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Sayan, Bali
Thursday 8 January 1981

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Dear Ben, Jean and Sam:

We were delighted to receive a letter in Ben's own hand and with a postscript from Ben (your airletter dated 1.12.80). Sorry to hear of Ben's cluster of disasters, but they're not too serious if he's recovering in Mum and Dad's good care on "Kydabab". If and when we fall sick, jobless and broke all together, we'd be happy to have such good conditions & But we hope to be able to take you up on your kind offer of hospitality long before that.

The thing about Ben's adventures or misadventures that puzzled me at first was: which immigration authorities didn't issue a Visa for 6 weeks? Then I tumbled that it must have been the Australians, and that Ben as a U.S. or Canadian citizen must require a Visa to enter Australia, especially to work- and I suppose Dad was in Sri Lanka and couldn't put in a word in Canberra. But it doesn't say much for the ANU if they couldn't fix that more quickly. I trust that it will all have value in the long run as a lesson to Ben that nothing can be safely left to look after itself if it's important to you... as Murphy's Law so succinctly states.

The Sri Lanka experience sounds great; it gets my professional juices flowing again, and makes me remember working 14 hours a day 7 days a week in Semarang, under trying conditions of sweat, isolation, discomfort and breakdowns of essential services, combined with the propensity of poor people to expropriate whatever they can from crazy foreigners or government funds, in a kind of survival reflex.

The heady variety of your lives sounds great, but we've been happy to stay relatively still and quiet here in Sayan most of the past three months after our cumulatively tiring travel in Japan, Hongkong, Italy, Spain and the USA. But we really only had a couple of lousy weeks over Christmas and New Year.

We've improved our temporary home here in Sayan and made it comfortable, clean, efficient and charming - and relatively free of scorpions and other bugs as well. The wet season came early this year (it rained on the day we arrived, October 15, and the last few weeks have been wetter than I ever remember). We returned to Bali too late to build bales and complete roofs before the wet set in, so we're just pottering with the garden, and some walls and siteworks until the wet clears in March or April, and to complete the roofs we'll have to wait for next season's crop of dry, termite free bamboo and good quality

thatch. So we're forced to make the best of staying in our temporary home until late 1981.

Meanwhile, we can comfortably accomodate a single short-term visitor in the room next to ours, sharing our bathroom, but with all meals and other comforts and entertainments provided, including the most delicious orange, banana and coconut flavoured cakes that Valli makes in a special doughnut shaped dish on top of our new gas stove.

We can make a hardy couple reasonably comfortable in a nearby old house with a most spectacular view (excellent for romantics) but our entertaining style won't go big until the end of this year.

Sorry you couldn't get thru to Kerry Hill's house in Singapore. We spent a week in Jakarta, another in Singapore and a further week in Jakarta. On the way, we spent several days in Semarang and Surakarta, where I took 4 rolls of film of our new-built 5,000 house new town, and our half completed Kampung Improvement Projects, and where I did the proper things and chatted with the residents, visited the authorities and so on.

First priority was to get a Visa for 3 or hopefully 6 months. Second was to initiate a campaign to win appointment as the U.N. Senior Policy Adviser, or Senior Urban Planner, on a UNDP-UNOHS Urban Development Strategy Project being mooted in Jakarta.

The Visa restrictions of the Indonesian Government, while all very rational and development/anti foreign exploitation oriented, and likely to spoil our plans and ruin our budget apropos of spending uninterrupted periods in Bali. This time our Balinese host signed in front of a Notary a 4 page Statement inviting us to spend 6 months with his family on a Social and Cultural Visit ... he swore we respected the God, the culture, the religions and beliefs, the locals, their customs, taught them English, had done a great deal for them, taught them modern technology, and he guaranteed us, our good behaviour, and our expenses. In Jakarta the Immigrasi official we saw quickly (24 hours) gave us a letter to take to Singapore, instructing the Consul there to issue us with Social and Cultural Visit Visas for THREE (3) months, vaguely saying that we could get them extended in Denpasar up to a maximum of 6 months, maybe. Singapore was no problem (again 24 hours) but now we're told that the Denpasar Immigrasi people are being totally tough and cleaning long stay drop outs, hippies and drug smugglers out of Bali by refusing to give any one any extension of any Visa, unless one is known as a revered friend of Indonesia, or has a really top drawer sponsor.

Our 90 days will expire on my birthday 17th February, and if we are forced out, we may be looking for somewhere to stay in Australia for a while during the second half of February (or March or April or May, depending on what extensions we get) so could we come to Kydrabah at any or all of those times ? Our Paddington house is rented out, and if I had any business in Australia, it could just as well be in Canberra.

In Jakarta, I had good, but unresolved discussions with a number of the key chaps in Cipta Karya (Dept of Public Works) and Dalam Negeri (Dept of Home Affairs), and also some more vigorous and enlightening discussions with a number of old and new friends among the relevant expatriate advisory mob... Americans and Dutch mostly, but some English.

I came back to Sayan with a library of the latest research and project reports (Employment and investment strategies, water supply investment policy reviews, the full Medan urban dev. report by PADCO, ENGINEERING SCIENCE & SINOTECH, the latest KIP reports and PERUMNAS housing policy and programme details and stuff on Dalam Negeri's City Development Policies and their latest work on trying to set up a national urban data bank, together with most of the draft final report on the Jabotabek Metro Region Development Plan prepared by some old friends of mine under a World Bank technical assistance grant, with expats hired as individuals. Best of all is a 200+ page analysis of the mess that Indonesia's land laws (ownership, various forms of title, registration, transfer, government taking of, use and control of use) are in, together with valuable and scarce English translations of the laws themselves and Indonesian legal commentaries. I've been through it all in the past month.

I also received and discussed with all relevant people a draft of a UN Project Document on National long term urban development strategy, which, if it goes ahead, will require the services of some expats here for 3 or 4 years. It's a badly muddled document, seemingly written by someone with little sophistication in urban policy, and practically no knowledge of Indonesian conditions. How the hell does this happen? The UN seems so absolutely incompetent compared to the Banks. Apparently UNCHS sent out "an Iranian consultant" who prepared this draft, after Lloyd Rodwin had had a go. Did Lloyd ever discuss it with you? I'd like to see what he wrote.

I've written 9 pages of gentle commentary, trying to politely but definitively set out what's wrong with it, and how it could be set on the right path. I've sent these pages off privately to an old friend of mine, who used to work for me before he left to join the UN in the early seventies, and who is now close to the Executive Director of UNCHS in Nairobi.

I've also written a four page letter to another old acquaintance, an Indonesian with an MIT PhD who is to be appointed National Coordinator of the Project if and when it goes ahead.

I've offer to help the UN and/or the Indonesians to redraft the Terms of Reference and the Project Document if they so desire, and I've registered strong interest and availability apropos the top job... Senior Policy Advisor on Urban Development, or alternatively, Senior Urban Planner. The latter will get just as much pay or nearly so, with a hell of a lot less administrative and political responsibility, and more time to put in on the professional/intellectual side.

The draft proposes a host of specialist consultant assignments for varying periods, short and long; and a number of expensive and unnecessary sub-contracts. There'll certainly be lots of jobs going; if I can get into the core team at or close to the top, I'd like to suggest Ben as one of the specialist consultants so we could get to work together on the problems.

In fact, the whole national strategy could much more effectively be worked out in conjunction with the Indonesians from the various Ministries if a 3 man team (Clarke, Higgins plus a good engineer) were to work quietly and strategically on the key variables for a slightly longer period, so that the work could be done sensibly in stages..... rather than the "big bang" approach which the UN is still apparently wedded to: lots of expats falling over one another in a vast and huddled effort to do everything at once, and to solve all questions for alltime shades of the master plan... shades of the Charge of the Lightweights Brigade. The influence of Ken Watts lingers on, apparently. I thought that a succession of failures over several decades had taught the UN something.

Anyway, it would be comic if it weren't so serious. I'd like to get in there and do this one... I'm really keen to achieve something again.

Ben, do please let me know if you can help in any way; maybe by giving me some information; maybe by putting in a word for me in Jakarta, in Nairobi, and in New York; maybe by agreeing to act as my referee if the UN still bothers to check referees; or in some other way of which I'm not aware.

It may turn out that the core team will be contracted out to a consultant firm or team; in which case, I shall want to get Clarke Urban Systems short listed, and then will want to put together a team from my old associates and colleagues...such as yourself. Do you have any commitments to Delcanda or others that would prevent or inhibit you in joining with me under the Clarke Urban Systems banner?

Do write soon: or if you want to communicate quickly, efficiently and cheaply, **TELEX**. I've arranged a telex link to Indonesian Telex number 35140 (or 35141 or 35142) Answerback Code **EXNH DPS** (which is short for Telex Booth Denpasar). These machines are in the Denpasar Public Telex and Telegrams Office. Start any message to me as follows:-

"please deliver to:

George Clarke
care Wayan Karyasa
Easy Rider Travel Service
Melasti Hotel
Kuta Beach.

"....."

As you can see, I have a new typewriter and letterhead, both acquired in Singapore. So I'm now as fully equipped as if I were in a big expensive city office... and can knock out proposals, programmes, cost estimates, bar charts, GVs... the lot.

CV & photos enclosed.

G.