



**Larry Cashman, the  
Unrepentant Loser**

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Paradox of Pedro Franklin**

*At the conclusion of Chapter 3, Larry Cashman was on a roll in Indonesia. He had survived the sabotage of his household shipment to Indonesia, then turned the tables on the sanctimonious US Embassy Management Officer who accused him of smuggling marijuana into the country. After he received a "remuneration" from his Indonesian colleagues for his contribution to the overseas training system and Sabrina forced him to return it, he gave the money to the lowest level staff at the Indonesian Family Planning Institute, and they thought he was Robin Hood. Cashman's life had rarely been so tranquil. Then, who should show up in Jakarta but his old antagonist, Pedro Franklin.*

When I received Pedro Franklin's resume, I must admit it was quite impressive; a bachelors degree from Dartmouth, medical school at Stanford, and a medical internship at a major medical center in Phoenix. Pedro was apparently raised in a blueblood family from Cleveland Heights, a swanky suburb of Cleveland, Ohio. When Dr. P called me in Bangkok in 1981 asking me to help Pedro find a fieldwork assignment in the Cambodian refugee camps for his master's thesis, Pedro was enrolled in the Masters in Public Health Program at the University of Hawaii, on his way to completing a Preventive Medicine Residency. On paper Pedro Franklin appeared to be a superstar.

"This guy is a work in progress," Dr. P cautioned. "He's smart, I'll give him that, but he is a dreamer who is lazy beyond belief, as well as a hopeless romantic. It seems that the only thing that Pedro can keep his mind focused on is women.... and the more the merrier. In the classroom, however, he is always at the top of the class. In summary Pedro is a Prima Dona and a pansy to boot. I want to see what he can do under difficult conditions in the field."

"Does he have any specific interests or skills?" I inquired.

"Other than women none that I can discern. He professes interest in epidemiology and medical anthropology, but that's just an excuse to justify studying public health while he chases women of all ethnic backgrounds and creeds." Dr. P was obviously skeptical of Pedro.

He continued, "I want to place him in a cross-cultural situation where there are few amenities to see if he can survive. That's when I thought of the Cambodian refugee camps."

I could sense some hesitance in Dr. P's voice. "You seem to have some doubts about him. Are you sure you want to take a chance sending this guy to Thailand?"

"As you know, Cashman, I take chances on eccentric non-conformists who will challenge the status quo. I took a chance on you, didn't I?" I couldn't argue with his logic.

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This exchange occurred in 1981, while I was living in Thailand and working for API in the Cambodian refugee camps. When Dr. P needed help with an errant student — something I could identify with — I had to respond. Accordingly, I arranged for Pedro Franklin to do his fieldwork in the Khao-I-Dang Cambodian refugee camp. I would be his fieldwork preceptor.

When Pedro arrived in Bangkok, I wondered if Dr. P had sent the right guy. He was tall, about 6 ft. 1 in height, with a body that could only be described as pear-shaped — wide at the hips, narrower at the shoulders, and topped off by a pointy head with a thinning Afro. Ladies' men come in different shapes and sizes, but I had never seen one who looked like Pedro Franklin.

Pedro was in a daze when he reached my office for our first meeting to discuss his fieldwork assignment. As we started talking about what he could possibly do in the refugee camps, I noticed that his gaze kept wandering outside the door. At first I thought his lack of focus was the result of jet lag and the new stimuli he was encountering in Bangkok. Then I realized that he was checking out the assortment of Thai ladies working at the API office. When a phone call interrupted our conversation, Pedro wandered off to chat up a few of them. When it came to chasing women, Pedro didn't let the grass grow under his feet.

I finally corralled him in my office and closed the door so he couldn't look at the ladies. "We need to discuss your fieldwork assignment. Do you have a fieldwork proposal for me to review?" Usually a student prepared a written proposal stating the objectives and scope of their fieldwork.

"I didn't have time to prepare a proposal," Pedro informed me. "I spent my final three days in Hawaii at a music festival. I did some magic mushrooms and smoked too much Maui Wowie. The time just flew by."

As the reader knows by now, Larry Cashman is the last person to criticize someone for smoking too much weed, but Pedro had some pair of brass balls, I'll acknowledge that. Dr. P warned me not to expect much from him, so I pressed on by saying, "Dr. P wants you to do something in the Cambodian refugee camps. Do you have any interests or suggestions?"

Pedro thought for a moment and then replied, "I haven't given that much thought. I like sports. Maybe I could organize some sporting events."

I waited — and continued waiting — for the punch-line but Pedro was serious. I couldn't believe how clueless he was.

"You may not realize this, Pedro, but these camps house refugees fleeing from the Pol Pot genocide. They need water, sanitation, food, and health services. You're a physician studying public health. Perhaps you could do something related to public health or preventive medicine to help these people."

All of a sudden Pedro became quite animated as he enthusiastically exclaimed, "That's a great idea. Maybe I could do something in sports medicine. Do they have any athletic teams in the refugee camps? You know, like baseball or basketball or football teams?"

In addition to being hopeless, this guy was living in another galaxy. By now I was losing patience with Pedro and was just about to throw him out of my office when, as luck would have it, my lovely wife Sabrina walked in. Seeing an opening to get rid of him, I introduced Pedro to Sabrina, which in hindsight was a huge mistake that would haunt me for years to come.

Turning to Sabrina I uttered with a smile, "Sabrina, this is Pedro Franklin. He just arrived from Hawaii. Why don't you show him around the API complex and introduce him to the staff? I have some important matters to take care of."

Then I turned to Pedro. "We'll continue this discussion another time. Sabrina will show you around and explain how things work around here."

As Pedro left with Sabrina, I considered my options. Pedro was hopeless and clueless. Having him around would be trouble. But I promised Dr. P I would find something constructive for Pedro to do in the refugee camps in order for him to complete his master's thesis. For now I simply wanted to get rid of him. Sooner or later, however, I would have to deal with Pedro Franklin.



Cashman found Pedro eating a big plate of Thai fried noodles

When I returned home that night, I was surprised and a bit shocked to find Pedro sitting at our kitchen table eating a big plate of Thai fried noodles. Not only was Pedro sitting in MY chair but he had an enormous shit-eating grin on his face. My first inclination was to throw him out of the house, but apparently Sabrina saw that look in my eye and, pulling me aside, whispered,

"He's such a sweet man...so kind and gentle and caring. He is all alone in Bangkok and has nowhere to go. I want him to stay with us until he goes to the refugee camps."

"Are you crazy!!! This guy is an idiot and the biggest loser I ever met. I was hoping I would never see him again."

"Cashman, you're so impatient and mean to people who are sensitive and compassionate like Pedro. You need to be more tolerant," Sabrina chided and then adamantly added, "He will be staying with us."

This was the paradox of Pedro Franklin. His sweet, charming but helpless exterior entirely disarmed women to the point that they wanted to mother him. Women absolutely loved the guy. His siren's song enchanted them. They didn't see or seem to care that he was a hopeless loser who was lazy, aimless, shiftless, and totally clueless. Sabrina had been beguiled by him, and now I was stuck with Pedro for the next two weeks.

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Having Pedro Franklin living with us was revealing. He spent every day singing his siren's song of love to the ladies at API. He fell in love four times in those two weeks and left each of these paramours heartbroken. I called him *Lothario*<sup>1</sup> to describe his prowess with women. When he returned to our apartment each night, Sabrina pampered and protected him. Even if I wanted to, and I did so very much, I could not kick his useless and lazy ass out of the house as Sabrina wouldn't hear of it.

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<sup>1</sup> *Lothario* comes from the 1703 play *The Fair Penitent*, a tragedy by Nicholas Rowe. In the play, *Lothario* is a notorious seducer, but beneath his charming exterior he is a haughty and unfeeling scoundrel. The word *Lothario* has been used to describe a foppish, unscrupulous rake.

It took some time and a great deal of subtle prodding but I finally managed to get Pedro to think about his fieldwork. Although he finally acknowledged that it should have some tangential relationship to public health, I still couldn't get him to focus on anything concrete.

"You must have some interests in public health," I pleaded.

"I'm interested in traditional medicine. Maybe I could observe some traditional Cambodian healers."

"Is that it? You merely wish to 'observe.'? And what, may I ask, will be the utility of your 'observations' to us?" Once again I was losing patience with Pedro.

"Maybe I can write a book. That should be fun. You can sell it and make lots of money."

Pedro was oblivious to reality. He lived in a fantasy world where he could come to Thailand with no skills and write a book about a topic he knew nothing about because it would be fun. I couldn't wait to be rid of him.

We eventually agreed that Pedro would collect epidemiologic data on the different diseases presenting at the Khao-I-Dang health clinics. In addition he would use his budding anthropological skills to document traditional birthing practices among Cambodian women. I personally expected very little to ensue from either endeavor. At least Pedro would be working far away in the refugee camps and not bothering me on a regular basis.

Well, this fantasy didn't last long. Within a week of his arrival at Khao-I-Dang, Pedro was complaining about the food, the accommodations, the bathrooms and the heat. He didn't like sleeping on the floor and using a squat toilet<sup>2</sup> like the rest of the staff. He wanted to work in an air-conditioned office, and not a bamboo hut. He expected steak and mashed potatoes occasionally as he did not enjoy consuming sticky rice and/or fried noodles daily. It still hadn't occurred to Pedro that he was living in a refugee camp containing hundreds of thousands of people!



**Pedro didn't like using squat toilets**

The good news was that Pedro was five hours away from me while he was physically stationed at the refugee camps. I told him to send a report every two weeks. Other than that, I didn't care if he was dead or alive. I received one or two reports and then radio silence — no reports arrived at my desk, but on the other hand I did not have to listen to his incessant complaining. In brief I expected nothing from Pedro and that's what I got.

Three months later while sitting in my office daydreaming about the day when I would be living the good expatriate life like that guy I observed many years ago in Morocco, I was awoken from my reverie by a phone call from Somchai Visitkun, the API Director.

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<sup>2</sup> A squat toilet consists of a toilet pan or bowl at floor level. The user assumes a squatting posture to perform their daily constitutional. Its use is particularly taxing for someone with bad knees.

“Cashman, listen carefully to what I have to say! I just received an urgent call from the UNHCR<sup>3</sup> Country Director in Bangkok. UNHCR has received reports about the troubling behavior of one of API’s staff in Khao-I-Dang. Although he would not give me specifics over the telephone, he stated in no uncertain terms that unless this situation is rectified immediately, the repercussions for API will be very serious and will affect our programs and funding in the camps. What may I ask is going on, Cashman? I want you to go to Khao-I-Dang immediately to investigate.” Somchai was worried. And he was pissed. As such I wasted no time and high-tailed it to Khao-I-Dang pronto.

When I arrived at the camp, I was summoned by the UNHCR Camp Director. Before I could even say hello or utter some vague platitude, which I am very capable of tossing to one and sundry, the camp director growled, “One of API’s staff is fraternizing with the camps’ inhabitants in an inappropriate way. If he continues, I will eject him from the camp and ask him to leave the country. And I will be forced to take immediate and severe administrative action against API and its activities in this camp.”

Fraternizing with camp inhabitants in an inappropriate way! Leave the country! That description could only pertain to Pedro. I consulted with API’s director in the camp.

“Where is Pedro? I have to speak with him immediately.”

“That might be difficult. He’s having his siesta now. He usually naps following his luncheon date.”

“Siesta! Luncheon date! What the hell is going on here? Can someone please take me to Pedro? And pronto!”

“I’m not sure,” the API Director replied. “He takes his siesta in different sections of the camp every day. As such, we never know where Pedro actually is during the mid-afternoon.”

It was like asking “Where’s Waldo?” I finally found someone who knew of Pedro’s peregrinations. He led me deep into the camp to a bamboo hut where a group of Cambodian women had congregated outside a flimsy structure.

“Is Pedro Franklin here?” I asked through an interpreter.

“Oh yes, he’s inside but he can’t be disturbed. He’s having a nap.” The woman who responded was concerned for Pedro’s well-being. She was protective of him. She had fallen under his Lothario spell.

I ignored her warning and barged into the hut. I was speechless at the spectacle before me. Pedro was snoozing on a straw mat with two Cambodian ladies gently fanning him to keep the flies away.

I grabbed Pedro by his shirt collar and shook him awake. “What the fuck is going on here?”

“I was having a nice nap until you barged in,” Pedro replied as he straightened his shirt. He was quite upset that his nap had been interrupted.

“Get your clothes on. You’re coming with me.”

Pedro was reluctant to leave. In his mind he had done nothing wrong. “Why are you being such an asshole?” he complained as he buttoned his shirt. “I’m just doing my job.”

When we reached the API office inside the camp, I dragged him into an empty room. “The UNHCR Director told me you were fraternizing inappropriately with the refugees. The API staff said that you have lunch at different sites in the camp every day followed by a ‘siesta.’ I found you having a snooze with two women fanning you. What else is going on?”

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<sup>3</sup> UNHCR is the United Nations High Commissioner for refugees. UNHCR was responsible for administering all Cambodian refugee camps in Thailand.



One of Pedro's "sporting palaces" in the Khao-I-Dang refugee camp

After some cajoling, which included threatening to have his pear-shaped butt thrown out of the country, Pedro came clean. He had created "sporting palaces" throughout the camp. He would visit a different one every day, where he would have lunch, occasionally enjoy some carnal pleasures, and then conclude his mid-day respite with a nap.

"And why are you so angry?" Pedro demanded indignantly. "This is part of my anthropologic methodology. How do you expect me to find out about traditional Cambodian birthing practices if I don't

intimately communicate with the women and gain their confidence?"

"Listen Pedro, you may not realize this because of the void where your brain should be, but this may be taking anthropologic observation a bit too far. These women receive a food ration of 1,800 calories per day, and they're sharing their food with you!! You don't look malnourished to me. And you're consorting with the women!! Don't you think your affections may be misinterpreted by them? They're desperate to get out of this camp, and although it may not be apparent to you, these women might see you as their ticket out."

None of this had occurred to Pedro. When he was around women, he couldn't help himself. Or I should rephrase my last comment to say that when his dick was hard, he had no conscience. He sang his Lothario's siren song of love and, regardless of the circumstances the women became infatuated and swooned at his feet.

I was at my wits end with him. "OK Pedro. Get your things together. You're finished here. You're coming back to Bangkok with me to resolve this issue with UNHCR. You'll be lucky if they don't throw you out of the country."

As you can imagine, the proverbial "shit hit the fan" after that.... UNHCR didn't buy Pedro's unorthodox anthropologic methods, nor could I blame them. Since the UNHCR Country Director was a male, he was immune to Pedro's ingratiating palaver and recognized him for the wastrel that he truly was. Pedro was immediately banned from the camps and UNHCR put API on probation, during which time API could not receive any further funding for use in any refugee camp. API was also barred from deploying any expatriates to the camps until we could guarantee that such incidents would not recur.

Somchai Visitkun was livid when he learned of Pedro's indiscretions and especially the precarious position in which his actions had placed API. Not unexpectedly, UNHCR and Somchai both blamed everything on me.

I was super pissed off at Pedro. I wanted him out of my sight and out of the country. When Sabrina heard what happened, she too became furious, but her wrath was turned towards me for she thought that that I was treating Pedro too harshly. "You always do this, Cashman. You jump to the worst conclusions without even considering Pedro's side of the story." To my surprise and amazement, Sabrina demanded, in no uncertain terms, that I apologize to Pedro..

Then, to add insult to injury, she turned around and invited Pedro to stay with us until he had sufficient time to recover from the trauma I had caused him, as well as ensure that he had enough time,

and peace of mind, to write up his master's thesis. When it rains, it apparently pours, as I was now stuck with Pedro for two more weeks.

The irony of this entire episode was that, when Pedro finally got around to showing me the information system he developed to collect clinical morbidity data, it was damn good and API used it in all of the health clinics in Khao-I-Dang. When Pedro finally wrote up his "anthropologic observations" dealing with traditional Cambodian birthing practices, it was insightful and provocative. Pedro used this data for his master's thesis and he graduated with honors.

When he finally left Thailand, I had only one thought; namely that Pedro Franklin was nothing but trouble and I never wanted to see him again.

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Thus you can imagine my surprise and dismay when, two years later, while we were living in Jakarta in 1983, I heard a knock at my door and discovered Pedro Franklin standing outside with two suitcases at his feet and with a huge grin on his face, as if two old buddies who never imagined that they would ever meet again in this or any other incarnation, had miraculously been reunited. In the interim period, Pedro had completed his preventive medicine residency and had been offered a consultancy with the World Health Organization (WHO) in Jakarta to conduct more of his "anthropologic observations" on traditional Indonesian healing practices.

Prior to his arrival and unbeknownst to me, Pedro had communicated his usual, disconsolate sob story to Sabrina — he would soon be arriving in Indonesia, a strange country, with no place to stay; and as usual, she had fallen for his tale of woe and invited him to stay with us until he got settled. I knew nothing of these machinations until Pedro showed up on my door step. Sabrina had a good idea what my reaction would be — I wanted to immediately toss him out on his hopeless posterior — but Sabrina wouldn't hear of it. Seeing that I had no other choice, I agreed that Pedro could stay with us, but only until he could find other living arrangements. After that, the only thing I wanted to see was the back of Pedro Franklin's head as he left for good and hopefully disappeared from my life.

As expected, Pedro made himself right at home. He stumbled out of bed every day at 9 AM, at which point he had a heaping hot cup of coffee served in his room. He then proceeded to order eggs, toast, and bacon for breakfast. If the eggs, by chance, weren't cooked to his satisfaction, he sent them back to the kitchen with detailed instructions on how they should be prepared and served. Sabrina's driver took him back and forth to the WHO Office every day, where he chatted up the ladies and occasionally brought them back to our house for afternoon cocktails. One day when I was ready to leave work, my driver was nowhere to be found. I shortly learned that Sabrina had sent him to fetch wine and cheese for Pedro's cocktail hour, and I had to take a bus to get home. Sabrina thought Pedro was so charming. I wanted to shoot him, or maybe drown him, but I couldn't think of a suitable way to dispose of his worthless carcass.

Several months before Pedro's arrival, Sabrina and I had decided to hire a housemaid, named Yanti, to help Sukiam with the housework. Yanti was 28 years old, married with no children, and seemed to be a young woman with a most pleasant and agreeable disposition. We had moved into a larger home in anticipation of shortly establishing a larger family. This development was quite convenient for Pedro, who now had his own bedroom with bathroom en suite. Regrettably, I didn't see much progress toward his finding other living arrangements, as Pedro was getting very comfortable in our home.

He was also getting very friendly with Yanti. When she served his meals, he always had a smile and a friendly word for her. Sometimes he would flirt with her. I didn't give this much thought because Pedro flirted with every woman he met no matter if they were big or small in stature, fat or thin, young or old, pretty or ungainly. It simply made no difference to Pedro. For example, there was an old lady with rotted teeth and a large wart on her nose who sold fruit from a pushcart near our home. When she rang the bell outside our house announcing her arrival, Pedro would bound out the door to engage her with flattery. No wonder she came to visit us religiously every day. Pedro was an inveterate womanizer.

Since his assignment with WHO would take him to rural areas of Indonesia, Pedro had to learn how to speak Indonesian. Using his considerable skills with flattery and flirtation, he convinced WHO's Nutrition Program director, who just happened to be a middle-aged Ukrainian woman — a prime target for Pedro's animal magnetism — that he needed to stay an additional month in Jakarta (on WHO's dime) to learn Indonesian. Testing my patience beyond all reasonable limits, Sabrina was only too happy to accommodate Pedro at our home for the duration of his "intensive" language instruction. In addition to the Indonesian classes he attended every day, Pedro could also be frequently found chatting with Yanti to practice his Indonesian speaking and comprehension skills.

I thought nothing of this. In fact the more time he spent practicing his Indonesian with Yanti, the fewer wine and cheese parties I found when returning home after a long day at work. As the days and weeks went by Pedro's Indonesian language skills began to improve. As the day for his imminent departure was drawing closer, I hummed an old Ron Tyson song from the 1960s...."I can see clearly now" the light at the end of the tunnel.

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Then, one evening, while I was peacefully watching a basketball game on TV, my night guard came to the door.

"Tuan,<sup>4</sup> the village chief wants to see you immediately."

"It's already 9 PM. Can't I see him tomorrow?"

My night guard was adamant. "He said it's urgent. You have to come now."

In Indonesia's political and social hierarchy, the village chief was a very important official. He (village chiefs were always men in the 1980s) was the government's representative in every village.<sup>5</sup> Suharto's<sup>6</sup> Indonesia in the 1980s was essentially a military dictatorship with a façade of democracy. As Suharto's representative in the village, the village chief was omnipotent when it came to setting policy and settling local disputes. If you were summoned by the village chief, whether you were an Indonesian

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<sup>4</sup> "Tuan" is an honorific reserved for the male head of household.

<sup>5</sup> A village in Indonesia is an administrative area containing about 600 households and 3000 people. Regardless of the neighborhood or the occupant, every home in Indonesia resided in some village and its inhabitants were under the jurisdiction of the village chief.

<sup>6</sup> General Suharto (he used only one name, not an uncommon practice in Indonesia) came to power in 1967 when he subdued a failed coup attempt, engineered by the Indonesian Communist Party with the tacit approval of Indonesia's first President, Sukarno. Inheriting a faltering economy, Suharto aligned Indonesia with the western alliance led by the US and Europe. He installed a military dictatorship masquerading as a democracy with elections every five years to please his western backers. Coincidentally, Suharto won those elections by resounding margins every five years, until he was ousted as President in 1999 as a result of the Asian Economic Crisis.



villager or a foreign embassy official living in that particular village, you were well advised to heed that summons.

I was confused and, of course, scared shitless when I received the village chief's summons. What could I have done that warranted my urgent presence to meet the village chief at 9 PM? Nevertheless I put on some appropriate clothes and, accompanied by my night guard, trudged down to the village chief's office. It was housed in a concrete building with tile floors that needed a good scrubbing. Three men were sitting on a mat on the floor, somber-faced, and they motioned for me to sit on the floor in front of them.



**The village chief's office**

In general I hate sitting on the floor. My knees begin to ache immediately and my bony ass provides no padding for comfort. I was tired, I was grumpy, and now my ass and knees hurt. The village chief introduced himself and his deputy sitting to his right. Then he motioned to the man seated on his left.

"This man claims that a foreigner living in your house is sleeping with his wife. She has become so enamored with this foreigner that she wants to divorce her husband. This is a serious offense under Indonesian law. Do you know anything about this?"

The first thought that came to mind was "Pedro!!!" He was up to his old tricks. His insatiable, amorous appetite was once again causing headaches for me. Whether this allegation was true was immaterial. Once the village chief decided to pursue it with me, the game was on. However, knowing Pedro's flirtatious ways, there was no reason to doubt it.

But wait! Could this in fact be a serendipitous opportunity to finally get rid of Lothario once and for all. If I turned Pedro in then maybe they'd throw him in jail and I would never have to see him again. Sabrina would undoubtedly be extremely pissed off and try every which way to protect him, but this was the long arm of the Indonesian law finally catching up with him. It was definitely worth a try!!!

"Let's say, for arguments' sake, that you are able to find this man, what will happen next?" I asked the village chief. If his reply contained the word "prison," then Pedro was history.

The village chief shuffled some papers as he considered his response. "Under normal circumstances we would take him into police custody while the case is investigated, the marital issues resolved, and then an appropriate punishment would be imposed."

This sounded good enough for me. I was about to abandon Pedro to his fate when the village chief unfortunately continued.

"However, because you are employed by the American Embassy and have diplomatic immunity, this situation is a bit more complicated. We can't take him into police custody. We will place him under house arrest in your home until all issues are resolved. Because of the sensitivity of the allegation and the diplomatic procedures that must be followed, this will probably take some time."

When I heard this reply my face turned an ashen grey and I couldn't breathe, as if my air supply had suddenly been cut off. This was the worst possible outcome for me. Knowing Pedro as I did, he would deny everything, claim innocence, and gladly settle into my home for the duration of the investigation. Sabrina would feel sorry for him for being unjustly accused, and I would have to put up with this hapless, pear-shaped, loser for an indefinite period. This scenario was unacceptable to me. I was now facing a "lose-lose situation.", With dwindling options I resorted to that tried and true stratagem for resolving an impasse in developing countries.

With a straight face, I looked the village chief right in the eyes and said, "Isn't there another way that we can amicably solve this problem?"

I have used this line countless times over the years when faced with a predicament with government authorities, and it works every time. After all that was what this meeting with the village chief and the aggrieved husband was all about — a shakedown. The village chief knew exactly what I meant. He just needed some plausible excuse to name a figure. I was anxious to see what he would devise.

"Well, now that you mention it, there is another possibility which we can pursue. Perhaps we can dispense with the legal procedures if I can convince this gentleman to drop the charges in lieu of some appropriate financial compensation." The village chief turned to the cuckolded husband for a side consultation, and spoke to him in Javanese so I couldn't understand what was being said.

After several minutes of heated discussion, obviously for my benefit, the village chief turned to me again and said, while pointing to Yanti's husband, "He wants to reconcile with his wife. For that they will need a marriage counselor. He wants to return to his village in West Java Province for the counseling. This will take some time. As such he will need 35 million Rupiah (about \$5,000) to cover these expenses."

To my knowledge, there was no such thing as a "marriage counselor "in Indonesia, and certainly not one who opened a practice in a village located in West Java. This was nothing more than an opening gambit, but a steep one. We negotiated and haggled for the next two hours, and finally settled on 14 million Rupiah, or about \$2,000. This was still a bit extortionate, but since it also included the village chief's cut, I agreed. If I delivered the money the next day, the entire incident would be forgotten.

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It was nearly midnight when I returned home. I was physically and mentally exhausted by this ordeal. Most of all I was pissed beyond belief at Pedro for causing me so much grief. As I entered my house, who should I find sitting on the patio, sipping a cool beer and snacking on a ham and cheese sandwich, but Lothario himself.

"Hey Cashman, where the hell have you been?" Pedro inquired disinterestedly; adding, "Isn't it kind of late for you to be taking a stroll with the night guard?"

I turned my ire on Pedro and exploded, "Where have I been? I just spent the last three hours trying to save you from going to jail, you jackass!!! Have you been sleeping with our maid? And don't give me any of your bullshit. You have a history with these indiscretions." Thereupon I proceeded to describe the events of the last three hours.

As expected, Pedro denied everything with his usual sense of righteous indignation at the accusation. He claimed that those afternoons he spent with Yanti, while Sabrina and I were working and Carmencita was at school, were only dedicated to improving his Indonesian language skills....nothing else!

A dubious assertion to anyone who knew Pedro's history. I cut him off before he spewed anymore of this unadulterated nonsense.

"I don't care what you claim, and I don't want to listen to any of your excuses anymore. The bottom line is the village chief is prepared to arrest you unless and until this issue is resolved. I had to agree to pay Yanti's husband \$2,000 to get you off the hook. They wanted \$5,000, so you got off easy. I need the money by tomorrow."

Now it was Pedro's turn to be pissed. I had never seen him get angry. He was usually too busy ogling the ladies. "You promised them \$2,000 and you expect me to pay it? This is blackmail! I haven't done anything. You made the deal. Why don't you cough up the \$2,000."

I was in a fix now. Pedro denied the allegation, as expected, but refused to produce the money. If he didn't pay, he would be placed under house arrest at my home, which would suit him just fine. I definitely wasn't going to let Pedro get away with this.

"Listen you little weasel. If you don't give me \$2,000 by tomorrow at noon time, I'm going to beat the living shit out of you and throw your sorry ass out onto the street." And then I let loose with some of my choicest expletives, pejoratives, slurs, vituperation, and vilification to impugn Pedro and his ancestry. I was on a roll and Pedro had turned crimson red with anger.

And then the strangest thing happened. Pedro attacked me. He totally lost it. He rushed at me and somehow wrestled me to the ground. Avid readers may recall that Larry Cashman is a lover, not a fighter, so you may consider this an unfortunate turn of events for me. But at the same time you must remember that Pedro was built like a pear with no upper body strength, while I was a sturdy six footer who learned, as a youth, to get by on the mean streets of New York City. There was no way that this pansy from Cleveland Heights could get the better of me.

I quickly turned Pedro around, placed him in a headlock<sup>7</sup> and began to squeeze his neck...gradually putting more pressure on it until I heard a crackling sound muffled by Pedro's scream, which was so loud that it woke Sabrina. Rushing from our bedroom, she was shocked to find the two of us sprawled on the floor with Pedro grasping his neck and back. At first he couldn't move. My first thought was "is he paralyzed?" because if he was, I'll never get rid of him. Much to my relief Pedro soon started moving his arms and legs but howled in pain with each move.

"What is going on here? Have you two infants been fighting?" Sabrina asked incredulously. I explained the entire episode to Sabrina as Pedro moaned in pain on the floor. Not surprisingly, Sabrina immediately sided with Pedro.

"Cashman, you're always so eager to make false accusations against Pedro. You started doing it in the refugee camps in Thailand and now you're continuing to do it in Indonesia. Don't you realize that Pedro was only learning how to speak Indonesian with Yanti?" Pedro eyed Sabrina submissively as she continued her harangue. I tried to interrupt, but she didn't want to hear another word from me.

"Now help him onto the sofa. I'm going to get some ice for his neck. And Cashman, I want you to settle everything with the village chief."

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<sup>7</sup> I learned that headlock from Haystacks Calhoun, who frequently applied his famous "crusher" headlock to Happy Humphrey in the late 1950s at the wrestling arena on Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn.

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This incident turned into an unmitigated nightmare for me. The headlock had strained Pedro's sternocleidomastoid muscle and injured his cervical vertebrae so badly he claimed he was disabled. I bought him a used neck brace that I found at the Jalan Surabaya flea market that made him look less like an inverted pear and more like an isosceles triangle with his pointy head at the apex. During his "incapacitation" he merrily laid around the house being pampered by Sabrina and the maids. He was enjoying himself immensely with all the comforts of home and no worries about going to work. It was clear from this scene that Pedro wouldn't be leaving my home anytime soon.

I wanted him to visit a doctor, hoping to hasten his recovery and departure, but Pedro refused medical help, afraid that medical therapy might infringe upon this blissful period of unlimited sympathy and affection. Then, from out of the blue, one of my Indonesian colleagues came up with a brilliant idea.

"Hey, why don't you take him to see a *dukun*?<sup>8</sup> Indonesian traditional medicine is really good for musculoskeletal problems like his. I know a *dukun* who specializes in massage therapy for orthopedic problems."

This was, indeed, a brilliant idea. With his professed expertise in "anthropological observation" and his upcoming consultancy with WHO on traditional Indonesian healing practices, Pedro had a vested interest in traditional medicine. There was no way that he could weasel out of this proposition.

Not that he didn't try.... I consider myself a world class malingerer, but Pedro gave me a run for my money as a close second. Pedro claimed, in a very loud voice, that he was too weak to walk, his injury was beyond the purview of traditional medicine, and he even pretended that he had lupus erythematosus and it was a contraindication for traditional medicine. I rejected all of his lame excuses. "Are you



The labyrinthine streets of the West Jakarta kampung

insinuating that you don't believe in Indonesian traditional medicine, Pedro?" That did it. He had to go to visit the *dukun*.

The *dukun* my colleague referred us to lived deep in the kampung<sup>9</sup> of West Jakarta. The kampung's labyrinthine streets were lined with small concrete homes covered by ubiquitous red clay roofs. Stalls selling sate kambing, martabak, and soto ayam<sup>10</sup> crowded the narrow streets. When we

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<sup>8</sup> A *dukun* is an Indonesian traditional healer who uses ancient rituals and a natural pharmacopeia to heal physical and spiritual ills. A *dukun* can also be a [spirit medium](#), an expert in customs and traditions, on occasion a sorcerer and master of [black magic](#). The *dukun* uses a deep and extensive knowledge of herbs, natural medicines, and massage to treat illness or invoke help from the spirit world. They can also cast revenge or retaliation spells against someone who has wronged a patron.

<sup>9</sup> The word "kampung" is literally translated as a "village." Its more colloquial meaning was a densely populated area of local-style dwellings where Jakarta's lower middle income residents resided. Homes in the kampung are quite basic and may lack water, electricity and sewage. The term is frequently used to describe an urban slum.

<sup>10</sup> Indonesian street food vendors can be found in any area of Jakarta, but their principal market is the kampung population. In addition to satay kambing (grilled lamb on a skewer), martabak (scrambled egg rolled flat with a meat filling served in squares), and soto ayam (chicken noodle soup), you can also get gule kambing (goat stew), bakso (meatball soup), nasi rames (jasmine rice surrounded by a collections of meats and vegetables) and much more.

arrived at our destination, we learned that our *dukun* was part of a group practice that catered to nearly every physical and spiritual need. In addition to orthopedics, the group practice contained traditional birth attendants, spiritualists, experts in spells and black magic, specialists for neurological disorders, and most unlikely of all, a *dukun* who used traditional healing methods to repair dents in vehicles. I was astonished to observe a dented, banged-up vehicle enter the *dukun's* repair shop and exit one hour later looking as good as new, with nary a bang, a clank, or the sound of a mechanical instrument coming from the repair shop. Some things that occurred in Indonesia defied explanation.

Our *dukun's* office was more like a small clinic with several rooms containing patients with elastic bandages covering their extremities. As we later learned, these patients had fractured arms or legs that the *dukun* treated with massage therapy. The *dukun* massaged the newly broken arm or leg until the bones had been repositioned, wrapped the extremity in elastic bandages, and did the same thing the next day — and the next, and the next, and the next until he was satisfied that the bone was properly set and healed. This process was excruciatingly painful, as evidenced by the screams and howls reverberating throughout the clinic. Pedro, who was also a coward and a pansy, tried to bolt when he heard the first screams. His many infirmities amazingly resolved themselves quickly at the sound of those screams. Was it possible Pedro was only faking injury to gain sympathy and attention? I wouldn't put it past him. I restrained him and forced him to face the *dukun*.

The *dukun* examined Pedro's neck and gently massaged it with his hands. Then he examined Pedro's arms, legs, and back. He focused on three spots; one on the left arm, the second on the right leg, and the last one in the lower back. Then, with his thumb and index finger, he squeezed the spot on the left arm firmly for three minutes. Pedro's blood-curdling shriek from the pain sent shivers through my spine. The *dukun* did the same thing on the right leg, and then on the lower back. The pain was so severe that Pedro's clothes were drenched with sweat. Then the *dukun* went back for another round. I was enjoying watching this immensely. After all of the headaches Pedro caused me, it was a pleasure to see him getting some payback.

The *dukun* was ready to start another round when, miraculously, Pedro was on his feet and walking around with no dysfunction. He didn't want any more acupressure massage. After a week in bed (feigning injury no doubt), it seemed that Pedro had totally recovered. For me this was the best outcome. Now I could throw him out of my house. All of a sudden, however, the *dukun* snuck up behind Pedro. Grabbing his head in two hands, he yanked it to the right and then to the left, accompanied by Pedro's most ghastly howl of pain yet.

"That will realign his vertebrae," exclaimed the *dukun*. "You can take him home now. By the way, tht will be \$100." This was an example of "fee-for-service" medicine at its best. Although \$100 was a pretty steep price to pay for a massage, it was easily worth it to get rid of Pedro.

Much to my dismay, however, that final yank on Pedro's neck actually caused worse problems than the headlock I gave him on my living room floor. Now Pedro was truly writhing in pain. Only this time I took him directly to a hospital where they placed him in traction for three weeks. By the time he was released Pedro had had his fill of Indonesia. He got on the next plane and retreated to Hawaii.

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It was a relief to finally be rid of Pedro Franklin. He had caused me no end of grief. But he left his legacy. We had to let our maid Yanti, the object of Pedro's affections, go. In the week he recuperated at

our home, she positively swooned in his presence. And to think that she and Pedro were just practicing his Indonesian language skills together. Really? Give me a break!!

The day after my tete-a-tete with the village chief and Yanti's husband, I had to withdraw \$2,000 from the bank and pay the village chief. The money quickly assuaged any concerns that he or Yanti's husband had about the affair. I made Pedro promise to pay me back. To this day, Pedro Franklin still owes me \$2,000!!!!

On a more positive note, this episode taught me a lot about the spiritual realm in Indonesia. I would need it because this would not be my last run-in with the black arts.