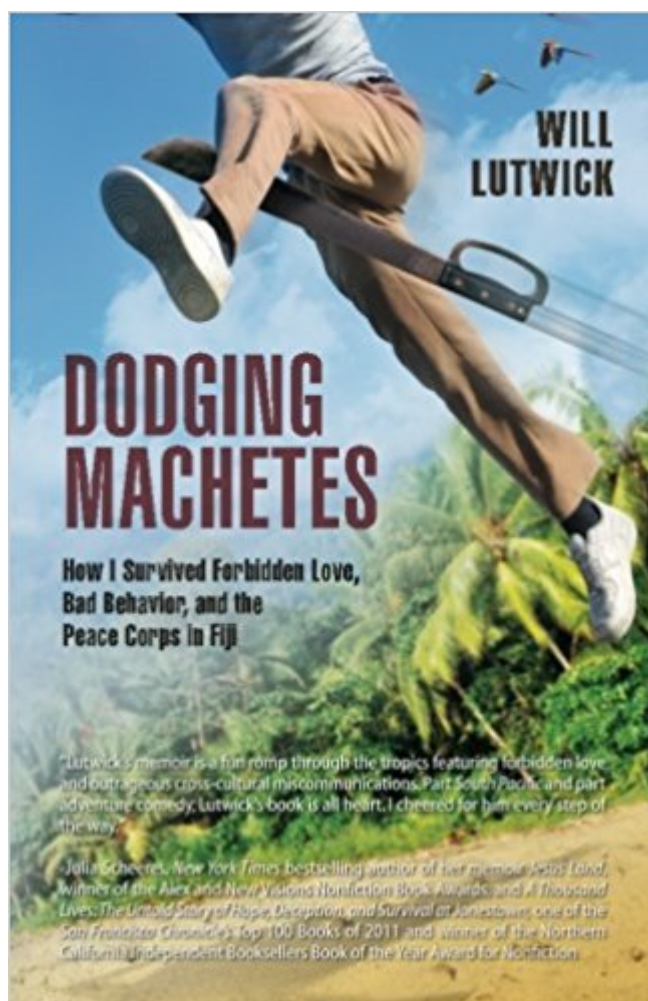


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# Dodging Machetes: How I Survived Forbidden Love, Bad Behavior, And The Peace Corps In Fiji



## Synopsis

WINNER OF THE 2012 USA BEST BOOK AWARD FOR MULTICULTURAL NON-FICTION  
FINALIST IN THE 2013 ERIC HOFFER BOOK AWARDS AND THE INTERNATIONAL BOOK AWARDS  
FEATURED IN ROBERT MCKEE'S BYLINE --- THE LEGENDARY MCKEE IS THE GURU OF HOLLYWOOD'S TOP SCREENWRITERS. Strap yourself in for a wild ride! "Dodging Machetes" is sometimes dramatic and thrilling, other times flat-out funny. And it's always compelling! Will Lutwick, a quirky misfit, gets an MBA at 22, but soon realizes he and the American corporate world are a horrid mismatch. He joins the Peace Corps and is sent to the Fiji Islands, the quintessential tropical paradise. Will finds himself attracted to prohibited pulchritude when Rani Gupta, a beautiful, rebellious 20-year-old from a traditional Hindu family, begins working in his office. Dating is taboo in Fiji's large Indian community, and an interracial couple would be unprecedented. But Rani and Will soon discover their mutual attraction impossible to resist. Their liaison is clandestine, but word gets out, and a cultural firestorm engulfs Rani's community. The two lovers are under constant threat of attack, and violence ensues. Will must confront his personal demons about courage and commitment, while Rani is treated like a pariah by her people. Will the besieged lovers stay together, or will a hostile world tear them apart? In between the dramatic scenes, this seriocomic memoir is savvy and often hilarious. Lutwick deliciously skewers his own behavior and satirizes the people, practices, and protocols he encounters in Fiji and in backstory about his youth. Will Lutwick has woven his provocative insight with the dramatic events of a singular, but timeless, forbidden-love story. The result is "Dodging Machetes"--a story-driven page-turner from an exceptional writer.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"In his beautifully written memoir...he relays these memories with neither bitterness nor self-serving pity--just a good dose of humor and intelligence...He shares thoughtful insight into Fiji's exotic history and society...Off-the-charts hysterical.An unabashed, candid memoir that continually entertains and educates."--KIRKUS REVIEWS"An eye-opening story about love, loss, and discrimination...Not only is this an exciting memoir, but it's a great modern day Romeo and Juliet tale. You can tell that this book was a passionate labor of love. Each page is as addicting as the last, with great emotional elements driving the story.This is a great book for those looking for a well-rounded love story with a few laughs and a lot of heart." Five Stars. --SAN FRANCISCO BOOK REVIEW"Lutwick's memoir is a fun romp through the tropics, featuring forbidden love and outrageous cross-cultural miscommunications. Part South Pacific and part adventure comedy, Lutwick's book is all heart. I cheered for him every step of the way." --JULIA SCHEERES, Award-winning, New York Times bestselling author of *Jesus Land* and *A Thousand Lives: The Untold Story of Hope, Deception, and Survival at Jonestown*"...entertaining and thought provoking...This is a fine example of what a memoir can be...episodic, fast paced chapters. Once I started, I could not stop and yet, found myself thinking about his story and its themes long after the highlighted passages began to fade.If you enjoy a roller-coaster memoir, you'll love *Dodging Machetes*. It will probably win awards. Five stars. "--PEACE CORPS WORLDWIDE by LAWRENCE F. LIHOSIT, author of the bible on Peace Corps memoirs, *Peace Corps Experience: Write and Publish Your Memoir*

*Dodging Machetes* was edited by Jordan Rosenfeld, author of *Make a Scene: Crafting a Powerful Story One Scene at a Time*. Her book reviews are regularly featured on *The California Report*, a news-magazine produced by NPR-affiliate KQED radio.

It's good. It's not great literature, but it's enjoyable and full of recognizable impressions of Fiji (I lived there for nine months 1993-4). There's real dearth of books on Fiji, and if you're looking to get some flavor of what the country was like right around its transition away from British colony to independence, along with a sense of how insular the Fijian vs. Indo-Fijian populations were, this is a very interesting, readable, likable book.

The easiest way describe *Dodging Machetes* is to talk about it in terms of movies: I would compare the book to romantic comedies written by men--movies like Woody Allen's *Annie Hall*, for example,

which look at romance from a decidedly male point of view. In fact, the comparison to *Annie Hall* is an apt one, because not only is that movie, like *Dodging Machetes*, about lovers who come from very different worlds, but the story is told through a narrator with a distinctively Jewish sensibility about a unique, attractive and, to him, exotic love-object. So let us call *Dodging Machetes* a literary *Annie Hall*, set in a place as foreign to many Americans as New York City, the island of Fiji, and told about the romance he will never forget, not with a goofy Wisconsin-bred Christian girl, but rather with a willful, ethnically Indian Hindu. The memoir, narrated in the present by a witty, now-accomplished adult, looks back at his younger self, when his social maturity and world-wisdom were not yet equal to his book-smarts. Perhaps because he lost both of his parents as a young boy or perhaps because he was a misfit Jewish kid living in a part of the South with few Members of his Tribe, Lutwick needed extra time to mature and become socialized before entering the business and administrative world. Rather than becoming a man by sacrificing his life for his country in Vietnam, Lutwick joined the Peace Corps and was assigned to a tiny Pacific island country, Fiji. Rani Gupta, the star of this movie, I mean the book, is a member of the country's ethnic Indian population, that was originally brought by the British to this former colony to work plantations for the Empire. Indeed, if *Annie Hall* is the star of the movie *Annie Hall*, because of her quirky, fun personality and her one-of-a-kind style, then Rani Gupta is the star of *Dodging Machetes*, because of her strong will, her admirable bravery, her recklessness, and her downright sexiness. Without apparent invention and, remarkably, through just the power of words, the narrator Lutwick does a superb job of bringing his love-object to life for the reader, making us wonder through the twists and turns of this difficult romance if she will survive the adventure, and how. Because Lutwick's narrator is prevented from reading her thoughts, the reader finds himself tantalized and, like Lutwick, attracted to this young woman. The author deserves high praise for using the narrative tools at his disposal to make us understand what drew him to this mysterious Indian girl with the boldness to wear a mini-skirt instead of a sari. Lutwick's memoir generously rewards readers who look for certain traits in a book. For readers who seek escape, *Dodging Machetes* offers a story set on a tropical island with a testosterone-fueled American falling for a reckless, dark-eyed beauty. For readers who love humor, Lutwick's comic narrator tells his story with wit and dramatizes a great number of hilarious scenes that illustrate the silliness of a bright but socially immature man who has not yet mastered human relations. For readers who like to learn, Lutwick explains what it meant to grow up Jewish in the American South at mid-century; he gives a fascinating explanation of the history of Fiji and the makeup of its people; and he makes clear what it meant to be an able-bodied American male on the verge of being drafted during the Vietnam War. And, finally, for readers who love characters and

relationships, this book offers you Will Lutwick and Rani Gupta--two likeable outcasts in a culturally unacceptable relationship that is anything but sure to succeed. I relished the time I spent with these two young people and I believe that you will also. Like me, I'm sure that you will not soon forget *Dodging Machetes*, the literary Annie Hall.

I must admit that I still have visions of this tale swirling around in my brain. Last week, I finished this book, the second half in one sitting--ignoring my cravings for lunch and other distractions. What makes this book so special is that Mr. Lutwick has opened his soul, exposed his vulnerabilities, and invited us in to learn the tales of a brave, young couple. Yes, it's a tale that could make its way into a movie, but if it were, there would need to be a narrative track expressing the innards of Mr. Lutwick's brain. It's a testament to Mr. Lutwick's writing that I have firmly embedded in my brain a graphical construct of Rani's leopard eyes. Though there is no photo of her in the book, he paints quite carefully how he reacted not only to Rani's captivating beauty, but also to her take-charge attitude. Who could not enjoy this wild ride through cultural taboos and young love? I heartily recommend this book on many different levels: to get a taste of our youth culture in the 1960's, to learn how the U.S pushed its values onto the world, and to enjoy quite simply the universal love story in a not-so-universal set of circumstances.

Will's memoir is insightful, funny and romantic. It is a well written memoir of his Peace Corps experience. He has crafted a story that reads more like a fine novel than a dateline of experiences. He provides great details of the Fiji people and culture while maintaining plot and just the right amount of humor. He makes it easy for the reader to understand the main characters and what drives them. He successfully creates suspense as well as romance. His use of dialog is well done and enhances and moves the story forward. He clearly shows time and place right to the end with the suspense filled Selective Service Board hearing to gain III-A status. *Dodging Machetes* takes place in the late 60's and early 70's and he portrays that era flawlessly. Will's Peace Corps experience was unique yet familiar and believable. I feel his writing is a fine representation of a Peace Corps experience in the early seventies with a wonderful story to boot. I would highly recommend *Dodging Machetes*.

Will Lutwick does a great job of sharing his fumbling with relationships in the late sixties. His stories of growing up in Richmond hit home; particularly the parts about how our generation was raised with "Spare the Rod and Spoil the Child" as a rationale for what would later be called abuse. His first

sexual encounter was handled with taste and hilarious self-deprecation. Interweaving the story of his forbidden love in the Peace Corps with just the right amount of autobiographical flashback made for a great read. The short sentences in his first chapter were rough going, but after that, I had no problem with his style and voice.

I don't usually finish books I start. BUT, I just finished reading Dodging Machetes! The book takes you on an unexpected adventure with various twists and turns, ups and downs. Toward the end I could not put the book down and was asking myself if this is for real? Will does a great job of sharing pieces of his childhood while focusing on his crazy adventure in Fiji. I felt as though I was able to connect with the characters, laugh out loud at times, and hang on for the wild ride. This was both a fun and enlightening read!

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