



Video Story Transcript

A LINK IN THE CIRCLE: LEARNING TO LEAN ON MY INDONESIAN FAMILY

By: Storyteller Arianna Ross
www.storytapestries.com

Link to YouTube Video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIEfVBXg5Y>

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

My name is Arianna Ross and I am a storyteller who has lived all over the world. During this journey, this story, I was living in Indonesia. It was two o'clock in the morning and I was exhausted.

The police officers had been getting on our bus every 30 minutes on the dot. I was taking the bus from Banda Aceh all the way to Medan and every 30 minutes the bus would stop. The doors were open. A police officer would get on the bus. He would walk up the bus. He would walk down the bus with his AK 47 in his hands and then he would walk off the bus... and the bus would begin again.

Usually the bus driver, he would check the people on the bus to make sure that we were OK. He would smile. He would nod his head as if to say, "Are you ok?"

I always responded with a nod back, "I'm fine."

At two o'clock in the morning, I pulled my sarong over my hand and I leaned up against the Plexiglas window and I fell asleep for one hour.

Suddenly I felt this stabbing sensation in my arm. I heard the sound of my name being shouted and I heard the sound of a man speaking to me in a language I didn't understand Acehnese. (I spoke Indonesian). Then suddenly, a soft voice broke through the screams. It was the woman sitting in front of me; she was saying, "It's ok, my child. He just wants to see your passport."

I took the sarong off my head. I reached inside my money belt and I handed my passport to the man. He swung his AK 47 in front of my face and he reached out to grab my passport, flipping through it, reading out names of countries I've been to and then he threw my passport back at me and turned and walked off the bus.

The bus driver, before sticking keys in the engine, he turned and he looked at me. "Are you OK?"

And I responded, "I'm fine."

All of the people on the bus, they all seemed to be looking at me asking me with their eyes and their smiles, "Are you OK?"

And I responded, "I'm fine."

The woman sitting in front of me, she was in full burka, black from head to toe. She smiled, her eyes peeking through her face, masked by the black. "It's ok, my child, your Indonesian family is here to protect you."

I reached inside my money belt and I took out a tiny turtle, one that was made out of seashell and coconut shell and I held it in my hand. I closed my fingers around it and I took a deep breath in... and I let it out...

I remembered what my adopted brother had told me. You see, I had been living on the island of Pulau Weh, just north of the city of Banda Aceh. I had been living in a home right next to my adopted little brother. He became my adopted little brother because his mother used to feed me on a daily basis. She invited me to their home for breakfast, lunch or dinner and the last night I was there, she cooked all of my favorite foods.

She made coconut soup, pumpkin curry and a special sticky rice dessert. And at the end of the meal, he took me out to the beach and he handed me that turtle. "Look down! What do you see?"

"A turtle?"

"Uh, uh. Family! A connection! If you ever need anything at all, just think of us. Hold that turtle in your hand and take a deep breath in and let it out."

I held that turtle in my hand all night long as I packed, even as I walked the next day to the docks where I was taking the boat to Banda Aceh to catch the bus. I sat down in my seat and I thought to myself, "Saya mau sendirian. I wish to be alone."

I managed to be alone for approximately 30 seconds before I felt this soft tapping sensation on my arm. I turned and I looked. It was this woman, she was in full burka, head to toe, in black. She held in her hand a dragon's egg. Not a real dragon's egg. It's a type of fruit from Indonesia. The outside is a thick, hot pink leather and the inside, a delicious white fruit. "kau mau mau makan," she said to me.

"No. Saya mau sendirian. I wish to be alone."

"Kau mau mau makan. you wish to eat!" I realized that there was no arguing with her so I began to share her fruit. And before I knew it, we were talking. And then she looked at me. "You look exactly like my daughter."

Huh! I was wearing khaki pants and a tie-dyed T-shirt. "How did I look like her daughter?"

"My daughter, she's the first one in her family, in my family to go to Banda Aceh University. She is now an English teacher." Before I knew it, we had actually reached the city of Banda Aceh.

We stepped off of the boat and I reached down to grab my bags and say goodbye. When I felt this hand on my arm, this grip on my wrist. "Come, I take you to the bus stop!"

“No, it's okay. I can go by myself.”

“T, t, t, t, t, t, t, I take you!”

I followed her down this long maze of roads through the marketplace. We stopped in a sarong shop. She needed to buy something for her daughter. In the end, she just bought one item... for me. It was a beautiful sarong with flowers all over it and then she handed it to me. She told me, “It's for your daughter.”

“I don't have a daughter, Auntie!”

“You will; one day you will have a daughter! This sarong is blessed by the imam, the highest of holy men in the mosque. He does not care that your child is not Muslim. He blesses all children.”

I packed that sarong neatly in my backpack and I followed her out the marketplace to the big bus stop to the ticket shop where I bought my ticket. The woman, Auntie, she explained to the man selling the tickets that I was her daughter and it was his responsibility to sell me the correct bus ticket. He explained to me that for his sister, he would do anything. He also explained that the bus wasn't leaving for another four hours and if I so desired, I could sit next to him and wait. I didn't have an opportunity to respond.

Auntie, she grabbed my hand and said, “Come, you eat dinner with me!”

Huh?” I found myself being dragged onto a little bus. I found myself getting off the little bus in what seemed like the middle of nowhere and there appeared to be a group of houses to the right and jungle to the left. The houses didn't even look like they were complete. Auntie, she explained to me that her husband's job was security. He watched all of the houses and when they were finished, they would move to a new location where he would protect the rest of the unfinished houses in Banda Aceh.

I had to duck in order to enter her house.

I noticed that there were no pictures on the walls. Just one poster in Arabic. I asked her what it said and she smiled. “It is a phrase about family, that strangers should be family and always welcome in your home.”

I asked her where exactly all the photographs were. I was used to my mother's house where there are photographs everywhere. She pointed underneath the bed. There was a box. I took the box out and I started looking through the photographs and I found one of her daughter at her daughter's graduation.

I asked her how her daughter was doing today and she grinned. “My daughter is perfect. You keep that photo.”

“Why would I keep this photo, it's yours?”

“T, t, t, t, t, t! You keep the photo. I have the memory.”

I put that photo in my money belt. Before I knew it was time to catch the small bus back to the big bus stop.

She waved down a small bus and she explained to the small bus driver that I was her daughter. He nodded his head and said for his niece he would do anything and he did. He, actually stopped his bus at the big bus stop, something I never seen before. He got off the bus explaining to all the passengers that they would have to wait as he escorted me to the big bus stop.

He explained to my bus driver that I was his niece and that he, my new bus driver, was to make certain I arrived in Medan safely. The big bus driver nodded his head and explained to me that for his grandchild, he

would do anything. Just before the bus leaved, just before he stuck the keys in the engine, he turned and... me... looked at me. Without any words, he seemed to ask me, "Are you okay?"

And I responded, "I'm fine."

About three years later, I was sitting on my grandparents' bed in Florida – Tampa, Florida, to be exact, when a news flash came on the television. News flash - tsunami hit Banda Aceh. I wrote down immediately the phone number at the bottom of the news flash.

I ran to the telephone and I began to call and call and call and call until, finally, I made it through. And when I did, the woman's response was, "We have no idea if the island of Pulau Weh (that tiny island I lived on just north of Banda Aceh), if it even existed anymore." And in terms of Auntie and Uncle, unless I had their address, there was no way that she could help me. I simply had to wait.

I couldn't, wouldn't be able to know what happened to Auntie. I didn't have any way of communicating with her. No cell phone number, no nothing. But I did send an e-mail to my friends at Pulau Weh and I waited.

I finally received an email one month later. When the ground began to shake, the people in Pulau Weh ran up to the highest point on their island. Only one man died. He was trying to rescue his fishing boat. The rest survived. I went into my keepsake box and I found the turtle and the photograph. I put them together in my hands. I took a deep breath in... and I remembered and I had hope that Auntie was okay.