

The letter arrived ten days later. Shorn of diplomatic politeness, it summoned me to Nusquam to assist the Director of the Nusquami Development Board and the Governor of the Central Bank of Nusquam “in facilitating the transition to a banking system under the supervision of” the CBN. It suggested that we might begin with a review and audit of banking functions within Nusquam, and requested, ever so delicately, for some indication of the likely fee that I might charge them as a consultant.

This was a thrilling prospect - to be present at the creation of a banking system - and it was necessary for me to dilute enthusiasm with a measure of practicality. I had a sheet of standard terms that I usually submitted in connec-

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tion with consulting work, but the logistics of the situation called for more. We were talking about traveling a world away, probably for a considerable period of time, and that was itself a cost to be considered.

Communications fluttered back and forth, mostly by email, before the Sovereign Republic of Nusquam and I finally arrived at a financial arrangement, a plan of action, and a schedule. And what a schedule! Consulting in succession an atlas, three travel web sites, Mr. Bren, the executive assistant to the Director of the Nusquami Development Board, four more travel web sites, a travel agent, six discount travel sites, and the check-out clerk at the supermarket where I usually shopped, I finally determined that I could comfortably make the trip to Nusquam in approximately 36 hours, including layovers.

Having obtained the agreement of the Board to cover all travel expenses, the long trip began with a two-hour drive to San Francisco

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International Airport at 8:00 a.m. A cozy aisle seat at the back of the plane awaited me. Vic Gold had urged me to hold out for business class at least, but there was no point to that. I always slept in flight, no matter the time of day, so what was the point of an expensive seat? Vic waxed enthusiastic about the meals and amenities, but I couldn't see it. I don't like to eat on planes; I don't like to be entertained. And besides, a long flight is just about the only time I get to sleep for an extended period, uninterrupted.

United Flight 869 to Hong Kong was scheduled to leave at 1:00 p.m. on that Tuesday, 15 October, but the drive from Sacramento to SFO was always a little unpredictable. It could take 90 minutes, or three hours. It was a good day, however, and I arrived at the airport around 10:00 a.m. With an international flight departing at 1:00 p.m., I needed to check in by 11:00 a.m. Still, I would rather sit around wait-

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ing in an airport than be rushing down the highway running late for a flight.

Check-in was relatively easy. I always travel light, on the theory that you should never check a bag that you wouldn't mind losing forever. I wear my "traveling suit," pack a fresh shirt, a tie, and a change of socks and underwear in my carry-on. Also snacks. Also two 50 ml bottles of Jameson's. And my papers and books, of course, if there's room.

Boarding began about 40 minutes before the scheduled departure time. Loading from the back of the plane, I should be among the first down the aisle. Ah, but I had forgotten about Global Services and 1K members of Mileage Plus, passengers seated in United First and United Business, all those magic red carpet travelers. And then children flying alone, or with the aid of an aircraft, families traveling with children, children traveling with families, passengers requiring extra time to board the aircraft. Twenty minutes later, I was allowed to

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board, by which time I needed extra time to board, since the aisles were now crowded with people stuffing suitcases into the overhead compartment, luggage large enough to contain a family traveling with small children, and certainly children flying alone. Unfortunately, my children were now too big to be placed in the overhead, and so I rarely had the opportunity to fly with them.

Finally, my seat, on the aisle, rear of the plane, near the restroom, with just enough overhead space to lodge my carry-on bag without too much carrying on. Jacket off, stuffed in near my bag, snacks tucked away in the seat pocket, I nestled down into my seat. Immediately the urge to fall asleep began to overtake me.

At that moment an elderly lady loomed in front of me, painstakingly deciphering the seat numbers. "I'm so sorry, but I think that's my seat," she said, twitching her nose in the direction of the window seat to the right in my aisle.

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“Not at all,” I replied politely, unhitching my seatbelt and struggling from my seat in close quarters. She hoisted an immense, floppy bag into the overhead, disposed of a backpack and a purse under the seat in front of hers, as she wriggled into place. At last regaining my seat, I clicked my seatbelt, and once again experienced seductive sleepiness.

At that point, a large, burly young man with a bulky rucksack and a tangle of electronic equipment materialized in the aisle beside me. “Sorry,” he said. “That’s me,” lifting his head to toss his gaze into the middle seat to my right.

“OK,” I replied pleasantly, unhitching my seatbelt once again and struggling from my seat in even closer quarters as he hovered alongside. But now the inevitable crisis occurred, as there was clearly no room in the overhead compartment. Nor the one to the left or to the right. A flight attendant, her gaze attracted by the growing clog in the aisle, side-

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skipped past several standing passengers and rescued the rucksack. Relieved of his burden, my middle-seat companion nestled into his seat and began adjusting cables and ear pieces. I settled into my seat again, and drifted off.

From time to time, the beverages cart rumbled past, and I rose to the occasion, ordering a ginger ale. While supplies lasted, I prepared a Jamie and Ginger and sipped my drink while I nibbled on the little snacks provided by a generous airline. About halfway through the sixteen-hour flight a small cardboard box suggestive of dinner arrived, but I couldn't bring myself to eat it - something about the sense of smell and confined spaces. This was when my little cache of snacks came in handy.

Aside from the occasional trip to the restroom - always a good opportunity to stretch the legs and see the world - I spent the rest of my flight time wrapped in sleep. Knitting up the raveled sleeve of care, as my father would say.

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Just past 6:00 p.m. on Saturday, 16 October, we touched down at Hong Kong International Airport. I watched through the window, two seats to my right, as it came up to meet us in the twilight. It looked like a small island in itself, tethered to a bigger land mass south of it. In fact, the airport was built on a large artificial island, formed - in the last years of the Crown Colony of Hong Kong - by razing two small islands Chek Lap Kok and Lam Chau, little more than a square mile between them, and reclaiming some three and half square miles of seabed between them.

After an interminable wait huddled in the aisle with my traveling companions, I finally emerged from hibernation into Terminal 1. International airports all exist in the same peculiar space-time continuum. The same marching pace of flowing streams of travelers in transit, to gates at the farthest distance from wherever they are, to flight connections, to baggage claim, to news kiosks, to the inevitable café. It



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seems to be home, whatever the location, at least until you walk outside and find the world beyond the terminal.

The solution of course is to stay inside the terminal. With four and a half hours until my next connection, there was time enough to check the departures board, take the long hike to the gate, and scout out coffee and a sweet.

United Flight 180 to Guam left from the same terminal, and so luck was with me still. In twenty minutes I had made it to the departure gate, and there in the near distance was a coffee stand. I would fortify myself with caffeine while I sat, secure by the gate, checking e-mails and intermittently dozing.

Another boarding line, another interminable wait, but at last I found myself inching down the crowded aisle of the plane. It could have been the same seat; it certainly was the same coordinates. And the same routine - aisle seat, rear of plane, near restroom, carry-on overhead, jacket off, snacks, seat pocket, and

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then to sleep, perchance to dream. It could not be, though. I started, anticipating the arrival of some interloping fellow passenger, and . . . there was . . . no one. A row to myself!

Naturally, I found I could not fall off to sleep. Perhaps the marvel of unfettered space was too much to take for granted. A six-hour flight ahead of me, and *now* I couldn't sleep. A lesser man would sit there eating airline food and watching stale movies, but not I. I sat there eating my snacks and reading a stale *SkyMall* magazine.

I had run out of Jameson's two hours into the flight. Time for a walk about. There is only so far you can walk in a plane, however, and the scenery is limited. I returned to my seat after a few roundtrips up to the curtains that mark the frontier separating Business from Economy and back to my seat.

The exercise was good for me, and so at last I drifted off to a dreamless sleep, falling deeply into the quiet. Lights sprang up eventually,

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and the breakfast carts began making their way down the aisles. We were reaching the approach to the airport on Guam.

Around 6:00 a.m., we touched down at the A.B. Won Pat International Airport and slowly taxied to our gate at Terminal 1. I sat thinking about Won Pat, whom I had met almost 40 years ago, when I was a young attorney in Washington, D.C. This was a man who deserved to have an airport named after him. A compact, tough-looking fellow, he had lived through the Japanese occupation in World War II, and then a life in politics – more of the same, I thought. He served as Guam's first delegate to Congress beginning in 1972, which he was when I met him. Always dignified, always serious, he made me embarrassed to be so cynical about politicians. Gone, but not forgotten here in his homeland.

There was little time to reflect on these memories; I had a boat to catch in four hours. Something called the Nusquam Pacific Area

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Transport – NPAT – 75 was scheduled to leave at 10:20 that morning. I could reach the pier by way of a shuttle bus from Won Pat.

This brief leg of my long journey was uneventful. Indeed, there was only one other passenger on the shuttle bus, a tall, thin man in his forties, dressed like a minister, and quiet and withdrawn. We mumbled good mornings at each other, nodding our heads and pretending smiles. Then each of us courteously avoided eye-contact with the other for the rest of the ride out to the pier.

The NPAT 75 was something of a surprise to me. It resembled a small cruise ship, but with none of the polished wood trim and gleaming surfaces. It was comfortable but streamlined for function rather than display. Gradually separating its own smells from those of the surrounding vessels and the pier itself, I noticed that it seemed to lack the pervasive, tangy smell of diesel. Whatever its engines,

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they were apparently fed by something other than fossil fuel.

The ship looked to be about 150 feet long, with a superstructure of gleaming white, with a hull of alternately red and white striping. It seemed to be very sleek, and overall suggested great speed. I saw nothing like a smokestack, which struck me as unusual, because I suppose I just associated a stack with the natural profile of an ocean-going cruiser.

I followed the tall, thin minister up the boarding ramp. I handed over my voucher to the ship's officer, and he handed me a card key to a cabin on the right side of the ship - starboard, I think. This turned out to be a very pleasant if compact suite, all built-in, modular style furnishings in honey-colored, highly polished finish. Maybe it was the port side; it did have portholes, not star-shaped windows at all.

Within thirty minutes, we were under way, powering out on the beginning of our 800-mile run, west northwest to Nusquam.

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Two hours later, I entered the dining hall and found my assigned seat at the captain's table. I looked about for my traveling companion, the tall, thin minister, but he was nowhere to be seen. Once I thought I had spotted him at a neighboring table, but it turned out to be another traveler, a man dressed totally in black who could have been the minister's younger brother.

Captain Barr soon joined me. He was a man of middle age and middle height, tanned and well brushed, of compact build that gives the appearance of solidity. We exchanged greetings and sat down as salad was being served.

"Have you been before, Professor?" the Captain asked courteously.

"No, sir," I replied, realizing that, pleasant as he might be, Barr's very appearance prompted a yes-sir-no-sir kind of response. "So, Captain, how long is this voyage?" I continued.

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“Approximately 800 miles, say 695 nautical miles,” he replied. Obviously, a question frequently asked and answered, but he made it sound as if I had engaged his interest with my inquiry.

“Is that knots?” I asked on the return serve.

“No, Professor,” he replied, careful to avoid giving offense in responding to what must have seemed a bone-headed landsman’s question. “Strictly speaking, knots is speed; miles is distance, you understand.”

“Oh, I see that now. Thanks.” *Stupid stupid stupid.* “So, how fast are we going?”

“Well, most cruise ships travel about 20-25 knots. Well, a knot is one nautical mile per hour, or approximately 1.15 mph.”

“So you’d be talking approximately, what, 23-29 mph?”

“Yes, that’s about right, Professor. Now, a cruise ship doesn’t always go that fast, you understand. If we’re heading into a port overnight that is not that far out, it would actually

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float about awhile. If the port is quite far, we'd travel at maximum service speed."

"And with an NPAT?" I asked.

"Oh, considerably faster, I can assure you," he replied, a tinge of pride coloring his otherwise careful and balanced demeanor. "This is a very fast vessel, sleek bow, modified, streamlined, you understand, super-light materials, particularly as to the superstructure."

"And so, the speed?" Veal cutlets replaced the now empty salad plates. I declined with a slight, discreet gesture of my right hand, acknowledged by the server with a barely perceptible nod.

"Easily 40 to 60 knots," the Captain replied.

"Which would be what in miles?"

"Well, say, 45 to 70 mph."

"So how long is this voyage then?"

"Approximately 14 hours, you know. With a little speed, we've done it in 12 hours."

Lunch turned out to be the most exciting part of the voyage. Once I got used to the slight



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vibration of a ship in motion, and the ubiquitous background noise of the sea slipping alongside, the trip was like sitting in your apartment waiting for the taxi to arrive.

At approximately 4:30 p.m. local time, I came up on deck for my first sight of Nusquam. An absolutely smooth, apparently featureless shoreline filled the horizon. Was it silvery-white, gray, or what? Beyond that shoreline sprouted a bristly series of tall buildings or spindly superstructures of some kind.

Within the hour, we arrived at a docking facility on the southern edge of the vast shoreline. The NPAT 75 inserted itself into the slip like a laptop into a docking station, form-fitted and secure. Debarkation began, and I was soon passing through Border Control into the main arrivals hall of the terminal building, a wide atrium with a pebbled glass ceiling. Ahead of me, I was confronted by a marble-clad wall some three stories tall. The wall was covered from top to bottom with carved quotations,

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highlighted with golden flecks embedded in the carved letters. This is what it told me:

**SCIENCE IS THE FOUNDATION OF  
RATIONAL PLANNING.**



**HUMAN POTENTIAL IS OPTIMIZED  
IN ACCORDANCE WITH SCIENTIFIC PLANNING  
AND OUR DEVOTION TO RATIONAL POLICY IN  
ALL MATTERS AFFECTING THE WELFARE OF  
THE NUSQUAMI POPULATION.**



**INCIDENCE, NOT ACCIDENTS.**



**WE ARE TO RELY ON SCIENCE AND  
TECHNOLOGY TO ACHIEVE THE GOALS OF  
A JUST AND ORDERED SOCIETY, WHERE THE  
WELFARE OF THE PEOPLE IS 'ADVANCED BY  
THE ADVANCE OF KNOWLEDGE.'**

“These are the essential insights of Premier Toft,” a voice said behind me, ever so satisfied with the truth it found in those quotations.

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I turned and found myself facing my fellow passenger the minister.

“It is Professor Malloy, I understand,” he said with the merest suggestion of a query in his tone of voice, not wishing to offend with anything as direct as a question.

“Yes, you are correct,” I said, beginning to feel more formal even as I smiled politely.

“A pleasure, a pleasure. Allow me to introduce myself. Paarol, deputy assistant minister. Ministry of Finance and Planning. May I take you to the car? Do you have your baggage?”

“Oh, sorry, yes, I have everything here,” I replied in some distraction, as I noticed, coming from Arrivals, *my* minister, accompanied by his younger self. So my new acquaintance was not my travelling companion after all, but another austere and conventionally dressed Nusquami citizen. And a minister. Well, deputy assistant minister.

“Shall we go, then, if that is convenient?” Paarol gently suggested.

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“Yes, of course,” I replied, and we made our way at a gentle pace into Nusquam.