board, 1372 for example, and the whole lecture theatre could call it out, '*Seribu tiga ratus tudju puluh dua*'.

'You have to give them something concrete to take away at first, show them the possibilities', Mr Emanuels said, 'Otherwise they won't come back and tackle the difficult part'. He also knew that if first-year courses in any discipline were poorly taught, good students were lost to the discipline.

After an hour of studying a phrase book, a newcomer to Indonesia can go to the market and point and say 'How much?' and 'Too much'. And the vendors simplify their language for foreigners. But after a few months, the complexities of the language become apparent, and so begins the task of trying to make your sentences beautiful and exact, achieving the nuances of time and the refinements of meaning without the more rigid grammatical structures that guide us in European languages.

When the first news of President Kennedy's assassination came over the radio, via the BBC or Radio Australia, I told my friends, 'Kennedy has been killed', using the verb *dibunuh* for 'killed.' And I told them what little I had been able to learn about it. Afterwards, a friend suggested that *ditembak* rather than *dibunuh* would have been the right word to use.

We talked for a long time that day, lamenting violence and racial discrimination in the United States. Eighteen months later I found myself in New York writing radio news, condensing into thirty seconds or a minute reports of President Johnson's Great Society, walks in space, civil rights marches in the American South and race riots in Watts in Los Angeles.

At that time I received a letter from a Javanese friend, a social anthropologist, telling me about his field research in Central Java. He was studying the prejudices in a village divided into two groups, each of which refused to have anything to do with the other. He also said the political atmosphere in Jakarta was anti-Malaysia, anti-America, and anti-India. Then, in Javanese he told me about the new hotel that had gone up near Prambanan, outside Jogja. '*Saiki wis ono pinggir dalan menjang Sala. Hotel iki didjenengakd Hotel Ambarukmo.*' The building of luxury hotels had begun.

I had heard that Tini was managing a hotel in Bali with her husband. During those few days in 1986, I tried to find her. Over the years I had lost touch with the family and the last I had

heard from Tini directly was a letter in 1964 when she told me she was giving up her studies at Gajahmada University. She was tired of studying, *bosan sekali*, very bored, and wanted to follow her interest in theatre. She was reading as many novels and plays as she could and intended to direct plays herself, first an Indonesian play, then Tennessee Williams's *Summer and Smoke*, which she had been translating. When she told her professor that she was leaving, he had agreed that it was a good idea, and suggested she get married right away. Tini did not like that.

'*Saja tidak suka hal ini*', she wrote. '*Saja belum ingin Karin dengan apapun sekarang. Saja masih ingin hidup sendiri. Dalam arti tidak kawin dulu.*' She was not ready to marry anyone yet. And she objected to the teachers 'interfering with the personal lives of their students.

'She manages a hotel with her husband', I told the clerk at my hotel as I began trying to trace Tini.

'But there are so many hotels in Bali', the clerk said. 'Hundreds.' just then a guest wandered by in tiny shorts and a briefer halter-top. The clerk looked down at the counter. '*Malu sekali*', she said. 'We are so embarrassed for them. Then she added, '*Pende-e-ek*', stretching out the last syllable, 'so short. We have to look the other way'.

Back in my student days, one of the foreign students was invited by officials from her embassy to swim at the Hotel Indonesia, and later at the house where she was staying she hung out her swimsuit to dry. The next morning, she found the swimsuit on the ground, cut to bits, a potent statement that even hanging on a clothesline her suit had offended someone.

Now, in Bali, in one morning I counted ten T-shirts inscribed with these words: 'No I don't want a fucking bemo, postcard, massage, jiggy-jig'. Most of these T-shirts seemed to be worn by Australians, holding cans of beer as they wandered along the endless bazaar that the south coast of Bali has now become.

Then the hotel clerk asked me, 'And where is *your* husband?'. For a moment I was startled. Even with tourists wearing offensive T-shirts in the streets and hotel guests in scant clothing, a woman travelling alone was still noticed. '*Disana*', I said, 'Back there', without going into a detailed account of my life and

explaining that, although I had my daughter with me, there was no longer a husband.

'Ah, *orang penting*', the clerk said. My husband surely was an important person if he had to stay behind and let me travel alone.

It had taken me a long time to understand that questions did not have to be answered literally. '*Mau kemana?*', acquaintances called out as I rode my bicycle to a lecture at Gajahmada or to visit friends. 'Where are you going?' I had to stop in order to explain where and why, confused like many newcomers by what seemed to be unnecessary inquisitiveness, until I understood that 'where are you going?' was rather similar to 'how are you?'

'I'm going north', I learned to answer, without getting off my bike, if I was riding to one of the villages through the rice fields and the palm trees. Or when someone asked where I had been, '*Datang darimana?*', I could answer, 'From back there', '*dari sana*'. (North and south were useful terms. Inside the cinema the usher used to whisper, 'Take the aisle to the north'.)

In Indonesian I even learned to joke and play word games. Those afternoons when we lounged on the enormous beds in Jogja, we played a kind of verbal tennis, coining new words as rapidly as possible. '*Killangan*', Tini called out, when someone's hand brushed against her foot, and we had to guess that it was an anagram of the last syllables of the words *kaki kena tangan*, 'your hand hit my foot'. Or '*Yanapi*', when a flaming clove dropped from the kretek cigarette I was learning to smoke and set fire to my blouse. *Kebaya kena api*.

But when they switched to Javanese, which always happened as everyone relaxed, I was quickly left behind. In Javanese I had barely mastered even routine exchanges in *ngoko* and *krama*, two of the many levels of the language, which remained dauntingly fluid to me.

Twice a week I cycled to the Taman Siswa, to the cottage of the director - I'll call him Pak Pardi - for instruction in Javanese. The pupils in the yard stopped playing to watch as I parked my bike and stood on the steps leading to Pak Pardi's veranda.

'*Kula nuwun*', I had to call out. That was what the children

were waiting for. They liked to fall about laughing at my rendering of the *krama* phrase for 'May I come in?'. In intonation it must have sounded like our neighbour in Sydney when she called over the fence, 'Ooh-oooh'.

I tried not to sound coarse or rude, not to shout, but to keep my voice at just the right volume. Sometimes I had to call out two or three times. When Pak Pardi heard and answered from within, 'Inggih, *mangga*', I could enter and begin the lesson. I sat before him and copied down his words in my notebook with the rough paper on which the ink from my pen spread out, as blurry and fuzzy as Pak Pardi said my voice sounded. He spent a lot of time trying to rid me of what he called the sing-song quality of my speech and the huskiness that he said was common to all westerners. He heard it in films and on the radio, and it was not considered attractive.

'European voices hit several notes at once,' he said sadly, 'like a chord on a piano'.

In order to coax my voice onto a single note, he thought I should learn to sing in the Javanese way. He sang a few notes, one clear sound at a time, and I mimicked him, phrase after phrase, producing what sounded to me like a passable, Javanese sound. But I always caused him to look down to the floor.

'That won't do in Javanese,' he said.

I can see now that I must have got on people's nerves at times, a stranger who often seemed a bit slow, who did not catch on. (I must have been like the puzzled student in my class in Sydney who, after several tutorials in which I had delved into the mysteries of adding prefixes and suffixes to root words, asked, 'Why do you keep talking about rude words?'. What struck me, apart from my irritation at the slowness of this particular student, was that, by coincidence, the words for 'root' and 'rude' were as close in English as they were in Indonesian, *dasar* and *kasar*. Not that my student knew that.)

So hard did I try to blend in and be Javanese that once I spent some of my precious allowance on black hair-dye. But the dye came off on the pillow and I had to spend an hour in the bathroom throwing dippers of water over my hair to get it out. At Kaliurang, a little resort in the hills outside Jogja, I met several

chiefs from West New Guinea, which as Irian Barat had just been incorporated into Indonesia. They were wearing suits and shoes possibly for the first time, using knives and forks, unable to speak Indonesian. To me they looked a little glum, and I felt a certain kinship with them, trying as we all were to learn the customs of this country new to us.

'What is your friend's name?', the clerk in the hotel in Bali asked me.

But I only knew Tini's name before she married. 'She is from Jogja, very pretty,' I said. Before, it seemed to me, this kind of detail would have been sufficient to trace someone, so quickly and effectively was information passed, from one end of the country to the other. 'My cousin's husband used to live in that town and his sister married so-and-so...', and thus news of almost anyone could be ascertained.

'And she has a lovely singing voice,' I said, as if that would help.

Tini could certainly sing. 'Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered' was a family favourite, which she sang in English, as we lay on our beds taking our afternoon rest, endowing all those words with the heavy, beautiful Javanese 'B' sound.

That was when I did most of my reading. Paper was scarce and books hard to get. (Such was the paper shortage that once when I bought peanuts from a vendor I discovered that the paper cone they were wrapped in was made from a letter I had received and discarded a few days before.) I read whatever I could get my hands on - books and newspapers in Indonesian and Javanese - and whatever I could borrow, from the family, friends, libraries - the sonnets, *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, Kerouac's *On The Road* - and copied out passages that seemed significant.

I don't know what road the Kerouac book had taken to end up in my hands in Jogjakarta. But I remember the book depressed me. I was reading it one night when Tini was singing *Bangawan Solo* and repairing the hem of a skirt. It seemed that everyone in the world, Kerouac and myself included, was a prisoner of his or her own little world, even those who believed they had broken free, and I remember wondering what we were all striving for, as if I were the first to discover that question. *Mengapa aku ini?*

I copied into my notebook, quoting a character in an Indonesian novel I was reading. Who am I? What does it all mean? The universal questions that every young person has to discover and utter for him- or herself. I like to think now that perhaps, at some level, I grasped for a moment the extent to which we are all products of our own culture, including those of us who felt we were different and well able to embrace another. And yet, because of Tini's singing, it seemed that it might indeed be possible to rise above the pettinesses and panics of daily life.

Then President Sukarno came on the radio in the living room, just outside our bedroom door. I could hear him over Tini's voice. He was addressing a gathering of lawyers in Jakarta in Indonesian, yet in the space of fifteen minutes he used French, Dutch, German, English, and Latin phrases.

I had discovered quickly that educated Indonesians took pleasure in speaking Dutch and that it was a status symbol. A writer I met in Jakarta, who had grown up during colonial times in a poor family in a small town, had missed out on the western education of his wealthier contemporaries and felt he did not speak Dutch well. Even after independence, he said with some bitterness, when Indonesian was the official language and nationalistic fervor was strong, his lack of Dutch isolated him from other writers of his generation.

However, when I arrived in Indonesia, Sukarno had forbidden Indonesians to use any Dutch at all. Indonesia still had no formal relations with The Netherlands - the quarrelling over the possession of West New Guinea was still going on. Then, when it was decided that Irian Barat would be part of Indonesia, relations with Holland were resumed and the Dutch began returning to Indonesia, as diplomats and businessmen, and Indonesians were using Dutch again openly. 'At last,' said one Indonesian I knew, 'there comes someone who understands us'.

As the Dutch returned, relations with Britain and Malaysia deteriorated. In Jakarta the British Embassy, just up the road from the Hotel Indonesia, was sacked. I saw it a few days later, partly burned, papers scattered all over the place, with streamers of toilet paper dangling from the windows. A Chinese friend in Jogja - I'll call him John - wrote to me, in English:

I have many friends all over the world. Many of them are whites. They are always my friends no matter what happens. This I hope they'll understand and believe. I say that because I have a dream and that dream, when really fulfilled, might not be very pleasant for people of the western world ... May God always be with you and bless you. In his letter John also said: I don't believe that I will ever be able to go abroad. First, I'm Chinese. This is the greatest sin, you know. Being Chinese is something like a curse. I had listened to Sukarno addressing the Chinese of Jakarta the night after he spoke to the lawyers, but I could not hear any Chinese expressions woven into the Indonesian.

John had talked about ethnic and racial tensions and political and religious divisions one afternoon when we spent the day at Parangtritis on the coast south of Jogja. We were with a Swedish friend and a Javanese student of literature, one of the most quietly spoken and refined young men I had met. Together we formed a conspicuous and unlikely foursome as we strolled along the sand, stopping to drink milk from the young coconuts the villagers cut down for us. The ocean that day was wild, rushing up against the beach and falling back down with a fierce churning. And suddenly I remembered the weekends I used to spend on the Hawkesbury River and the old hotel at Wiseman's Ferry, where we called in for a drink and a hamburger before driving back to Sydney.

My going off like that from time to time with such diverse companions must have made my Jogja family uneasy, and despite my vigilance, I could still unwittingly cause embarrassment.

When a group of Japanese singers visited Jogja on what was billed as a goodwill tour, I invited the family to a performance, since I knew they all loved music. I had heard the group in Jakarta and had been entranced by the simplicity and beauty of their singing and the staging of the songs - lengths of blue and green chiffon, for example, cleverly made to ripple like a river when they sang '*Bangawan Solo*'. The performance was given during Ramadhan, the month of fasting, when the family rose at four in the morning to eat a meal before beginning the day's fast and ceremonially broke it each day at sundown. Out of politeness to me, the father of the family and several of the children came

to the concert. They carried bags of food and drink, which, at the moment of sunset when the singers were in the middle of a song, the members of the family unwrapped and passed along our row, conspicuously breaking their fast. That was when I knew there was something I had not understood. Afterwards they explained that the troupe was communist-sponsored, that everyone in the audience sympathised with the communists. By observing their Muslim rites at the concert, they were making both a political and religious statement.

(Not long after that I made a very small and involuntary statement of my own at a production of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, performed in English by Chinese students. I started crying. Life in Grover's Corners in New Hampshire in the United States suddenly seemed familiar and just next door to Sydney, Australia.)

During the first days of October 1965, on the radio desk of the wire service where I worked in New York, yards of reports started to arrive from Indonesia via telex:

Volatile Indonesia, long a source of trouble to its Southeast Asian neighbors, shook with a new kind of tremor: an internal power play directed against President Sukarno Sukarno came on the air early this morning and ordered an immediate halt to the fighting that has ripped the coup-racked country Clashes between the army and rebel forces were reported in Central Java Jogjakarta had been retaken by army groups after it was captured by communist elements The mutilated bodies of the six army generals were found In a subdued, calm voice, Sukarno told the Indonesian people: I have ordered all the people to be more vigilant so that we can implement the Dwikora (twin commands of Crush-Malaysia and the intensification of the revolution) let our spirit flourish, God is with us'. Then came the reports of the killings, with thousands of Indonesians dead. I received another letter from my social anthropologist friend telling me that the houses of anyone connected with the Communist Party had been destroyed by the people, and also houses of the Chinese, because everyone believed that Peking was behind the coup. But then, he wrote, the communists themselves were killing people from the religious and nationalist groups, always

gouging their eyes out, with fighting particularly heavy around Prambanan. Those connected with *Gestapu*, were still being hunted down. '*Gestapu, jang artinja GERakan September Tiga PULuh, seolah-olah mirip bunjinja dengan Gestapo-Nazi karena kekedjaman jang dilakukan*', he wrote, pointing out that *Gestapu*, an anagram of 'September 30 Movement', created a powerful pun, linking the cruelties of the coup supporters with the Nazi Gestapo. '*Pandai sekali. bukan, orang Indonesia mentjari nama*' he added. Indonesians were very clever at making up words, weren't they? I was thinking about all this as I walked along the sand in Bali, the sea on my left and on my right the walls and hedges shielding the string of hotels from the beach and the public.

In a letter that Nunu had written to me years before, she said: '*Selama Nunu bergaul dengan Glenda mungkin saja pernah berbuat salah kepadamu dan mudah-mudahan Glenda suka memaafkannya dan mudah-mudahan persahabatan kita tetap kekal*'.

It was possible that she had unknowingly offended me during the time we had spent together, and she hoped that I would forgive her. I should have been the one to write such a letter.

At the end of her letter, Tini wrote: '*Sekarang sudah amat malam ... Saja selalu sukar tidur... saja djadi restless lagi karena ada pikiran jang mengganggu saja*'. It was late, and these days she had trouble sleeping. She had thoughts that bothered her.

Too many thoughts, as they used to say. In the twenty-three years since I had left Indonesia, Indonesians had killed one another in the months after *Gestapu* - three hundred thousand had died. *Dibunuh? Ditembak? Dikorbankan? Diindjak?* Sukarno had fallen. Many critics of the new government had been jailed, some for years, including the writer who took care not to use too many Javanese words in Indonesian, the poet who staged his plays, and the novelist who was not fluent in Dutch.

Yet Indonesia appeared to have prospered - there were those hotels and malls and in the bookstores were books with bright, shiny covers printed on fine paper. The country had been opened to tourists and others from the outside, including John Gregory Dunne. In *Harp*, in that other paragraph stowed in my

shoebox file, he describes briefly a visit to Java, inadvertently providing a lesson in the politics of language and a glimpse of the writer's power as he or she commits experience and observation to words, whether it is a piece of journalism, a scholarly paper, or a work of fiction.

The conversations are generally impenetrable. 'I in Los Angeles once,' my host said in jogjakarta. 'You in Los Angeles once?' I replied, falling into a kind of makeshift pidgin. I was eating pineapple upside-down cake, the dessert I was given every time I had dinner with Indonesians; it seemed the local idea of an Occidental delicacy. 'Where you in Los Angeles?' 'Manhattan Beach in Los Angeles. 'Really?' You know Manhattan Beach? My cousin lives in Manhattan Beach. 'I felt like a tennis player trying to keep the rally going. 'First cousin?' 'Second cousin. 'Ah, second cousin.' Then wild whooping laughter. 'Second cousin,' he repeated. The beach I was walking along in Bali seemed deserted. Then suddenly I was almost stepping on a European woman, lying in bikini briefs, topless, sunbathing alone. Her skin was the same color as the sand - she had completely blended in. Farther on, a fisherman working on his boat called out to me as I passed, 'Darimana?'

In those few days I had not located Tini, and it was time for me to leave. At the airport waiting to exit, a band of sunburned Australians in short shorts and singlets were calling out to each other, alarmingly jocular. Mossman suggests that when we travel we learn more about ourselves than about others. But perhaps even this is not true, and all we do when we venture forth is reinforce beliefs already held as we continue to impose our own sensibilities on everything we encounter. For Europeans and Australians a beach is for sunbathing, vacations for drinking more beer. Dunne finds only that the English spoken by some Indonesians is quaint and their attempts to please him with western cuisine laughable. And I, not as different from Dunne as I might think, construct a story from my own subjective patterns. And through it all, an Indonesian fisherman continues to greet strangers with 'where are you from?'
