

Borneo Confidential

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I.

It's not at all clear that I'll get an article out of the Borneo experience, for two reasons. The first reason is that the best stories involve too much sex and violence. A newspaper geared for the family audience wouldn't publish them. Orangutans, it seems, have a very fine sense of gender and age group, but not such a fine sense of species. The very first morning, we walked out to the 300-meter-long pier to watch the 7 am feeding of the orangutans. We had spent all afternoon and into the evening the day before travelling by slow boat the 50 miles upriver between banks of low nipa palms and taller jungle with monkeys in the high canopy, past the occasional Dayak house on stilts and the occasional Dayak family in a dugout canoe, through the intermittant downpours, and we had arrived after all the orangutans were asleep. (Like most of the primates except us, they sleep at night to keep out of trouble when they can't see the limbs of the trees they have to maneuver among—with people, of course, the limbs have become more metaphorical.) We had walked excitedly and apprehensively along the pier in the dark, and we had occasionally seen a dark blob that was a sleeping orangutan in a tree or in the fire tower that was built a decade ago but had to be abandoned to the orangutans immediately afterwards, but we hadn't actually interacted with any orangutans and we didn't know what it would be like. So the next morning when a young female named Siswi jumped up on the shoulders of the best-looking teenage boy, whose name was Mr. "Mark"—The Professor, as Biruté Galdikas insisted that she be called, insisted all of us be called by Mr., Mrs., Miss, or Ms., depending on sex, marital status, and politics, followed by our first name. Something to do with making sure the Dayak assistants treated us as appropriately high-status individuals. The Dayak assistants, it turns out, thought the practice was candy-ass, and so did half the Earthwatchers, but no one told The Professor that, and the other half of the Earthwatchers jumped into the practice with gusto. Anyway, Siswi rode on Mr. Mark's shoulders halfway out on the pier. He didn't really know what to do about it, so he let her ride. Then she dropped off of him and lay down on the pier in front of him and spread her legs and started stroking

her inner thighs.

Our dorm was completely open to the breeze all the way around at window level, but a fine-mesh screen covered the windows to keep out the mosquitos and over that there was chain-link fence to keep out the orangutans. But the orangutans liked to climb around on the chain-link fence and look in at us. In the second week one morning this same Siswi was climbing around on the chain-link fence covering the window, and when she reached the point just above the bed of Mr. "Scott", a very good looking 29-year-old free-lance writer from New York doing a story on The Professor for the London Times Magazine, she urinated on his face. Well, he might have moved fast enough that she only urinated on his pillow very near his face. The Professor told us later that that was definitely a sexual advance. Later that morning Mr. Scott was sitting on the porch of the dorm reading a mystery novel, and Siswi was sitting on the railing right next to him, chin resting on the back of her hand, staring at him intently. Then she reached over and grasped his thigh.

This sort of interest was apparently not unique. A scientist spent a year and a half there in 1978-80 trying to teach various orangutans sign language. The Professor's evaluation of the effort: it failed because the orangutans weren't motivated, because they had no use for language in their life style. He had one star pupil, a female, but when she learned enough sign language for it, she invited him up to her nest with her, and when he declined, she lost interest in sign language. Perhaps that's what The Professor meant when she talked about no motivation. By the way, I saw one orangutan, the young female Princess, signing for a banana, but she did so in a very perfunctory and irritable manner, impatient that her interlocutor wouldn't already know what she obviously wanted.

As for me, none of the females ever came on to me. On the contrary, since I'm an adult male, obviously so because of my beard, and since the female orangutans generalize from their experience in the orangutan world, in which the adult males are real bad dudes, whenever I walked down the pier at feeding time, the females would silently slip off and under the pier to let me pass. This was actually all right with me. I'm basically afraid of animals. I have this thing about large carnivores of the dog family, for example. So before I saw any orangutans, I was deathly afraid that I would be deathly afraid of them. When I actually did see them, I wasn't exactly deathly afraid of them, except for the 300-pound adult males, of course, and especially Bagong whom everyone, including The Professor, was afraid of since he had spent the first ten years of his life in the Surabaya zoo

where he had built up who knows what resentments against humans which might burst out who knows when. But I was a bit apprehensive about rough-housing with an animal strong enough to have sex hanging by one arm from a tree and teeth sharp enough to eat bark. So it was four or five days before I had the nerve to wrestle with Charlotte, a very young female who lived at the nursery, and even then it consisted mostly of me circling around behind her where she couldn't use the muscles she had developed for climbing trees and her trying to twist around and up to bite me. By contrast, Mr. "Jason", a wealthy 19-year-old from New York City from a famous old family, who always talked about going for a "jungle run", got down in the dirt with Charlotte and the even meaner and more biting Herbie and pried their prehensile lips apart and stuck his fingers in their mouths, daring them to bite him.

Well, so much for female sexuality. All in all, it expressed itself in rather whimsical ways. Not so with male sexuality. Especially Apollo Bob, whose name was thought up by Pak Bohap, The Professor's Dayak husband, who had originally intended to name one of their children that, so that The Professor was immensely relieved when he decided to name an orangutan that instead. Our first introduction to him came the second morning when we sitting around before breakfast in the dorm and we heard something outside and Mrs. "Anne"—

Now Mrs. Anne was a real case. She met us at the airport in Borneo, coming on like Helga the Nazi She-Devil, a slim, attractive, auburn-haired woman in her early 40s with brightly painted toenails. She described herself as a FORMER zookeeper from Fresno, disillusioned with the way zoos treated animals like property (although when we asked her what she thought of zoos, she replied icily, "I'm not at liberty to say."). She had decided to come help The Professor for several months in a place she could feel good about animals living free and being returned to the wild. She was in charge of us, as she frequently let us know. Let me put it in her own words. After on the boat upriver I had suggested a bit too unmitigatedly that the two people on top of the boat where the best view of the jungle was—only two could be on top at once or the boat would capsize—should come down to give others a chance since they had been up there for half an hour, she replied, "I give the orders around here. Not you." I don't easily sit still for this sort of thing, so I said, "I've noticed." So she said, "Well, at least you could say 'please'." William and I had discussed her the night before, and he very astutely had said she acted like a camp counselor who was at great pains to distinguish herself from mere campers, so I replied, I don't know

how obscurely, “Yes, counselor.” I was of course immediately sorry that I had brought about a blow-up so soon with someone who thought she was my boss for the next two weeks. After she insisted that I be one of the next people on top and I went up with my camera (my poor \$1000 Minolta Maxxon camera) and a downpour began, I was too proud because of the incident to come down and I held my camera under a folded up but leaking tarp, pulling it out only occasionally to snap a picture of the jungle, and even changing my film under the tarp. When Mrs. Anne looked up to see how we were doing, I made a lame joke to repair things between us. I said, “This really is a *rain* forest.” Fortunately, she tried to repair things too. Later on, down below again, she pointed it out to me when some leaking water was coming dangerously close to my camera bag. We treated each other carefully after that. I wasn’t the only one who noticed her impericity. She had made a rule that we always, always lock the door to the dorm when we came in, so the orangutans wouldn’t come in and tear the place up. Well, one evening she came in and didn’t lock the door and we pointed it out to her and she replied unpleasantly, “I make the rules. I can break the rules.” and disappeared into her private room and we all mouthed expressions of astonishment at this personality of hers. Another time, in a very remarkable incident, she came out of her private room into the commons room of the dorm where Mr. Scott and I were sitting and one of us made some comment or other and she replied by launching forth into a long, semi-bantering tirade on the exquisitely painful tortures she would inflict on us if we crossed her. Mr. Scott and I looked at each other astounded, and after she left, Mr. Scott said, “It looks like we tapped into something.” It turned out, however, that we were wrong about her. We began to realize this when we saw the way she aided in an operation on a female orangutan with a vaginal infection full of maggots, and then the second week when she stayed up all night, catching only a few hours of sleep during the day, to nurse two sick, darling, fragile two-year-old ex-captive orangutans back to health. At the farewell banquet the last night, Mrs. Anne was described as “the woman who taught us that first impressions can be wrong.”

Anyway, we were sitting there, and Mrs. Anne leaped out of her chair and said, “That’s a rape cry!” and we all ran out onto the porch. There was Apollo Bob, the horny, nine-year-old subadult male, chasing a young female, Mellie, around the porch and over the railing, grabbing her, sniffing her genitals, and attempting to mount her. That left us with a moral dilemma. Were orangutans mere animals, and we should let nature take its course, or were they close cousins to human beings, so that we should intervene

to rescue Mellie. Unable to decide, we took photographs and debated, and then made attempts to pull Apollo Bob off, half-hearted but enough to let Mellie escape. I saw him a week later in the nursery raping a three-year-old female (named Anne, curiously enough, after Mrs. Anne) who could only lie there passively on her stomach, her legs at a 180° angle as orangutans can do. I'm not so moral as the rest. I just took pictures. Who knows what I would have done had it been people.

But the worst was— Well, as it happens, women when they are menstrating, eliminate the same hormones that orangutans do when they are in heat. Mrs. “Ann”—a different Mrs. Ann. This one has no *e* at the end of her name. She's an elementary teacher from Oregon—the information we were sent beforehand on all the team members gave her address as *Fox Lane, Troutdale, Oregon*, so I naturally assumed she was an ex-hippie whose husband was a marijuana farmer in the backwoods of Oregon. It turned out she *was* an ex-hippie, who had hitchhiked across America at 20, (I told her I had done the same and had spent nights in jails, and William, who was on the other side of me at the dinner table in a conversation the other direction, wheeled around and said, “What!” so I cut the story short.) but her husband was a lawyer, and Troutdale is a rather sedate suburb of Portland. The two facts about her, which struck me as rather clearly related, that emerged in our discussions with The Professor and in conversations at the dinner table, were that her mother said her husband hadn't touched her in the last ten years of marriage that preceded his leaving her when Mrs. (then Miss) Ann was eleven, and that she (Mrs. Ann) naturally preferred men as sex partners but could not imagine having a man as an actual *friend*.

Well, this Mrs. Ann was in the first day of her period on our second day in camp. The Professor led us single-file out into the deep jungle, insisting we be silent and only speak in whispers in the not quite cathedral-like forest, lecturing to us in a soft voice that didn't carry beyond the first three or four of the sixteen of us about the poor and shallow soil in the rain forest that consisted of new plants living entirely off of decaying old plants, so that when rain forest is cleared for agriculture, it supports crops for at most four or five years until it turns into forever useless clay. (Mr. Scott told about visiting Madagascar, which overpopulation and human exploitation had turned from a lush, jungle-covered island into a large red brick.) The Professor lectured about how all the trees needed the darkness of the forest floor at first as they grew, racing quickly and thinly to the high canopy to bask in the sunlight in their maturity; you could see it looking around—the forest at eye-level was all vertical lines of thin, straight trunks with no intermediate

foliage, while looking up was the dense, sun-flecked green you associate with jungle. She pointed out the largest of the trees, the dipterocarps, which had flying buttresses at the bases of their thick trunks to lend support to their hundred-foot heights that their shallow roots could not lend. She talked about how there was a natural process in which large dipterocarps died and fell, clearing a large patch about them in which opportunistic secondary trees could grow up in the sunlight for twenty or thirty years, thus creating the shade the primary trees needed to begin to grow again, so that the patch would recover after about seventy or a hundred years, a process that occurred also in the Dayak ladang, or slash and burn, agriculture. Flying over Borneo on our way there I could look out the window and see in the flat green terrain below numerous square patches in various shades of regrowth. But this process does not happen when lumber companies come in and clear large tracts of forest for Korean and Japanese disposable chopsticks because the sources of the necessary seeds were now too far away. She talked about how since anything can survive where there is no winter the species diversity in tropical rainforests is immense and each species thus specializes to very narrow microhabitats and spreads itself out thinly among all the other species to hide in space from its predators, and about how you hardly ever saw animals in the rain forest because except for the orangutans, most of the animals are nocturnal or crepuscular—a word I had heretofore heard only in poetry. The crepuscular part of the day was a wonder, by the way. On days we followed wild orangutans as they ate their way through the forest we would get up at 4:30 and walk and wade for an hour out into the forest and swamp to the place where the orangutan nested the night before and then string up our hammocks and lie from 5:30 to 6:30 when the orangutan began to rustle the leaves above, listening to the wondrous sounds of the forest, a chorus of gibbons hooting in the distance, the chirps and peeps and hoots and howls and unlexicalized sounds of numerous nearby and distant birds, the cicadas waxing as loud as buzz saws. As day dawned, all would grow quiet except for the occasional barks, loud as the barks of large dogs, of the barking deer, as small as small dogs. The diurnal animals hide well and avoid people, so that all you really see are the trenches rooted by wild boars, and if you're lucky a glimpse of a barking deer or two and maybe a gibbon looping through the high trees, and if you're unlucky a glimpse of the small but vicious honey bear before it attacks. Actually none has ever attacked an Earthwatcher, but that's one of the two things The Professor fears the most, along with falling branches, and branches thrown down by hostile orangutans, the thing that resulted in the only time The Professor

thought she was about to die in her seventeen years in Borneo. By contrast, the snakes, which everyone fears since there are snakes there that can kill you in seconds, you will never see since they are so well camouflaged, unless you walk around at night without a flashlight and step on one, as The Professor once did, and you will never get bitten by unless you go around reaching into dark holes. Once, however, lying in a hammock one afternoon in the swamp beneath a wild orangutan feeding on tiny flowers 80 feet up, after seeing no other animals all day, at about 3 in the afternoon, in a period of fifteen minutes, I saw three or four red monkeys travel in one direction in the high canopy, followed a bit later by a large squirrel, and then a gibbon swinging through the high branches in another direction.

So we walked through the forest on the grid of paths, one every half kilometer, at right angles east-west and north-south that The Professor's first husband, American Rod Brindamour, had cut through the jungle for their convenience in their joint studies, before he became too jealous of the baby orangutan The Professor was raising and having sleep between them and went back to America and got divorced, freeing The Professor to go native. The long line of sixteen Earthwatchers with The Professor in the lead and husband Pak Bohap bringing up the rear broke into three mutually nonvisible groups—the front four or five who turned a corner when The Professor did to follow her to her first campsite in the jungle, now just a lean-to and a garbage heap which she is leaving as is for archaeological reasons, the middle group consisting of Mr. Scott and Mrs. Ann who did not turn that corner but headed straight back toward camp on their own thinking they were following The Professor at a distance, and the back group who turned the corner with Pak Bohap when he hooted in the forest at the corner and heard The Professor hoot in reply. When Mr. Scott and Mrs. Ann neared the camp, they saw an orangutan—Apollo Bob—who seemed to want to play. He wrestled with Mrs. Ann a bit and she thought it was innocent fun, until he grabbed her by both ankles and jerked her to the ground and started to mount her. Mr. Scott tried to pull him off, but orangutans are real strong. He said later it made him understand how horrible it must be to witness your wife or girl friend being raped and be able to do nothing about it. The struggle moved across about thirty feet of the trail, with Mr. Scott being able to do nothing but grab the back of Apollo Bob's neck and push his head toward the ground so he couldn't proceed. About then, Mrs. Anne (with an *e* at the end of her name) heard the ruckus from camp and came running, and, knowledgeable primatologist that she is, exploited the fact that humans are tool-using animals and orangutans for

the most part are not, and grabbed a stick and chased Apollo Bob away.

As you might imagine, Mrs. Ann was quite shaken. Back at the dorm later that afternoon, our group reunited, the woman Earthwatchers gave her rape counseling. Toward evening some of us, including Mrs. Ann, were out at the end of the pier bathing, and Apollo Bob approached. Miss Cassie, a tennis player and administrator from Australia and a strong woman who carried herself with a matter-of-fact self-confidence in every situation, picked up a stick and chased Apollo Bob back, and Mrs. Ann followed her lead, taking an obvious pleasure in the fact that she was now able to dominate the situation. For the rest of our time there, whenever Apollo Bob approached, Mrs. Ann would adopt a very aggressive stance, and Apollo Bob would slink away. It was very nice to see her take control of events like that.

She wasn't the only one who was aggressive to Apollo Bob. One day the second week when I was part of a team that was measuring the ex-captive orangutans in camp—29 measurements from random joint to random joint, while trying to hold down a very strong animal in a state of terror-stricken panic—before I suffered my weekly (or weakly) reaction to my malaria pill and got dizzy and nauseous and perspired profusely and had to retire for the day to my bed, we went out behind the nursery to an area I had never been to before, called Gibbon Walk, a boardwalk constructed through deep swamp bordering the river, and saw Ralph, the large dominant male, king of all the territory far and near, and he began to descend from his place high in a tree toward the boardwalk where we all stood. The Indonesian park ranger knew it was because he was going to attack Apollo Bob who was following us and was unwelcome anywhere around Ralph or any of his females, so he turned around and chased Apollo Bob back to camp. But we thought he was turning around to run from Ralph, so we panicked and turned around and ran from Ralph too. Nothing happened, but we learned later it was the worst thing you could do. It spurs the big males on to attack, which he would have done if it had been us and not Apollo Bob he was interested in. What you should do in this circumstance is stand your ground and look tough, stare them down and don't back away. I couldn't have done it.

II.

Then there was the issue of sex among the people. Well, there was no hanky-panky involving the Earthwatch men (that I know of). There was a

very attractive, sultry-looking Dayak girl who was fourteen and unhappily married, that all the teenage boys drooled over; they called her Miss Intensity. But it would have been a very serious faux pas to approach her. A story to illustrate this: There were visitors in camp when we arrived, a Mr. Sam, an Australian sea captain who likes to spend his life buying native sailing ships in Indonesia and sailing them back to Australia and who had often visited the camp before, and his wife, also a sea captain. There was a farewell party for them the day they left, in which speeches were made and gifts were given. Mr. Sam's wife thanked The Professor for her hospitality and they exchanged gifts and then they kissed each other on the cheek. Then Mr. Sam gave a speech thanking The Professor for her hospitality and they exchanged gifts, and then Mr. Sam leaned forward to also kiss The Professor on the cheek. She withdrew in what she tried to make look like mock rather than real horror, and said, as a joke, "Oh no, Mr. Sam! This is Indonesia! You can't do that!" Mr. Sam then laughed in an embarrassed manner at the joke, and the incident was over. But The Professor told us later that he had committed a terrible blunder, one he should have known to avoid since he knew Indonesia so well, that her husband Pak Bohap was furious during this incident and for the rest of the day, and that if Mr. Sam had succeeded in kissing her, or even touching her, Pak Bohap would have had to respond with physical violence.

The Dayak men, on the other hand, could mingle freely with the Earthwatch women. The Professor gave us a lecture on this the first day in Pangkalan Buun, before we went upriver to camp. She noted, as was apparently the case, that they were very attractive—after all, she had married one. They are short, but they are sensitive and very strong and don't have an ounce of subcutaneous fat on their bodies (with no winter, it's not needed). You're out there in the swamp with them all day, where you depend on them completely and they exhibit a competence that is beyond your comprehension, and you're in their complete care. They actually were a remarkable group. It is to be expected that they could spot things in the forest a hundred metres before you could see them and then only if they pointed them out to you, and perhaps that they could run through the branches of trees and along vines from tree to tree like I might run around a track, but it was a bit less expected that they could beat us, who were all a head and sometimes two heads taller than they, in volleyball, and could beat the strongest weightlifters among us in arm wrestling, and it was positively deflating when they beat us all in chess. But The Professor told the Earthwatch women to watch out for the Dayak men. One of them, for example, (I think it was

Hijat) kept a scrapbook with pictures of all the former Earthwatch women he had slept with, that he would show around to anyone who asked. One former Earthwatch woman had agonized over the decision but finally decided that she really loved one of the Dayak men and would go to bed with him and someday marry him, and when it was all over he asked her for \$200.

Mr. Scott arrived in Pangkalan Buun a day late and after this lecture. Just after the lecture in fact. He appeared at The Professor's house in town as we were all sitting around her living room listening to her. We poured out of the house to greet him. He was unexpected, had signed up at the last minute, since that was the only way The Professor would allow him to visit the camp. In general, she was against journalists, believing them to have no interest in accuracy, especially men journalists. Mr. Scott was a highly travelled free-lance writer from New York City on assignment for the London Times, dressed to fit the part, six foot three, handsome and tanned, Princeton-educated, blond and arrogant, although he turned out to be a teenager at heart and in mind, and spent all his time with the other teenagers. So he wasn't aware of the issues involved between Earthwatch women and Dayak men. The first day in camp after dinner we all stood up and introduced ourselves. I did so entirely in Indonesian which I had learned on the plane from San Francisco to Singapore, and the Dayaks clapped. They even laughed at my one joke. We were supposed to tell about things that they cared about, like our family, or, if we had none, about our pets or hobbies. When Mr. Scott's turn came he said he had a truck. Pak Bohap, through The Professor's translation, asked him if he used it for logging—a nice example of seeing the world through one's own perspective. He replied that no, he used it to take girls to the beach. The Professor wouldn't translate that for him. Then Mr. Scott did something that struck me as inexplicable. After introducing himself, he said to the entire assembly that he had a message for Hijat from Miss "Lisa", a woman on the previous Earthwatch team who had gone to the trouble of contacting him, and it was that she said hello, and that she was coming back for him. The Professor only translated the hello part of the message, but even that caused an outburst of lewd laughter among the Dayak men.

So far as I know none of the women on our Earthwatch team had an affair with any of the Dayak men. The closest to that was Mrs. "Betty", an attractive biology teacher in her mid 30s from suburban Ohio, who taught at an expensive private school and took her biology students on two-week field trips scuba-diving in the Florida keys, and who spent most of the time hanging around with the teenage boys. (In fact, she developed a quite close,

mother-type relationship with William, listening avidly as he talked about his rock group and his philosophy of life (Everything is a rationalization and boys need sex.), and advising him on how to keep his voice down after The Professor started badgering him about how loud it was.) Toward the end of the second week, she went out following Pete, the pregnant and almost due female orangutan that The Professor was particularly anxious to have followed until she gave birth, with Hijat and Rana and Mrs. Sy, the other writer on our team, but this one a hippie-type who wrote for small ecology mags on recycled paper, and had a contract to write a book on all three of the trimates—The Professor, Dian Fossey, and Jane Goodall. Mrs. Sy was a rather dour-looking person with a crooked mouth but, as it turned out when I had my accident (see below), a very nice, caring person, but a very bad walker through the swamps. Apparently because of this, Hijat and Rana insisted that they all start out at 3:30 in the morning instead of 4:30. It turned out that was because they wanted to take the very long way around to avoid having to help Mrs. Sy walk through the swamp very much. Moreover, Rana stayed back to help Mrs. Sy along, while Hijat raced ahead with Mrs. Betty. On the way Mrs. Betty asked him to cut a walking stick for her with his machete, a standard request for us to make, but he refused, saying instead that he would hold her hand. He wouldn't give in so she did. They raced ahead so much that they got to where the orangutan was nesting an hour before Rana and Mrs. Sy did, and he hung up her hammock and then hung up his own almost directly beneath it and just to the side, so that he could lie in his hammock and put his arm around her. You have to remember this is deep in the swamp and she couldn't necessarily find her way back. When Rana and Mrs. Sy finally arrived, Rana hung their hammocks a hundred feet away, to give Hijat room for his efforts. So he spent the morning trying to put the make on Mrs. Betty, while she spent the morning, accommodative female that she is, trying to be nice to him while telling him about her very big, six foot five inch husband. Well, it turned out by midday that what Hijat was really interested in was Mrs. Betty's pair of shoes which he wanted her to give to him before she left. In the past, he had managed to get several watches as gifts from Earthwatch women and even from The Professor herself, and he would always sell them in town at the first possible opportunity. When it was clear to Hijat that he wasn't getting anywhere with Mrs. Betty, he lost interest in following the orangutan, especially since it was moving toward the very deep swamp near the river, so he told the women that it had crossed the boundary of the study area (not true—it was half a kilometer from the boundary) and that they

weren't allowed to go out of the study area (not true—they were supposed to follow the orangutan wherever unless it would make it difficult to get back at night), and that therefore they all had to go back. Mrs. Betty and Mrs. Sy argued with him for an hour, while Rana stood quietly on the sidelines, and then they finally gave in. On the way back to camp, a thorn hit her in the eye, and Dr. Judy (on whom more below) had to take care of it when they arrived. Hijat and Rana reported to The Professor and she was furious that they had lost the pregnant orangutan. The same thing had happened just before we arrived and as a result we had all been sent out specifically to find *her* the first few days. She insisted the four of them go back out into the swamp and look for her, and Mrs. Betty broke into tears, but went anyway. Normally people following return sometime between 6:30 and 7:30 in the evening, in time for dinner at 8. Dinner was never served before everyone got back to camp. By 8:30 they had not returned, and The Professor came over to the dorm to tell us her theory. Hijat was from the interior, and people from the interior had strange ways of thinking. For example, she had once taken an Earthwatch team into the interior, and they had all returned sick. She suspects the Dayak people there had put nicotine in their tea. They typically test people to see how they react to pain and hardship. One time several months before, just before sunset Hijat and another Dayak assistant were taking two orangutans out into the forest. Suddenly Hijat disappeared. The other went back to report it. The Professor was afraid he had been eaten by a python. She sent out all the assistants to search for him, one every ten metres, covering the entire area all night, beating drums. He wasn't found. The next morning he came into camp. His story was that a "force" had pulled him down and held him down all night in a hole quite near the camp. The Professor said he must have hidden himself very well. Her theory now was that Hijat had told the women that it was too late to come back in, that they had lost the way (an impossibility) and would have to spend the night out there. She said that if he had done that with people as high-status as Earthwatch team members, that would put him "beyond the pale", a favorite expression of hers that may or may not have had something to do with the possibility of his being fired. She said we should all go eat immediately and then organize a search party that would spend the night out there in the swamp looking for them. Around 9:00, in the middle of dinner, the four of them showed up. It turned out that Mrs. Betty was so upset at losing Pete, that she wanted to stay out all night looking for her. The Dayaks had finally convinced her to come back to camp. Mrs. Betty was strangely obsessive in other ways. Apparently she once bet Mr. Scott

\$500 that scientists had cloned sheep. A few weeks ago, we received a form letter, from her with the relevant scientific articles enclosed and quoting molecular biologists she had called, saying that what she had said was not strictly true, although close, and hence she was publicly apologizing to him for disagreeing with him and would send him \$500 in monthly installments of \$100.

So much for the sexual life of orangutans, Dayaks, and Earthwatchers. Perhaps I could write this all up in a story, call it “Sex and Violence Deep in the Borneo Jungle”, and send it to *Playboy*.

III.

The second reason I can't really write about the experience (remember back there at the beginning I said there were two reasons) is that one wouldn't want to say anything unfavorable about The Professor, or it may make it more difficult for her to get funding for her very important work. But there was a nagging, central question about the whole experience—why were we there? It wasn't obvious that we were doing anything useful for her.

We took what notes we could as we walked around the jungle and followed the orangutans, but the Dayak assistants were taking notes as well and they knew where they were and what kinds of trees the orangutans were in, and they could estimate heights and distances. In the end, The Professor didn't even ask for the notes that we took. One exception to this was William. He did a mother-infant study one day, where you follow the orangutan around from 8 to 4, and from 8 to 10 you record minute by minute the behavior of the mother, the infant, and the juvenile that is hanging around, and then you make general observations from 10 to 2, and then you record minute by minute again from 2 to 4. This was for one of the ex-captive mothers that hung around the pier for the morning and evening feedings. You do it with one other Earthwatcher, one of you observing and calling out the behavior and the other recording it on a chart. So William with Mr. “Todd”, a teenage boy from Massachusetts, went out to the pier at 8 and sat there with other Earthwatchers, watching the orangutans eat and in particular William watched Tutut and called out things like, “8:22. Infant clinging to fur. Tutut sucking her own nipple,” and then leaping over to the other side of the pier and peering under it, “Juvenile under pier chewing on sugar cane.” It all looked quite pleasant until 8:30 when Tutut

decided to take her brood off into the swamp. She waded in. William and Mr. Todd waded in after, up to their thighs in water and to their chests in swamp grass. Then she crossed the river at a shallow part of it, and the boys waded across it. Then they spent the rest of the day standing in water up to their knees or thighs, looking up at the tree into which Tutut had climbed. William did observe one remarkable event. Tutut wanted to get across a deep creek. There were two live trees on the other side forming a fork. There was a dead tree on this side. She could push it over, and if she aimed it just right, it would fall between the two live trees, which would brace it on that side. But there would be nothing to brace it on this side. So first she pushed a smaller branch down parallel to the creek and then pushed down the dead tree, in such a way that the smaller branch braced it. That is, she was using a tool to build a bridge. Tool use is, The Professor reports in one of the half dozen papers I read before going there, quite common among some of the ex-captives—in fact, the Dayaks have to sink their dugout canoe in the river at night, or the orangutans will ride off in it. It is interesting which ex-captives use tools. Those who have been raised by people as if they were babies for their first two years use tools but have trouble learning to make a nest in the wild. Orangutans make nests by climbing to the top of a small tree and bending a circle of branches inward and weaving them together. By contrast, ex-captives who were not raised by people as babies, even if they were in a cage near people, never used tools and had no trouble building nests. Tool use has been observed in wild orangutans only once: an adult male broke off a twig and used it to scratch his rectum. Anyway, the rest of the day William and Mr. Todd ran into a bit of trouble. Around 1:00, Mr. Todd got bitten on his thumb by a millipede. About a minute later, he said, “Oh, my thumb is getting numb.” In another minute he said, “My whole hand is numb.” In another minute he said, “My arm is numb all the way up to my elbow. Maybe I’d better go back to camp.” He did, where he got some medicine that took care of it, but William was out there by himself the rest of the afternoon. That meant from 2 to 4 he both observed and took notes minute by minute. In the midst of this another ex-captive orangutan Unyuk came up behind him and put her hands on his pockets and began shaking him. He tried to brush her off in between jotting down notes, but she kept shaking him. Finally, he had to run through the swamp a bit to get away from her. Then about 3:30 something very itchy began at his ankles, deep in the mud, and spread quickly all over his body. He could hardly control himself, but macho teenage boy that he is, he refused for a while to give in to scratching himself

anywhere and just kept on writing. But soon he could no longer refrain, so he moved close to a tree, and as he was writing, he rubbed as much of his body as he could against the trunk and branches. He was able to continue with increasing desperation all the way up to 4 o'clock, or rather 3:59:30, when he had noted the behavior for the last minute. Then he tossed his notebook into his backpack, ran to the bank of the river, waved someone to come over in a canoe and pick him up, ran to the dorm, tore all his clothes off, covered himself with Calumine lotion, and crawled under his sheet and didn't move. When I came in an hour later, what I saw was Calumine lotion spilled all over his suitcase and all the clothes he owned. Anyway, William spent our last full day there writing up the notes he took for The Professor, including about building the bridge, and surely they will be of use to her, although I don't know for sure that she will look at them.

There was a certain amount of exploitation of the Earthwatchers. Dr. Judy was the most notable example, but one that in the end turned out for the best. She was a doctor who had just finished her residency in Philadelphia, and had signed up for the Earthwatch team to get away from everything and do something completely different for a while. As soon as she arrived in camp, The Professor said, "Oh, Dr. Judy! We've been waiting for you for so long." The first day Dr. Judy had to perform an operation on a recent mother orangutan that had an infection in her vagina. The orangutan was knocked out, I believe not with a drug that killed pain but just with one that paralyzed movement. She was laid in the dirt, propped on a folded up tarp. Dr. Judy squatted in the dirt, that, after she had douched the orangutan with a makeshift plastic water bottle that a plastic straw had been attached to, had turned into a mud puddle, and cut away the infected flesh. Mrs. Anne picked out over 30 maggots, dropping them on the ground. Before the operation was over, the ants had carried away all the maggots. The one thing Dr. Judy refused to do was deal with the maggots. She said she had made it through her medical career so far without doing anything involving parasites, and she hoped she would make it the rest of the way through. She was the person who was the most squeamish about the leeches that attached themselves to our shoes and socks when we walked in the moister parts of the forest, even though I pointed out to her that they took less blood than the average blood sample. Leeches are remarkable little creatures: They are heat-seeking. They move like inchworms, scrunching up to a point and then stretching out to twice their normal body length, as they move with incredible rapidity toward something warm, like your leg. They attach themselves, and if they get to bare skin, they bite, inject an

anticoagulant, and drink until they are red and bloated to five times their normal size. Because of the anticoagulant, you don't stop bleeding, though not profusely, for several hours. (The worst case we saw was the Dayak guide Ma'un who had a leech attach itself to him when he was taking a piss in the forest and leave a small, bleeding wound on the head of his penis.) But it turns out if you wear men's long nylon socks and tuck your pants inside them, the leeches can't get you. The mesh is too fine for them to reach through and being strictly heat-seekers and already in a warm spot, they don't have any reason to move up your leg. So I just ignored them, and when I got back to camp and was washing up in the river—That was my first stop after getting in from the jungle. I would jump in the water with all my clothes on, shoes included, and then take them off one by one, washing the mud out as I went, and then in underpants or swim suit, would jump in and wash myself. Meanwhile, the orangutans would come out to the end of the pier and try to steal our soap or shampoo, which they would rub into a lather on the hair of their arms and then lick off. The alternative was to bathe in a stinky bathhouse next to the dorm, which I never did. Anyway, I would start off my bathing by picking sometimes two dozen leeches off my shoes and socks. Sometimes as you picked, they would attach themselves to your fingertips before you could give them a toss. Anyway, back to the operation. The operation lasted 45 minutes, cutting, picking, cleaning, stopping bleeding, sewing, and since a dose of the anesthesia only lasted 20 minutes, the orangutan was given a second shot, but then since The Professor didn't like using it on the orangutans anyway, she just cradled the orangutan's head in her arms for the last 5 minutes, keeping her calm, possible only because she was dopey.

After that day, Dr. Judy was kept doing medical work. The Professor was engaged in a mitochondrial study to determine how closely related orangutans in various parts of Borneo and Sumatra are to each other. It has recently become fashionable for zoo keepers in America to consider Sumatran and Bornean orangutans different subspecies, since earlier mitochondrial studies showed the lines diverged 2 million years ago, and that meant they had to label their cages not just "orangutan" but "*Borneo* orangutan" or "*Sumatra* orangutan", so that meant firstly that the 100 or so hybrid orangutans in zoos were no longer in fashion, so they were all sent off to second class or third world zoos, thrown away in essence, and secondly that a male and female orangutan that had been living together in the San Francisco zoo for twenty years had to be separated, an emotional issue in San Francisco and an even more emotional issue with The Professor. Her view

was that they have feelings and should be treated with consideration, that if they can interbreed then they are of the same species, and that genetic diversity is essential for the survival of the endangered species in any case. The zookeepers are applying fascist doctrines of racial purity to orangutans. So the purpose of The Professor's mitochondrial study was to cast doubt on the earlier study in some way. But that meant for the next five or six days, while the rest of us went out into the jungle, Dr. Judy had to stay in camp, taking blood samples, something she could have been doing at her hospital in Philadelphia. In addition, she was appalled at the conditions she had to work in and the pitiful supply of medicines and equipment, and displeased with The Professor that she hadn't warned her in advance, so she could have herself brought the necessary equipment. She also had to measure some of the young orangutans in the nursery. This was traumatic not only for the orangutans but also for the Earthwatchers. Mark was a particularly cuddly 3 or 4 year old orangutan that everybody loved. He freaked out completely when six people tried to hold him down on a table (even young, they are strong) and take various measures, and screamed pitifully and heart-wrenchingly, and when released, ran around the table and bit each of the people holding him down and then crouched under a building the rest of the day. The Earthwatchers revolted after that. So after about a week, Dr. Judy told me that if she had known all that she was going to have to do, she wouldn't have signed up. But by the end of our stay, she had changed her mind. The Professor talked to her and explained about jungle medicine and jungle everything else, that one of the marvels of the Dayaks was that having almost nothing, they could do almost anything with it. You were forced into a resourcefulness that you can never imagine in America. So Dr. Judy left figuring she had had experiences that she would never have again. I talked to her over the phone about two months later, when she was back in Philadelphia working at a small clinic, and she complained about the inferior facilities, and I said, "How can you say that after Borneo?" and she said, "The orangutans don't sue for malpractice."

But there was one case of exploitation that was even worse, to my mind, since it had no redeeming educational value. Mrs. "Judy"—another Judy—was an elementary school teacher from southern California, and someone about whom the most interesting things I know I learned by report from others, not directly from her. She was a quiet, plain, middle-aged woman, an elementary school teacher, who blossomed only among other women, and then generally with detailed psychoanalyses of the various Earthwatchers, mostly hostile psychopoliticoanalyses of some of the men. Well, she made

the mistake of admitting she could type 70 words a minute, and for the next four days The Professor wouldn't let her go out into the jungle, but made her stay in camp and type letters for her. Being a mild-mannered, accomodating woman, she didn't object (and for all I know, was happy to have an excuse to stay out of the swamp). Mr. Scott, the writer from New York, also was a very fast typist, and that led to his spending the last two days typing for her, but he said it was very useful to him. He got an intimate look at her business that he wouldn't have gotten otherwise.

I was very leery beforehand that with my computer background she would try to exploit me. I had not come to Borneo to program. I had decided I was willing to work at the level of algorithms, but I would not dirty my hands with the grubby details of some particular machine. Sure enough, she asked for my help in setting up her new computer. Fortunately, it turned out that what she had in mind was the Borneo equivalent to plugging it in, i.e., hooking it up with a battery and a solar cell, just the sort of task I am incapable of doing. So I was able to suggest that Mr. "Richard", a 44-year-old mechanic from Ontario, might be able to do a better job, and he was.

So back to the question—why were we there? Finally, as we were sitting around drinking beer at the Blue Kechabung Hotel in Pangkalan Buun at 2 in the morning at the end of our stay, after it was all over, discussing the meaning of it all, I hit upon it. "She's Kurtz," I said, and Mr. Jason and Mr. Scott agreed with me immediately. We travel up the jungle river, just as in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and there she is deep in the jungle, not evil as Kurtz is, but presiding over just as much of an empire. She lived there, always in charge of the camp and its 20 or so Dayak assistants, easily dominating her Dayak husband, queen of the jungle for 20 miles around. Eight times a year for two weeks at a time, 12 or 15 prosperous, highly educated Americans (or people from "America and thereabouts" as it was called to cover Australia and Europe as well) would come there for her to be in charge of for a while. She was the only one who spoke both English and Indonesian fluently, so all essential communication between the two groups had to pass through her. She devoted far more time to us than was justified by the work we did for her; for example, it would have been more efficient for her not to spend all those hours lecturing to us but rather to do herself the few useful things Earthwatchers did for her. If it was company she wanted, it was a very special sort of company, for she always talked, never listened. So the only possible conclusion: What were we there for? To be witnesses to her empire.

But that's not a story I'd care to tell publicly.

IV.

Nevertheless it was all a wonderful and unique experience for me. This in spite of a number of events that at every moment threatened to plunge me into a bad mood. The first problem was the camera. Borneo was the centerpiece of a photographic disaster during the Indonesia trip. The first problem came two weeks before, our first day really touring in Indonesia, in the interior of Sulawesi (formerly Celebes) in the Toraja country. It was after a day, that we later said was the best day outside of Borneo on the whole trip, spent at an incredible funeral festival with a thousand people in ceremonial costumes, water buffalo fights in the middle of rice paddies surrounded by children who turned to scatter (as I did, in panic) as the losing water buffalo turned to flee the winner across the fields, an invitation to visit a family's house, and numbers of pigs and water buffalo being slaughtered. William and I stayed late talking to some cute teenage girls about the Beatles, and Dallas and Dynasty and Brooke Shields, and Mike Tyson, who just that day had knocked out Michael Spinks in a bout we had watched from the only chairs in the only house with television in a farming village several miles off the main road, surrounded by fifty villagers more interested in us than in the fight. It was after dark when we left the festival to walk the two miles back to our hotel in town. I jammed the flash attachment to my camera into my daypack. When we reached the edge of town we hailed a pedicab and both squeezed in and he pedalled us the last three blocks. When I got out and opened my daypack I realized that the plastic water bottle I had in there had split and spilt all over the flash attachment. That evening it went off randomly by itself even after I took the batteries out, and it worked for the rest of the trip only occasionally.

Then there was the incident on the boat going upriver, with Mrs. Anne and the rain on top of the boat. When I got to camp, I got one good roll of pictures at the morning feeding on the pier the first day, but after that the humidity hit my camera, and I was able to get shots only at random moments the rest of the stay. It worked for the operation, so that was my other good roll, but I was never able to get pictures of the jungle, or pictures of me and William and the orangutans, or pictures of the other Earthwatchers and the Dayaks. I finally borrowed Mr. Richard's camera the last day as he was between rolls, and I ran out into the swamp alone to

snap typical pictures, but I got the settings all wrong on his camera, and they are all too light. So that was something that was weighing down on me the whole time. (Meanwhile, Laurey was in Bali with our old camera, taking marvelous pictures of exotic dances and trances, not knowing until we returned to California that every picture she took with a flash was, for some mysterious reason, half black. That ruined our family portrait at six in the morning at the Equator in Sumatra too. After Borneo, in Sumatra, my new Minolta Maxxon stopped working completely and we could only use the old camera. In Malaysia, the old camera's light meter stopped working.)

Then there was a bit of disappointment over what we were doing in the jungle. I had heard from two people on previous teams that the first day in the jungle was spent searching for orangutans, and that generally five or so were found. The rest of the time, people would spend their days following these five orangutans. Following was much more interesting than searching. Well, just before we had arrived, a new nondominant male Milo had been spotted, and one team a day was always following him. Then the pregnant female Pete was being followed everyday before we arrived, but the day before Hijat had been following and lost her. The Professor was quite anxious to find her before she gave birth, so she sent all the groups out into the area where she had last been seen. The most orangutans our whole team could hope to find under these circumstances was this one, and the first day we didn't even find *her*. So the second day, we went out looking in the same area with almost as little success. Well, given our Dayak guide, Kuncang, the second day, I couldn't be surprised. He had no interest at all in finding an orangutan. They are supposed to walk along the trail stopping every 100 meters to listen carefully for rustles and search the treetops for dark unexplained spots or nonbreeze motions of branches. Kuncang, however, raced along the trails until he got to its farthest point, never pausing, and then strung up his hammock and slept for three hours, leaving us nothing to do but the same. During this time, another group walked past us, and later when we finally moved on, we soon came upon them off the trail a bit in their hammocks looking up. They had found Pete. Against Kuncang's wishes, Mr. Jason (my partner that day) and I stayed there for half an hour or so, peering up into the branches at that patch of orange fur, occasionally seeing or imagining the pregnant bulge of her tummy among the leaves and branches, and rivetted with excitement. But when she moved along into another area of the swamp, the Dayak who had found her objected to our following too so we went our own way. Our own way turned out to be, at Mr. Jason's insistence, straight through some of the worst part of the

swamp as fast as he could move. I, like Mr. Jason, had always wanted to race through the swamp, although I wasn't nearly as fast as he was. I had also always wanted to smoke one of the clove cigarettes that the Indonesians are always smoking, so when Kuncang offered me one, I accepted and lit up. Then Mr. Jason raced off, and I had to follow, trying to balance on rotting tree roots and at the same time trying to balance in my hand the first cigarette I had smoked in 20 years. I had wanted to try running through the jungle and I had wanted to try a clove cigarette, but I hadn't wanted to try both of these things at once. Anyway, three other days we went out searching, but no one found anything. The reason, I think, is that it was the season when a particularly delectable-to-orangutans flower was in bloom in the deep swamp so that's where they all were, and the Dayaks had no interest in going in there to look for them. If they were to find one, it would only mean that they would have to go in there the next day and spend 15 hours following it through the swamp, rather than spending 6 hours walking on trails searching. So they stuck to the trails and didn't look too hard at all. So no other orangutans besides these two were found.

Then there was my fall. My first day following. We had been following Milo since 4:30 that morning, as he moved majestically and leisurely through the trees. (One irrelevant incident: The day before the Dayak guide Ma'un had been following with William and Mr. Richard, and at one point he asked them what the appropriate response in English was to "How are you?" William said, "Fine." Mr. Richard said, "Or you could say, 'Shitty would be bragging.'" They spent the rest of the day drilling him in this response. The next morning, Ma'un said to me, "When someone asks you 'How are you?' you should say 'Shitty would be bragging.'" After laughing a while, I pulled out my Indonesian pocket dictionary. The closest translation I could manage was "If I say I am like feces, I would be boasting." He thought about that a moment, and then said, "Oh! That's bad!") Around noon Milo stopped in one tree, and we tied our hammocks somewhere below him, and I lay lazily back thinking profound thoughts about orangutan cognition and devising design specs for an arboreal robot. A hierarchical model is appropriate. At a coarse grain, the problem is to get from one food tree to the next. For us down in the swamp the forest was a very closed-in affair, but for him in the high canopy, at the top of one tall tree, looking over to the next tall tree must have been like looking from one island to the next in an empty sea. At a bit finer grain, he must choose his path from tree to tree. This cannot be very problematic, since the rich branch structure of the forest provides so many options. At a still finer grain, there is the

dynamics of moving from tree to tree. They essentially pole vault from one to the other, positioning themselves on the side of one tree, bending it back, riding it forward while moving around to the other side, and at its farthest swing, grabbing for a branch of the next tree. Down below, when you saw a tree bouncing back and forth, that didn't mean the orangutan was in it; it meant he was well beyond it, a bit like the sound of a supersonic plane. At an even finer grain, there is the problem of which branches to grasp and where and with which of four available limbs. He has to be able to judge which limbs are dead, since surely there are as many dead branches up there as there are dead and decayed tree roots for us down below, so that when we step on them they crumble like crumbs and plummet us into the water. Actually, the orangutans sometimes do fall, and most of them have broken bones at some time or other. So I was thinking these thoughts in the warm, peaceful forest, and very nearly dozing off, when suddenly the rope that tied the foot end of my hammock to a tree came undone and sent me thudding to the ground. I landed with the right side of my lower back right on top of a large hard tree root, and I cried out. (Ma'un thought I had been bitten by a snake when he heard me.) Mrs. Sy, who was my partner that day, came over to help me. I tried sitting down but it was too painful, so I tried standing up, and I held onto a small tree with one hand and reached for Mrs. Sy's shoulder with the other when everything slowly went black. A moment later when the world resolved itself into large clumps of black and yellow and then into trees and leaves, I was on the ground and Mrs. Sy and Ma'un and the other Dayak guide Sehat were crouched around me. I stayed out there in the forest for another 45 minutes, just to see if the pain would go away and I could complete the day with the orangutan, but it wasn't going away, so Sehat cut me a walking stick and led me through the swamp and along the swampy trail an hour back to camp. I got so for the most part I could avoid those moves that sent stabs of pain up and down my body.

Back at camp I washed up at the end of the pier, where William and his friend Mr. Mark were swimming after spending the morning measuring orangutans in the nursery. I was touched by the concern William showed when I told him what had happened. I slid into the river to clean off, but then discovered that there was no way I could pull myself out again. William pulled me out with his strong grip and arm. Back at the dorm, Dr. Judy saw me, said I should be on the lookout for pink urine, which may or may not indicate kidney damage, and especially for a pain in the abdomen. If it was kidney damage, she said, it would be a surgical emergency. We both knew what that meant. It was 3 hours downriver by speed boat to

the town of Pangkalan Buun where they had the nearest medical facilities. But it is not facilities you would want to trust. Small towns in Indonesia are doctored by inexperienced people just out of medical school since the government requires doctors to spend their first two years in the boonies before going back to Jakarta, and sometimes these doctors know how to do an appendectomy, but rarely anything else. In any case, The Professor had described for us the operating room in the Pangkalan Buun clinic. There was blood splattered all over the walls. It could be a day's wait before there was a flight to Jakarta, and even there I don't think I would want to be in a hospital. Another day could take you to Singapore, and that was the closest reliable adequate medical facilities. Singapore is first world now, by the way, the world's most recent entry, a beautiful, spotless, and dazzlingly modern city, ruled by a benevolent dictator who shoots drug smugglers and fines people who spit \$250, a real shock to all visiting Indonesians.

Anyway, no pink urine and no abdominal pains, and I gradually learned those moves I could not make—steps that were too long, the jarring of running, standing straight up and tilting my head back to look up, any sudden twist. Occasionally, I would make one of those moves, for example, once as someone pushed past me at the door of the dining hall, and I would feel a stab of pain and break out into a sweat and feel faint and have to sit down for a few minutes until I regained my composure. By the next day, when The Professor asked me how I was, I was able to say, “95% okay, by volume.” That day was a day off from the jungle for everyone, so all I had to cope with was an uncomfortable chair as we sat all day listening to The Professor lecture. I was determined not to miss out on any of the experience because of my accident, so the next day I volunteered to search, which I did with Rana and Mr. Richard. It wasn't too bad, since we always stayed on trails and I could for the most part choose my moves carefully. The day after that was the day I went out following with William (see below), and once I no longer had to race to keep up with William along the slippery logs and breakable branches on the swamp trail with a dimming flashlight in the early morning dark, I could again for the most part choose my moves carefully and do rather well, although I would fall behind sometimes as we all chased through the swamp trying to keep up with Milo. The next day was the day I spent in camp, supposed to measure. My job was to hold the orangutans down, but I'm afraid I wasn't quite up to wrestling yet, so I wasn't of much use, even before dehydration and a reaction to my malaria pill hit and I had to spend the rest of the day throwing up, sweating profusely, and suffering from spells of dizziness. So the days were for the

most part quite manageable. The nights were another story. I could lie on my back, and I could turn to the left, but I couldn't turn to the right, and I couldn't lift myself up. So I would spend most of the night lying on my back. The result was a rash, possibly a heat rash, that covered my back from neck to foot with little itching bumps. Or maybe they were flea bites from fleas one of the cats had brought in. More than once I saw him sleeping in my bed, and I was in a bad enough mood toward the end that I would generally fling him out. Then around five o'clock in the morning I would turn to lie on my left side. It was a break for my back, but not especially comfortable in itself. The mattress didn't have much stuffing left and what there was was all around the edges, so in the middle I could feel the piece of plywood beneath. Then when seven o'clock approached, I would very gingerly try to roll back over to the right and make numerous attempts to raise myself without too much pain. This usually took half an hour or more. I tried not to let my cries of pain waken the others. My back is fine now, but after the third morning of sleeping like this, the left shoulder I lay on for two hours each morning ached so much I couldn't lift it. It still aches, this very moment, the one lasting injury of the Borneo adventure. My doctor tells me it's bursitis. He won't take it seriously. He says I'm 46, of course I have bursitis.

Then there was the problem with the laundry. We had been told that the Dayak women in camp would do the laundry, and they did. But they could only hang it out in the sun to dry. Even in the "dry" season, which it was, it rains sometimes every day or two, often a real downpour. So that meant when you turned in your laundry, you might get it back the next day, if the sun had been shining, or not until four days later. I had only two pairs of jungle pants. That meant that I couldn't turn in one pair for laundry until I got the other back. Rather I would have to wash it off in the river and then hang it up to dry a bit, and the next morning put it on wet. Well, it wasn't pleasant pulling it on wet, but it would be wet in an hour or two anyway so it didn't matter much. The real problem was hanging it up to dry. You couldn't hang it up outside, or the orangutans would take it. (One took my drying shoe from the porch once, but fortunately I found a banana inside and effected a trade.) That left only the dorm. But the men's area of the dorm was very small, maybe 15 feet by 25 feet, and into this area were crammed eight bunk beds. My feet dangled off the end of my bed and brushed William's feet as they dangled off the end of his. Between each of the beds there was about two feet of space and this was all filled up with disemboweled suitcases. Over the beds was a framework of wooden poles

where the first night we had tacked our mosquito nets to let them drape over our beds. (By the way, I discovered with the rash on my back that mosquito netting is the most delicious thing in the world to scratch yourself with.) Well, if you wanted to hang up your wet clothes, it had to be from these poles. That left me with a choice that I solved as follows: The wettest clothes I would hang so they would drip over my suitcase. The not quite as wet clothes I would hang so they would drip over my bed, making my sleeping sheet decidedly damp by morning. However I hung it all, my bed was always surrounded by curtains of wet pants, shirts, underwear, socks, and bathing suit, that I had to brush through everytime I got in or got out. Worn down as I was by all the other disasters, I think this is finally the thing that got to me the most.

V.

I, of course, originally wanted to do all of this as an adventure to share with William, a kind of a bonding experience. When we got the list of people on the team in May, however, I knew it would not be like that. There were three other teenage boys and a teenage girl. As it finally turned out, another teenage boy and a man (Mr. Scott) who was emotionally a teenage boy joined the team at the last moment. It was clear that they would all band together and leave me out. The first night in Pangkalan Buun that had not yet happened. The other team members were green, and William and I were experienced travellers and we went off shopping together in town for mosquito netting and hammocks, pitting ourselves against the Third World as one does whenever one goes out, and that evening William and I in the hotel room we shared psychoanalyzed all the other team members on the slim basis of the information we had taken in so far. The next day, on the boat ride upriver, William spent the whole time up top in the rain with Mrs. Betty, the biology teacher from Ohio and another emotional teenager, so that was not something we did together. By the first day in camp, he had already begun to attach himself to Mr. Mark, the very good-looking and quite smart high school student from Virginia, and when I mentioned something we might do together, or even tried to talk to him he responded in an awkward and embarrassed manner, like he wanted to do stuff with me but he didn't want to do stuff with me. After that I let it go, and we went our separate ways. I sat back in the dorm with the adult women. He sat in the dining hall playing poker, which didn't interest me in the least, with the other teenagers and the Dayak men.

After dinner each night The Professor gives everyone their assignments for the next day. On the first Friday night—the next day was to be our second day in the forest and it was William’s 16th birthday—I wanted to spend his 16th birthday with him following an orangutan through the swamp, a real shared experience. The Professor asked who wanted to follow Milo, and I jumped in and said, “William and I will,” and she said okay. But she wanted us to take pictures for her. My camera was flakey, but Dr. Judy offered to let me use hers. Then William said he didn’t have a camera either, and immediately Mr. Richard, the son of a bitch, jumped in and said, “I have a camera. I’ll go in Mr. Will’s place,” and The Professor said okay. So it was to be me and Mr. Richard instead. I looked across the table at William the rest of the evening, and it seemed to me, quite possibly wrongly, that he looked deeply disappointed that he couldn’t spend his birthday engaged in the highest adventure the Borneo trip had to offer. So after we broke up for the night, I went up to him and said he could go instead of me, a sacrifice that only a father would do. He took me up on it, probably not recognizing it as a sacrifice. Back at the dorm, Dr. Judy said she didn’t feel comfortable lending him her camera, but one of the other teenage boys did, so he got ready and he and Mr. Richard went to bed early. I stayed up talking to Dr. Judy and at one point mentioned my disappointment at not being able to go out with him. She suggested I borrow her camera and ask Mr. Richard if I could replace him. He might understand. He was already asleep, so I decided I would get up at 4 in the morning when he did and ask him. I prepared as if I were going, set my alarm for 3:30 and went to bed at midnight. The next morning when I heard him get up, I got up and went over and asked him, explaining it was William’s 16th birthday. Mr. Richard was very unreceptive, to say the least, even acted offended, and said I could go out with William some other day. (Mr. Richard was the only other real adult male. He was 44, a mechanic from Ontario, and had been in the US Army the same years I was, serving in Vietnam. In communications. No war stories, other than a few mortars one night while on guard duty. I didn’t think about him much one way or the other, but William thought he was an extremely negative man. Everything William said to him, he would disagree or disapprove. For example, when at the end of our stay all the Earthwatchers were given blow guns as parting presents, William said, strictly as a joke, “Now we can go shoot pigeons in the park,” Mr. Richard replied in all seriousness that No, they’d be able to fly away too fast. My only other negative experience with him was when I expressed my realization that the Americans fighting in Vietnam would have been in a jungle like

this one and the Viet Cong would have been as superior to the Americans in forest skills as the Dayaks were to us, i.e., a lot. Mr. Richard replied that, No, Vietnam was farther north, and there was a lot more bamboo in its jungles.) So I woke up William, who had slept through his alarm, and went back to bed. They did not return until after 8 that evening, since Milo had made his nest late, and they came directly to the dining hall. There the Dayak women had decorated the room with crepe paper streamers and I had passed out noise makers. I had asked Mr. Scott to take pictures for me, but—part of the photographic disaster—before he could take his first picture, the film advance lever on his camera broke. So no pictures of the 16th birthday party. After dinner, a birthday cake was brought out. (I had brought a very good package cheesecake from America and lugged it around in the bottom of my suitcase for two weeks before Borneo, and when I got to camp, I gave it to The Professor for William's birthday party. She decided to keep it for herself, and had the cooks cook the dry tasteless cake they usually cook for special occasions. The *candles* I had brought were used on the cake, however.) After the cake, we all got up and danced around in the center of the room, and William played one of the Dayak's guitars and sang. The next day was the day I followed Milo and had my accident.

But I was determined to spend at least one day out in the forest with William. So the afternoon I got back from searching and found William in his bunk covered with Calumine lotion, I asked him if he would go out following with me the following day, if it was okay with The Professor, and he said okay. Later that afternoon I walked back off the pier with The Professor, and told her I'd like to go out following, perhaps the next day, with William. She said perhaps. That evening after dinner she assigned Mr. "Dave", a teenage boy who had never followed, to follow Milo, and then asked who wanted to go out with him. William, half a table away from me, volunteered. I knew if he went then he would never be allowed to go again, so I said, in as discreet a half-whisper I could manage, "William!" He looked at me puzzled and said out loud, "What?" I said, still attempting my half wisper, "I thought we were going out." By this time the rest of the table had stopped talking and all eyes were on us. The Professor said, "This is interesting. I want to watch this." Finally, she settled it. She said that first William and I would follow, and then the next day, Mr. Dave and someone else.

It was nice following with him. During a couple of long waits in hammocks, looking up through binoculars at Milo high in the canopy above us, we microanalyzed his feeding behavior, talked about exactly how he sup-

ported himself and with what limbs, how he reached for and grasped the tiny flowers, whether he was breaking off a whole bunch and nibbling the flowers from it, as we would eat a candy bar, or whether he was plucking individual flowers and eating them as we would M & M's. We also joked with Sehat and Rana, our Dayak guides. Mostly dirty jokes.

On our trip downriver back to Pangkalan Buun there were to be two boats. I was standing at the end of the pier next to William before we boarded. I wanted to sit next to him on the boat and hear his impressions, and as the boarding began, I asked him if he wanted to get on the nearest boat, and he said okay. We settled in there. Then it appeared that all the other teenagers were getting on the other boat, so at the last minute William upped and jumped on that boat too. I was left in the smaller boat, sitting there with Mr. Richard and the dourest of the elementary school teachers. We passed their boat up at one point as it was stuck in some reeds, but they were faster and passed us up again once we reached the main river. William was on deck, surrounded by other young people, playing a guitar.

That night in the hotel, I joined the teenagers after dinner in the dining room of the Blue Kechubung Hotel, and that's where we had the discussion of the meaning of it all. But William was preoccupied with other things, namely, the young Indonesian waitress with large breasts. After she left for the night, he went up to the bartender and asked where he could find her. He wanted to meet her. The two of them disappeared for almost an hour. The best I can reconstruct, the bartender and another man took William to her room and stood there at the entrance with the door open, while William mustering all the Indonesian at his command said his name was William and what was hers, and she asked him if he intended to marry her and take her back to America with him. So he didn't get very far. I meanwhile was a bit nervous, but said to the others I felt I shouldn't try to direct him in any way since he could as well be here alone just as all the other teenagers were. In any case, I said, I thought promiscuity was preferable to early marriage. William returned, the topic of conversation turned to whether Mrs. Betty had done the right thing with Hijat, and we stayed up til 4:30 in the morning.

The next morning, breakfast being at 8, someone banged on our door at 8:15, and zombies we rushed down. There we were told that the flight that was supposed to take us back to Jakarta that day had been cancelled; this was bad, since we were to meet Laurey and Thomas that afternoon, and fly to Sumatra early the next morning. Planes were packed in the summer, so rescheduling would be hard. The rest of our trip was in jeopardy. I imme-

diately went into my aggressive, me-against-the-Third-World mode, found out what other people's constraints were, found out where to find all the airline offices in town, where long-distance calls could be made, and so on, and immediately after breakfast William and I swung into action. We went to one end of the town to one airline office and asked about scheduled flights and the possibility of chartering a plane today, and then ran to the other end of town to the other airline office, learned about a flight to Surabaya an hour from now but were told there was no plane from there to Jakarta, looked for Surabaya on the map and determined that we could reach Jakarta by overnight train or taxi from there, ran back to the hotel where I got the luggage and checked out while William went down to the bar to get the taxi driver. "We need to go right now!" William told him, and he said, "Okay," and casually took another sip of his full glass of beer. "Right now," William reiterated, and he said, "Okay," and casually took another sip of his beer. Then he offered William a sip of the beer, so William took the glass and chug-a-lugged the rest of it, put it down, and said, "Now we go." "Okay," the man said, and got up to take us to the airport. There William checked the luggage while I fought my way to the ticket counter to buy the tickets. We boarded the plane, flew to Surabaya, found there was a flight to Jakarta leaving in an hour, boarded that, and took a taxi, seven-foot-long blowguns with spears on the end sticking out the window, from the Jakarta airport to the hotel where Laurey was waiting for us and wondering what to do about the rest of our trip. It's a real high when things come together like that.

VI.

The Earthwatch people came in two varieties—adventure lovers and animal lovers. For adventure lovers the peak experience would be something like the time when Mr. Jason, Mr. Scott, Mr. Richard, Pak Bohap, a Dayak assistant Injui, an Indonesian student from Jakarta studying proboscis monkeys Mr. Yan, and I went out in a small canoe with an outboard motor (which Pak Bohap filled with one can of gas, then remembered to throw away his cigarette, then filled with another can) in the evening in the rain to go downriver for an hour to look at the proboscis monkeys in the trees lining the river. (They are one of the few animals that can both climb and swim, so they hang out in trees near the river so they can escape predators of both sorts.) The first event was that the top edge of the canoe was perilously close to the water, maybe a centimeter above, which meant

that any time anyone moved in a funny way, water would pour over the side, so someone, usually me or Mr. Jason, had to bail water constantly. Gradually we learned how not to move in funny ways. Then there was something strange about the way the rudder guided the boat that made it head toward one bank or the other, so we progressed by wild swings. On one swing close to the bank, we had to duck under a branch, and Mr. Yan and Injui didn't, and they were knocked into the river. We stopped as soon as we ran into the other bank and let them swim up to us and get in again. Then we reached an area where a wash of dead weeds clogged the river, and several of us had to get out and push the boat through. After that, we had figured out how not to move and how to guide the boat, and the river was clear, so we proceeded nicely, except that Mr. Richard had come along not dressed warmly enough for an evening in the rain, so he huddled for several hours under the linoleum mat covering the bottom of the boat. We made it down to the main branch of the river and started to see tree after tree with families of five or six proboscis monkeys in them, scampering in confusion as they saw us. As we were looking at one of the trees, we failed to notice that water was pouring in over both sides of the boat, a bad sign. When we did notice it, two of us started bailing madly, but we couldn't keep up with the water pouring in. We were sure to sink, until in desperation, Pak Bohap leaped into the water, raising the boat just enough to allow us to bail it out. When we had, he climbed back in and we returned upriver to camp.

For animal lovers, the peak experience was taking care of Stan and Ranto, two two-year-old ex-captive orangutans who were feverish and clearly about to die. Two-year-old orangutans are extraordinarily cute; they are about the size of a six-month-old human baby, but very scrawny, with very clinging arms and personalities, wide hungry-for-love eyes, cute grins, and orange hair that stands on end as though they are in perpetual surprise. Mrs. Anne cared for them in her room during the nights and the rest of us took turns caring for them during the days. This involved holding them for hours on end, since especially Ranto refused to let go. The only way you could transfer him to someone else was to position yourself right next to them, put one of Ranto's hands on their shirt, rotate toward them until Ranto was more than 50% facing them, and then place his other hand on their shirt. Once I saw Ranto try to get a banana: He grasped the shirt of the woman who was carrying him with his fingertips, pulled it out as far as he could, then stretched himself as far as he could toward the banana. But with all his efforts, he could only get within two inches of the banana. The woman holding him wouldn't move any closer because she wanted to encourage his

independence. But instead he gave up. Caring for these babies involved holding them—since diapers ran out the first day, we either chanced it or wrapped plastic bags around their bottoms. We were supposed to wear gloves so we wouldn't get ringworm from them, but we rarely did wear them. And we were supposed to cover our mouths and noses so they couldn't get any germs from us. Bandanas proved inconvenient since they were always slipping off, so one of the women discovered the ideal thing. When our laundry was returned, it was all placed in a big stack in the commons room. The teenage boys especially were rather casual about reclaiming it until they needed it (so William for example left Borneo with not one remaining pair of socks). So Mrs. Ann discovered that the ideal thing for covering mouth and nose was a teenage boy's underpants—you look out one leg hole and cover your mouth and nose with the part that goes between the legs. All the women took this up. I never did. For the first few days we just sat in the commons room and held them, sometimes feeding them milk from a bottle. Toward the end of the week however we started taking them on "field trips" out to the end of the pier at feeding time. Stan we even took out to small trees to teach him to climb. (Can you imagine that! Teaching an orangutan to climb a tree!) Toward the end of the week he was getting quite proficient, though very careful. Since they couldn't be cared for forever, it was important to try to get one of the young childless females to adopt them. Female orangutans frequently do things like that. We tried first with Ranto, since his dependence made us desparate. We placed him on Siswi's chest one afternoon on the porch of the dorm. Siswi took right to him, holding him in all the right ways, and retrieving him whenever he tried to get away. But Ranto would have none of it. He knew the difference between people and orangutans by now and he knew he was people. So he screamed pitifully and tried again and again to squirm out of Siswi's grasp. We let this go on for half an hour, one or the other of the women breaking under the strain from time to time, and finally we gave up. That was how it was when we left the camp at the end of our stay.

In general, the men were adventure lovers and the women were animal lovers.

Mr. Jason was hard to classify. Mr. Scott's description of him was perfect when he told him, "Jason, you're so far out there you're in there." He was quiet, and even a loner, during the day and in large groups and among women. But when we all went to bed, he blossomed. He would raise some weird topic and explore it in depth. For example, after the rape attempt, we were all lying in bed with the light out, and Mr. Jason said, "I wonder

if you took a woman's menstration and smeared it on a metal box, a male orangutan would try to have sex with the box." Every night it was another topic just as bizarre. It would always initiate heated discussions among the teenage boys that would carry up through the ceiling to the women's spacious dorm upstairs, and that would keep some of them awake. The first few nights they would just call down and ask us, futilely, to be quiet. Finally they decided to confront us and talk through the issue, but they got nowhere with the teenage boys. It was not just men against women, although that was the basis of Mrs. Cassie's psychoanalysis; her theory was that all us men (except Mr. Richard, who emptied the garbage sometimes) were in jobs or other situations dominated by men, that we were nervous finding ourselves in a situation with so many women, and what we were trying to do by our loud talking was reassert our male dominance; this struck me as an implausible and self-centered theory; in fact, the teenage boys had almost no cognizance of the women at all. It was also students against teachers. Here were these teenage boys on vacation, and they weren't about to knuckle under to the complaints of a bunch of teachers. It all reached a climax when one of the teachers, Mrs. Judy, told Mr. Jason, "You're not the only person in the world, you know." Now growing up rebellious in America means you hear this very sentence four or five times a day, in the very tone Mrs. Judy uttered it in, from a long sequence of people stamped out of the very mold Mrs. Judy was stamped out of. So all the teenage boys, and even the teenage boy in me, broke out into derisive laughter. The women glowered at us for a few moments, and then one-by-one stomped out of the room or upstairs. In the middle of this, Mr. Mark mockingly stood up, glowered, and stomped out of the room. After they had all left, all the teenage boys, not me this time, continued their mocking by standing up one-by-one and stomping loudly out of the commons room into our bedroom, leaving only me sitting there. At this point, Mrs. Anne burst out of her private room where she was caring for Stan and Ranto, and screamed, "This is ME now and I'M telling you to cut it out or you're in for REAL trouble!" I looked down and avoided her eyes, and she avoided looking at me and went back into her room. The next day Dr. Judy approached me and asked me why I didn't use my influence to quiet them down. This of course placed me directly in conflict with male solidarity, so although I would normally have been quite accommodating, this time I wasn't. Being at one of my laundry-induced low points in the second week, I said that I thought the problem was trivial in comparison with leeches, swamps, hiking in downpours, crowded conditions, dehydration, bland food, and laundry dripping over our beds.

If the boys wanted talk a bit at night to release the tension caused by the squalid conditions we had to live in, I couldn't see anything wrong with it. She thought that was irrelevant. (Speaking of bland food, by the way, I lost 15 pounds in Borneo, on the diet of rice and mangoes. It was wholesome food, that got none of us sick and cleared up William's complexion, but toward the beginning of the second week I noticed that the women were often talking about fine restaurants they had been to, and by the middle of that week, William and Mr. Mark would shout out the names of junk foods at random moments—"Twinkies!" "Hi-Ho's!" "A Big Mac!" I had sexual fantasies of hot fudge sundaes.) Anyway, back to Mr. Jason. He got along very well with the Dayaks. He was the best of the Earthwatchers at moving quickly through the swamp, and the best of the tree climbers. He hung out with them at their cabins in the evening. In his speech at the farewell party on behalf of all the Dayaks, Mr. Ugin singled out Mr. Jason as the one person they would most like to have stay on.

VII.

Most of all, Borneo is the sunsets, at the end of the pier after feeding time. The tall luminescent green trees rise from the high luminescent green grass of the Pleistocene swamp and the black-water river into a blue sky studded with pink clouds. Bats, big as pterodactyls, swoop over the high canopy across the river, the sunlight glinting brown through their wings. A black leathery hand, belonging to a long-lost distant cousin, reaches up from under the pier, as though of the troll under the bridge, and wraps around your ankle.

Ten Years Later

When I got back to America, I began to contribute to the Orangutan Foundation and receive their flyers. Ten years after leaving Borneo, I got a flyer announcing a reception for The Professor in San Francisco, and I went. She looked ten years older, as did I. She remembered me and Mr. Will, or so she said. When she heard he had his own Internet start-up in Los Angeles, she eagerly requested his address. I reminded her I'd been there in 1988, and she said, "Yes, it was just after that that the devastation began."

Then she gave her talk, mostly about the changes in Borneo in the last ten years. Large parts of the forest have been cleared for plywood by Korean

and Japanese lumber companies. Now the remaining fields are being used for palm oil plantations started by the Malaysians. The chemical fertilizers used on them mean that the forest can never return. There is gold in Kalimantan, huge excavations have been made, and the resulting debris has turned the black water of river into a thick muddy brown. The year before, El Niño had triggered a drought, which triggered fires. The smoke was so thick that in the morning you could not see the hand at the end of your outstretched arm. Planes had to stop flying to Borneo, so the only way in and out was by boat every two weeks. Orangutans had no place to go. She saved the ones she could, but for what, now that their habitat was gone forever? She described starving, confused orangutans wandering dazed among the burnt-out stumps of trees or in the wasteland of the gold diggings or palm oil plantations.

Every nature story these days has the same ending.