**Preface Who is Hiroshi Taniguchi?**

Some of you may have already seen me on TV or magazines in Japan, but please allow me to briefly introduce myself.

 I was born in Fukui prefecture in 1972. After attending university in Shanghai, China, I worked here and there in Asia, and am now president and CEO of Free Bird Institute (stock listed in securities market in the Republic of Fiji) as well as for its parent company. South Pacific Free Bird Inc., in Japan. I am also the honorary chairman of Ba Provincial Free Bird Institute, a national high school in BA administrative district of Fiji.

I also happened to be a stage IV terminal cancer patient. Next to me, as I am drafting this, there are "Senba-zuru" (thousand paper cranes) and message cards given to me by acquaintances to pray for my recovery and good health.

So, do you all know about the country called the Republic of Fiji? 　I would think you only vaguely know that it's a warm, southern island country and is strong in rugby. Briefly explained, Fiji is an island country located about 7,200 kilometers south of Japan, across the equator, and a bit north of New Zealand. A famous Britain novel called it "Heaven on Earth" and indeed it truly is a country of heavenly beauty.

 The population is roughly 900,000 people. It is constituted by Fijians of a Polynesian/ Melanesian descent, British descent (Fiji was dominated by Britain as a colony until 48 years, Indian descent (Indians were brought as work force by the British), and Chinese descent (also brought as work force). It is a multi-ethnic nation. When you hear "southern islands" everyone probably thinks of its people walking around half naked. But in Fiji, if a young girl is walking around only wearing a camisole, she would be condemned that her outfit was too sexy and should hide her shoulders with a cardigan or something of the like. It is quite a strict Christian country.

 The interesting thing is that each ethnic group has their own language, but everyone, from the young to the old can also speak English because English education has been obligated for over 100 years. When I first went to Fiji, I had thought islands around there were French-speaking countries. I was surprised that everyone was talking in Queen's English at the airport. While English has become widely used, children are unfortunately losing their native tongue.

Fiji is known for ranking 1st in Gallup's world poll surveys that indicate overall rankings of country happiness. Though it is economically poorer than Japan, everyone lives happily, as you would expect in southern islands.

 The first time I visited Fiji was Christmas of 2002. I never imagined I would be starting my business here nor would that small business grow to be stock listed on the market.

 I started an education business to teach English to non-English speaking people in Fiji about six years ago. My management skills of my language school were highly evaluated by the Fijian government and I was offered to serve as a chairman for one of its national high schools. I endured a lot of hardships along the way. When this high school rose from the very bottom to 6th place (out of 162) in academic ranking as well as become two times rugby champions in 2014 and 2015, I became quite the hero in Fiji.

 At the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, the Fiji team won the gold medal for the first official competition of rugby sevens. Though the team consisted of strongly built men, who did not train much and took too many breaks, it was the first time in Olympic history for a small island country with a population less than 1 million people to win the gold medal in a team competition.

 It would not be as surprising if a small populated island country won gold medals for an individual or a two-person sport. To win medals for a team sport is truly amazing. I watched the final Rio Olympic game of rugby on TV while fighting stage IV terminal cancer in the hospital. My body was weakened to the core with anticancer drugs, and yet I could feel the adrenaline pumping in my blood as I watched the Fiji team play.

 In Fiji, the country of rugby champions, there are a total of 162 high schools. Four years after I took over as the chairman, my school became the rugby national champions of Fiji. Well, it was the students who made the effort, so accurately speaking, I was only able to help them become champions, but for me, it was a great honor. Recently, the people of Fiji have been asking me to become their politician. As a terminal cancer patient, this is one of my dreams that I want to fulfill if I am able to live a little longer.

 This book is a record of half my life, about a young man who swam out into the South Pacific by coincidence. Cancer may get to me first, in which case this book will end up as not half but rather an 80% autobiography.

This book is about me living life as it will be, like a bird freely flying to wherever the wind will take it.

**What kind of language school is the "Free Bird Institute"?**

 My school, "Free Bird Institute", is a language school that is unique in both Japan and Fiji. It is a language school established by a company. I established a language school in Fiji and its entrance center in Japan in 2004. In Fiji, there is the South Pacific Stock Exchange, (probably) the smallest in the world. My company is stock listed here as the Free Bird Institute.

So, I would greatly appreciate it if everyone would buy my stock! (lol)

 There are two campuses for the language school--- one in Nadi, the city where the international airport is located, and Lautoka, the second largest city in Fiji. Although the number of students vary, especially during the summer and Christmas, but throughout the year, there are 250-500 international students enrolled at both campuses. Since reputations about studying abroad in Fiji has recently spread, our campuses are filled with students when summer holidays arrive in the northern hemisphere. Students are of various nationalities, and since our foundation, we have accepted more than 20,000 international students from 26 countries.

 About 70% of the students homestay at the warm homes of Fijians. Fijians are incredibly affectionate people, and many students feel that their Fijian families are warmer than their families. Considering that students desire facilities such as their own rooms and hot water showers, host families are limited to those that are on a slightly higher end than the average homes in Fiji. During their stay, the students make meals with their homestay families, eat meals with their homestay families, and enjoy conversations with their homestay families. Of course, the students are provided with breakfast and dinner. "Provided" meaning that in general they eat the same meals as their homestay family. Sometimes the meals are lavish, sometimes simple, and sometimes they go to a nearby restaurant to eat out.

 The remaining 30% of the students are staying in the inexpensive student dormitory (hostel) that we had built. I. myself, designed the hostel, with my experience in working at a construction company. There are 44 single rooms and 43 sharing rooms. A total of 216 people can stay in the hostel. It is plainly structured, as frugal as the prisons in Japan. For the sake of cost reduction, I proposed the use of a "semi-single bed" with only a width of 60 cm. Students tell me that they can roll over while sleeping but for some reason it has never been escalated as a major complaint. I think it is because the Fijian dorm mothers care about the students as if they were her own children.

The reason why I was able to expand the business into the market to the point that it could be stock listed at the stock exchange is because expenses to study abroad is overwhelmingly cheaper than other countries and other language schools.

 One of the reasons is because the school is located in Fiji, where living is cheap. But the primary reason is that our school has no intermediate exploitation by agents. School fees, homestay fees, and accommodation expenses are all offered directly, and thus our study abroad program is cheaper than any language school in any country. Usually, it is very rare that a foreign language school has a directly operated counseling center in Japan.

 The accommodation fee is 300 yen per night at the hostel. Thus, even if you stay 12 months, it is only 100,000 yen. Plus, even if you add tuition fee and enrollment fee, you can study abroad for a year at 870,000 yen. Roughly speaking, that is about one-third the expense to study in the US!

 Our directly operated centers are in Tokyo and Osaka. I often hold orientations at Nagoya and Fukuoka every year. If you are at all interested in studying abroad, search for us on the internet with keywords, "Free Bird, study abroad."

 The teachers at the language school are composed of Fijians of Melanesian/Polynesian descent and of Indian descent. Most of the teachers at our school would probably not have been employed if it weren't for this school. But they are teachers who are properly awarded with qualifications of an English teacher by the Fiji government. Fiji actually has an education level as high (or maybe even higher) than advanced countries such as the US and Australia.

 The students at the language school take classes Monday to Friday from 8 am to 2:30 pm. They all seem to enjoy studying every day. The Fijian teachers are not as good in mathematics and arithmetic as Japanese, but their high communication skills are not comparable to Japanese or American teachers. They are naturals at their work!

 The characteristic of our students is that they are studying abroad with money that they saved on their own. This is possible because the cost to study abroad is affordable. Unlike students at American language schools whose parents pay all of the expense (which is inevitable because it is expensive), students studying in Fiji passionately listen to lectures and aggressively ask questions to teachers. People can work harder if they pay for it than when paid by others (lol).

I think the learning speed of English is faster than those studying abroad at other countries. Fiji is not a very convenient country. Unlike developed countries where there are supermarkets and convenience stores, the students must talk to the men and women at the market to buy even one tomato. Of course, everything is in English. If you cannot communicate well, the Indian-Fijian ladies at the market will try to rip you off. As a result, the students become even better at English (lol).

In Fiji, students are able to enhance their English without stress and the classes are fun. Some students come to study abroad at our language school multiple times. There is this Japanese man who studies abroad in Fiji at the same time every year. He has already studied four times! Fijian men are pretty good looking, and I have heard rumors that some students come back to see their boyfriends.

 I think it helps that Fiji is somewhat similar to the Confucian spirit of Japan, respecting seniors. It truly is heaven for older aged students. The oldest student at my school was an 87-year-old woman who came years ago. She said that it was great being able to visit "Island closest to Heaven" before actually going to heaven (lol).

 Moreover, Fiji has a culture of mutual aid called "Kerekere" where people help each other to live. The teachers at my school are of no exception. I give them their salary every Friday, but they use it all up over the weekend. Nevertheless, they have nothing to worry about. Somehow, from somewhere, someone provides them with some money.

 If we started paying salary monthly instead of weekly, they would all probably die. What Fijians earn by day, they would spend by night. When the market ladies go shopping in the morning, they usually do not have any small change at hand. Both adults and children use up all of their money as is.

They are hardly ever wealthy, but they are gentle to everyone, to people they know and do not know. Some of the sneakier students took that to their advantage, and often went to nearby churches to get their share of free cakes and donuts. They went to the church so often that I ended up feeling pitiful for the people running the church. I decided to lend them the school hall for free.

 Several years ago, there was a Russian woman named Anastasia and her son Maxim who had come to study abroad at our language school. They liked Fiji so much that they relocated to Fiji from Russia. Her son Maxim was born with short arms and was physically handicapped. However, in Fiji, there isn't anyone who cares about it. This mother and child liked the fact that Fijians always lend a helping hand to Maxim when he seems to be troubled.

Students at the language school get acquainted with various people both on and off campus. Facebook has more presence in Fiji than in Japan. Some students make hundreds of friends during their few months of studying abroad in Fiji. There are also students that fall in love with each other and ultimately get married. I think there has been about 300 couples that married. There are also 'Cinderella' girls who get married with students from a wealthy family and are now living in castle-like houses in Dubai. And yet here I am, still unmarried!

**What kind of high school is the "Ba Provincial Free Bird Institute"?**

 "Ba Provincial Free Bird Institute" I had undertaken as chairman seven years ago was a national high school founded by the Fiji government that just declared independence from UK in 1970. I renamed Ba Provincial Secondary School to its current name after I took office as the chairman. When I took over, Ba Provincial Free Bird Institute was a "rock-bottom" school that wasn't good in academics or sports.

Both teachers and students had lost hope.

 There is a total of 624 students. Not only are they from Fiji, but there are also students from the Republic of Nauru, where there isn't a proper high school in their own country, as well as students from the neighboring republics of Tuvalu and Kiribati. Among them, there are also 120 Japanese students and it is the tuition that they pay that enabled this national high school to become the first tuition-free high school in Fiji.

I will explain in more details about this later on in the book.

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Prologue

At 2:30 am on August 12th, 2016, a rugby match was to be held in Rio, Brazil. To watch this game happening halfway around the world, I'd have to wake up quite early. So, I set my alarm for 2 am and went to bed.

My body had become accustomed to medication during the five months of anticancer drug treatment that I had completed. The sleep inducer tablets, “Myslee”, was becoming less effective and I had trouble falling asleep. The doctor had told me that I could take up to two tablets if I couldn't fall asleep. I didn't hesitate to take two.... and yet I was still having trouble to fall asleep. I would toss and turn in the futon, but time would just pass with my head very clear.

On January 19th, 2016 I was declared with stage IV terminal cancer (B-cell follicular lymphoma). Now that I think of it, I was lucky that I went to a big hospital in December of the previous year. They found five tumors all over the body. My attending physician, Dr. Shimizu, told me that these tumors could have been overlooked if it were not a specialist.

At the end of November, I went to a nine-day business trip to Mexico/Peru for an activity inspection of JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency). On my flight home, I felt like my stomach was bloating. On December 1st, the day after I returned to Japan, I decided to go to Keio University Hospital.

I had eaten burritos bought from a Mexican street vendor, which I couldn't say that it was very clean, as well as dined at a restaurant, or more of a garbage dump, at Cusco, Peru (the capital city of the ancient Inca Empire). I was a bit worried to have myself checked at a small hospital.

 Despite that I was an emergency outpatient, Keio University Hospital conducted various tests such as blood tests, X-ray inspections, and echo examinations. The doctor said, "I think it's a virus, but the lower abdomen does seem a little swollen." He told me that results of the detailed examination will come in about few days. So, I made another outpatient appointment on December 11th and returned to my hotel.

When I went back to the hospital to hear the results, the doctor seemed more concerned and had me redo the same examinations as the week before. At this point I had taken the matter lightly, and despite reserving an outpatient appointment on December 19th to hear the test results, I was too preoccupied preparing for the business trip to Fiji that I did not go. I received a message telling me to make sure I drop in at the hospital when I got back from the business trip, so I made an appointment for the morning of January 18th the following year.

I was supposed to already be at Narita Airport on the evening of January 16th, 2016, but to my misfortune, my return flight on the New Guinea Airline was cancelled and I had to stay a night at Port Moresby of Papua New Guinea and another night in Manila. By the time I arrived in Narita Airport, it was already the afternoon of the 18th.

As soon as I landed, I turned my cell phone back on. I don't think two to three minutes had passed before it started ringing.

It was a call from Dr. Shimizu of Keio University Hospital. I began to politely apologize that I was unable to be at the hospital that day due to my flight delay. The doctor didn't hear me until the end. All he asked was, "Would you be able to come in tomorrow?" I pondered a little and then asked, "Was it something serious?" The doctor took a breath and simply answered, "I'm afraid so." I apologized to Dr. Shimizu that I had not shown up at my appointment twice and made an outpatient appointment again at 1:30 pm on the following day.

After that, the days just flew by. I was hospitalized on February 4th and got a biopsy done. On the 18th, the doctors drilled a hole in my hip bone to perform a bone marrow examination. On the 23rd, I got a PET examination (an examination in which radioactive fluorine is injected into the body to see how much the cancer cells have spread throughout). More examinations followed until finally I was diagnosed with stage IV cancer. It was Stage IV out of four, not IV out of ten. My body was affected with the last stages of terminal cancer.

 On March 2nd, I started a chemotherapy called R-CHOP. The anticancer shot made it painful to sleep or stay awake, and even to breathe. Although Dr. Shimizu had warned me that this treatment was painful and there were many patients that give up midway because it was too painful. But R-CHOP was much, much more painful than I had thought, and I wanted to take my anger out on Dr. Shimizu for not warning me enough!

 There were to be six cycles of R-CHOP, injected every three weeks. The first one wasn't so bad. I only had slight difficulty breathing. I heard that this treatment strips the patient's physical strength, so I decided to tone up my body when I had the energy. I had the nurses take out the needle of the intravenous catheter at night so that I could challenge myself to do push-ups. At this point, I still had the leisure.

 The second cycle of treatments started, and on the morning of the 24th day, I found a ridiculous amount of hair on my pillow. I was told that I would be losing every hair, from my head and eyebrows to even eyelashes. Yet when I saw the strands of hair scattered all over the bed I was shocked. I thought it would be stressful to see my pillow like this every morning. I'd rather be bald. So, I made a reservation at Mrs. Saito's barber shop where I usually go to.

 On March 26th, I saw my head skinned with a hair clipper without any of its length adjustment cartridge attached. I began to really feel like a terminal cancer patient. Mrs. Saito said, "This one’s on me. As long as you promise to come again after you are better!" I politely thanked her and promised her I would come as soon as my hair grew back in and rode the taxi back to my room.

 At this time, I had a white blood cell value less than one-fourth of an ordinary person, and the hospital instructed me to always wear a surgical mask when taking the subway or bus. But I had no physical strength to ride either of them. I took the taxi everywhere. Since salads and fruits have bacteria on the surface, I was not allowed to eat them. The hospital recommended me to eat completely sterilized ready-made foods and frozen foods.

 The molecular targeted drugs of R-CHOP treatment made you nauseous. I took tablets to prevent nausea before my IV drops, and since these tablets had side effects on the stomach, I needed to take medicines for that as well. Furthermore, the treatment strains the heart. Patients are given pills to weaken the activities of the heart while taking medications that vigorously pumps it. This deteriorates the physical strength to its limits and prevents the bone marrow from making blood. Thus, the patient's immunity is stripped to almost nothing. My white blood cell count was one-fourth the typical range, and my red blood cell count was half. It was unwise for me to go out. In my case, I was hospitalized for the first nine days. Then I moved to a service apartment, which provided housekeeping and bedmaking services, fairly close to the hospital. From there, I took the taxi to the hospital, two to three times a week.

 I had a girlfriend and we were planning to get married in July. But I didn't think I would be able to survive terminal cancer and asked her to break up with me on the fifth day of my hospitalization. She cried and did not listen to me, saying she would look after me. I asked her parents to sit in on our discussion and we officially broke up. I didn't tell her my new home address, but I kept in contact with her via phone calls and text messages, because I was worried about how disheartened she was. Yet, it was myself who needed those calls and messages. I was the one disheartened. I don't think I would have been able to continue with therapy without her mental support. During my fight with cancer, I went back and forth in between feelings of regret from breaking up with her to forced affirmation that it was the right thing to do.

What kept me going throughout my painful treatment and solitude was most definitely the sense of responsibility that I had to protect the 200 employees of my companies and schools, and undoubtedly her existence.

 Oh! and one more thing! On April 16th, the day I finished my second cycle of treatment, the rugby team at my school, Ba Provincial Free Bird Institute, challenged itself at the national high school championship (similar to Hanazono championships in Japan) in Fiji and came in second place. As I mentioned before, in 2010, the year I took office as chairman, the school was out of rank. it gradually became stronger and became national champions in 2014 and 2015.

 I found out about the result of this match in Fiji Times (a newspaper in Fiji) on the web. I was really encouraged by their fight and I received many messages of support, encouragement, and sympathy via Facebook. One person said,

"It's like the Fiji version of the Japanese drama 'School Wars'!"

But I wanted to reply,

"No way! It started a lot worse than School Wars."

The school was really terrible when I undertook the office as its chairman in September 2009.

In "School Wars", the lead character, Coach Kenji Takizawa, arrives at his new school. Fushimi High School was in bad condition with its glass windows broken. But my school didn't have glass windows to break. It was a school with only window frames! (lol)

Okay, back to my cancer. It was May and I was to begin my fourth cycle of R-CHOP at Keio University Hospital's tumor center that day. My tongue, gums, and throat had started swelling from the day before. I showed this to the nurse and she cancelled the R-CHOP therapy and immediately sent me to the hematology. Even while I was waiting for my turn in front of the examination room, I could feel my strength falling steadily, and by the time the doctor saw me, my tongue had swollen to about two cm in thickness and I could no longer close my mouth.

 I had told my ex-girlfriend via LINE messenger about my swelling tongue while I was waiting. Worried, she immediately came to the hospital. I saw her for the first time in a while. Seeing me in the wheelchair, she started scolding me like a mother about my carelessness and lousy health management, despite the fact that she was much younger than me. Then she took care of the admittance process for my emergency hospitalization. Afterwards, she went to my service apartment to pick up my stuff.

 By then, I looked like one of the Japanese ghouls that mimicked a Japanese lantern form with a long tongue sticking out. Truth be told, I didn't want her to see me like this, but it was inevitable. I was too weakened to even move myself from the wheelchair to the bed.

I wanted to stay as that cool guy she once knew. Yet, here I was-- as the most pathetic person on the face of this Earth.

Even though I broke up with her because I thought that was a cooler thing to do, I was being looked after by that same ex-girlfriend. I was being looked after by nurses. I didn't even have the strength to operate my smartphone. I was disgusted with my weakness.

 In the evening, the doctor was concerned I would not be able to sleep with the acute pain in my tongue. He shot me with legislative drugs. To do so, it required me to sign consent forms. All I remember was being explained about it by a pharmacist and signing the forms. The rest, I don't remember. My ex-girlfriend dropped off my baggage and went home when I was drifting off, a bit out of consciousness from the anesthesia. I felt extremely alone.

 I heard from the nurse later that I had been in a critical situation. When your immune system starts failing, even the indigenous bacteria in your mouth starts playing tricks. We were not able to identify whether it was herpes or fungus in my case, but my air passage had become so small that I could barely breathe and yellow liquid, a mix of disinfectant, palliative drug, and saliva, just kept flowing out of my mouth which I was not able to close. The liquid had stained everywhere around my pillow.

 Most of the people who die of lymphoma die from contracting an infectious disease due to the extreme deterioration of their immune functions. I brushed my teeth eight times each day and washed my mouth every hour. I did not eat anything that might have bacteria, but somehow it made its way into my mouth. As reference for the treatment I was receiving, I read blogs of patients who were fighting the same disease. It seems that there are many who contract a communicable disease, and unfortunately most of the blogs either abruptly end or a family member makes closure comments on behalf of the person.

After my third hospital stay for 11 days, I went home alone in the taxi that the nurse had called for me.

 The side effects of R-CHOP accumulate, and so the pain builds up--- second cycle is more painful than the first, the third cycle is more painful than the second. After the fourth cycle, my eyebrows and eyelashes started falling out. Since I looked goofy without eyebrows, I wore a knitted cap for skiing deeply on my head when going out. I did not want people to see me like this as much as possible and I usually became badly out of breath when I walked home with shopping bags in my hands. So, I mostly did online shopping.

 Summer had finally arrived, and I heard cicadas crying from outside. I received my final cycle of R-CHOP on July 7th and 8th, shortly before the opening of the Rio Olympic Games. Once the Olympic games started, I would check out Fiji's rugby matches on TV during the day when I was feeling better or at night when I couldn't fall asleep.

 Fiji is a rugby powerhouse. At the World Cup in 2005, shortly after I became chairman of a school in Fiji, the national rugby team won against New Zealand at the final match of rugby sevens. I saw this moment on TV in Fiji. The New Zealand team had several immigrants from Fiji and came to the match accompanying a fine medical team, dieticians and masseurs. Contrary to this rich team, Fiji was so broke that they could not even take all of its registered benchwarmers. So, all of Fiji broke out with joy watching Fiji beat New Zealand! When the game broadcast ended, the main street of Nadi was full of honking cars decorated with the blue flag of Fiji and people dancing with banana leaves because they didn't have any of the blue blankets or towels at hand.

 In this team was Ryder, who worked on asphalts during road construction, and Bobo from the corn farm. At the victory interview, the captain, Serevi, was asked what he wanted the most and had answered "a house." I was astonished that this 'diverse' team was able to win the World Cup.

 Fijians are proud of their rugby sevens. After a while, a citizen's holiday was fixed in celebration of becoming World Cup champions.

 The Olympic games must have delighted the people of Fiji again. Though I was not in Fiji due to treatment, I was able to easily imagine their joy. Members of this year's team were all excellent and had strong pass work. They definitely were one of the strongest teams. But, I certainly did not think that they would get this far at the first Olympic rugby sevens game.

 At the Finals of the Rio Olympic, Fiji's rugby sevens team overwhelmed Britain, the country that dominated Fiji during its colonial era, at 43 to 7. They became gold medalist team for the first rugby seven Olympic tournament.

I was truly encouraged.

 There was a high school teacher who sent five of his players to this Olympic team. His name is Meli Tora and is my benefactor. He is currently the principal and rugby coach at the national high school, "Ba Provincial Free Bird Institute" where I serve as chairman. 15 years before meeting me, Meli Tora arrived at Fiji's third largest city, Nadi, as the principal of Ratu Navula Secondary School. The school was in a devastating state, with the number of students drastically reduced to 190. Principal Tora passionately rebuilt the school with his strong leadership and love for rugby. He fostered that high school rugby team to become Fiji's National Tournament champions. Three years after I took office as chairman at our national high school, I headhunted, without hesitation, Tora who had just retired as our school principal and chief rugby coach. He is now working as my right arm.

 It was September 2009 that I took office as a chairman. School buildings and facilities were terrible, as most people did not pay tuition. In February 2010, I decided to host a ceremony and invite Ambassador Yoshizawa of the Japanese Embassy and Honorable Bole from the Ministry of Education. I made every effort to improve the school during the four months until that ceremony.

 All roofs were leaking. Th roofs were made from simple tin. Whether its because nails were directly driven into it or because the overlap is small, it leaked everywhere when it rained. After the tropical squalls, our feet became soaking wet even in the classrooms.

 And there wasn't one place where the water pipe was working. All four toilets in the school wouldn't flush. The vast school grounds next to the school building had a very noticeable height difference in various places. After heavy rains, you were able to catch eels in dipped areas.

 At such a school, the teachers had completely lost their passion to teach and the students taught by such teachers had lost their passion to learn. I am a super super optimistic person, but even I thought I took on an overwhelming job when I saw the dull faces of teachers and students at pre-inspection.

 Nothing will change unless something is done. It is easy to not do anything, not change anything, and just complain. So, I analyzed the essential problem of this school.

 After investigation from various perspectives, I found out that the financial statements handed over to me from the previous chairman were made irresponsibly. No matter how much I look over it, calculations don't match up with the report. Yet, the clerks who arranged my undertaking as chairman kept asking me nonsense questions such as "When will you construct a swimming pool?" and "When will there be a computer room?"

 I looked in further and it quickly became clear that the school were unable to collect more than half of semesterly tuition of 120 Fiji dollars (3,000 Japanese yen). I immediately sent out letters to the parents notifying that students are not qualified to come to school if their tuitions are not paid.

 Fijians are really nice people. When hanging out with Fijians, I notice their purity and at the same time become depressed by my own wickedness. It must be noted that they do not have any bad intentions of not paying. I persistently asked them to pay the tuition, and they came up with many wild ideas such as making a 120 times payment to pay a dollar a day or paying after graduation. None of these ideas were realistic.

 I still urged them to pay, and this time, there were students who came in with bundles of cassava potatoes, taro potatoes, and fish. Let me note that in Fiji, cassava potatoes and taro potatoes grow naturally everywhere. I do not need someone to go out of their way to harvest them. However, for Fijians, who hardly had any cash income, that was the most they could have done.

 So, I decided to gather the entire student body to hold a meeting. There weren't many students who could pay the tuition, but there were many students eager to learn. Moreover, they were geniuses at making friends.

 On the other hand, students whose parents could pay the high tuition at private high schools in Japan are not as motivated to learn or not so good at making friends and cannot enjoy school life. I thought that maybe Fijian students can help cheer up students from Japan or become their friends and take care of them.

In a nutshell, this was what I proposed: If this goes well, it was likely that tuition for all Fijian students could be waived. I had not received approval of this idea from any of the board members (and to be exact, this was over exercise of authority) but declared to them,

"If you take care of students from Japan, then I will waive your tuition."

The Fijian students cheered like children.

"Yeah!!!!!"

This is how "Ba Provincial Free Bird Institute" became the first tuition-free high school in Fiji.

I quickly calculated that if more than 50 students from Japan enrolled in this school in Fiji, it will cover the tuition of all 600 Fijian students, though it would not yield any profit. Well then! I must first start looking for students in Japan! 　But for that, I had to fix this worn-down school. It'll probably cost a lot, but I had to fix the roof, the windows, the water pipes, the toilets, EVERYTHING! Plus, I needed to find a new school principal. I could not rely on this easy-going principal to change the school. I would need someone who was strict to him/herself and to others. I negotiated with the Ministry of Education to find me one. At this point, I had roughly decided on what I would need to do.

First and foremost, I had to do something about the water!

I ended up spending the first month digging for a well.

I had to return to Japan for a while afterwards. As I was arranging plans for the new program of studying abroad at a high school in Fiji, I received a video from Fiji via email.

"We found well water!!!"

 From a well dug in a section of the school grounds, clean well water was shooting up with great force. We inspected the water quality to find out that it was good enough to be able to invite a mineral water factory!

 The following week I received a picture of the beautifully painted school building. The following month, I received a picture of the newly built toilets and shower rooms. Our school was getting better and better! 　The Fijian teachers were beginning to feel this way, and thought they were only standing by at first, they gradually became proactive and started to help us.

 The next time I visited Fiji was in November. I could tell right away that light in the eyes of the students who witnessed the school reformation changed. It may even be said that I saw their eyes glowing. This crazy Japanese chairman who does everything by himself may really change this school. I think everyone was beginning to feel that way.

**Chapter 1　Speeding Violation**

It was on the Hokuriku Expressway that stretches across Fukui and Ishikawa prefectures. I was driving that expressway regularly, twice a week, at that time to get from the office in Kanazawa to client in Fukui.

 I do not remember the exact date, but it was in the summer of 2001. I was driving home from Fukui on the Hokuriku Expressway as I have always done. The only difference was, I had let go of my small displacement Toyota car, Vitz, to one of my subordinates and was not driving a Toyota Harrier, provided by the company FYI, the Harrier had just been released into the market and had the same engine as today's Toyota's top car model, Lexus.

 I should note that with Vitz's displacement, I always needed to step on the accelerator all the way down to drive through the ramps and slopes between Fukui and Kanazawa. But this new car had a displacement as twice as much as Vitz and a light pressure on the accelerator was enough to get over these slopes.

Reflecting back on this, this was probably the cause....

 A few days later (I think it was Monday), a pink envelope arrived at my home. When I opened it, it was a notification from the highway patrol saying that I (or "my car" to be exact) had violated the speed limit on the Hokuriku Expressway and am requested to show up at their police station.

 Ever since I got my driver's license, I had only done one traffic violation, which was when I accidently driven into a rice paddy path in the rural area. There was a police car nearby who saw this, and the officer handed me a ticket for trespassing a designated pathway.

People couldn't get around the Hokuriku area without a car and drivers were prone to violations. It was rare that driver only had one point deducted from his driver's license in such an area.

However, in this pink envelope, there were two more items other than the besides the notice of appearance. One was a picture of myself driving, taken by Orvis (Speed Detection System) and the other was a document indicating that the car was driven at a speed of 150 kilometers per hour.

I turned slightly pale. Though it was on the expressway, the maximum speed limit is 100 kilometers per hour. If I had violated it at 150 kilometers per hour, we were not talking about a mere deduction of a point or two.

I looked up on deduction points of traffic violations on the internet and immediately found that my speeding violation was about 12 points deduction, and subject to a fine of about 100,000 yen and suspension of about 90 days.

Two days after receiving the pink envelope, I went to see the highway patrol at a police station in West Kanazawa. I was shown an even more clear photo of my violation. There was no way I could make any excuses. I had no other choice but to consent to the administrative penalty of 90 days suspension and 100,000 yen fine. I reluctantly signed the forms handed to me by the patrol officer.

It took some time before the administrative penalty became active so until then I able to drive the car as usual. In the meantime, I had to go to my clients in Fukui again. While driving I was preoccupied with thoughts of how to live during my suspension. I would have my subordinate drive me around during suspension, but still, it would not be very economical in a city like Kanazawa where one needed a car to get around. It would be pretty tough to even go shopping without a car.

I opened my mailbox as usual that Friday and I couldn't believe my eyes. Inside was the same pink colored envelope that I just saw this Monday.

 I opened the envelope and checked what was inside. I could feel sweat gathering around my temples. It was again the same Orvis data of me traveling on the expressway with my beloved Harrier, and another indicating that the Harrier was driving a mountain road between Fukui and Ishikawa at 150 kilometers per hour. Just like I saw it on Monday.

Though I was still under the process of being penalized, I have added on to my already accumulated 13 violation points. I didn't need to look it up on the internet anymore.

By no doubt, I was going to be revoked of my driver's license!

If this was an ordinary person, he/she will non-reluctantly accept this revocation of their driver's license. BUT Hiroshi Taniguchi isn't the kind of guy that easily gives in. I started studying mechanical and physical blind spots of speed measuring machines. Fortunately, my college major was applied physics, so I was familiar with science jargon. I planned to persuade the judges at court that "measurement of speed and determination of position" was impossible due to Feynman's physics of "speed and position cannot be understood at the same time."

 I wanted to gather more information but didn't have enough time. So, I set up a business trip to China for consultation of business I was engaged in at that time and had my investigation postponed twice. The prosecutor at that time was very understanding and told me it was okay if it was work. He didn't fuss postponing my investigation.

 At the prosecution, I started blabbering that if either the location I violated the speed limit or the speed that my car was driving at became clarified, then the other would become unclear. I made sure to apply Feynman's physics with a touch of Kurt Gödel’s "uncertainty principle"! 　At this point, I thought

I would be able to completely overtake the prosecution's claim!!

However, when the trial began, the judge did not bother listening to my claim.

I got so angry that during the trial I was arrogant enough to ask, "Excuse me, judge, but do you understand the uncertainty principle that I am speaking about?"

Even though I had asked it in a polite tone, the judge's response was terrible. He said,

"If you let out another word from your mouth without permission to speak, you will be held accountable for contempt of court!"

 I was too outraged to say anything. Unluckily for me, the judges had the authority to determine victory or defeat at a summary court. The summary court ordered a fine of 100,000 yen. In such a case, public security will surely order the revocation of my driver's license.

If this was an ordinary person, he/she will non-reluctantly accept this revocation of their driver's license. BUT Hiroshi Taniguchi isn't the kind of guy that easily gives in. Disgusted with the attitude of the judge who did not bother listening to my say, I started fervently studying road traffic law.

I settled myself in the library and perused through the law book. On the second day after I started studying, I found a loophole of the law.

(Operation of vehicles such as automobiles by a person with an international driver's license or foreign driver's license)

 Article 107-2: Convention on Road Traffic (hereinafter referred to as the Convention) The driver's license, as stated in Article 24 Clause 1 (excluding foreign driver's license indicated in Article 107-1 Clause 1) which conforms to the form specified in Annex 9 of the Convention or Annex 10 of the Convention ...

Okay, okay. So, in short, this is what it said:

Those who are "living overseas" as defined in the Basic Resident Registration Act and have acquired their driver's license abroad can drive for a year in Japan. However, if he/she "resides in Japan" as defined in the Basic Resident Registration Act, one must stay in the country where he/she originally acquired their license for three months to be able to drive in Japan."

Humph! I may have lost to that arrogant judge by trial, but I will win in reality!

Ha! Ha! Ha! I had great advantage. Back then, I was going back and forth between China and Japan and it was easy for me to temporarily transfer residence to China.

So, I studied further on international driver's license. This wasn't good news for me. The international driver's license is valid in 97 countries that have been ratified at the "Geneva Convention." Sadly, China was not among them.

Well then. China may be out of question, but it didn't matter where my residence was. I figured I could travel to the US and get my driver's license there. So, I called the American Embassy to ask what I needed to bring to get a driver's license. 　The Embassy asked, "Are you going to the US for business? 　Or are you studying abroad?" to which I honestly answered, "I'm just traveling." Then the person in charge promptly answered that the US only issued driver's license to those staying in the US for over three months, such as working or studying abroad.

I was back to square one.

If this was an ordinary person, he/she will non-reluctantly accept this revocation of their driver's license. BUT Hiroshi Taniguchi isn't the kind of guy that easily gives in. So, the US didn't work. How about England? Uruguay? or Ecuador? I started to call all foreign embassies in Japan in Japanese alphabetical order.

However, I kept getting the same reply. Some countries needed a visa to stay for more than three months, others required a stay of six months or one year. There were even more demanding countries where it was necessary to have a tax-payment number and social insurance number at that country. I checked with so many embassies and none of them gave me a good reply. I kept saying to myself, "Let me just try one more embassy. Just one more...." That lingering hope motivated me to call halfway down the list. I was already up to "Hungary." I was so disappointed that I started laughing with self-mockery. But the next phone call I made was a hit!

"Well, in our country... all you would need is your Japanese driver's license, its translation, an international driver's license issued by the Public Safety Commission of Japan, your resident card which will serve as your birth certificate, its translation, and your passport. Hm! I think the application fee is about 40 Fiji dollars...."

And this was my encounter with Fiji.

 In the summer of 2002, during the period I was prolonging the trial for revocation of my driver's license, I traveled overseas to try trout fishing (fishing for salmon and trout) that I had long wanted to do. My destination was Sakhalin, the Far East of Russia. It was during the Obon holidays (Buddhist customs to honor the spirit of one's ancestors, usually observed for a week in mid-August). During this period, the pink salmon comes up the river to lay eggs. They do not each much but will aggressively attack other fish if they feel they are in danger of laying eggs. I was planning to do lure fishing, taking advantage of these salmon behavior.

 There were so many giant pink salmons in the narrow river that you would not believe it had swum up through it. That summer, in the Far East, I caught 18 of these big pink salmons.

Let me note that it was not easy catching these big fish. Some were larger than 90 cm! I had only brought fishing line that could endure fish size of about 50 cm. I carefully set up the fishing rod so that the line will not break and got into the river that was so deep I could only keep my head above the water. I swam to lure the fish up on shore.

Reflecting back on this, this was probably the cause....

 I returned to the hotel and by dinner time I had the chills. It seems I was fevering up. I brought three large pink salmons to the hotel kitchen. A boy chef that had a mouth full of silver teeth cooked these fish for me into a Russian-style dish. The food was delicious, but I felt weak when eating dinner. I had planned to go fishing at another point the following morning, but I was in no mood for it.

 The next day and the day after that, I began to feel a little bit better. I took short strolls around the city of Korsakov and killed time until my flight back to Japan. I had caught 18 big fish, so I was very satisfied. I promised myself I will come back here again.

 I returned to work immediately after my return to Japan and resumed my usual life. But it seemed my poor physical condition had not gotten fully better since Russia. I did not recognize I was feverish but sweat was flowing endlessly. One of my employees urged me to go see a doctor. At the office, I had a 41-degree fever.

 I didn't think I would be able to drive to a hospital, so I decided to go to the nearest Ikeda hospital. This was right across the main street. I filled out a medical questionnaire and got a blood test.

The doctor instructed me to come back two days later, after the blood test results came in. He also added that there must be a reason why I had a fever over 40 degrees, so I should take a fever-reducer and a good rest at home until then. I went back to my office, explained the situation, and went home as the doctor instructed.

 Sweat kept flowing like a waterfall even while I was sleeping. The futon was warm and humid from my sweat. Oddly, my head was clear, and I did not become delirious from the fever. I was able to smoothly finish my work at home the next day. I measured my temperatures many times throughout the day and it would always read somewhere in between 39 to 40 degrees. It was depressing to see it, but not overwhelming that I couldn't endure it.

 When I returned to the hospital to hear my results, I was instructed to get another blood test. I also had CT scans and X-rays taken. Again, I was instructed to come back in another two days, so I returned home and worked there for the next two days.

 By the time I went to the hospital for the third time, my fever had gone done and I no longer had to take the fever-reducer prescribed by the doctor. I thought that I was getting better at this point, but reality indicated differently.

The doctor called me in the examination room where he calmly declared,

"From your blood test results, your symptoms indicate leukemia." He continued,

"I am studying leukemia at a university hospital, and from your abnormally increased white blood cell count, you are in a very critical condition. I will put words in at the university, so please go get a lumbar puncture test (spinal tap) done immediately."

I had been expecting the doctor to tell me that I was okay. Bewildered that I got a different diagnosis than I had expected, I asked the typical question of "So how much more time do I have?" as I saw in TV programs.

The doctor said that he couldn't say for sure until he looked at the results of the lumbar puncture, but if it was acute leukemia, I would only have about six months to live.

 I went to Kanazawa University Hospital to get my lumbar puncture test done as the doctor recommended. I also got a blood test almost every day, but I don't quite recall everything that happened during this period of time. Blood test results came in quickly at the university hospital, but it still took time to hear the results of my lumbar puncture test. Since we couldn't cross off the possibility of a viral disease, the doctor was also trying to identify the virus by culturing my blood. All I remember was that the food was awful. Even the food at the hospital restaurant was awful. I literally did nothing for the next two weeks. When you are facing death, you lose your appetite, your desire to sleep, and even your desires for your pastime hobbies--- in my case, the desire to read books.

 I continued to live like this for two weeks until the day came to hear my examination results. I gathered courage to step into the examination room. The doctor who was a junior to the doctor at Ikeda Hospital first kindly apologized to me. He said,

"Good news is, it wasn't leukemia. However, it could be a viral disease. I will prescribe you antibiotics. Let's see how that works."

 Just two weeks before, I was told that "the possibility of your disease being leukemia is about 70%." I rounded up and was 100% certain I was going to die from leukemia. I should not have rounded up but should have rounded down!

I repeatedly thanked my doctor who kept apologizing and left the examination room. I was only affected by a viral disease that can be treated with regular visits to the hospital! I was prepared to close my book of life, but I still had chapters left! As happy as I was, I suddenly got hungry because I had not had any appetite for a while and had not eaten properly. I went to eat soba (buckwheat noodles) at the hospital restaurant. As aforementioned, it tasted awful, but for me, anything was appetite-satisfying. It was a good kind of awfulness, allowing me to soak in the sweetness of life.

 As soon as I arrived at my apartment, I headed straight for the bathroom. I badly wanted to take a bath. There were only showers at the hospital, and I have been longing to soak myself in a hot tub. I love taking baths and I could practically live in my tub. I often bring in a small waterproof TV to watch it as I soak in the tub. My apartment in Kanazawa was an apartment for bath lovers. Each bath was equipped with hot spring water that Kanazawa was famous for. I turned the hot spring water faucet and waited for the bathtub to fill up. I stuffed all the laundry I had not been able to wash during my hospitalization into the washing machine and glanced over the washbasin to see myself in the mirror.

 Standing in front of me was Hiroshi Taniguchi, worn-out from the hospital stay, but still had vibrance left in his eyes. I tried raising the corners of my mouth to make a smile.

 I wondered if I looked like this back when I was a university student. 　If so, my smile looked terribly plain.

 I was managing a business consulting company for Chinese business at that time. I had an income much higher than my former classmates, lived in a large home that everyone envied, and traveled overseas multiple times I was freely living "the life" and yet when I looked at my fake smile reflecting in the mirror, I suddenly became uneasy.

I think I was smiling more naturally during my years at the university and I had laugh wrinkles around my eyes.

However, all I had now were vertical wrinkles enter between the eyebrows. Quite possibly, I may have looked like murderer, a person with a face that passersby wanted to avoid walking in the vicinity of.

**Chapter 2　My First Fiji**

 This is how the revocation of my driver's license due to speeding violation led to my trip to Fiji. At this point, all I knew about Fiji was the capital city that I learnt in elementary school. That the capital city of Fiji was Suva.

 Despite that I was on an urgent mission to get a driver's license, I was only able to stay from December 25th, 2002 until January 3rd, 2003 due to work. It was the peak season for airfare. Instead of a nonstop flight, I booked a flight that flew into Fiji via Korea and flew out of Fiji via New Zealand.

And so, I finally arrived in Fiji.

 There are two international airports in Fiji, but I got off at the airport in the western part of Fiji called Nadi. It was the day of Christmas, and the airport was decorated with cheesy plastic Christmas trees everywhere. Despite it being Christmas, the sun was glaring. Reindeers would never be able to live here.

 The first thing I was surprised when I got to the airport was that all Fijians spoke English. I thought that everyone spoke French because Fiji is situated between French territories of Tahiti and New Caledonia. However, Fiji was once a British territory that declared independence from it 32 years ago. Even after their independence, it still belongs to Commonwealth of the United Kingdom and Fijians speak clear Queen's English.

 I had once learned French studying abroad in Lyon, France for about two weeks. But I was concerned if I would be able to communicate with the person at the license center in my inadequate French. I was a bit surprised and at the same time relieved to know that the official language of Fiji.

I exchanged my Japanese yen to Fiji dollars at the exchange office located across the arrival port of the airport. Looking closely into the bills and coins, I saw Queen Elizabeth looking straight back at me. With no doubt, this area used to be part of England.

I stashed away the bills and coins that I had exchanged in a small back pocket of my bag. I started looking around for a travel agency that could help me book a hotel.

 I do not see it in Fiji anymore, but at that time, there were barkers of travel agencies at Nadi airport. They would find travelers traveler looking for a hotel, take them to their offices to arrange them hotels and car rentals. Of course, they came to me too.

 I chose the most rough-faced barker. He pushed my luggage cart in order to take me to his travel agency office on the second floor of the airport. He pushed for the elevator and we waited. But no matter how long we waited, the elevator just wouldn't come....

 Birds that wandered into the airport were chirping, and men, women, even children I was not familiar with would stare at me and then smile, saying "Bula!" (meaning "Hello" in Fijian).

 Sooner or later, more birds came chirping and started pecking at litter strewn on the floor.... Time that seemed to stop.... The elevator that doesn't move.... The birds that just keep on gathering.... I started asking myself, "Does this two-floored airport need an elevator in the first place?"

 About five minutes have passed since I pushed the button. The old man said, "I guess this elevator is broken." I was already screaming "Like I already know that!!!" in my head.

Time passes so slowly in the southern islands.

 I somehow got my luggage up the stairs and arrived at the old man's office. I explained to the man that I wanted to go to the driver license's center. I had checked in advance with the Fijian Embassy in Tokyo that a day would be enough to renew my Japanese driver's license. So, I had decided to stay two days in Nadi and spend four days at a resort where I can relax, and then come back to Nadi the day before my flight back to New Zealand. I told the man of my itinerary.

 He called to reserve a hotel of my desired budget and took cash from me. In Fiji, the travel agency pays 30% of accommodation expense and then pays the remaining 70% when arriving at the hotel. Compared with Japan, where you do not know how much of your money is allocated to any place, this Fijian system was clear-cut. I knew where all the money went and even made me worried if this business system really worked or not.

I paid the man cash, received my receipt and hotel reservation confirmation ticket and started down the stairs with my luggage and looked for a taxi stand. I planned to head to the hotel by taxi.

 I found drivers hanging out at the taxi stand. I chose the most built Indian-Fijian driver who had a mustache and told him the name of the hotel I was staying at. I started negotiating the price. Nowadays, metered taxis have also become mainstream in Fiji, but back then, there were hardly any.

 As I was negotiating with the driver, the travel agency guy found me and came to me again. According to the man, the driver's license center was in bit of a complicated place in Lautoka, the city next to Nadi. He added that he will show me the way around.

Here was the big secret:

He had nothing else better to do.

I had no reason to refuse, so after confirming with him that I could not pay him money even if he tagged along the next day, we arranged to meet up the next morning.

The taxi driver that drove me to the hotel boasted about how brilliant Fiji was even though I had not asked him anything.

That day was Christmas and the people's holiday in Fiji. I took a cat nap for about two hours and went out to the city.

Everywhere I walked, both adults and children would stare at my face, smile, and greet me with "Bula!" Of course, they weren't familiar faces. Everyone was too friendly, it was kind of scary.

I spent that day rummaging through gift shops. The hotel staff kindly told me that there are no Fijian cuisine restaurants in Fiji (because everyone can make it at home), but I should try Indian cuisine made by Indian-Fijians because it was delicious. So, I tried fish curry in a small dining room. With the fish curry came rice and roti, a thin crepe-like bread, bean soup, and a small salad. All of this only cost 40 Fiji dollars (200 yen). To top it off, curry in Fiji was quite delicious!

 The next day, I went to the travel agency as I had promised the old man. The large chain on the glass door was locked. I roamed about the airport, waited for the man at his office, but he didn't show up.

 I began to become worried about business hours of the driver's license center. I decided to leave the old man and go there by myself, so I headed to pick up a taxi. The old man finally appeared, taking his time to walk up the stairs.

 He found me, not looking guilty at all, and said "This way." He did this so casually that even I forgot to mention it-- but normally, people should first apologize in such cases. I didn't realize he hadn't until we got onto the taxi.

 When arriving at the driver's license center in Lautoka, about a 20 minutes’ drive by taxi from the airport, the old man asked around and helped me find the receptionist window that handled renewal of foreign driver's license. There were already a few people waiting. I joined in the line.

 The wait was about 20 minutes. Even in that short period of time, Fijian people waiting in a different line came up to me and asked: Where did you come from? Isn't Fiji a great place? 　They were friendly. They would ask me my name, shake hands with me, and then strike up a conversation with "Konnichiwa!" the only Japanese they knew. Despite their own welcoming spirit to use Japanese, they would laugh out loud out of awkwardness.

Here was the big secret:

These people had nothing else better to do.

 After the basic conversations, they ask if I had any other plans and invite me to their homes. I glanced at the travel agency guy standing next to me. He seemed to be proud, as if to say, “I was the one that found this Japanese man!" He would pipe in at any chance he found and interrupted the conversation.

While I was absorbed in these conversations, my turn came, and the receptionist called my number.

　I handed my Japanese driver's license, its translation, an international driver's license issued by the Public Safety Commission of Japan, my resident card which will serve as my birth certificate, its translation, and my passport as I was told by the Embassy. I asked when I would be able to receive my driver's license.

"I think it'll take about a month."

He didn't sound very confident. I doubted it would be issued in a month. By then, I was beginning to understand that Fijians had a different concept of time. I was half discouraged finding out that the situation was bit different from what I was told by the Fijian Embassy. It seemed like it was going to take more time.

Then I realized that travel agency guy who had been listening to the conversation besides us trying to cut in.

 Here we go again! 　He's going to interrupt!

"Alrighty then. I'll come here to pick it up for you and send it to you in Japan."

 Contrary to my expectation, he made a very rational proposal. Even I was impressed that it was a good idea. That thought filtered my eyes. The man's face started to seem saintly.

He wrote his contact information on the edge of my application and looked at me as if to say everything will be okay.

Although I had told him that I would not pay him today, I felt that I should pay him the expense to fetch and send my driver's license all the way to Japan. I thanked the man and promised to pay 100 Fiji dollars (5,000 yen).

I finally learnt that the old man's name was Rabua and he was from the Yasawa Islands.

 After thanking Rabua, I headed to visit another man that I had acquainted at the driver's license center. He treated me for lunch at his home, and then I was invited to a lady who called herself a relative of this man I was visiting. She told me to visit her that night.

At the lady's house, there was another man who called himself the lady's relative and he invited me to his house. Every day, except for the days I spent at a resort, I was invited to someone's house eating meals with them that they had cooked for me.

Even in the Yasawa Islands that I went to as a retreat, the invitations continued. I walked 40 minutes to a village on a wild path from the resort and had a meal with someone I had just met.

This was how my week in Fiji passed....

 There was one thing I noticed on my flight back from Fiji to New Zealand. My face hurt a lot.

 This was definitely muscle cramping of my face. The reason behind it? I had been smiling all day, every day, in the mere week that I was in Fiji. I was delighted with the pain running in my face on my return flight. I tried reflecting back on my life. My face that resembled the looks of a murderer.... had changed in a matter of a week. My eyes wrinkled with smiles and I felt the corners of my mouth turn more upwards.

At that moment, I felt a strong desire lighten in my heart. I wanted to live in that friendly country of Fiji.

 Four months prior, I had been declared that I only had six months to live. I had reflected back on my life and thought hard about it. I was beginning to doubt that I was only conducting business of what I was able to do (what I was good at doing), which was not exactly what I wanted to do. It was a time I had been asking these questions to myself.

The opportunity may have been a somewhat not legitimate way to obtain a driver's license and even though I have not found out what I wanted to do, I discovered that I wanted to live in Fiji. It was the first time I ever wanted to live somewhere specific.

 So, I decided to hand over my business to the Number 2 employee and decided to start some kind of business so that I could live in Fiji. The challenge was there being not many jobs in Fiji. The most representative industries were fisheries, mainly for tuna and bonito, agriculture centering around sugarcanes, and tourism selling the beauty of Fiji’s blue sea and nature.

 For the time being, all I could think of was what I experienced in Fiji to have my driver's license issued. Two months had passed since my return from Fiji, and just then Rabua from the travel agency in Fiji sent me my driver's license by international mail.

 Looking up in the internet, I was quite surprised to find out how many people (market size) had their license revoked for violation of the Road Traffic Act. There were 40,000 - 50,000 people a year revoked of their driver's license due to some kind of violation(s).

If 5% of the 50,000 people, in other words 2,500 people, became my client, and I took a consultation fee of 50,000 yen, I would be making a profit of 125 million yen! Not to mention that accommodation and airfare are covered by themselves, so expenses on my side would not be so high. This would be a booming business!

 I immediately started preparing the establishment of a corporation. Its name was "South Pacific License" and was to be a consulting firm specializing in renewing a Japanese driver's license into a Fijian driver's license.

 In my head, I was already picturing a house with a big swimming pool and myself cruising on my own yacht. This was the life of a millionaire! (lol)

 I spent almost a year prepping and training our company's Number 2 player, the managing director to take on my role. In December 2003, I went to visit Fiji for the second time in my life. This time it was a trip to confirm laws and procedures concerning issuance of driver's licenses in Fiji.

As risky as it may sound, the business I was trying to start was actually and definitely legal. Most of the member states of the Geneva Convention on international driving licenses have updated their laws and regulations. Fiji had left it untouched. It was obvious that Fijians will leave it untouched hereafter. I could tell just by looking at their way of life!

 My second trip to Fiji was only a week stay. I returned on February 11th, 2004, when snow was falling heavily on Kanazawa. I went around to my clients and business partners to greet them farewell. I became free again. I then asked an attorney to compile the articles of incorporation for my new company South Pacific License.

He understood what I was trying to do and asked if he could be part of it.

The night that I was reviewing the articles that my attorney had compiled for me, in other words, the night before I was to submit my documents at the notary public office, I suddenly had a change in mind.

I started questioning myself if I was doing the right thing.

At that time, I was beginning to have doubts in the fact that I was doing business with what I could do (what I was good at doing), not business of what I wanted to do. But what I was trying to start now was most definitely something I was good at doing. I was again trying to gear myself towards the direction that made me “ugly.”

 After I graduated high school, I advanced on to studying at a university in China. I majored in applied physics at Tongji University in Shanghai, China. When I first entered university, there were not many Japanese studying abroad. It may have been the effect of the Tiananmen Incident. The Chinese government wanted to have more foreign students studying in China, so they established a scholarship that would partially cover their tuitions. The Chinese government also wanted to spread the Chinese language around the world. Chinese classes were being set up in different universities all over China.

I was studying physics as a regular student with tuition partially covered by the Chinese government. In a little less than a year since my admission, the Chinese classes at the university had expanded and there were quite a few students from Japan studying Chinese.

The most interesting thing was most of the students were females in their late twenties or thirties, who used to work as office ladies or at temp staff agencies. These ladies were studying Chinese in a classroom made up by only foreigners. One day, I asked them,

"Why are you studying Chinese in times of globalization? Isn't it more typical to first start studying English?"

 Their answers were very simple:

"I wanted to study abroad in the US or England. But the expenses were too much (about 4 million yen per year) and I couldn't afford it."

"If I waited to save up money to study abroad in the US, I would be in my forties!"

"I compromised in terms of money. China was a practical choice to study abroad before I turned 30 years old, so I chose learning Chinese."

Indeed, it only cost about 0.8 million yen per year to study abroad in China at that time. I still remember to this day that I agreed with their answers. Tuition and living expenses were indeed high in the US or England. Then I realized,

(1) English was the official language of Fiji.

(2) Fiji is a cheap place to live. One could study English, the language they originally wanted to learn, with the same expense as studying abroad in China.

(3) Fiji is a friendly country. One would probably not feel the typical alienation or loneliness that most students studying abroad experiences. Unlike developed countries, there aren't much technical advancements such as digital currencies in society. Thus, there will be more opportunities to converse in English.

 There were a few other points I realized at the previous second trip to Fiji.

(1) Birthrates in Fiji has begun seriously declining since around 2000. Despite the leisurely capacities of the school buildings, half of the classrooms were not used and there were spider webs forming in them.

(2) Despite that there are many Fijians (baby boomers from 10+ years ago) who acquire a teacher's license and a degree from universities and junior colleges, there are not many jobs offers of teaching positions due to the decreasing number of children (as a result of the declining birthrate).

(3) Fijians have a custom to invite people over to treat them dinner or accommodate them.

Recollecting these thoughts, a new and different business concept started forming in my head. With this new business concept, I called the attorney to ask him to replace the article of corporation for my new company. At the same time, I changed the company name from "South Pacific License" to "South Pacific Free Bird." "Free Bird" was a handle name that I was using on the internet, but I thought it was the perfect name for a company focusing on young people who were eager to learn in a carefree environment like Fiji.

This is how the Free Bird came to life.

 I finished company registration on March 2nd. I was planning to finish it on March 1st, but one of the shareholder candidates decided not to participate at the last minute. It took a little while to find another person. The day before establishing the company, capital funds are deposited in a special bank account called "separate deposit." I had forgotten that I had to pay a fee of 75,000 yen to withdraw from this account. If I had 75,000 yen ready at hand, I would be able to immediately withdraw the capital of 10 million yen I had deposited at the bank!

 But with intentions to put myself in adversity, I had drawn a stupid scenario of carrying minimal cash. I learned the hard way that it was important to have some financial margins. I regretted this while riding around snowy paths of Kanazawa on my motorcycle to find sources for financing.

The night that I founded the company, I only had 57 yen on me. I celebrated the company foundation by myself with tap water poured into a wine glass.

 In mid-March I got aboard alone in Fiji and was able to speak with the then Minister of Transport Mr. Napolioni, then Minister of Immigration and Minister of Defense, Mr. Ganilau, and then Minister of Education, Mr. Lal without any appointments. I realized then that Fijians were often sympathetic to Japan and Japanese were treated well in Fiji. I made a very simple presentation:

(1) I would like to rent a classroom that is not used in schools of Fiji. I will pay rental fee.

(2) I would like to hire a bunch of qualified but unemployed teachers.

(3) I would like to make the most out of Fiji's hospitality to create a safe environment for home staying.

 They praised me more than I had expected on my idea. By referral from the Ministry of Education, I was assigned an unused classroom in a section of the Ratu Navula Secondary School. I started my language school within a national high school. We rented the noodle making room of a Chinese restaurant "Dragon Palace" located near the high school and opened it as a support office.

 I can now share this amusing story: on the internet, I had made it look like there was already a school and I had started recruiting international students to study in Fiji. But in actual, I was still in the midst of negotiating, even though the situation seemed positive (lol).

 At Ratu Navula Secondary School, I met Principal Tora and Assistant Principal Baleilevuka. These two are the ones who have helped open the doors of my business and are still with me.

 The language school was ready for operation in its little corner at the national high school and I have begun recruiting teachers. In fact, there were many unemployed, licensed teachers.

 By promoting on the internet, I was able to offer a study abroad program to learn English at a price that no other country or school could offer! Plus, I didn't have any rivals! I was worried that over 100 students would suddenly come to apply. But, unfortunately, it did not go so well. There were only three students at first. These three students were introduced by acquaintances and were from Kanazawa.

 On May 11th, 2004, the first students entered the school. I arrived in Fiji three days before their entrance and hurriedly arranged a house I had borrowed as a dormitory. I had not yet started the homestay program. There was a total of six bedrooms which seemed too spacy. There would only be three students and Japanese staff to manage the students living in it at first, but I figured it wouldn't take time for more students to come.

 However, no matter how long I waited, my language school only had three students. At that time, I checked how many people visited the company website almost every day. Some days I would exclaim, "Wow! I had 47 visitors!" only to find out that it was me visiting 45 times and the other two times were by the web design company. I was very disappointed.

 No matter how good or how cheap the deal was, it was worthless if no one knew about it. Here, I started to study web marketing from scratch. There were a couple of things I learned. In web marketing there was a method called SEM (increasing the number of visitors from the search engine) and there are several ways to do this:

(1) SEO (Search Engine Optimization) was a process used to visibly display search results by relevance or topicality of the search keyword. Higher relevance would be displayed first.

 (2) Listing advertisement was a method to display certain websites first, regardless of the degree in relevance it has to the keywords as long as one kept paying the search engine companies such as Overture (now acquired by Yahoo) or Google. The purchase of a search keyword is displayed in auction form on the management website.

I don't think there was anyone that entered keywords such as "study abroad in Fiji" at that time. I gave up on the SEO strategy and focused on a strategy to buy keywords that other companies would not buy for listing advertisements. This was because major keywords such as "English" and "study abroad" cost more than 600 yen per click.

So, I used the idea of reversal and started searching what kind of keywords people were entering in their computers. Back then, the internet had just begun. Interestingly, the most entered keyword in Japan was "funny pictures" which I don't think anyone would enter now.

 Besides, no one ever thought of buying such a strange keyword. The minimum bidding price of a keyword was nine yen at the time and the keyword "funny pictures" was nine yen.

I did not hesitate to buy "funny pictures."

 Although it cost nine yen per click, this keyword was very useful for spreading information about studying abroad in Fiji to people in Japan. The number of viewers of my website spiked from almost zero to about 30,000 a month. However, it was still unknown whether people would come to study abroad in Fiji. The company website was mainly to request for materials. I was able to investigate to some extent on what keywords were used to request for materials to be sent. It seemed requests were not made from visitors searching for "funny pictures." Perhaps by this time, people that happened to come visit the company website via the keyword search of "funny pictures" had later searched for this website with "Fiji" or "study abroad in Fiji."

 I analyzed further to find out more interesting facts. I also investigated into the most entered keywords by age. College students mostly entered "job hunting" and "Recruit." "Recruit" is a company name that many people were familiar with. This was also a keyword bidden at 9 yen.

 I did not hesitate to buy the keyword "Recruit." I also bought "HIS" and "JTB" (Japanese travel agencies) and "NOVA" (English school in Japan) that young people were likely to search.

This was what the Japanese called "sumo wrestling with someone else's loincloth" which means to benefit from someone else's expense. Thankfully I had great reactions. At one time, if you searched for "Recruit", you would see my company website listed before the actual company of Recruit.

 In addition to the inexpensiveness to study abroad, all of our graduates agree that the friendly country of Fiji is the perfect environment for learning languages. These reviews were passed on from one student to the next. The number of students grew steadily with the help of “mixi”, a social networking service that was beginning to become popular at the time.

 Our language school was blessed with really good students in our first years. They all enjoyed my school and we had a relationship that was more like a gang leader and his team than school manager and his students. They were very cooperative and when one of our office supplies came short I would say to the students, "Go buy me some staples! It'll be good practice for your English!" and they would happily run errands for me. While the staff was small at that time, the students were like my employees.

 They often came to visit my home and ate with me when they missed Japanese food. It was around this time that the culture of "students looking after other students" was fostered. The language school had many faults in its facilities, but for some reason the students enjoyed these faults. Some of them later became employees and board members at my company.

 One of the greatest pleasures of my business is that many of my former clients or in other words former students at either my language school or high school, come in for job interviews at my company. I have never heard of any business where a person that was once a customer who has used the company's services and products later become involved in that very service or product that they have used. I'm certain that there are not many businesses with such a wonderful circulation.

 Mainly, our job is to encourage those who are debating whether to study abroad or not, encourage students who have become desperately homesick while studying abroad, help resolve issues, and in the unlikely event of getting sick, take them to hospitals. These are just some examples of how our counselors look after the students. Pushing the backs of those who need encouragements require heavy responsibilities, but it is also a very worthwhile experience. It is wonderful that these counselors, who have once been given words of wisdom when they were unsure of studying abroad in Fiji, to be talking about their survival or boasting about their experiences as counselors themselves. It is these moments that make their work worthwhile and to be proud of.

 Students that come to our language schools in the world's happiest country are usually come to look for themselves. That is obvious from my eyes as well as from the eyes of counselors who listen to their distress in Japan. With no doubt, they are living their lives unable to find their true selves at work, universities, or at part time jobs.

 There are people who often deny other's quests to look for themselves. I do not like this trend of looking down upon people who are making the effort of finding what they want to do with their lives. To live desperately is to make efforts living. I am sure Columbus, who once discovered the Americas, must have been a restless man as well the young people heading to the New World at the forefront following Columbus's footsteps were also restless and desperately made efforts. And they were probably lonely.

 Many of the students at my language school are like them. It is rare to find someone who loves themselves without seeing anything, without experiencing anything. So, I want my students to look around to see or poke around and listen. I finally found my way of thinking after seeing and hearing from various experiences. I want my students to do the same-- be restless, look around, poke around and frantically search for themselves.

On the walls of our school hallways are slogans written to encourage them:

　Sky is your limit!

　Expecting Unexpected!

　Break your shyness!

　English Only Policy!

 The absolute rule in my language school is that languages other than English (native languages of the students) are strictly prohibited on campus, whether it be inside or outside the school building. The students who have just arrived and are not yet good at English tend to close their mouths. But the Fijian teachers make every effort to open their mouths such as singing songs or giving them simple quizzes. They want the students to become talkative like themselves.

 The classes begin at 8 am and do not end until 2:30 pm with a little bit of break in between. We are using the Cambridge program, an English learning program developed by the University of Cambridge. Typically, language schools divide their classes to four or five levels. We have seven levels to make sure that everyone with the same language skills learn together in the same class.

 The classes in the morning focus on conversation and articulation, while classes in the afternoon focus more on grammar and idioms. This is probably the same at any language school around the world. However, in addition to that, we made efforts to help shy students come out from their shells. We made the students sing and dance in front of each other, and at graduation ceremonies held at the end of academic year, the teachers make the students dress up, by class. This is quite effective and has the similar effect of being able to become familiar with people they do not know on the way home from Halloween parties. During their stay in Fiji, students have no problem making friends. Of course, this is made possible by the great public security Fiji has.

 There are also very serious students. There was once a Japanese student who wanted to be introduced as a Taiwanese student so that she would have to speak to her fellow Japanese peers in English as a Taiwanese student even off campus. When she first came to Fiji, she was enrolled in the lowest level class, but by the time she was to return Japan, a year later, she had advanced to the second highest level class. After returning, she was offered a position at a trading company and sent us this happy news.

 I have had several opportunities to lecture at Japanese universities. At Rikkyo University, I have heard that my business is included in their teaching agenda. This particular university and Kansai University have made a program to send students study abroad in Fiji every year. During the first years that the language school was established, the only feature was humanity. Now it is actually functioning in a more business-like manner (lol).

 A few years after my language school started, we have seen that the graduates tend to take working holidays in Australia and New Zealand. If they had gone straight to Australia, they probably would not have found any part time jobs because they couldn't speak English. However, our graduates who have acquired English wisely and cheaply in Fiji, have an easy time finding a job with higher hourly rates. Plus, they get to work with the Australians. We call this "Joint Study Abroad."

 The problem was that when the number of students increased, the number of incidents also increased. At first, I had arranged Korean students with host families of Indian descent. I remember having a lot of troubles. I had arranged them together with good intentions--- their soul foods, kimchi and curry, were both so hot!

 The problem was that Indian-Fijians and Koreans both had self-assertiveness. After I realized this, I made sure to arrange Korean students to the hostel or a highly cooperative Fijian family. This drastically reduced the number of troubles. Everything needed to be experienced.

 Currently, there are more than 800 host families taking care of our students in Nadi and Lautoka. Although Fiji originally has customs to invite strangers, whether they be Fijians or foreigners, to their homes, finding a host family is a rather interesting process.

　In Nadi and Lautoka, where we have our schools, there are about 60% Christians, 30% Hindus and 10% Muslims. Each religion has different eating habits and customs.

 Almost all Christian host families are Fijians and are very friendly. At the same time, they have very different sense of time and finance from us Japanese. At each host family, students are provided with meals. With Christian families, there are days when the students are provided with elaborate homemade dishes and then there are days when they just throw in some noodles in soup.

 They prioritize relatives and friendships over anything. If a relative or a friend comes to borrow money, they will give them everything that they have. On the other hand, if they need to borrow money, they can borrow as much as they need from their neighbors. They help each other out so there is no need for them to subscribe to insurance and or worry about the future. Japanese and other international students are sometimes amazed, sometimes surprised at how they live. I think the students also feel somewhat envious of this way of life.

 Fijians are very open-minded about food culture. They eat Chinese and Italian as well as their own coconut-sauced dishes. If you are thinking of staying long without having to be too considerate or you want constant companionship, Fijian families are the best.

 Hindu host families are very strict compared to the Fijians. Every meal is made mostly from tasty, homemade curry. I love it, but some families do not eat any fish or meat on days before praying day. They are strict about both time and money. It is common to hear them scold you for minute matters such as taking shorter showers to save water.

 Compared to Hindu host families, Muslim host families provide more meals that include fish and meat other than pork. I were to choose a host family solely based of meals, I would choose a Muslim family. There is a hint of curry in every dish, but each has their own flavors. One day, when I open a Fijian restaurant in Tokyo, I want to bring them over to Japan. You many often hear that Muslims treat men and women very differently. Limited to Muslims in Fiji, both fathers and mothers are of equal status in their homes, and sometimes practice "ladies first" customs. I have never seen a polygamous household in Fiji. To top it off, tidiness is in Islamic precepts, so theses households are the cleanest. I should also note that they practice the fasting month of Ramadan once a year (Students are offered food during the fasting month).

 Nowadays, reputations have spread and there are families that come all the way to our office to say that they wish to become hosts. This was not the case when the business first started. I had to have the pastor spread rumors that one will be able to go to heaven if they do good deeds such as host international students. As a result, the number of host families quickly grew. Today, one out of every ten families in Nadi and Lautoka are hosting homestays of our international students.

 This is only a brief introduction, but I think you could see that our study abroad program is far superior to any other study abroad programs in other countries. In fact, it seems that the number of students studying abroad in other countries are decreasing while we are the only school growing.

Before long, I moved my small office in Kanazawa to Shinjuku district of Tokyo, opened a branch office in Osaka, and later opened branch offices in Busan, Korea and Beijing as franchisees.

Our steady advance continued.

The number of students exceeded 30 people in August 2004, five months after establishing the company. Soon it was 100 students, then 300 students, and more. Our little corner at the Ratu Navula Secondary School was becoming too small, and so we relocated our Nadi campus to the school grounds of Namaka Public School, a national elementary school. At the same time, we opened our second campus at an unused facility of Lautoka Fijian Primary School, a national elementary school in the city of Lautoka which is adjacent to Nadi.

In 2006, we won a prize at a venture business tournament sponsored by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. One of the teachers who was a judge at this tournament advised me to increase company investment to stock list it on the Mothers market at the Tokyo Stock Exchange. In the following year, I was nominated for "Entrepreneur of the Year” sponsored by one of the world's largest accounting firm, Ernst & Young and Ernst & Young ShinNihon LLC. I was also elected as one of the 30 next-generation entrepreneurs by American Express.

In the fall of 2007, I attended a London workshop held by ICEF, the world’s biggest language school association and marketing network. The organizer told me,

"Your school has become the world's second largest language school!"

The capital which was initially 10 million yen at the time of incorporation, quickly became 20 million yen, and after three months it increased to 60 million yen. Though our stock price was unlisted, the buying/selling price suddenly shot up to six times more.

 In order to increase profitability, I wanted to join the director of the marketing department specializing in marketing from the outside with the remuneration which is higher than the officer's remuneration of the time at that time, and since I am lucky, the construction cost will be 170 million yen Despite the fact that it took, it started construction. We simultaneously started the hostel construction at both campuses of Nadi and Lautoka.

 Though it rarely happens to businesses of our size, Daiwa Securities, a major Japanese securities company, offered to become our lead managing securities for listing at Mothers. The person in charge at Daiwa Securities went around with me to have our company permitted to consolidate accounts with an oversea school as educational project.

Without a doubt, I was getting carried away.

Before I knew it, I had an audit corporation that charged me 7.5 million yen per year helping me to stock list at Mothers, and the expenses I was paying to unnecessary board members and external consultation firms was expanding to become more than 30 million yen per year.

On September 15th, 2008, the news of the "Lehman shock" shook the world....

**Chapter 3　Pinch is Chance!**

 On Monday, September 15th, the news that the American brokerage company, Lehman Brothers, filed for bankruptcy broke out. There had been rumors a few months prior to the bankruptcy, but it never crossed anyone's mind that the US government would abandon the Lehman Brothers.

I suppose that Lehman Brothers themselves had not thought this would happen.

 Fortunately for us, the news of their bankruptcy had heightened the value of Japanese yen. The influence that it had on the Fiji dollar was merely 5%, but the strong effect on the Japanese yen was honestly sweet to our business. This lowered expenses on the Fiji side by 5%.

 Yet in less than a month, the situation turned around. The performance of Japanese companies declined and started HR adjustments on an unprecedented scale.

It mainly affected temporary staff and contract workers in the manufacturing industry. They were given a month notice of contract cancellation. It also affected graduates-to-be who were already recruited to join companies the following spring. (In general, most of the university students of Japan all start working from April 1st, after they graduate in March.) Companies withdrew their employment offers.

 This had a great impact on the language exchange education market. The number of new applications drastically reduced to about one-third. As if the students became concerned with the future Japanese economy and employment environment, those who had already applied for studying abroad and were just waiting for their departure, requested to cancel.

 Typically, our company refunds based on the Travel Agency Act. In other words, we refund the full amount during the cooling-off period which is within eight days of contract (application for studying abroad) finalization. Abiding to the Travel Agency Act, we ended up refunding almost the full amount for everyone who cancelled, except for those who were on the point of departure.

Sadly, bad events overlap. The hostel under construction in Fiji was approaching completion and the bill for the remaining balance of the construction cost was sent to the Fiji office.

At that time, there had been more than 400 students in total, across the two campuses of Nadi and Lautoka. By the time we noticed, the size of the student body had shrunk to less than 200.

 My first concern was the cash flow of our company. I humbly pleaded to Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation, our main bank at that time, to increase our credit line but was denied.

 The number of students had been growing steadily as well as sales. The downturn of this global economic crisis came during the time we were increasing the number of international student counselors in order to increase our sales. Not only was the labor cost increasing, but expenses for external consultation were also increasing.

 I held a meeting with the board of directors, and without hesitation I cancelled our contract with the external consulting company that we had been consulting for our stock listing plans, and for the time being, I put a hold on our plans for Mothers listing on the Tokyo Stock Exchange. We were tens of thousands of yen on consulting to apply for listing the following year. Many board members voiced their concerns that we were wasting all the money we had spent, but it was more important for me to protect our students and employees.

 Yet, in November, matters became worse. At my company, I promise my employees to pay them bonuses three times per year. At this point, I had no other choice but to freeze bonus payments.

I gathered our employees from the Tokyo office, connected via Skype with the Osaka branch office, and explained to everyone about our current situation in detail and informed them that we will not be able to pay bonuses this time.

 Some of the employees seem to be taken by surprise, but there were some who had vaguely grasped the situation looking at the extremely depressed sales in the past few weeks and at the fact that they were frequently processing cancellations. Whichever their initial reactions were, all of them encouraged me. As I spoke the typical words of "In times like this, we need to come together as a team...", I couldn't bear how worthless I was and started crying in front of all my employees.

But I knew, crying doesn't solve anything.

In the past, I had overcome so many difficult and unexpected changes with eccentric ideas.

 Although I tried talking to several banks to somehow manage our cash flow, the impressions I got were not very good. All over Japan, companies were suffering from an unprecedented recession, and banks were suffering likewise.

 Yet, amid the unprecedented recession, a good deal came along with the new year. The Japan Finance Corporation, whose establishment was prompted by the Japanese government, has set a special policy of bridge financing during this economic upheaval. Using this new policy, we decided to pay visits to other banks that we had never transacted with before.

 I paid a visit to the Tokyo Star Bank with Nishio, who was in charge of Finance and Accounting at that time. Before our visit, we shared with them our financial statements for the past three years as well as our financial plan for the next five years. Though I usually wear Hawaiian shirts to work, I properly wore a business suit for this visit.

However, I couldn't believe what I heard when the bank presented its loanable amount.

"In this economic environment, we can finance 1 million yen"

 Honestly, a loan of 1 million yen will not even help pay a month's rent for our office. What made me angry was that we had nearly 70 million yen in the bank account. We were not in such a tight state where our funds were quickly running short. Nevertheless, this bank teller wearing glasses had the nerves to tell me that we were only limited to a loan of 1 million yen.

 "Fine, then. I will visit other banks."

 I left the loan desk at the bank. To think that I had gone out of my way to wear a suit! I could not bear to face Nishio because I was embarrassed and mad that I was swiftly denied a loan in front of my subordinate.

But I knew being depressed does not solve anything! In the past, I had overcome so many difficult and unexpected changes with eccentric ideas.

When I founded this company and hired my first employee, I had decided on two matters.

The first was to train all of my counselors at the language school in Fiji shortly after they join the company. After all, they will be consulting people as a counselor to study abroad, a major milestone in life for many people. I wanted themselves to truly know where they were sending off their clients to.

Not a single international study agent in Japan has such training program. This is from my philosophy that counselors should be responsible of their work, especially because they are working in the domain of "education." Accompanying expenses were inevitable.

 The second was to allow employees, who have served for three continuous years, to study abroad in Fiji's language school for a year. It was a welfare program, which the company bears all cost, created at time of foundation. People who wish to take on a job as a counselor for studying abroad tend to have experience in studying abroad themselves. Indeed, some at our company had been former students at Fiji. In short, these counselors are interested in working overseas. I believe that it is best if the counselor that our client is consulting with about studying abroad has first-hand experience of how wonderful Fiji is. It is better if they had experience working there for a while than just the two-week training program. So, if there are anyone who would like to work as a counselor, call me! I can find you a job in Fiji.

 These are the two practices I had decided to keep ever since I founded the company. The counselors who had spent time at the language school and experienced homestay in Fiji become much better at counseling. I think that it is from the peace of mind that he/she knows they are selling a good product. They become naturally better at counseling than any hard training from a good boss. To be honest, I was a complete rookie in this industry, and so when I first started the business I had thought other companies also sends their counselors on site. I soon found out that there wasn't any other company with this revolutionary policy, a win-win system for both, the counselor and the company.

 In Japan, there is an idiom that says three years on a cold stone will make the stone warm. It means that you should not give up, and that perseverance and patience will bring good results. Yet, when working, there are often times where you want to give up or cannot have confidence in what you are doing. By setting a goal for the counselors with the conditions of "if you can continue working as a counselor for three years ...", you allow them to have a chance of reflecting back on their jobs, whether they decide to leave the company for good or temporarily for a year.

Moreover, it seems that this condition really resonates with personnel who wish to become an international student counselor.

Although these two practices were costly at first, it helped our company to steadily gather excellent resources. To this day, I have never regretted keeping these practices.

Some of our employees immediately make their own plans, such as "work hard for three years, study abroad in Fiji, refine my language skills, and then..."

After three months following the Lehman shock, the situation got worse. The topic at the board meeting of directors was always about staffing. We had done every possible reduction of expenses. We had to do something about the increased number of counselors which resulted in labor cost expansion. First and foremost, I fully gave up my own board member compensation without hesitance. I had asked other board members to follow my footsteps and reduce their compensation by 20%. However, I soon realized this was a waste of time. Everybody was protective of themselves.

 They extremely hate pain, but are not hesitant to put pain on their subordinates... I clearly saw this many time in the faces of these board of directors. I seriously loathed attending these meetings. Being company president was a lonely job.

 I regard myself as a manager, if not much one. I, too, have my own management philosophies.

When I hire an employee, I keep in mind to attend their final interview, no matter how busy I am. This is because I think that job recruiters should be just as earnest as the job seekers. It was with some fate that we hired these employees, and I simply did not want to go against that fate. Even during the time where other companies were withdrawing employment offers, I did not want to change this philosophy.

I came up with a brilliant idea!

Like I said, some of our employees had already made their own plan, such as "work hard for three years, study abroad in Fiji, refine my language skills, and then..."

Why make them wait for three years? How about allowing them (bearing their cost) to take leave of absence in advance to study abroad in Fiji?

Employee: Studying abroad was my dream. I'm so happy it came true.

Company: (1) We're happy too because expenses to send students abroad is much cheaper than employing you. Hence, we can temporarily cut down labor costs.

 (2) If economy recovers by the time you return, you will immediately be work-ready.

I briefly summarized my thoughts, selected a few candidates that were probably willing to take leave of absence, and passed the original plan at the board meeting.

We decided that the company will cover tuition, accommodation expenses, round trip tickets, student visa application fee, overseas insurance to study abroad, and monthly subsidies of 15,00 yen for food expenses.

As I was drafting this idea onto a PowerPoint, I came up with another brilliant idea!

Why keep this idea of "making the employee take leave of absence to allow them to study at Fiji and wait for economic recovery" to ourselves?

 By January 2009, the word "Naitei-giri” (meaning "withdrawing employment offer") had become a general term. Employment offers made to university students to join from April were being withdrawn everywhere. I listened carefully and found out that in companies with sufficient resources were paying solatium to these university students for a more "peaceful" withdrawal of their employment offer.

The typical solatium was about 2 million yen!

Meanwhile, our annual fee for studying in Fiji is 1 million yen per year!

I asked around to be introduced to HR department heads of companies that were intending on withdrawing their employment offers. I wanted to promote my plans of "making the employee take leave of absence to allow them to study at Fiji and wait for economic recovery" to them.

The reactions were much better than I had expected.

There are several companies that wanted to hear more, and soon I had agreed with a semiconductor trading company to send 27 of their employees to Fiji for 11 months of studying.

 The counselors at our company were positively influenced by the reception of a large order, by the company president himself. The employees were beginning to think that our company was sinking down into a serious situation. The fact that president himself took an order of nearly 50 million yen in business enlivened them!

 The great effect did not stop there. Our company had decided to ask four of our employees to take leave of absence in advance. As we were sending them off to Fiji, with tears in our eyes at their farewell party, a local bank had decided to finance a loan of 80 million yen!

To be honest, in the worst case, I was thinking of selling the company to one of the listed companies who had shown interest to buying it. This was my last card. While consulting with a shareholder about selling the company, I got into a controversy with him many times. Our relationship ended with me buying all of his shares at his indicated price. This was a big burden for me. Board members belonging to this shareholder's faction also got in conflict with me and left the company.

To them, “Pinch is chance!" meant nothing.

But indeed, pinch WAS chance. We were able to receive a large order and renew board members. With this pinch, the company was given the chance to make a fresh start.

**Chapter 4　School Wars**

We somehow managed to get through the waves of the Lehman shock.

 Fortunately, April 15th, 2010, Reserve Bank of Fiji (equivalent to the Bank of Japan) announced the devaluation of the Fiji dollar by 20%. This greatly helped our business get back on our feet. All of Fiji's expenses became 20% discounted. The Lehman Shock wasn't all that bad.

 Yet I was still not in ease. Half a year after the Lehman Shock came the Greek Shock and the Cypress Shock.

 So, I decided to analyze the shortcomings of our business model. The fundamental problems that we faced in the last six months were not only the fact that number of new applicants drastically reduced due to the downfall of economy but students who already applied started cancelling.

 The streak of hope was that students already in Fiji were enjoying their time from the bottom of their hearts, regardless of the economic recession. For them it was irrelevant whether the world was suffering from any recession or not. They had quit their jobs to come here in the first place.

 It soon became obvious how I needed to change my business model. We needed our students to stay abroad longer. If the period of studying abroad becomes longer, we would be able to continue business for the time being with the students already in Fiji even if the society undergoes an economic upheaval. If all the students left after three months from the upheaval, we would soon go out of business.

　So, the principle challenge was how can we make our students stay longer?

The main market was students studying abroad for three to six months. It was unrealistic to lengthen it to over a year, let alone lengthen it two or three years.

So, what should I do?

To which I recalled the words of a student I had heard three years ago.

 This girl had come to study in Fiji as part of a seminar class at Hokuriku Junior College. It was a short three-week course. The girls fully enjoyed their stay in Fiji and returned to Japan.

 Coincidentally, I was on the same flight back to Japan with these girls. With their seminar teacher at the lounge of Nadi International Airport, I had the opportunity to hear about their impressions on their study at Fiji. The plane we were supposed to ride back to Japan was abruptly cancelled and the alternative flight was to transfer at Sydney, Australia.

 We were dropped off at Sydney, with nothing in plan but to wait for the next flight to Tokyo. I negotiated with the airline and had a tourist visa issued for our group of Hokuriku Junior College students, the teacher, and myself so that we could kill our free time in Sydney. We were also offered free shuttle service The Rocks (near Sydney's Opera House).

We had almost ten hours of free time. I took the girls around the Opera House and even got a chance to stop by at the Sydney Aquarium which was nearby.

One of the girls casually mumbled to me,

"I am actually a year older than everyone else. I was held back in high school because my atopic dermatitis broke out horribly and I couldn't attend school for a year."

I glanced at her arms and neck, and realized her skin looked a bit flaky as she mentioned.

"Perhaps if I lived in Fiji where the environment was clean, I could've attended school."

 I wasn't that focused on this conversation, just casually listening. It didn't particularly strike me with an innovative inspiration. It took more than three years for that moment to take shape as an idea.

 I can lengthen the students' period of studying abroad by starting a high school!!　And if I could sell how attractive Fiji is as a learning environment, Japanese high school students are sure to come!

 I consolidated my ideas and briefed about it at the board meeting. The meeting was held with the so-called board of directors, but there wasn't a single board member that wasn't sympathetic to me. All those who confronted me in the past had already left.

So, I said to the board of directors,

"Some schools help elevate a student's potential of getting into a university from Waseda University (one of Japan's prestigious private universities) to the University of Tokyo (Japan's most advanced university). Some schools help an illiterate child how to read and write."

I continued, "But to make it possible to provide children, whose circumstance does not allow them to be educated, with the opportunity to learn! How high of a significance is that?"

All the newly appointed directors were those who thought like me. So, the new board of directors unanimously approved my idea.

 All that was left was to actually make the school. Although I have established vocational schools (language schools) before, I did not have any experience in starting a new high school. There were difficult obstacles, but I managed to obtain agreement from the town mayor of Waya Lailai Island of the Yasawa Islands to establish a new high school because there weren't any at Yasawa Islands. He offered us land on the southernmost island of Yasawa Islands, the Kuata Island, to build the high school.

 Kuata was a small uninhabited island with a perimeter of five kilometers. It is said to be the location where the protagonist acted by Tom Hanks in the movie "Castaway" landed.

There truly is nothing at the island.

 I drew a design plan for constructing a wooden schoolhouse (partially made with concrete) by myself. I sent two university students who were my fan and wanted to help build the school with two of my employees as responsible persons to this uninhabited island. One of the students who came to help me joined a plant development company called JGC Corporation after graduation and is currently oil in Kuwait.

Now that I think about it, sending them off to that environment was close to complete negligence.

But first, I needed to secure water!

 They went to Kuata with a diesel generator, shovels, pickets, professional tools for well-digging, pots to cook rice, a frying pan to make side dishes, rice, oil, salt, ..., and a spear to catch fish which would be their main source of food.

 This may sound like a joke--- these men kept digging wells for a couple of weeks while living in a hut that they built with tree branches and coconut leaves. No matter how much they dug, well water was not found. Hence, we moved the location to Waya Lailai Island where there used to be a village.

 Yet, we still had no water. I instructed them to dig under the big mango tree, the only tree standing in the island. The all-mighty internet told me that water veins ran under big trees.

　Yet, we were STILL not able to find water.

　The plan went down the drain in three months. (excuse me for the pun)

 If this was an ordinary person, he/she will non-reluctantly accept the results. BUT Hiroshi Taniguchi isn't the kind of guy that easily gives in.

 I had another plan running in parallel. I visited a high school located about an hour drive from Nadi. Rumors said this was a high school that Americans established over ten years ago. Moreover, the high school had decided to close it at such an exquisite timing. I tried contacting the principal of that high school, Tricia.

 We have talked over the phone a few times, but this was the first time seeing her in person. Tricia was a charming and energetic woman, even from the eyes of a man much younger than her. She showed me around her school, which was a four-classroom building on a vast 11 acres of land. She was an educator and it was nearly ten years since she founded the special high school for students that refused to go to school.

I liked the environment of the school, so I cut to the chase.

"If you are thinking about closing the school, may I please have it?"

 Tricia and I could not agree upon a price even after negotiations. She asked for 100 million yen for the land and building, as well the management rights of the high school. It was shortly after the Lehman shock, and I had no leisure to risk using such a large sum of money.

The project in the Yasawa Islands, which had been pursued in parallel, wasn't looking so great. It seemed that no matter how much we dug, no water was to be found.

 If this was an ordinary person, he/she would non-reluctantly accept the failure of this plan. BUT Hiroshi Taniguchi isn't the kind of guy that easily gives in.

That was when I received a message from Ambassador Mataitoga of the Fiji Embassy in Japan, located in Tokyo.

According to Ambassador Mataitoga, there was a national high school called "Ba Provincial Secondary School" in the outskirts of Lautoka. The operation of the school was not going well, and he wanted me, with my expertise in school administration, to become the chairman of the school to rebuild it.

 This offer agreed well with my plans to expand my business to high school education. I jumped at the offer and took the position as chairman to a school that I did not even know where it was located. I reported to the other board members after my reply. (lol)

This was a win-win situation for both of us. Fiji needed someone to take over the seat of chairman to rebuild this national high school, and I wanted to start my own high school.

 I arranged my schedule to go and inspect the school as soon as I was possibly able to. Principal Baleilevuka, who was the former head teacher at Ratu Navula Secondary School and currently a board member at my language school, came with me to visit the school. The high school in subject was situated on the outskirts of a residential area beyond the hills of the Lautoka Golf Club. Even before entering the school gate, we could tell that the facility was tattered. Since we were able to see some students on the school grounds it did not reflect to us as "ruins”, but it was clearly obsolete.

 We asked for the school principal and went around to see the classrooms and hostels with officials from the Ministry of Education. The facilities were in such a terrible state that it could hardly be called a school. The grounds were weedy and filled with litter which was either thrown there intentionally by students or landed there from somewhere else. There were no windows in their frames, and according to the principal's explanation, there was no water coming from the pipes and thus the toilets couldn't be flushed. About one-third of the desks and the chairs in the classroom were either broken or unusable in some other way. Lunch offered to the students at the hostel was soup (or more like a bowl of water) and sloppy, watery cassava potatoes.

I saw this and swore to myself I would somehow manage to reconstruct the school.

 However, it wasn't just the facilities that were in poor condition. There were not enough textbooks in each classroom to support the teachers and the teachers had completely lost their enthusiasm to teach, and the students had lost their passion to learn. You could immediately tell just by looking into their eyes. They had lost their hope for better life.

 It was a school that wasn't great in academics or sports.... or what the Japanese call as "rock-bottom school."

 I looked into various issues of the school and noticed that these issues were quite deeply rooted. "Ba Provincial Secondary School" was a national high school founded in 1973 as soon as Fiji became independent from Britain. Although the employment of teachers was engaged by the government, the administration of school facilities and other faculty members were conducted by the school board (which I undertook as chairman) constituted by the local community.

 At the time I undertook the school board, the government only funded a little for school administration, and instead a tuition was set to be collected from the students. This mechanism was a system transplanted from the UK to Fiji when it used to be under its colonial rule.

 Though a tuition was set, it could not be set too high because Fiji is not a wealthy country. The total tuition per year was only 9,000 yen (180 Fiji dollars). This means it is 3,000 yen per semester.

 In the financial report (though this was not an "official" statement because it has not been drafted at this school for a long time) submitted from the previous chairman when handing me over the tasks, it said that more than half of the students had not paid the semester tuition of only 3,000 yen. "More than half" was an understatement. It was more accurate to say, "the tuitions were hardly paid."

Under such financial situation, it was impossible to maintain this large school campus. It was beyond impossible to even think about setting up a computer room, science laboratory, or swimming pool. Anyone, even if they had no experience in managing, was able to tell you that.

We sent out reminder letters to the parents in effort to collect tuition fees.

When students came to try paying with cassava and taro potatoes, I changed my initial plan and announced the new plan I was considering. I started the first tuition-free high school in Fiji for Years 9 to 13 students in September 2010.

 In February 2011, four months after I took office as chairman, I held a grand ceremony grandly at the high school. This is an episode on that ceremony.

 In Fiji, drinks called Kava are essential for ceremonies and rituals. I have drunk these mud-water looking Kava drinks many times.

 Kava is a luxury item, widely drunk in Fiji and island countries in the South Pacific, but it has disseminated into society and can now easily be obtained in the market. This drink was originally exclusive to the chiefs and only on special occasions, but recently it has become a drink for all people to drink and this has affected their ability to work well.

 Kava is made from mixing the powdered root of the pepper plant with water. It doesn't look like anything but mud water. I can't really say it's tasteful. Living in Fiji for quite a while, I have acquired its taste. I was already familiar with the numb feeling in my tongue after drinking it.

The ceremony was ready to begin. A young boy dressed properly with a traditional Fijian waistband, brought a cup made from a coconut core cut in half. The Kava inside has a distinct sweet smell and leaves a powdery-ness similar to cornstarch in the mouth.

The Kava ceremony is similar to the formal tea rituals in Japan. The participants must create a void between their hands and clap once before and three times after swigging the Kava. Synching with that clap, the people surrounding the person claps four to five times and then pass the cup of Kava to the next person. Once the Kava drinking starts, it continues almost endlessly. In order to escape from the Kava party, people make up a variety of excuses such as his child suddenly becoming sick or leaving to use the bathroom and not returning. By the time its 2 am in the morning, there are only about two people left. Some are strong enough to wake their wives to have her cook a meal. Of course, no one can work the next day.

The ceremony that we held was intended to inform the people of Lautoka that I took office as Chairman of the national high school "Ba Provincial Secondary School."

The school started out with pane-less windows, water-less water pipes, and a school ground full of grass--- the grass has grown up to knee-height and we were able to catch eel in it after it rained. There were hardly any roofs that didn't leak. If it rained, even a little, every square of the classroom floor was wet. To top it off, the hostel students were offered soup lunches that only looked like a bowl of water...

For the past four months, I worked hard. I did everything I possibly could.

I had the holes in the roofs fixed, ordered new window frames with their panes, asked a janitor to repaint the school, and created a small farming area near the school by improving the soil with chicken manure containing phosphorus and coral containing silicon. In order to make sure that the hostel students actually had vegetables or meat in their soup, I asked the agricultural chemistry teacher two months prior to start self-cultivation of tomatoes, okras, and eggplants.

 No matter how many times the water pipes were fixed, there was not enough water pressure. So, we had a well dug in the corner of the school grounds. At first the Fijian teachers and school staff were just watching us do our work. Gradually, they started helping out. Once the teachers regained their liveliness, then the students regained theirs as well.

 Regarding the meat for the soup lunches, it was difficult to find a meat shop that met with our school budget. So, I went to a slaughterhouse outside the town and bought meat of the cheapest internal organs. Fijians were hesitant to eat meat of internal organs. I brought a manual mincing machine from Japan and gently mixed it in with the soup in a state where the children wouldn't even notice that there was meat in it. Just like any parent would do to have their child eat vegetables that they did not like, such as peppers and carrots.

Much to my pleasure, students were delighted to find the pieces of meat in their soup and kept repeating how delicious it was.

This "rock-bottom" school in the city of Lautoka, the second largest city in the Republic of Fiji, transformed itself in matter of four months. Or at least the visible parts of the school did. The sparkles in the students’ eyes told us everything.

There is a total of 162 high schools in Fiji, including both public and private, but this was of course the first school to have a Japanese chairman. The first time I visited Fiji was in December 2002, around Christmastime. Back then, I would have never guessed I would be living here, let alone be running a national high school as its chairman. It was very touching, with a bit of a tingling feeling, to be standing there that night being celebrated.

 I was reflecting back on the memories I had in Fiji and was feeling a little sentimental while drinking down the Kava I received. Though I had been accustomed to the taste, it still left an unpleasant taste. The aftertaste of Kava started spreading in my mouth, and due to its relaxing effect, my tongue started feeling numb.

I handed back the coconut cup back to the young boy who handed it to me in the first place and clapped my cupped hands three times, expressing my gratitude in Fiji style.

　I heard the loud applause by the students and guests echo throughout the venue.

The Kava cup made its way back to the chief guests, Honorable Bole from Fiji's Ministry of Education and Ambassador Yoshizawa from the Japanese Embassy in Fiji.

After me, Chairman Saukuru of Fiji's western district council swigged down the Kava to officially start the ceremony.

 In a Kava ceremony, once everybody has their drink, there is some leisure time and then the next round of drinking starts again. In cases such as this formal ceremony, guest speeches follow the first round of the Kava cup. The Minister of Education gave a speech, highly acknowledging the waiving of tuition and extensive renovation of the school. The vice principal of the high school came up to tell me that it would soon be my turn to give a speech.

 The timing soon came. I was called to the stage. After they had introduced me, I walked up on stage to the microphone set in front of our guests. I picked up the microphone, bowed and started my speech. The following is that speech (abridged):

Ni Sa Bula Vinaka! (meaning "hello" in Fiji language)

Thank you very much ladies and gentlemen. Minister for Education Honorable Fillipe Bole, Japanese Ambassador to Fiji Mr. Yutaka Yoshizawa, and Chairman of Ba Provincial Council Ratu Meli, Saukuru, and all invited guest members of the Ba Provincial Council, Ba Holdings and all friends in Lautoka and Nadi.

It is my great pleasure to be here. Today, I would like to show my respect to Great Fijian Hospitality and show you our new vision today. One year ago, no one here could imagine we are here. Even I didn’t. Not many people… not many students here knew us at that time. Not many teachers here knew us at that time.

One time, I asked a student here "Who is the most famous Japanese who you know?" I was very shocked to hear he just answered like. "Jackie Chen!"

(A very loud laugh from the crowd)

I tell you something. Jackie Chen is not Japanese. He is a Chinese actor. But with very much help, warm help from Ministry of Education we are getting very popular in Nadi and Lautoka. very. Now even taxi drivers, cassava farmers in market tell me "I like what you are doing in Fiji." and they really appreciate us and give us good price for our school.

OK, Students who stay in our hostel: Last night, did you taste your dinner in our hostel?

(From the hostel students: YES!)

What did you see in your plate?

(From students: "Meat! Big fat meat!")

Yes. Big piece of meat! Big piece of meat! 　Before we could only buy ten kilograms of meat in a week, but we negotiated with Abattoir in Vuda, and they agree to give their cheaper meat, so we can provide 40 kilograms of meat every week. Four times bigger than before! Did you enjoy it?

(The students answered: "Yes! They were delicious!!")

Vinaka. Vinaka.

Now our students are planting vegetables farm in our new farm over there. Cassava, cucumber, okra, tomato, pumpkin, pawpaw, banana, long bean, and French beans ...... You work hard, you can have better foods. Education is something similar to vegetable farming. You work hard, you can have better foods, not only better foods, you can have better life, if you work harder.

So, students and teachers, please understand, this school will be one of most strict school in Fiji. And try to support your hard working. The management, we have already asked our Principal Mr. Tawake (the first principal appointed since I took over as chairman) to change the school atmosphere. So, he is going to change the school culture soon. So, you have to watch out! You may feel it is bit too strict... But I am sure…if you start to work in the community, you could feel more stress... So, I'd like you to get used in our community in Ba Pro, then flight away to the community in Fiji. I believe everyone here can reach your dream with education that we are providing you, and your hard working.

This school is the only school, that has No school fee. It is very well known now. I read newspaper last week; The Honorable Minister [Bole] mentioned "School shouldn’t charge a lot of money to students." I really appreciated it. It is truth. Yes, when 3rd semester started in September last year, we were trying to collect the school fee. But only few students brought some money. Some didn’t have cash. So, they brought some cassava to the school instead of money.

But we followed the Ministry of Education Management Guide. We didn’t expel any student with this reason. I think those students are just victims. We should do something before we just expel those students. Then I recommended to our management board and I said, "Ba Pro will be the first school in Fiji [with] NO charge school fee" and they all agreed with it.

So, we started "No [tuition] Fee"…"Free education" in this school. But to maintain our huge compound, and employ all expertly staff, we need something.

Yes, it is money.

We will co-operate with foreign company and accommodate foreign students. Japanese, Korea, and Chinese students here in Ba Pro.

We don’t charge you anything, but you have to work.

You have to work.

Your job description is very simple, just provide your "Great Fijian Hospitality." Please provide some more Hospitality to our foreign students here.

Then we can keep on provide Free Education to you.

Don't forget! We are learning [from] each other. We are helping each other.

I will do my best to give the best to all local and international students in our school.

My vision is to make Ba Provincial College, the new name Ba Provincial Free Bird Institute, one of the top five schools in Fiji in five years' time.

(A large round of applause from the audience.)

Vinaka! I believe we can achieve this vision if we all work together and all work harder.

Remember! Slogan of the school! "Faith moves mountains."

Thank you for listening. Vinaka Vaka Levu.

In 2014, three years after this speech, my school, the "Ba Provincial Free Bird Institute", won the rugby national tournament that all 162 high schools in Fiji participate in. They won again in 2015. As for academics, in 2016, our school ranked 6th out of 162 schools for the common national academic ability test.

Where there's a will there's a way.

In 2015, four years after this speech, Minister for Education Honorable Bole, who had attended the ceremony, made all public high schools in Fiji tuition free.

 After I took position of chairman, my high school made great advancement in both academic and sports. I had studied about things I had never studied before such as well digging, soil improvements for vegetable gardening, and nutrition science. I paid visits everywhere, from the Ministry of Education to slaughterhouses, for better maintenance of the school. I would be at my wits end if it hadn't excelled considering all I have done(lol).

Of course, I was happy to see our Fijian students excelling in their studies, but it was exhilarating to see that the way students from Japan viewed life change from its foundation.

 I myself do not yet have any children. I sometimes ask myself if I have been able to leave my footprints in this world as a living creature.

 Of course, technically speaking, the biological heredity of 'Hiroshi Taniguchi' will become extinct if I do not have children. However, when designing education for a language school and high school, I just don't feel like 'Hiroshi Taniguchi' will become extinct.

 As of now, there won't be anyone related to me in genetic terms. Nevertheless, by sharing time and values together, there are gradually more people that started thinking like me and behaving like me at the schools. They are not my children by blood, but they are my children by love. I feel the same way toward my employees. By sharing time and values together, each and every one is becoming a little bit weirder like me (lol).

 Nearly half of the high school students from Japan were children who were uneasy at the schools in their home country. I will not deny the fact that Japanese education is truly wonderful, but it is absolutely stressful for weirdos like them and myself to be forced to behave and think with same values. These are the children that I want to help out, to provide them a place to live freely in a free country like Fiji.

 Although there are facilities such as science labs, cooking spaces for home economics, and computer rooms, they are not as fine as those found in Japanese high schools. However, our school is the best environment to think on your own, soak into deep thoughts, and dream about your aspirations. Ironically, it's the shortcomings of the facility that offer such valuable opportunities to the children. It is up to the child to decide what that opportunity is for!

I think this is the greatest distinction with Japanese education and also the essences of what education should offer.

 "There is something that I feel more important than improving their English or academic skills. I want the students to cry out loud when they have to leave school, when they have to leave Fiji. What we should aim to become is 'Disneyland' rather than a school! 　We have to make everyone feel that they do not yet want to go home!"

Fortunately, I frequently see students crying in the departure lobby of the airport, surrounded by friends and homestay families. I can't ask for more!

 There is another great thing. My school is a national high school in the former UK and the current British Commonwealth Republic of Fiji. This plays a big role. Graduates of my high school are exempted from TOEIC and IELTS testing that are normally mandated to Japanese students when they apply for universities in English-speaking countries. When advancing to a Japanese university, they are qualified to take entrance exams as returnees or AO special exams.

When I first started the school, I had not given this much thought. However, the advantage of being qualified as a returnee or Admission Office applicant is big. It has helped increase Japanese applicants.

Of course, it depends on the student's own academic ability, but by using the special examination system, the students are able to enter a "higher-ranking" university than the universities that would have been a more practical choice if they had continued studying in Japan. Starting with Waseda University and some prestigious private Universities (Meiji, Aoyama, Rikkyo, Chuo, and Housei University), many of our Japanese students advance to famous universities every year. This is probably because Japanese universities want to enroll more global students who can speak English. By admitting graduates from my high school, students surrounding them will be stimulated by their peers' global ways of thinking.

 But it is truly hard to look after the students. Especially because their fathers and mothers are in Japan and have little understanding of Fijian culture. They cannot objectively perceive the small incidents that happened in Fiji and cannot rationally judge from information that is reported to them by their own children. The hardships of the study abroad counselors are beyond the parents' imagination.

　As aforementioned, there is a mutual aid culture in Fiji called "Kerekere” where it is quite common for someone to be using your belongings or simply gone. Either way, it is perceived as "stealing" in the parents' eyes and we have difficulty explaining this culture to them.

In many of today's high schools in Japan, the viewpoints of students and teachers are much closer and in some cases the authority is reversed. Many parents, familiar with that culture, often criticize strictness of the Fijian teachers or hold the school responsible for misdemeanors of their child such as smoking or drinking when it was the child's choice to do so. I feel these criticisms are unreasonable.

On the other hand, it is a very fulfilling job.

 Students who would have dropped out if they continued attending high school in Japan are touched by the affection of Fijians and their view of life completely turns around. In most cases, they mature enough to become considerate of the counselors. The students take good care of others who are sliding if left alone, show leadership by taking the initiative to become school committee members, and when they hear about their admittance to universities, they make sure I am the first to know. At my high school, there is a sense of unity that has been lost in high schools in Japan.

**Chapter 5　Life and its Treasures**

Almost every person who has heard the story of my school asks me the question "Why can you do that for people you do not know?"

 I have once reflected back on my life to seek its answer. Tagava Konate from Republic of Mali probably had the biggest influence on me.

 In September 1996, I dropped out of Tongji University in Shanghai and contacted Draman, a senior international student that attended Tongji. He was from Mali and was residing in Hong Kong at that time. Back then, Hong Kong still hadn't been returned to China from England. Draman told me that Hong Kong economy was booming and there were a lot of jobs available.

 He invited me, who had nowhere to go since I had just dropped out, to visit him in Hong Kong anytime. I was planning to go to the interview at a real estate company in Shanghai that an Australian friend had introduced me, but I declined the opportunity and headed for Hong Kong alone.

On a side note, back then I had many, many friends. The day before I left Shanghai, all of my friends threw me a big farewell party at the university's student dormitory hall. At the end of the party, my friends prepared a world map bigger than three tatami mats. Drunk as I was, I declared "I am going to throw a dart on the map and wherever it lands, I will go there within three years!!"

 It was one of those student impulses. They blindfolded me, and I threw the dart. It landed on a ridiculously remote island called Flores Island. It was the westernmost island of Portuguese Azores islands, floating in between the Americas and the European Continent. It actually took four years, but in 2000, I went to that not-so-exciting island to fulfill my promise with everyone. They all told me it was impossible to get there... I proved them wrong, making 12 transits with a roundtrip airfare of 120,000 yen. On the island there was even a monument that indicated it as the westernmost location in Europe. You can see how remote of a place it is on the world map (lol).

 Okay, back to my story in Hong Kong. So, the next day, my friends came to see me off at Shanghai Airport. I departed from the university's dormitory to the airport in a "parade" of 14 taxis. I remember someone saying "Hiroshi is one lucky guy. 14 taxis must be a university record for a farewell party!"

However, as I was thanking my friends one last time before checking in, I noticed that I had misplaced my passport. I desperately searched for it all over the airport. One of my friends happened to be at the spot when a cleaning lady picked up my passport. Luckily, I was able to find it.

 However, I was not able to check in for the flight I was supposed to take. Awkwardly, I rode back in the parade of taxis to the student dormitory. When I returned to the airport a week later, there were only three taxis of friends sending me off...and I safely arrived in Hong Kong.

 I was finally able to meet Draman there. I naturally thought that Draman was living in a room he rented on his own, but he wasn't. He was a lodger at a fellow Mali, who was a friend of a friend of his Sudanese friend. The room owner (the person renting the place) was Tagava Konate.

You heard French, an African tribal language, and Chinese (since all lodgers were studying abroad in China) in this community of eight people, including Tagava. Here, I started my life in Hong Kong.

Everyone was kind. I was the youngest. There was someone a bit older than me and those a lot older like Tagava. We were an extremely diverse group with different culture, different race, and different religion. Some were Islamic, and some were Christian, while I was an atheist who did not believe in God.

 I was given an area that was less than one tatami mat. Every single morning, I woke up with someone's feet in front of my face. I will probably never forget these memorable days. It was a queer space shared by completely different types of people.

This life was supported only by Tagava's income. He ran a trading business. Though he called himself a trader, it was a very small private trade, without a secretary or a clerk, to send parcels of goods bought in Hong Kong or China to a client in Africa, once or twice a week. There wasn't anyone else working besides Tagava. Yet everyone had a huge appetite.

In the morning, someone would make a soup called "mafé", stewing up the carp, lamb, and chicken that Tagava had bought the day before. We would eat it with rice or tortilla-like food (made by kneaded maize and flour). We all sat in a circle to eat and they would always 'God' and 'Missions.'

 Though I am an atheist, I have never confronted them that there are no such existences as 'God' or 'Missions. ' I had no intentions to disturb their faith which they value, and I also didn't want to be kicked out saying something inappropriate.

 Though the people living there didn't work, they were swift at housework. Their cooking was amazing. Draman had made African dishes for me while we had been studying abroad in China and they were quite delicious. My favorite was "Chicken mafe (chicken stewed in tomato and peanut butter)."

 A week passed, then another, and I eventually started to help with the cooking. Unlike other lodgers, I had a small amount of cash and I tried paying it to Tagava to help with the rent and food expenses. He never took my money saying, "I am happy and fully satisfied, so if you want to help, please help somebody who isn't happy or satisfied."

 About a month since I started to take turns cooking, I had begun to master making African dishes. I was stewing mafe as usual when Tagava asked me what kind of work I was interested in.

I couldn't answer Tagava's question right away. I had started university studying applied physics but switched to architecture in my second year. I couldn't come to like architecture which pursued beauty. It just wasn't for me.

When I got up in the morning the next day, Tagava handed me "South China Post" a major newspaper in Hong Kong. He had marked some sections in its recruitment column "Classified Post" with a fluorescent highlighter for me.

To seek for a job in Hong Kong at that time, the most typical way was to check "Classified Post" on Sundays and send your resume to the company's HR department.

Tagava had picked up several companies for me who was clueless. He asked me more questions and made my resume for me.

 I had no address or phone number in Hong Kong, so I used Tagava's and sent me resume to four companies that I thought I had a better shot at. By Tagava's suggestion, I wrote "Tongji University 1993-1996" for my educational background, making it seem like I had graduated even though I had dropped out.

 The following week, Tagava got a call saying that I had made it to job interviews at all four companies. It was my first time getting a job interview, so Tagava and the other African residents helped me practice by acting as the interviewer.

 On the day of the interview, I realized I was not fully prepared. I did not have any business suits, not even a pair of trousers to wear to the interview.

 Tagava told me to wear his jacket, so for my interview outfit I picked out my own shirt, one of Tagava's most plain neckties (because all of them were extremely flashy), and one of the nicest pair (meaning they weren't torn) of jeans that I had because Tagava's trousers were just way too big for me. As for the purple jacket I borrowed from Tagava, I couldn't wear it because it was too big (never mind the color). I told this to Tagava and he shortened the sleeves by stapling the end.

 I went to my first job interview wearing a purple jacket with sleeves fixed with staples. If I had seen someone dressed like this walking towards me on a sidewalk, I would probably have crossed the street to the other side much sooner than I had to pass him. That was how crazy I looked.

 As soon as I was shown into the interview room, I introduced myself in both English and Chinese and appealed to the HR people sitting in front of me, as I had practiced. The HR people at the first company was an old man and the interview was conducted in Chinese. When the interview finished, the man offered me the job because there are not so many Japanese who can understand technical terms of architecture in Chinese.

 Tagava had told me that in Hong Kong it was better not to immediately accept a job offer. Despite I already had an offer, I went to the interviews of the other three companies that I had sent my resume to. These were all conducted in English.

 Regardless of the purple jacket, I was offered a position at all four companies. It may have been that there were many Japanese clients or Japanese-favoring clients in Hong Kong, which was in a real estate bubble at that time. "Timing was everything" I thought as I slid the hanger into the crumpled purple jacket. Tagava and the Africans all celebrated for me. After much consideration, I decided to join the major real estate developer.

 Even after I started working and began receiving salaries, Tagava never once accepted my money for rent or food expenses. This continued for the three months I had stayed at Tagava's place.

I decided to help someone who wasn't happy or satisfied as Tagava always said.

I must note that there was one more life-changing encounter.

 In the summer of 1996, when I was still a university student, I was invited to a wedding ceremony of a French couple, Christian and Martin, who I had befriended during my time abroad studying in China. The wedding ceremony itself was at the beginning of September. Since I was going all the way to France, I figured it would be fun to go to Europe in advance, around July when university was closed for the summer, and travel around before attending the ceremony.

 However, after I booked my ticket to Rome via Moscow, which was the cheapest flight from Shanghai to Europe, I had only 100,000 yen left. Though this was twenty years ago, it was still nearly impossible to travel around Europe for two months with only 100,000 yen. A normal person would have given up their initial idea of going. My friends had all said that it was impossible and impractical. But no, Hiroshi Taniguchi isn't the kind of guy who listens.

 I didn't have much money, but I had many friends who were sure to help me with my European tour, starting with Rome and then heading north to Venice. From there I would head south to Sicily, back to Italy, then to France and Switzerland, head north from Austria to Germany and back south again to Netherlands, Belgium, and finally into Paris, France. I asked around to find friends who would let me stay at their place along my planned route of Germany-Netherlands-France.

 My friends from university who were returning home for summer vacation invited me over and gave me their contact information. Some were not even from the same university as I was, such as the Italian student studying abroad at the adjacent university. Now I didn't have to worry about accommodations or meals.

 All I had to do was to be able safely arrive at each destination. Or in other words, the mean of transportation. 　One of my German friends proposed hitchhiking. According to him, it was easy to hitchhike in Western Europe, excluding Italy and Switzerland. They all told me to stand at the entrance of a highway or the exit of a gas station, holding a piece of cardboard box. I should write my destination, en-route point, and major cities as rough destinations in large letters with a permanent marker. "It's easy" they would say, though I was not sure if that was true or not while being very sure these friends had never hitchhiked before.

My plans were to arrive at the airport in Rome, stay there for three nights to see Michelangelo's paintings and sculptures that I had long wanted to see as well as Vatican's treasures, then to rely on my friends to visit Venice or otherwise known as the "City of Water", Bologna which is famous for spaghetti Bolognese, Rimini to then quickly stop by San Marino, head to Naples where my friend lives, go to Palermo station which is at the farthest tip of Italy, where my Sicilian friend will come pick me up by car to take me to her hometown of Sciacca, situated in southern Sicily, and finally head back north to Milan to travel to Lyon in France where my friend will be waiting for me.

My plan was super simple.

 Although I would need to pay for tickets, I would go around Italy by railroad and head to Germany (where it was supposedly easy to hitchhike) sooner. Without second thinking, I bought the "Euro Pass" which would allow me unlimited rides anywhere throughout Europe the "Euro Pass" had just started its sales. It was a great deal because you were able to ride as much as you want in any railway within EU during the specified dates.

I bought a pass for two weeks because I intended to only use it to travel within Italy. In the course of the two weeks, I had to travel north then south and then north again to arrive in Lyon, France where my friend lived. Once I enter France, then I would be able to easily travel by hitchhike throughout Europe, other than Switzerland. My grand plan was to cut travel costs as much as possible by traveling on railroads in only Italy and Switzerland and hitchhiking in other countries.

 Alessandra came to Venezia and Mario came to Naples to meet me. Mario's house was quite a distance from Naples and told me it was difficult to allow me to stay. Instead, he introduced me to one of his friends.

 From the toe of the boot-shaped Italian Peninsula, I then traveled to Sicily. To my surprise, the train cars were disassembled to be loaded on to a big ferry and re-assembled again as a train.

 When the ferry arrived at the port of Messina, I sat in the same seat that I had sat before the disassembly/re-assembly. From there, the train aimed for Palermo, its final destination. It took a lot of time to travel that distance because the train had to be disassembled, ferried over, and re-assembled.

 When I arrived in Palermo station, my best friend Alica's father came to pick me up. He said something like "Alica is out playing right now, but she will be back soon!" in Italian. Alica's father, Don Fauci was a kind-looking man. According to Alica, he ran a tile and brick manufacturing factory, but in reality....well, I'll leave that to your imagination, considering he lives in Sicily with "Don" in his name (lol). Anyway, he was very kind to me.

 There was one favor that Alica had asked me to do as a condition to stay at her house. It was said that men in the southern part of Italy, especially Sicilian men, often become very jealous. To make sure that they did not mistake me as her boyfriend, she wanted me to say "non sono ragazzo" when I introduced myself.

 This meant "I'm not her boyfriend" in Italian. I had to first say "non sono ragazzo" when I first met with her father at Palermo Station, when I went swimming with Alica at the sea, and even when I was introduced as her acquaintance at the pizzeria after we got off the two-seater scooter.

 Alica's home was a large mansion sitting on top of a hill with great view. She lived with Don Fauci, her mother, her brother Alessandro, and two Cameroonians (probably illegal workers) that served them. When we went out to the beach, Alessandro lent me his swimming pants because I had not brought mine along.

 The city of Sciacca was originally a small fishing village. The fisherman and the man selling ice at the fishing port seemed to know Alica as a child. As did the lady at one of the diners nearby. Of course, I had to say it again.

"Non sono ragazzo!" (I'm not her boyfriend!)

 I spent nearly ten days in central and northern Italy, so I only had five days left in Sciacca. This was because my two-week Euro Pass was about to expire. However, this beautiful city of Sciacca was hard to part with.

 I was lying on bed, glaring at my Euro Pass, sighing "Oh, I wish I had bought a longer Euro Pass." No matter how much I pouted, the expiration date written on the Euro Pass remained as the day after tomorrow.

 Just like in Japan, summers in Italy are hot and sweaty. Two days before, hail fell for the first time in Sicilian history, but it only cooled the air for a moment.

"I wish I could stay a little bit longer in Sciacca."

 And just as I sighed, I glanced down to see that the expiration date, written in ballpoint pen on the bottom right of the Euro Pass, had transferred onto my sweaty thumb.

 "Huh? What is this?"

I checked my Euro Pass and found something quite unexpected. The expiration date on the Euro Pass had cleanly been transferred onto my thumb, leaving the ticket blank.

Since I came to Italy, I've visited many Catholic churches, so I thought

"God must have heard my wish!"

I enjoyed my short summer stay at Alica's and left Sciacca a week later. I had written a new expiration date, a week later than the original, on the blank part of the Euro Pass with a ballpoint pen... I didn't forget to try copying the railroad staff's handwriting.

I sincerely thanked Alica's parents who had taken me back to Palermo station. Alica's mother gave me homemade cookies in return. I put the cookies in the pocket of my backpack and thanked them again. I kept waving my hands until the car they were driving were no longer in sight.

 Beautiful ocean, beautiful cityscape, and though I could hardly communicate with them, people with beautiful hearts. I must also note that all of Alica's friends were surprisingly beautiful.

 When I got onto the train, I noticed that there were also many famous churches around Palermo station. It was also said that the oldest astronomical observatory in the world was in Palermo. I should have gone to see it. I was beginning to regret that I stayed a little too long in Sciacca.

 The crispy Mediterranean wind came in through the compartment of the train from little opening of the windows and caressed my cheeks. It felt good and I was reminiscing the places, friends, people I met in each part of Italy. I realized that an hour had already passed since we left Palermo. The traveling distance in plan was double the distance between Naples to Palermo. I was riding a limited express, and so the train was not going to make any stops until Messina where it would be disassembled. I would be able to ride that ferry again from Messina! I recalled that Aranciini (rice croquettes) that were sold at the cafeteria on the ferry was very tasty. Even if I had to spend my small travel budget, it was worth it to buy it again. Just thinking about it excited me. Just then, I heard

"Tickets, Tickets. Please have your tickets ready."

 The conductor and a young boy, most likely his assistant, came around to check passenger tickets. I had ridden the railroad several times by then, and it was unusual to see the conductor coming around to check tickets. I saw the lady next to me take out her ticket from her bag. I took out mine from the pocket of my backpack and handed the conductor the ticket as the lady next to me had done. Just then, I heard

"\:@[]/.-,:@^1:.;@,::-p@?"

 The Italian train conductor asked me something. I couldn't understand Italian, but the train conductor was pointed at the back of my train ticket and saying something.

".,:.@;^,.\;,:,@:./;,\-@,.:!"

 Soon, the conductor started raising his voice and ultimately the lady next to me started yelling at me too. I then finally realized what was going on. Looking from the back, you can easily see the date I had written in ballpoint pen and the actual date that was written at Rome station.

":;/,@」.:[,@;]/:;^-:\:;]"

The conductor shouted and a total of six people-- four passengers and two assistants-- pinned me down. My backpack was in the assistant's hands and the ticket was in the conductor's. Shortly after the train conductor said something into his transceiver, railroad officials in other train cars came gathering about.

When I heard the hustle and bustle outside the compartment door, I became frightened. The conductor and railroad officials were saying something in Italian into their radios to somewhere else. Passengers in the same compartment were saying something to me in a loud voice. At last, I began to understand the seriousness of the situation.

 There was an in-car announcement, and after about five minutes, the train stopped somewhere. Originally there wasn't any stop scheduled until the port of Messina, so I knew that this train had stopped for this one criminal (me). I didn't need to understand Italian for that.

Screeeeeeeech.

 The train skidded to a stop. I was robbed of my backpack by the train conductor and his assistant. Both of my hands were held down and I was forced off the train. A station staff member and a total of seven police officers were waiting for me to get off the train and I was soon handcuffed. It was at a small train station called St. Agatha.

St. Agata? was a small station, but we had to walk through a long underpass to get to the station building. I was surrounded by four officers in front and three behind. As I got down from the stairs, I was made to walk this dark and narrow underpass.

 In the back pocket of the young policeman's trousers in front of me, a pistol was casually stuffed away. I could take out the pistol with handcuffed hands, threaten the policemen with it, and escape from their hands....

 I fantasized it for a second, but we passed through the underground road sooner than I could put it into action. If the road were a bit longer, then I probably would have done such a stupid thing. No doubt, I had lost my cool being pressed for the first crime in my life.

 By the time we arrived at the police station at the edge of the station building, I was quite exhausted emotionally. I have often seen the guilty stay stubbornly silent in movies and TV dramas. I was forced to sit down, and by the time the young police officer started taking records, I too decided to not talk unless absolutely necessary.

 The young police officer confiscated my passport and wallet and started interrogating me. However, none of policemen or station staff knew English. I had a bit of knowledge on French, so when they said "Documenta" I was able to predict that it likely meant the same as "Documente" which was 'passport' in French. However, I was not able to communicate in Italian during the interrogation.

The young police officer frantically wrote something on the paper and repeated "Yapon Ambasciata" over and over. "Yapon Ambasciata" probably meant the Japanese Embassy. The police officer who was typing next to us heard this, took a copy of my passport, and apparently faxed the copy to the Japanese Embassy in Rome to reference me.

Perhaps one hour had passed.

A large-built man with a mustache came into the room. He said something to the young officers and they left to go to the next room with the fax machine. The man sat in the chair that the young officer was sitting on before. He sat comfortably with his legs spread out.

He looked straight into my eyes....

For may be about a minute or so.

 He called in the young officer and had the officer report to him in Italian about my incident. He looked straight into my eyes again. And finally, he opened his mouth.

"You did it?"

“Do you understand a bit of English?”

The man held a type-written record in his hand and asked me in English with an Italian accent, "Did you really cheat on your train fare?" I was embarrassed of what I did and couldn't look at the man in his eyes. I quietly sat there, looking down.

All I heard were sounds of the keyboard clicking away in the room next door.

 I then heard the phone ring a few times. It seems the young officer was receiving a fax. I heard the scratching sounds of the fax paper being printed out amid the clicks of the keyboard. The printing sound stopped as well as the typing sound of the young officer. Silence fell in the room.

 The young officer from the room next door brought in the fax paper just printed out. He handed the paper to the man, in which he took a quick glance and then stared at me in the eyes again.

"You are a good boy." said the man. Then he picked up the record in front of him and put it on top of the fax about me that was probably sent from the Japanese Embassy. He ripped those papers in front of me. And he said again,

"You are a good boy."

I stayed looking down. The man continued,

"You like Italian cafe?"

 I couldn't believe my ears. The man was asking me whether I liked Italian coffee or not. I finally answered the man.

"Yes....."

 The man smiled and patted me on my shoulders. He gestured me to come out of the room. The man handed me my backpack that the young officer brought to me, and the man followed.

 It seemed St. Agata really was a small city. There was only a small cafeteria in the station and no shops like other stations. The man sat me down in a chair at that one cafeteria and ordered a cafe granita (a mixed drink of ice, sugar and espresso) for himself and for me.

The waiter handed us coffee poured in a small crafted glass. The man asked,

"Italian gelato?"

 I sat there at the little cafeteria with the man that was just interrogating me, drinking Italian coffee and Italian gelato (ice cream).

 I was truly embarrassed, felt uncool and could not make eye contact with the man. I stayed looking down, sometimes glancing at the beautifully crafted glass with the ice cream, and just prayed for the time to pass. Yet the man was kind enough to tell me that I should head to Palermo station and go to the beach-side terminal to find the ferry for Genoa (a town in northern Italy). It would be a much cheaper route to France than the train. The train for Palermo was about to arrive in 30 minutes.

 Until then, the man kept smiling and ordering coffee for me who sat very nervously in front of him. I think he was trying to help me relax.

 When the train finally arrived, the man came up to me and held out his big hand to shake hands me. He grasped my hands tightly. His hands were big and warm. He wrapped them around my hands. But I kept looking down.

　I boarded the train and turned around to find the smiling man raising his big right hand.

"Ciao!"

In less than 20 seconds, the train announced its departure and the doors closed. I whispered "Ciao" (meaning 'Bye" in Italian) to the man far away.

The window on the connecting parts of the train became smaller and smaller. I was no longer able to see the man. I crouched there and wept, crying out loudly.

**Chapter 6　No Runaway, No Life**

 There is another question that I am always asked,

“Why is your heart so strong?"

Like the other question, I have once reflected back on my life to seek its answer. I think it was Mrs. Nakajima, one of the ladies that lived near my parents' house, that influenced me most on this matter.

 I was born into a rather wealthy family. My father managed a construction company and a hotel. My mother was a housewife, making us delicious meals every day.

My father used to play rugby, a rare choice of sports at that time, and even led his high school team as captain. The sub-captain was Yoshiharu Yamaguchi, who is now well known as the rugby coach for Fushimi Industry High School which was the model for the Japanese movie "School Wars."

 My father was accepted to a university by recommendation for his talents in rugby, but before he was admitted, my grandfather suddenly passed away. My father gave up advancing onto university and started working locally. Eventually, he started his own business, and I was born. After my younger sister was born, he started a rugby school that he had been wanting to do. When I was in elementary school, I was forced to go to rugby school with him. I wanted to stay home and watch cartoons. Hence, rugby is a sport I most dislike.

 Back then, I would be sent to a temple near our house called Enshoji. I was sent there early in the morning every day to practice sitting in Zen meditation. According to my mother, I was a very restless child and disrupted class by asking the teacher with difficult questions that were impossible to answer. That was obvious from the comments made on my report cards that I later came across as an adult. The teacher had hastily written (with much resentment) what a problem child I was.

 My problematic behavior could not be resolved by the school teacher in charge and the issue was escalated to the elementary school principal. Again, my behavior could not be improved and was eventually escalated to the board of education. I met with them and was then urged to have a psychoanalysis done at the Reinan Hospital (currently called Reinan Kokorono Hospital), a large psychiatry hospital.

 One morning, as I was finishing my breakfast, my younger sister left for nursery school on the school bus. My mother had told me that I did not have to go to school that day. I jumped with joy and started to lazily spend the day in front of the TV.

After a while, my mother took me in her small car, driving through roads and mountain roads that I had never passed through before, to a building in a secluded area. There were iron frames fixed on the windows.

As soon as we arrived, they made me draw, do puzzles, and take a scan through a machine similar to a CT with wires on my head.

My mother later told me, all we found out that day was that I was a lot brighter than my peers. (Perhaps if it were today, I may have been diagnosed with Asperger's or ADHD, but at that time, that was the most they could get out of a psychological analysis.)

 Despite that I was taken to the psychiatry(?) hospital, sent to temple for Zen meditation training, I religiously refused to do my homework. I just hated doing the same thing as everyone else, and always sat out for physical education (PE) classes by saying I forgotten my PE clothes. I did do anything during music classes, again saying that I forgot to bring my pianica.

 As I advanced to higher grades, a tough teacher would send me out the classroom to do homework in the school hallway while everybody else was normally taking classes. All I heard was the teacher's voice leaking from the classroom, and yet my scores for science and arithmetic were always top of the class, and my Japanese grades were only slightly affected. Of course, my grades for PE (which I always sat out of) and Music (which I always cut classes) were of the worst.

I really really was a problem child.

 Yet, I become a much more 'normal' student as I advanced to high school. Maybe it was because tons of my brain cells died from too much heading practice for soccer (lol), which I started in junior high as an alternative for the much-despised rugby.

 In 1986, when Halley's Comet most closely approached Earth, I invented a reflecting telescope that the world has never seen. I was only in 9th grade. Much later, when I was fighting cancer, I had so much leisure time that I had this invention patented. I also applied for its international patent. This invention is introduced on the Internet as the "Taniguchi Telescope" alongside with Newtonian Telescope invented by Isaac Newton who had found universal gravitation (I think). If there is anyone at NASA or JAXA interested in using this next generation telescope, please do not hesitate to contact me.

 Until about the time of this invention, I was really bright. I sometimes regret I started soccer and killed so many of my brain cells.

 One day in high school, my friend taught me that if I became the student council president, I would more easily be admitted to a university by recommendation. In fact, it was said that the previous student council president got accepted to a well-known university by recommendation.

　I hated studying and terribly wanted to get the easy way out. I listened carefully to my friend and decided to run for student council president.

 For the past few years at my high school, there was usually only one student running for the student council president. The candidate was able to inaugurate to office by undergoing the process of "electoral votes" instead of the typical election. This meant, if I ran for president, I would automatically be elected and automatically be recommended to a good university.

 Miraculously, and much to my misfortune, there was ANOTHER candidate that decided to run for president after I declared it! 　I thought I heard the collapsing sound of my wonderful future. This girl was quite popular, so I thought I may lose in the election. However, we both had to speak in front of the entire student body and 70% of the students who heard my speech voted for me. I was too nervous to remember anything that the girl spoke in her speech, but I guess my speech reached the students' hearts. I couldn't confess to my friends that the real reason I wanted to become a student council president was because I wanted to take an easier path for university admission.

This is how I inaugurated as the president of Wakasa High School Council in Fukui prefecture. But the real problem starts here.

 The next day, my mother called me to come to the entrance gates of our home. Our neighbor, Mrs. Nakajima, was at the gates holding a big bouquet of flowers. I had never received a bouquet of flowers in my life before. I politely thanked her for her gift.

I repeat: But the real problem starts here.

 As I received the bouquet of flowers, Mrs. Nakajima said to me, "Congratulations on becoming Student President. Wow, Hiroshi-kun. You must be proud of your father."

 At first, I thought I had heard it wrong, but I realized Mrs. Nakajima was not praising ME, but praising MY FATHER. I tried thinking that maybe she meant to say "Wow, Hiroshi-kun. Your father must be proud of you." But no matter how many times I re-play her words in my mind, Mrs. Nakajima most definitely said to me "Wow, Hiroshi-kun. You must be proud of your father."

These words made me confirm that society does not evaluate me as much as I thought. Despite that I had thought up of what to address in my speech and that content resonated with everyone, society seemed to think that I won the student council election as if father had bought the votes of the students.

 This thought made me sad and at the same time, it got me thinking,”　What could I have done so that I wouldn't be perceived that way?"

Even if I advance to university, succeed my father's company, become company president, and make the company bigger, it'll probably still be my father that is praised. Just thinking that made me sick, and though my father was good to me, he became subject to my hatred.

　It was then that I drew the conclusion that I had to run away.

 In actual, it is not until much later that I run away from home on September 30th, 1999, when I am 27 years old. It was because I would plan it, but it would never work out. I planned it when I started university, when I dropped out of university and went to Hong Kong, as well as when I quit my job and went to Thailand. Each and every time, I had planned to run away and fall off from my parents' grid.

 For reference, my job in Thailand was the on-site supervision of the construction of a Japanese parabolic antenna factory. Someone introduced me to this job at the construction company when I had grown tired of working in Hong Kong. However, I just couldn't get along with the president of this company and quit in merely a month.

 On the day I quit the company, I went to a red-light district in Bangkok to drink alone. It helped that I no longer had to face the president I disliked. I did not know much about Bangkok since I had only been there for a month. There wasn't a place in Bangkok where I could drink alone in peace. It was the worst environment to do it, especially on Thanon Patpong in the red-light district. Prostitutes and dancers were hanging out on the street and the tourists leisurely took walks through it.

Nevertheless, I tried drinking beer alone at a noisy bar where the speakers were booming. Prostitutes and sellers would come up to me and start talking. I sighed, finally realizing I couldn't drink in peace there. As I was about to leave, two tall guys, a German and a Swiss, struck up a conversation with me. The girls and sellers that would come up to tourists to talk had minimal English understanding. Usually, the conversation did not last very long. However, these two men with Germanic ancestry were fluently speaking English and they were the perfect audience for my recent complaints.

　I ended up drinking with them in several bars in this town of Bangkok that night.

 The German's name was Marcus, who was working as a model for three years in Bangkok. The Swiss was Daniel, who had just recently come to Bangkok. I told them I had just quit my job and was wondering what to do from now on.

Marcus said that he belonged to a modellimg agency and that agency was not only looking for European models, but they were also looking for Asians. He added that he would put word in for us.

 Daniel and I registered together with the PIN model agency. Since the hotel I was staying at was expensive, I decided to stay at the same hotel they were at. That is how I got to know Asia's largest "backpackers' street", Khao San Road.

　Khao San Road is a place where various races are coming and going, cheap and comfortable hotels stand side by side, not only tourists, but a lot of people staying long in Bangkok were living.

 The hotel room was small, but it was cheap and the restaurants around the hotel were quite reasonable. With the savings I had, I estimated that I could stay here for half a year. I then later become sort of like the 'King of Khao San Road.

 In one of the arcades in the central section of this street was a pool bar called "Suzie's Bar" that we often hung out at. It was our go-to place, our backyard, our home. Vodka sodas cost 100 baht (500 yen) and was expensive for us. So, we would buy vodka bottles from a nearby liquor store, bring it in the bar only to order soda, and just hang out there from noon to midnight.

 One day the model agency called Marcus on his cell phone (he was the only one who had it at that time). The agency told him that Daniel's and my advertisement photographs were sold so we should come in to the office to pick up our wages. I hopped on a Tuktuk (tricycle taxi) to the office, and found Daniel, who had arrived earlier, arguing.

"What's wrong, Daniel?", I asked. Enraged, Daniel said to me, "Hiroshi, great timing. Look at this! What do you think?" and flipped over a page in a magazine.

There was Daniel, not wearing anything....

 "What the hell? 　Did you get nude, Daniel?"

"Hells no!!"

 "But what the hell? 　The picture ...."

I took a closer look. It was a body of someone that wasn't wearing anything, and Daniel's headshot next to it. It made it look like it was him that took off his clothes.

"You're like this, Hiroshi!"

And there I was, just like Daniel, in the magazine without wearing anything.

 Here the agency was, telling us to pick up our wages, and all that we got paid were a few thousand yens for the two photos used. We were both angry, demanded the girl at the office to give us back all the advertisement photographs we took and delete our registrations. Huffing and puffing, we returned to Suzie's Bar.

 We told Marcus of the incident and he laughed his ass off. "That's a great start", he said. Daniel almost punched him.

 The three of us were best buddies. We were scums having no positive impact on the world. I was living the scummiest life on a scumful street full of scums. A month passed, then two, until they suddenly left.

 Daniel was caught in Malaysia, where he had gone to renew his visa, for possession of marijuana and sentenced to death. Shortly after (which Marcus's girlfriend told me), Marcus was caught at Narita Airport for violation of Immigration Control and Customs (and maybe even for possession of marijuana?). The girlfriend was briefly investigated, by phone, and was told that Marcus's name wasn't Marcus. His real name was Jonathon. She didn't tell me in detail, but Marcus (or Jonathan to be exact) went to jail in Japan.

 Though I knew that they smoked pot (I don't even smoke cigarettes), it never crossed my mind that they would be arrested. It was pretty shocking.

 Amid all of this, the Asian currency crisis started in Thailand on July 2nd, 1997. Overnight, the value of my Thai baht lessened to half and the cost of living inflated 1.5 times.

 I was supposed to be able to live six months at Khao San Road. I was now only able to stay for three months, though I did nothing wrong. Yet, I couldn't get out of my scumly life, and continued drinking vodka at Suzie's Bar, alone like a hermit who lost his soul.

 Of course, my savings were just getting smaller and smaller. My English girlfriend that I was dating back then was going to pay for my hotel and living expenses. I truly didn't want to be her burden and finally decide to call my parents in Japan to tell them that I was becoming short on money and ask for financial support. I did not care for my parents and I did not want to make my achievements a result of my parents, so I thought until I was going home, but now I'm making my parents pay attention to my parents by international phone ....

　I was so pathetic that I didn't even have the money to call them. I used international collect call, which my mother picked up. She told me that my father said he will send me money to buy plane ticket back to Japan under the condition that I would join my father's company upon return.

　I didn't even have money to feed myself. I had no choice but to say "Yes, please."

 Many of my scum friends cried for me to say farewell. I drank with these scums at Suzie's Bar till the very last minute and then headed for the airport by taxi. I cried so much that I passed out in the taxi. Simon, Dai, Vincent, Stan, ... they truly were scums, but the greatest of friends with so much exciting drama.

As promised, I join my father's construction company as a CAD operator upon my return.

 I worked very hard at my father's company. It wasn't so tedious as I had done part-time jobs there when school was out in the summers. My mother had warned me that being a full-time employee was much different from working as a part-timer. To make sure that I wouldn't have people talking behind me saying "just because he's the son of the president", I joined the company as the lowest possible position with the least salary.

 I worked longer and harder than anyone else, working overtime and even on the weekends. I had a busy life, working from morning on either Saturday or Sunday every week. My mother used to always say, "Don't be a disgrace to your father!"

 Note however that my heart was never at work. It was at a small town called Obama City with a population of over 30,000. It was not an exciting city like Bangkok or Hong Kong, but I liked going fishing there on the holidays that I had, which were about three days a month.

 My childhood friend from elementary school often invited me to go fishing, and those moments were the only time I could feel I was alive. I would sometimes go fishing early in the morning before going to work or afterwards from around 10 pm. Of course, I would make sure I did not slack off on work itself. At that time, I used to go fishing about 200 days a year.

Indeed, fishing was the only hobby keeping me alive.

 One day, my father called me in to his president’s office. I was working as hard as I possibly could, so I thought I would finally be getting a promotion or a pay raise. However, my father asked me to seal the new loan documents from the bank. Listening carefully, I realized he was asking me to succeed his company. He wanted me to stamp next to the joint guarantor indication to seal the bank document as a new board member for one of his group companies.

I said to him,

"I'm not a beggar! I don't want someone else's stuff for free."

"I don't want to become a board member for a company that I have not even seen the financial reports of! Nor do I want to become a joint guarantor!"

My father tried convincing me with all kinds of benefits, but his negotiations failed.

"Then get out of the house!"

 "Fine then. I'm leaving!"

This is how my dream, ever since high school, had come true. I finally earned my status of becoming truly "on my own." I had long been preparing for my "run away" from home. I wanted to do a cool runaway and had simulated various versions.

 I chose to run away from home on my motorcycle. Exactly a year before my runaway, I bought a motorcycle. All of my local friends had been buying 4WDs and sport cars.

It was a large 1200 cc motorcycle called the BMW R1200 Cruiser. I only rode on it to go fishing, so it was always shiny. A few days after my father told me to get out of the house, I packed up my valuables in a backpack and decided to ride away on my beloved motorcycle. I was going to run away from home on a motorcycle that I had properly bought, not stole.

 The day I left my house, my mother with a worried look on her face called out to me in the garage. But all I said to her was "Thanks for everything. But I'm not coming back." and rode off on my motorcycle.

That was on September 30th, 1999.

 At that time, the highway did pass through Obama City, where I lived, so I took the interchange to Tsuruga to get on the Hokuriku Expressway. I drove north on my BMW R1200 Cruiser.

Foliage was starting on the Hokuriku Expressway and it was a really beautiful drive with the autumn scenery. My body was cold to the core because it was a bit chilly. Yet I was sweating with excitement.

 After three hours of riding north on the Hokuriku Expressway, I checked my gas tank at the parking area. There was not much left. I got off at West Kanazawa interchange and spent the night at a sauna. The next day, I decided to rent an apartment in this city.

 Life in the city of Kanazawa where I didn't know anyone was a bit nerve-racking at first but most of all, it felt free. I thought I would be fine even if I got hungry as long as I had my freedom. This wasn't quite so. I had to look for a job. I decided not to go job hunting, but to start my own business.

 What I really wanted to be was a president of a corporation, but after renting my apartment in Kanazawa, I only had 470,000 yen at hand. The minimum capital for establishing a corporation was 10 million yen, so I gave up. I went to the library to research on limited-liability companies and joint-stock companies. After much studying, I decided to set up a union that had no capital limit.

My very first entrepreneurship was the founding of the "Hokuriku Foreign Business Cooperative Union."

 The main business of this union was to support companies that wanted to expand abroad. Although there was no capital limit, in reality, a capital of at least 2 million yen was required to establish a union. I went around companies I knew nothing about and requested them for their kind cooperation once the foundation of my union was approved. The establishment of a union that spans across three Hokuriku districts was rare, and it was not approved by the Nagoya Regional Bureau of International Trade and Industry (currently, the Chubu Bureau of Economy, Trade, and Industry) until March 22nd (or was it the 16th?) in the following year of 2000. Everyone around me said "It had not been permitted for many years in Ishikawa Prefecture to establish a new union that spans across other prefectures. It'll be impossible!"

Where there's a will there's a way.

By this time, all of my savings were gone, and if the approval for establishment was a week later, I would have had to live off on the bag of panko sitting on my cupboard.

With help from expansion of the foreigner trainee acceptance business, running in full swing at that time, the union had grown into a mid-sized business with a sale of 380 million yen by the time I retired from chairman in 2004.

You see, anyone can do anything if they put their heart into it.

 In February 2004, I retired from the representative director and director of this union after I finished passing on the chairman's tasks to my successor and greeting with my business partners. That day, heavy snow fell on Kanazawa, the first time in several years.

On a side note, I had to unfortunately let go of my beloved BMW R1200 Cruiser in June 2004 for 550,000 yen, because I needed the money to establish South Pacific Free Bird.

**Extra Chapter 　Think "What can I do?"**

 In the spring of 2003, I was driving the Hokuriku Expressway as usual towards Fukui to meet a client there. It was not long since my driver's license issue was settled. It felt great to be able to drive freely.

 I was to visit a curtain manufacturing company with about 100+ employees. Of which, six were foreigner trainees from the cooperative union that I served as chairman. Training of foreigner engineers is supposedly conducted for educational purposes, but in actual, its purpose was to rebuild Japan's curtain manufacturing industry lacking human resources on the grounds of technical training of employees from state-owned enterprises in Shanghai, China.

 The company lightly renovated the former girls' dormitory where female workers used to live during the prime of curtain manufacturing industry and provided a living space that even I thought was spacious enough for the six trainees I introduced. There were a few single Japanese employees that lived here. Although it cost a bit for welfare benefits, the training allowance itself was close to minimum wage. For a company that had long been lacking human resources, these trainees were "golden eggs".

 It was obligatory for the staff-in-charge from the union to visit the company, once a month, and report about the training situation to JITCO (Japan International Training Cooperation Organization), an external organization of the Immigration Bureau. The staff-in-charge had already visited this month, but this day, I received an urgent call from the employee looking after the trainees. Hence, I went to see what happened.

 Upon arriving at the company, the president stopped the trainees from work and called them to the employees' break room. I was called to be consulted about the health of a trainee named Chunhua Zhang, but before I had arrived, one of the employees had taken her to the hospital because she complained about severe back pains.

 I had been briefed about the situation the day before, but as I took my seat at the meeting, the president explained to me with a solemn face that Ms. Zhang had a disease called "spinal carious." He wanted me to inform this to Ms. Zhang in Chinese. All of the union's trainee patrol staff had majored in Chinese at their universities, but with my long experience studying abroad in China, I was more capable of addressing something that complicated. I also wanted to return favors to this president, because he would often invite me to his company, take me out for meals, and had been extremely cooperative when key persons from China came to visit Japan.

Anyone could have looked up spinal carious in a Chinese dictionary to translate it, but it took quite some time to explain what kind of disease it was to have Ms. Zhang understand herself.

 Spinal carious is a disease where Mycobacterium tuberculosis invades bone for some reason and dissolves these bones. Therefore, it is necessary to remove the affected area by surgery. However, in the case of Ms. Zhang, the bacteria had spread, and it was difficult to operate because if a nerve is nicked even a little, it may leave her with an aftereffect. It was very sad to inform this to Ms. Zhang, who was only 25 years old. The girl in charge of the trainees who had accompanied me was crying out loud.

It was a difficult operation, but the issue didn't end there....

With the operation came great expense.

 Ms. Zhang had been examined at Fukui Prefectural Hospital and the inspections by X-ray, etc. already cost her tens of thousands of yen. Foreigner trainees are subscribed to the same health insurance as the typical Japanese employee. The co-pay of medical expenses was 30%. If it were only tens of thousands of yen, a 30% co-pay would not be such a large amount. In a case such as a major operation for spinal caries, the hospital estimate was about 6.5 million yen. Simply calculated, Ms. Zhang would have to pay 30% of that, which will amount to 2 million yen.

 At that time, my union invited trainees from Chongming County (currently, Shanghai's Chongming District) of Shanghai, China. In most cases, 'foreigner trainees from China' meant personnel from the back regions of China forced to work overtime with illegal wages. It was becoming a social problem. However, at my union, we deliberately chose proper technicians from urban China to train and though it was minimal, paid them according to laws and regulations. Still, Ms. Zhang did not have savings of 2 million yen, working in Japan for only about a year under such condition. That would leave Ms. Zhang with the only option of returning to China. The doctor said that trying to perform an operation that was even difficult to do in Japan would be devastating to do in China.

 After we finished explaining the medical condition to Ms. Zhang, the president started talking about what he could do for Ms. Zhang who was always hard working. At this point, I could not reply since I also wouldn't be able to pay for the surgery in Japan. I did not like just pouting at the situation, but it also seemed like a waste of time for me, a complete outsider in the field of medicine, to think. But no, Hiroshi Taniguchi is a man that never gives up.

When I returned to the office in Kanazawa, I started searching on the internet about this disease called spinal caries.

 Spinal caries is the tuberculosis of the spine. According to Wikipedia, the famous Japanese poet, Shiki Masaoka, died from this disease. I clicked on the word "tuberculosis" on the top part of the page.

Beyond my expectation, I discovered a new legal fact!

Under the Communicable Disease Prevention Law, tuberculosis was designated as a "Type 2 Communicable Disease." This Communicable Disease Prevention Law was a new law made by merging with another law in 1998. I read further on this law. It said that a tuberculosis patient may receive health checkup order, job restriction order, and hospitalization order from prefectural governors.

 Huh? 　What were these "orders" from the prefectural governor?

 I immediately called Fukui Prefecture Hospital and asked for a detailed explanation. A tuberculosis patient was a very rare case at this hospital. Hence, there wasn't anyone who knew the details and told me to call the Health Center.

I called the Health Center. Again, I was told that tuberculosis was rare and there has not been any precedent cases of a forced hospitalization order in recent years. However, if there were a patient with tuberculosis, a prefectural governor order of hospitalization was highly likely and if the order was issued, then the entire medical expense will be paid by the prefecture.

The person on the phone did not discriminate foreigners, rather he listened with great care. Thanks to him, I was able to communicate smoothly with the prefectural government. We were finally able to receive a hospitalization order from the Fukui prefectural governor. The next question was, "Who will be Ms. Zhang's parental guardian?"

 Ms. Zhang had a mother, but she was in Shanghai and there was no other method to communicate to her but by phone. I called her several times to explain her the details, but it seemed she was not good in Mandarin (the Chinese I was using). Sometimes Ms. Zhang had to join the conversation and somehow, I was able to receive her consent about me becoming Ms. Zhang's parental guardian. As the union chairman, I was also her guarantor under the Immigration Control Act. This worked to our favor and JITCO also pleasantly agreed that I should become Ms. Zhang's parental guardian and proceed accordingly.

The day of the surgery came.

It started a bit shy of 3 pm. It was still chilly in Fukui, with melting snow still left on the ground. I encouraged Mr. Zhang with "Jia-yu (meaning "Hang in there" in Chinese)."

When I was waiting in the hospital hallway, the personnel from the Health Center who had accompanied me encouraged me with "I'm sure everything will be okay", but to be honest, I was super worried about this great surgery that will be removing the affected area that had spread from the hip bone to the femur.

 The surgery ended at around 10:30 pm. The operation room opened, and Ms. Zhang came out on a stretcher with oxygen masks and other various instruments attached. She seemed to be going in and out of consciousness, but when I approached, she gazed into my eyes and slowly breathed out the words, "Ma-ma- (meaning mother in Chinese)" in her oxygen mask.

Ms. Zhang was still delirious. I immediately contacted Ms. Zhang's mother and told her that Ms. Zhang's surgery was successful but would have to use a wheelchair for a while. In about a couple of weeks, she should be able to stand on her own. I had no clue as to whether or not I was able to properly explain the situation to her, but she kept saying, "Xie xie ni! Xie xie!" (Thank you in Chinese) I was too tired with fatigue and a sense of accomplishment, so I gave up returning to my home in Kanazawa. I got myself a room at a business hotel near the hospital and slept.

 About a month and a half month later, Ms. Zhang returned to Shanghai with the Chinese agency who received the request from our union. The president of the curtain manufacturing company repeatedly requested to the Chinese agency not to punish Ms. Zhang, because she was not returning due to her fault. She was not punished.

　It was a happy ending.

 Fast forward, ten years later to the winter (or summer in Fiji because it's in the southern hemisphere) of 2013, I was in the hospital again. This time it was not Fukui Prefectural Hospital in Japan, but Lautoka Hospital in the Republic of Fiji.

Several days ago, a Japanese student studying at the national high school where I served as chairman was infected with dengue fever.

 The high school counselor had taken the student to the hospital, where he was diagnosed with dengue fever and prescribed a medicine. He had not taken those medicines. He was still a high school student and had not thought dengue fever was a serious illness. He fainted because he had lost his physical strength. The host father immediately took him to the hospital, but when I arrived, the student was receiving artificial dialysis due to severe kidney function deterioration. His consciousness had not yet returned.

I confirmed the situation with the hospital's Indian-Fijian doctor. He told me that it could turn into a life-risking situation due to high fever and kidney function deterioration. He added that even if the student recovers, he may suffer from aftereffects because of great damages to the brain and kidney function.

Generally, it is possible to cover treatment costs with the premium we have each student to subscribe when studying abroad. In Fiji, the cost is cheap and so, expense-wise I was not worried. I was more worried that in the worst case, the student may die or suffer from aftereffects. I consulted the doctor and decided to urge the insurance company to take him back to Japan by an emergency carrier.

 The insurance company returned us a very mindless reply. Although they had no clue about the situation, they kept saying "No problem in Fiji." This conversation went back and forth for three days. It seemed we were battling the insurance company, not dengue fever. The agent, with no particular reason, was reluctant to arrange a private medical jet for emergency transportation.

 We looked after the student who had fallen into a coma in Fiji with a three-shift system. Apart from that, I asked one of the Japanese staff who was not a counselor for the high school but for the language school to negotiate with our stubborn enemy (aka the insurance company).

Finally, after submitting a document from the doctor in Fiji, a private medical jet "Care Flight" arrived from Sydney on the morning of the fourth day. I was hoping to transport the student to Japan where his family was waiting, but the doctor judged that he might not be able to endure such a long flight. We changed the destination from Japan to Australia.

 All throughout the day, for 24 hours, I had kept in contact with the office in Japan almost every hour. I instructed Ishimoda of the high school business department in Japan to immediately start arranging tickets to Australia for his family.

 After finally arranging the private jet, I contacted Ishimoda to finalize the student's family's ticket to Sydney. I could hear her crying on the other end of the phone. She said that she wanted to go to Sydney with the student's family. She mentioned the manager at the Japan office thought so as well and stood her ground.

I listened to what she had to say and asked her, "Is there anything you can do for the student in Sydney?" She stayed silent for a while.

Medical expenses in Fiji, where standard medical care was very inexpensive, were about 300,000 yen in total. This itself was not much at all, but transportation from Fiji to Sydney by a private medical jet was about 8 million yen. To top it off, it cost close to 500,000 yen per day for a foreigner to be treated in Australia.

 This quotation was shared with the student's family. The amount exceeding the upper limit of 10 million yen insured by the insurance company, were to be covered by the family, and it was about to drastically expand. Didn't she realize that she will be adding onto the expense by another hundreds of thousands of yen, despite that she would not be of much help?

I told her that what she was trying to do now were only actions to satisfy herself. The student's family probably does not want her to be involved, and even if she did head to Sydney, she would only be helpful as a mere interpreter. I more or like roughly spit these words at her.

"So, what can you do for them?"

　I could hear Ishimoda crying on the other end of the phone, repeating "But.... but...." She didn't seem to be convinced.

 Perhaps the high school counselor and I were more aware (satisfied) of our devotion to the student, taking turns for the past few days to grasp his hands where he laid in the hospital room. I'm sure Ishimoda wanted to do something for the student because she couldn't do anything. At least, as a senior to Ishimoda, I was rational.

 We had done everything we could, so we asked Jack who was a minister as well as our school teacher to come to the hospital in the morning to pray. The student had not yet recovered consciousness, but according to the Indian-Fijian doctor, he seemed to think the patient had turned the corner. There was a Korean doctor at the hospital, and he too thought the patient would be okay.

 Japanese inpatients were rare at the Lautoka Hospital. Friendly Fijians came gathering in front of his room to sing a hymn for him. A young Indian-Australian woman wearing the cool uniform of orange and khaki color was the Care Flight doctor and pilot. She was meeting the doctors at the Australia hospital. She was originally from Fiji, and even after she moved to Australia before attending university, she had been helping seriously ill patients in Fiji.

 We saw the student off to the airport on an ambulance. Cagi, the high school manager, and other high school counselors all started praying. The sight of them praying was beautiful, but I myself did not pray. I was cynically replaying the words, "So, what can you do for them?" that I had said to Ishimoda the night before, in my mind.

 I flashbacked that incident in Ishikawa ten years ago. What was it that I did? Oh yeah! I had found the Communicable Disease Prevention Law, talked with the Health Center, had the prefectural governor issue an order, and had the entire prefecture pay for the medical expenses...

Hm! 　Maybe I could pull that off again!!

 I waited until the Japan office opened to immediately called Ishimoda internationally and told her that dengue fever is a Type 4 infection. I asked her to immediately contact the student's family and recommend them to negotiate with the public health center in Aichi prefecture before they left Japan. I added that about half of medical expenses in Sydney (expense calculated based on medical expenses he would have had to pay if he received standard medical care in Japan) could be applied for refund to the Social Insurance Agency.

 Later on, Ishimoda had told me that she had left Tokyo to head to the hospital in Sydney before the student's family. She knew she would only be able to buy personal necessities for the student, but she went anyway. She confessed that she bought tickets to Sydney out of her own pocket because she could not have her expense settlement approved by me in advance. Secretly, I had added that expense to her bonus. I guess Ishimoda will find out about this as she reads this book. (lol)

 After hospitalization in the intensive care unit for three weeks, the student was able to safely return from Sydney. He had to regularly go to the hospital in Aichi prefecture for a while, but he managed to recover without any aftereffects. The expense was paid by his home town.

Reflecting back, I sometimes worry I am cold-blooded because I can calmly make judgments in times like this. It was a happy ending and that's all that matters.

**Chapter 7　Becoming Fijian**

 In September 2014, a national election was scheduled to be held in Fiji. Fiji is a peaceful country, but its politics is not much so. Since 1987, a political coup d’état has been occurring almost as often as the Olympic Games. Though it is phrased as a "coup d’état", it is a 'good' coup almost like a relaxed regime change, not blood-shedding conflicts like those happening in dangerous parts of the world.

Even after I began to live in Fiji, the situation had not change. Despite the democratic finalization of the national elections in 2006, Commodore Bainimarama led the military to the coup on December 6th.

Fiji has long been urged by the international community to have a democratic election. In 2014, Fiji was finally ready for their democratic election, despite that eight years have passed since the establishment of the interim government.

 My business in Fiji was no exception to becoming the subject to political influence. I have petitioned to government officials, as well as politicians and military personnel. Moreover, China was providing a lot of economic assistance to Fiji. When I first heard of "assistance" I thought the Chinese were donating monetary gifts. However, in actual, it was "exploitation" with high interest rates and large economic collateral. I wanted to do something about this.

 I got the idea of acquiring a Fijian citizenship, running as a Parliament member, and trying to change Fiji from this state. The reconstruction of the national high school which the Fijian government had left in my hands were showing signs of success, my high school rugby team won the spring national competition, and local people requested me to run up as a politician.

 In fact, I had been applying for Fijian citizenship for two years, corresponding with Fiji's Immigration Bureau, but in Fiji time that seems to be flowing really isn't flowing... The approval for my application was delayed, over and over.

The Immigration Bureau called Principal Baleilevuka, who was a guardian of my acquisition application for Fijian nationality. I was told to go to the Immigration Bureau in Suva to retrieve my passport.

 I can't keep count of how many times I had been deceived by these phone calls! 　I had received similar contacts before (more than once) and headed to the Immigration Bureau as instructed, only to find out that I need to submit extra paperwork, or the person in charge had left his seat, or that they had lost the original passport. Naturally, I did not expect to receive my passport and listened to the request half-heartedly. I was given this call on August 4th, the final day announcing national election day. If I am not able to receive my passport on this day, then I would have to give up becoming a Fijian and would not be able to vote or run in Fiji's election.

Strangely, though, when arriving at the Immigration Bureau that evening, Secretary Vuniwaqa of the Immigration Bureau came out and handed me my passport with much "Congratulations!"

The clock read 4 pm.

 I hurriedly finished voter registration. FYI, the voter registration closed at 6 pm on this day. At the same time, I declared to run for office.

 My declaration was immediately reported in newspapers, television and radio. It became quickly known in Fiji. Starting with the current administration, various political parties asked me to run for office from their party. I chose the fourth party "People 's Democratic Party" in Fiji. I chose a weak party because it is not involved in the barren political strife between/within big parties.

I received the official recognition from the political party, and officially applied to run for office.

In Fiji, after proceeding to run for office, the candidate is investigated whether he/she has any criminal records, whether there are any doubtful aspects on the submitted asset certificates, etc. About ten days later, the election commission approves the nomination of the candidate.

 While I was waiting for that nomination approval, I was literally invited everywhere, from speeches on the street and debates at a university. The reasons for the great support from Fijians were most likely because I had a unique resume and probably because I was the only candidate to have my manifests printed in the newspaper.

For reference, I'd like to note that other politicians did not have any manifests whatsoever. Usually it was an incomprehensible battle of bragging and slandering, such as "I am a relative to so-and-so!" or "I share ancestry with the king." or "He is possessed by the devil!"

 I enjoyed visiting villages of those who I have never met and shaking hands with the village people, during my election campaign with other members of the political party. Everyone kept making selfish requests such as "We want you to make a road here" or "Please increase teachers' salaries" or "I want you to pull ODA from Japan."

 But first, they must take a look at the current state of the country! 　Fiji turned down the 3% interest loan offered by the World Bank IMF. Instead, they chose "donations" from China set at an interest rate of 10% which was three times higher and was now suffering. When I started explaining this, the crowd seemed to acknowledge me different from other politicians. From children to the elderly, everyone came out to greet and shake hands with me.

Or maybe everyone had nothing better to do.

I was too absorbed into the fun of the election that I did not see it coming:

That night, I was watching the 9 o'clock news on TV at my hotel room. They were reporting which candidates were denied nomination approval.

Candidate A is rejected because he had a car accident three years ago. Candidate B is found ineligible because he had a record of causing an incident with bodily injuries. Candidate C was still a civil service worker when he declared himself as candidate and thus cannot be approved. Candidate Hiroshi Taniguchi is rejected because his period of residency in Fiji is too short!!

 I couldn't believe what I just heard. I had been concerned about my period of residency in Fiji, so I had Principal Baleilevuka's daughter, who happened to be a lawyer, confirm this for me. In the new Constitution promulgated the year before, it did not mention anything about the term of residence of the candidate.

So naturally, I thought I would be able to qualify as a candidate.

 As soon as the news ended, my cell phone would not stop ringing. Everyone called to encourage me with "There must have been a mistake!" There was no doubt, I was only two hours a Fijian, registering as a voter just in time before the registration office closed. I was a person with the shortest history as a Fijian.

Many people, including the political party I belonged to and my friends, protested against the electoral committee for me, but the decision never overturned.

 And this is how my first election ended. I would have to wait another four years, until September 2018, for the next election.

Speaking from the extreme, if I was part of the electoral committee, I will not have allowed someone who had only been a Fijian for two hours run for the Parliament. So, I decided to regard that the Fijian people inadvertently forgot to note the required period of residency when running for office in their newly promulgated Constitution and election rules.

But I did not get away with this disapproval empty handed.

On the night that the news of my disapproval was aired, I could hardly fall asleep due to sadness and anger. One of my Facebook followers had read my post and contacted me. She later became my girlfriend and supported me throughout my struggle against cancer.

Although we ended up parting, there is no doubt that I was able to overcome the painful fight against my illness because of her. If I did not get approved, I wouldn't have met up with her after my return home to Japan, and thus I would not have made it through the cancer treatments.

There is an old saying "Jinkan banji saiou ga uma" (literally translated as "Everything in life is like the horse of the old man, Sai"). I regard it as "all bad happenings are a precursor of good happenings and vice-versa."

This saying originated from ancient China and is a bit complicated, so I will indicate here an abstract of the original story as supplement.

 There lived an old man (named Sai) near the country border with his beloved horse. This horse had a great reputation for being a very swift horse. One day the horse gets stung by a bee (I think) and suddenly runs away. The horse doesn't come back, and everyone feels sorry for the old man. Yet the old man continues to patiently wait for the horse's return saying, "Something good may come out of this."

 After a while, his horse comes back bringing back another horse. This horse was as good as the old man's beloved horse. People around the old man says how lucky he is but the old man warns himself, "This happiness may trigger something bad." and never rejoiced for this new good horse.

 Then one day, the old man's beloved son fell from that horse and hurts one of his legs. Again, everyone feels sorry for the old man and expresses their sympathy, but the old man says again, "This may be a precursor to good happening."

 After a while, a war broke out with the neighboring country. All young men were driven into war and killed in battle. However, his son was hurt and thus was not drafted. He survived the war.

After the war ended, Okina lived happily together with his sons.

I like this old saying.

If my life will continue a little longer, I would like to become a Parliament member in Fiji. And as I have written in my manifest printed in the newspaper, it is one of my dreams to make this Heaven on Earth an even better country.

**Chapter 8　Starting Insurance Business**

　It has been more than ten years since I started this business of studying abroad. Although I have been successful in lowering the cost of studying abroad, students still have a lot to cover for other expenses, especially overseas travel insurance. They were areas which I wanted the services to be improved.

 I left it untouched because starting an insurance company requires a tremendous amount of money. Thus, I have been using an existing insurance company ever since the foundation of the company.

 To attend my language school 'Free Bird Institute', the entry and arrangement fee for studying abroad is 100,000 yen, the annual tuition fee is 787,000 yen, and accommodation fee to stay 364 nights at the hostel is 109,200 yen. This is all we receive from each student for a year of studying abroad.

On the other hand, overseas travel insurance fee for one year is be around 250,000 yen at any insurance company. This is about 20% of the total fee to study abroad.

 It seems impractical because Fiji is a very safe country, incomparable with the safeness in the United States. Nevertheless, the premium for studying abroad is exactly the same amount, a flat rate whether it be in a country with great public security or a country where a war is about to break out.

I have other dissatisfactions towards insurance companies. For places such as Hawaii and Guam, insurance companies have a 24-hour service window, but for a place like Fiji where there aren't so many tourists, there isn't such a service.

 There had been many times where our students got in a dispute with the insurance companies. In most cases, it was because the company had not promptly responded to the students contacting them from Fiji. As seen in the aforementioned "Dengue Incident", it took four days to settle payments for the private medical jet used for an extremely serious case. Even an ordinary person without medical expertise could tell that the health condition of the hospitalized student was getting worse. It was so bad that the staff at my language school took turns to fully support him.

 Dissatisfaction with the insurance company's support system was building up. At the same time, I was starting to think, if we could start an insurance business on our own, we would be able to reduce the economic burden of the students and more easily settle payments for serious cases.

 But, in order to establish an insurance company in Japan, a minimum deposit of 10 billion yen (I think) to the Financial Services Agency was required. It was not a realistic option for our company that was finally making annual sales that exceeded 1 billion yen. I was ready to give up on this idea when I had quite an inspiration!

"Hey! Why not start an insurance company in Fiji?"

 In the same sort of tone as JR's ad of “Hey! Why not go to Kyoto?"

 I found out it wasn't that easy. Unlike establishing an insurance company in Japan, I still had to make a deposit to the Financial Services Agency. However, the amount was not unrealistic like in the case of Japan. The required deposit was not 10 billion yen, but 55 million yen (1 million Fiji dollars) in the case of Fiji.

 Great! Now this sounds more practical! Okay then, let's get that 55 million yen (550,000US Dollars) ready!

And for financing, let's get listed!

 So, our listing plan, once abandoned due to the Lehman shock, started again, incredibly casually. At first, I thought about listing as Mothers in Japan, but I realized I would not need to spend as much money to list on the "South Pacific Stock Exchange" which had just established and structured itself in Fiji. I changed plans to list in Fiji instead of Japan and formed a team with members from the Stock Exchange, securities companies, auditing firms, and consultants.

　This is how the listing plan of the local corporation of Free Bird started.

 In order to apply for listing in any country, whether it be in Japan or Fiji, we had to submit audit reports of the last three (?) years. We have been pursuing our listing plan since 2014, and we were blessed with an unexpected luck. Fiji's Financial Services Agency showed us an understanding of our insurance business and approved our business without deposit as long as we limit it to a specific client (students).

 Without waiting for the listing approval at the South Pacific Stock Exchange or preparing deposit money, the insurance business at Free Bird was approved by the Financial Services Agency. On February 1st, 2016, we began sales of a studying abroad program with insurance included (because sales of only the insurance would violate laws in Japan).

The student's burden of an annual premium was now reduced from 250,000 yen to 12,9240 yen.

 I had already been declared with terminal cancer at Keio University Hospital on January 19th. Thinking that this may be my last job, I drafted and finalized the 200-page clause of our insurance policy, sacrificing sleep. Sales of our insurance premiums started from February 1st. Coincidentally, it was the same day that I was officially diagnosed with Stage IV cancer from my primary physician, Dr. Shimizu, at Keio University Hospital.

 All the while I was being treated for cancer, we pursued our plan to listen to the South Pacific Stock Exchange. I wanted to see it through so that in the unlikely event that something happens to me, the company will still be able to run smoothly.

I think it was an exquisite timing that we started the preparations for the insurance business and stock listing. I could feel my physical strength deteriorating, slowly making its way toward death, so I was relieved to know everything was under control. I appreciated that it all happened at this timing.

 As it is every time we try something new in Fiji, where time just slowly creeps, there are so many landmines and pitfalls along the way. Waisale, our CFO (Chief Financial Officer) and board members in Fiji did not explicitly report to me their correspondences with the Financial Services Agency and Stock Exchanges, so as not to put the burden on me.

 I had given them instructions with specific deadlines, such as "Do so-and-so by this date", and often found myself flipping out on the hospital bed because it had not progressed as much as I had expected (lol).

Fijians really do not know the concept of time. For example: The hostel of the language school was close to completion and I arranged a move-in date with considerable margin. But the hostel was still not finished, even though the students were to move in the next day. Yet, the carpenters tried going home as soon as the clock struck 4. So, we locked the barbed cat fence (fencing with the spiked wires on top) that surrounded the hostel. We had to confine the carpenters in a state where no one could escape and make them work until 6 am the next morning. The construction was completed in the nick of time.

 Fijians also pretend they are out and do not pick up the office phone or cell phone when I am angry. This tactic of "pretending to be out" is important for Fijians, who do not like fighting, to sustain their relationships. However, this tactic is annoying as hell when they mindlessly do it for a week. Nothing gets done.

 Honestly speaking, the listing plan was not progressing well at all with me trying to remotely control the situation from the hospital room. We were facing people who regularly pretend to be out, even when we are physically in a vicinity. How could I confront them so far away? It certainly wasn't the time for me to leisurely fight cancer. I gathered all the strength I had left, and on September 26th, 2016 I went to the Tokyo office for the first time in seven months.

I returned with a knitted hat on my still quite-bald head and a surgical mask! Both my white blood cell and red blood cell count was only half of an ordinary person. Returning to the office under such condition was not so easy. I quickly became short of breath and risked getting a fever. I decided to work only for three hours a day at the office, but to be honest, that was not enough to realize my dreams. I decided to go to Fiji to take command on-site. Two weeks after returning to work at the Tokyo office, on October 10th, I returned to Fiji. It was also Fiji's 46th Independence Day.

 I arrived at Nadi Airport via Hong Kong. Despite it being early in the morning, Principal Baleilevuka and CFO Waisale came to pick me up. I had a brief meeting with them and decided to head to the capital city of Suva from Nadi the following day with Waisale to meet with the people at the securities company and Stock Exchanges. They were sure to pretend to be out if I had called them.

 Fijians are best to have as friends and worst to do business with. Although they say yes to any and every proposal you make, once it gets started, they run away or sulk. When prompting, you must do it at just the right frequency or they will start pretending to be out if they feel pressured. Plus, you should prompt them in person if possible, not by phone. And even if I am able to set up a meeting with them, there is this hierarchy similar to a Confucian society, whether it be the young or old, male or female. They start boasting or complaining about being kin to the royal family. This was something a person who just became a Fijian could not understand.

　Anyway, I was able to have a meeting with the Financial Services Agency, the Stock Exchange, and securities company in Suva.

　I instructed them again about the listing plan, shared with them that my goal was to get approval within the year again and told the goal of taking the listing approval within the year, and returned to Japan.

 At this point, my cancer was not completely cured. Cancer is not "completely cured" but "in remission", a state of the patient in which cancer cells cannot be found by examination. After finishing my anticancer drug treatment, I was diagnosed as "in remission" at Keio University Hospital. However, malignant lymphoma, the blood cancer I had, have a high possibility of recurring in about two years.

I consulted my pharmacist friend and she suggested I get a second opinion. She introduced to me her acquaintance, who was a malignant lymphoma specialist at Edogawa Hospital.

 It is truly a blessing to have a doctor as an acquaintance. Dr. Myojo at Edogawa Hospital saw my much-reduced tumor in the scanned CT image and told me about "ibritumomab tiuxetan+yttrium", the most advanced treatment. I told him I desperately wanted to receive this treatment. He asked if I would like to become the first test patient. So, on December 15th, 2016, I became the first test patient of "ibritumomab tiuxetan+yttrium" at Edogawa Hospital.

 When I was injected with ibritumomab, a molecule-targeting drug, doctors at the Edogawa Hospital, were not the only ones that came to observe. There were also many chemists and pharmaceutical manufacturers. Dr. Myojo later became an authoritative figure for this treatment. He thanked me, instead of the other way around.

 But anyway! I was given the most advanced treatment of modern medicine.

 When I finished my new treatment, I headed to Fiji again. The reason why I badly wanted approval for stock listing within the year was because there is a special tax system for companies listed on the South Pacific Stock Exchange in Fiji. Normally, the corporate tax is 20%, but with the special system it is reduced to 10%. By doing so, we would be able to further reduce tuition as well as offer bonuses to school teachers and host families.

Yet again, the Fijian tactics of pretending to be out started.

 When Christmas is approaching, or more like from a month before Christmas, Fijians do not work more than usual. Not only the officials at the Financial Services Agency but also people at securities companies, who we are PAYING for consultation, were not in working mode during this time. With no exception, the enemies were in my company too. Our company board members were no different.

They all lived freely.

Under such circumstances, we did not get approval to list our stock within the year. It became hopeless to receive tax incentives for the fiscal year of 2016.

The new year rung in.

My birthday is on January 10th, so as soon as business started for the new year, I immediately headed to Suva to petition. I told the director of the stock exchange,

"I very much want to get our company listed on January 10th!"

"Because it's my birthday!"

When she heard this, Director Lati at the stock exchange said,

"Sooooooo Sweeeet!"

 I was convinced that our company would finally get approval for listing. Yet, nothing happened on my birthday.

 We got the approval seven days after my birthday on January 17th. I received our listing approval certificate from the South Pacific Stock Exchange.

 We then had to decide our schedule for listing. After thorough discussion, we decided to stock list on February 1st and throw a ceremony the same day, inviting concerned high-ranking government officials.

Though we would need to make a bit of sacrifice, we decided to extend our invitation to all management employees above department director, board members, and shareholders to attend this ceremony in Fiji with expenses covered by us. We were making sufficient profit, and this was a good opportunity to show our appreciation to shareholders that have supported us.

 We sent out invitations and 14 people from Japan replied they would attend the ceremony. We also sent invitations to people who supported us in Fiji. It was going to be a big listing ceremony and thank you party with 70 guests at Fiji's best hotel. We started preparing for this party to be held at Intercontinental Hotel.

 Now this was a job cut out for Fijians! They worked hard to prepare for the party such as decorating the venue, ordering food, and making name tags. You would think that all of those pretending to be out were a big joke.

 On January 29th, our guests from Japan arrived safely in Fiji. It was the start of their 4-night/6-day whirlwind tour. The ceremony was to be held on the fourth day, so we had them visit our two campuses of our language schools in Nadi and Lautoka as well as our national high school. We also arranged a cruise out to one the smaller islands of Fiji on the day before the ceremony to allow them to enjoy this beautiful country.

 Both Waisale, the CFO, and I were busy while the shareholders were out cruising. Nevertheless, Director Ali Director of the South Pacific Stock Exchange suddenly notified us that she will be postponing the listing itself because she would not be able to participate in the ceremony.

This was the day before our listing ceremony...

The venue was all set up. Both catering and MC were arranged for. Everything was all set to go. We had to fight for the hard work we had already put in.

Early in the morning on the day of the listing, Waisale and I sent our guests from Japan to Intercontinental Hotel by bus and then returned to the office to start making calls here and there. We were busy trying to persuade Director Ali who was now bent out of shape.

Fortunately, I was familiar with Director Ali's husband, Zarin, so I went to ask him to persuade her. He made calls for us to related places while mumbling, "You know my wife doesn't listen when she already has her mind set. I don't think you should prompt her too much."

The Stock Exchange closes their stock dealing window in the evening. If we don't get a yes from her before noon, we will not be able to make it in time for the ceremony at the Intercontinental Hotel, far from Suva.

Minute by minute, it was approaching noon and we had not yet accomplished our mission.

 Our efforts paid off. That evening, Lati who succeeded in persuading Director Ali called to say that it would be fine if we list the next day. However, the shareholders who came to Fiji on a 14-hour flight from Japan were to return home the next morning.

 I headed straight to the Intercontinental Hotel where the shareholders have been waiting for the ceremony since morning. I then explained the situation and kindly asked if their schedule permits to change their flight and extend their stay to participate in the postponed ceremony.

Only four were able to attend the ceremony the next day despite the fact that there were fourteen guests that had come from Japan. The shareholders told me that it was of great disappointment that they wouldn't be able to attend the ceremony, but they were satisfied with this trip because they got to see with their own eyes what I was doing. The next morning, I saw my guests off at the airport and went to the ceremonial venue.

The Intercontinental Hotel went out of their way to let us keep the venue that our employees worked hard to decorate for another day, despite that we had only reserved it for a day.

At the launch, the MC, the former Miss Hibiscus in Fiji, Lenora Qereqeretabua introduced us all to start the ceremony. CEO Ali of the South Pacific Stock Exchange; Mr. Sakishima, corporate auditor of South Pacific Free Bird (the parent company in Japan); Mr. Whiteside, president of the Reserve Bank of Fiji; Principal Baleilevuka, my right hand, my Fijian mother, and principal of Ba Provincial Free Institute; and myself.

 For your information, Mr. Sakashita was the former commerce officer at the Fijian Embassy who responded to me when I inquired about getting a driver's license 15 years ago. After his retirement at the embassy, he joined our company in Japan as the corporate auditor. Life surprises us in many ways.

 Principal Baleilevuka always treated me like a son, and in fact, said so in her speech. In the midst of her speech, she started tearing, so by the time it was my turn, everyone's face was messed up from so much crying. The room was silent, and you could clearly hear people sniffling. I gave my speech:

Ni Sa Bula, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you very much for coming today and to share the wonderful moment with us.

Especially, our invited guests, Governor of the Reserve Bank, Mr. Barry Whiteside, Chairman of the South Pacific Stock Exchange, Dr. Nur Bano Ali and representatives from all accounting firms, banks, government agencies, and all honored individuals who are present here today. Thank you very much for coming all the way to this beautiful place.

And I don’t forget you… Thank you very much. Our shareholders and our parent-company’s shareholders, [who have come] super far away from Japan. I hope you enjoy the beautiful weather in the Island closest Heaven.

Finally, today, Free Bird is going to be listed on the South Pacific Stock Exchange market.

As you know, Free Bird started its history in 2004. When we started the business, we were using a small classroom in Ratu Navula Secondary School with only three students from Japan.

Exactly, we started language school as the smallest language school in the world. I was the only director, I was the only shareholder, I was the financial administrator, I was the student supporter, I was the human resource manager.... Honestly, I was everything. Free Bird was only MY company, when it was born in Fiji.

Then within three years’ time, Free Bird was getting popular. Once, I was invited to an ICEF party in Florida. ICEF is the world’s biggest language school association and marketing network. It was unbelievable! We were the 2nd largest language school in the world in 2007.

When business goes smoothly and very successfully, we always become greedy. We want to make it a bigger school. [We want] some more students, some more teachers, some more profit…

And it was very best timing, I was a part of a venture business competition in Japan. Japanese shareholders here [today], most of you were judges in the competition. I remember after the competition, we did capital increase with your support and suggestion.

Then "My company" became "Our company."

It was my first time to see that much money in my life. With the money we collected & increased, we tried to build student dormitory. [Amid this construction] We faced "Economic Recession." It was the worst time. We were building two dormitories, one in Nadi and another one in Lautoka. 　And after the "Economic Recession", the number of our students really decreased. And at the same time, some friends and some investors who were working for the company left the company. I told those friends who were leaving the company,

"Pinch is chance."

"THIS is the opportunity!"

But for them, it didn’t sound good for them.

During the Economic Recession, I had realized something. Many companies were paying a lot of money for people who were suddenly fired by the company. And it was bigger than our 12 months tuition fee.

Then I did my best to go around companies who were supposed to fire their employees. Why are we here to celebrate our listing today? [It is because]　I found many students finally in that situation. I could prove "Pinch is Chance."

Through the experience, I have learned people were really negative. Maybe I am a super positive one in the society. They still say, "Are you really trying to list in the Stock Exchange Market?" "You must be crazy!" They couldn’t believe one day, dream comes true if you work the hardest.

Anyway, "My Company" became "Our Company" and our company becomes public company today.

Honestly speaking, I have experienced so many problems on the way to this listing. While we were preparing application and IM, we lost one of our board members, Mr. Toganivalu. Suddenly, company laws in Fiji changed in 2014. [In] 2015, finally, I was diagnosed to have stage IV cancer... exactly a year before February 1st, 2016.

I told the doctor, "I am going to Fiji to complete my mission." He doesn’t believe what we are doing here today. I was super weak. Even skinny and pale serious cancer patient can do something big.

I am really enjoying my life. Doing something all my friends say "[That's] Impossible" is really thrilling.

 But I still want to mention, this is not what I have done alone. I fully appreciate your support. Staff and Board members who really trust me, super friendly teachers, matron, security guards, South Pacific Free Bird’s marketing team in Tokyo and Osaka who work until midnight every day, super warm heart host families, our account and administration team and KPMG, Price Waterhouse Coopers, and Ernest Young, who help us, Aliz Pacific who help us [at] our early stage set up, South Pacific Stock Exchange and Reserve Bank of Fiji who approved us. And my X-girlfriend who really took care about me when I was fighting against stage IV cancer and the side effect from Chemo-therapy in a hospital. Ms. Baleilevuka who treated me as own son from the beginning in Fiji.

Vinaka Vaka Levu!

I was able to speak normally for the 30 seconds. But then tears started flowing and soon my nose started running. Girls from the stock exchange kindly brought me a towel. I was sobbing so hard throughout the speech, it was embarrassing to look at the video afterwards.

When I finished my speech, everyone had broken down into tears. Even Ali, who was fighting with me until yesterday, came over to me with welled up eyes.

　My speech was followed by a speech by President Whiteside from Reserve Bank of Fiji and Director Ali from the South Pacific Stock Exchange. She then gifted me with a large board that indicated approval of our stock listing.

Plus, I received a bell that only those who listed their company can ring!

 While the 60 guests were watching, the MC declared our listing, and everyone started chanting as they do when a company is listed in the UK London market, "Oy! Oy! 　Oy!" In the commotion of what seems to sound like the howling of wolves, I rang the bell.

"Ding, ding, diiiiing"

This bell was really small, but I remember feeling awesome ringing it.

 On February 13th, 2017, I was introduced in a program by TV Tokyo called, "Sekai naze sokoni? Nihonjin -Shirarezaru haran banjyouden-" (Why in the world are you there? Japanese -unknown dramas of extraordinary lives-). It is a TV documentary program on successful Japanese living/working overseas. They were supposed to shoot the documentary around in the beginning of 2016 to broadcast it in May. The person in charge was Mr. Saso of the production company, Television Field.

 Mr. Saso gave me a phone call towards the end of 2015 to tell me that his proposal will be discussed at an in-house meeting in January for its approval. I was diagnosed with Stage IV terminal cancer and sadly but hastily declined their offer.

Mr. Saso encouraged me saying, "Please let me interview you when you are all better!" but in that hospital room, I didn't think such a day would come. But it did!

Just like Bruce Willis in "Die Hard".

The shooting started.

When I first received a request offer, they were thinking along the lines of "a runaway succeeds in Fiji!" for the program concept. Slightly getting ahead of the game, the production company had visited my parents’ house in Fukui and had already recorded about two hours of interview with them. But this time, the offer came after my recovery from terminal cancer. Thus, the main concept changed to "a terminal cancer working hard even though he is almost dying."

 In fact, much of the footage was me, a Stage IV terminal cancer patient, going this way and that, to solve issues concerning education of the Japanese students and employment of Fijians. I wanted them to mention about the stock listing ceremony held just before the broadcast, but honestly speaking, I thought people watching TV would be more interested in an 'unhappy' person than a happy one. That is what crossed my mind when I was being interviewed about how much I had left to live.

 I don't know whether that essence helped or not, but the program recorded a high viewing rate. I started receiving tons of encouraging messages via Facebook the day after the broadcasting. It took me a month to reply to every single encouragement. Among these messages was a note from the director of Narita International Airport Co., Ltd. who happened to watch my documentary by chance.

 In the program, I talked about how grave the employment problem is in Fiji. Though Fijians have a high educational background, there are no jobs to take in Fiji after graduating from college. Mr. Kariya, this director of Narita International Airport Co., mentioned if there was something he could do to help Fijians. He said that Narita Airport is having a hard time recruiting staff, so they would be happy to offer Fijians with such great smiles, fluency in English, and a college degree.

This must be what people call a "godsend."

I immediately called Mr. Kariya, and by the following week, I was drawing up a proposal.

If our proposal becomes accepted and Fijians with working visa are hired as regular employees, Fijians may possibly be able to settle in Narita in the future.

Oh my! I gotta start planting cassava in Chiba!

 We met an eel restaurant in Narita City. Seeing Mr. Kariya came with five board members/employees of Narita Airport, I was convinced that they were taking this matter seriously. Despite that it was our first encounter, Mr. Kariya and I discussed about our project over eel cuisine and I felt the excitement of many possibilities opening up.

Narita International Airport Co., Ltd. is a reputable company, funded 100% by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport. It seems there are many jobs, mainly customer services, that Fijians, rich with hospitality, could contribute to.

 Mr. Kariya told me, in quite a self-tormenting tone, that it was difficult to have young Japanese keep doing the same tasks for many years at Narita Airport, which was an hour and a half away from Tokyo with no fancy shops. Young people came but soon returned to Tokyo. (As a person coming from Fukui prefecture, even Narita city was urban enough and had fashionable shops....)

 The greatest difficulty for foreigners to work with working visas in Japan is the language barrier. The sweet advantage of this project was that Japanese was not going to be a major issue. At an international airport, there were many sites that required more English than Japanese. If the employee could provide services to the customers with a natural smile on their face, then neither the color of their skin nor eye mattered.

It was still absolutely necessary for them to learn enough Japanese for daily conversations. Our language school in Fiji could set up a new Japanese language department to teach them.

 The Fijians were delighted to hear this. Among the teachers at my school, there were many who said THEY wanted to work at Narita Airport.

 In December 2017, when we went to petition to the Fiji government, Mr. Kariya explained to Fiji's Minister of Labor that we will be starting small, with only a few members, at first, but our ultimate goal is to eventually employ Fijians for 5% of the total staff (approximately 2,000 Fijians) at Narita Airport. This was reported in the news on TV that evening and posted as a big article in the newspaper the next day.

 The impact that our idea had on Fiji was much greater than what Mr. Kariya or I had thought. We posted a small advertisement in a Fiji newspaper about the interview and received a great deal of inquiries. Ultimately, we received resumes for 220 young people who wanted to work at Narita Airport by the deadline. Narita Airport expressed it as 'extremely luxurious' personnel selection. Among them, there were some who had experience studying abroad in China and Sweden, and another who had graduated from an Australian university. 40 people passed the document screening. We decided to offer jobs to four to five Fijian women as our first team and start Japanese language training.

After Golden Week in 2018, the first team will arrive at Narita Airport and finally start working in Japan!

I really got to start planting those cassava potatoes!

**Extra Chapter 　I quit being Japanese**

 At 4 pm on August 4th, 2014, I finally acquired my Fijian nationality. I became a dual citizen of Fiji and Japan. I contacted the Japanese Embassy to confirm about this and the First Secretary told me to submit a Report of Nationality Loss in Japan. I guess that meant I could stay a dual citizen until then. Or that was how I interpreted it.

 I figured that if I enter Japan with a Japanese passport, but lose nationality afterwards, then I would have to have a working visa for my Fiji passport to be able to continue living and working in Japan. I went out of my way to confirm this at the Tokyo Regional Immigration Bureau in Shinagawa. After being sent around from bureaucrat to bureaucrat, I was finally sent to reception on the first floor. There the receptionist said, "People like you with dual nationality are living as is. Technically speaking, it is violating the law, but it is extremely rare to receive an order of deprivation of nationality from the Minister of Justice, so why don't you just leave at that?"

So, I decided to leave it be for a while.

 Of course, back then, I had no acknowledgment whatsoever that I was violating the law. It was Fijian nationality acquired to run in Fiji's national election. As mentioned earlier, I was rejected by the electoral committee to run in the election, but I was not denied dual citizenship in Fiji. Besides, most countries allow dual citizenship, so I thought I must be okay.

But it wasn't okay!

 It was by curious coincidence that the situation turned around because of a lecture I gave at JETRO (Japan External Trade Organization) upon request by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On September 21st, 2017, I had carelessly let out that I had dual citizenship in front of an audience that included many people working at the Ministry.

 Come to think of it, that was a BIG mistake! 　It wasn't until two months later that I realized this.

 My Japanese passport was about to expire on November 29th, so without much thinking, I went to the passport center in Yurakucho. I started filling out my application form. There was an item that asked if I had another citizenship, so I honestly checked "yes" and filled in "Republic of Fiji" as the country of my other citizenship. I handed the application form to the receptionist, and he told me to come back in five days. I took the receipt for exchange and left the passport center.

 In about three days after I submitted my application, I received a call from the passport center. Thinking how odd it was that I still had two more days before picking up my passport, I took the call. The receptionist told me that my Japanese citizenship has already been expunged and I can no longer renew my passport.

 "Oh, I see. Maybe this a result of my honesty when answering that question in the application form." or so I thought. It did not even cross my mind that I had said something at the lecture I gave by request from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

 One of my company's board members is a reliable, former bureaucrat. He could probably speak directly and negotiate with the Ministry. I didn't think I was in such a serious situation.

 I called Mr. Higashi, the former bureaucrat, and explained my issue. I asked him if he could arrange an appointment for me, so I could speak directly with someone at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Mr. Higashi carefully listened to my situation and immediately called his junior working at the Ministry. I was taken by surprise at his response:

"Mr. Taniguchi, it seems your dual citizenship issue is shared with EVERYONE at the Ministry."

 I was struck dumbfounded. The passport center was an institution of the city capital, the immigration office was under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice, and the passport was under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. That was why I thought I would have some leverage because I had done a favor for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, if almost everyone at the Ministry knew, I doubt that I would be able to pass through any loopholes. But how did the Ministry find out that I have a Fiji nationality?

And that's when I realized my stupidity.

I had leaked that information to the Foreign Ministry myself at that lecture!

Oh crap!!!!

 I couldn't do anything but regret. The fact that I spoke about acquiring a Fijian citizenship at a lecture they held was the greatest issue. This definitively made it impossible for me to have my passport renewal approved.

 Furthermore, I was to lose my Japanese nationality. My Japanese nationality was taken away from me dating back to August 4th, 2014, the day I acquired my Fijian citizenship.

 This means, I was now residing in Japan as a Fijian. Didn't that mean I would need some kind of visa? 　Though it was unintentional, I started to become worried that I was unlawfully residing in Japan. Therefore, I consulted Sakura Kyodo Law Office where our lawyer worked at. I asked Attorney Yamawaki, who was an expertise in nationality laws such as immigration control, on what kind of actions I needed to take.

 According to Attorney Yamawaki, "deprivation of nationality" that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Passport Center mentioned was officially known as "expatriation." In other words, I have expatriated from my Japanese nationality on the same day I acquired my Fijian nationality. I didn't have a visa to reside in Japan, but at the same time I no longer had a Japanese passport, so I had no legal means to leave the country. He mentioned that it was extremely rare for a person to abandon their Japanese nationality because it is one of the very few nationalities that can freely visit any country without a visa. (Probably the first case since Madame Dewi officially acquired her Indonesian citizenship?) The family registry and the resident cards, which are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice, still exists as myself being Japanese, so it was imperative to file a complaint with the Immigration Bureau.

 I entrusted my Fijian passport to one of my employees heading to Fiji for a business trip, so he could apply for a commercial visa in Japan at the Japanese Embassy in Fiji and bring it back for me. I figured I'd at least be able to prevent myself from getting arrested for unauthorized labor.

 Attorney Yamawaki refused to give me any further advice as a lawyer because my actions may be violating laws and regulations, but kindly told me that if I wanted to acquire my Japanese nationality again, I would need to apply for naturalization. The condition for applying naturalization in Japan was to (1) obtain a proper visa to reside in Japan such as a working visa or marriage engagement visa, and (2) reside in Japan for five years. For a person like myself, spending half of the time in Japan and the other half in Fiji, five years are long. Considering that I keep my dual lifestyle, I would have to wait at least ten years to be able to qualify as an applicant for naturalization. By then, I would be 55.

 I guess that means, I would most likely die before I could become naturalized as a Japanese.... or in other words, end my life as a Fijian. (lol)

**Chapter 9　What does it mean to work?**

 Living in Fiji, I often feel that everyone is truly enjoying life. In Fiji, there aren't really any kind of real 'jobs' so to say. Therefore, there are many who do not work to live their entire life. But if you include those who are 'making money with their hobbies' in the working force population, then it could be said that Fijians all have some kind of jobs.

When driving down a street in a car, I often see people standing on the side with fish and shrimps.

They do not have any base to lay down the fish nor do they have any shades to keep the strong sunlight from shining directly down on the fish. They just stand there in the open area, swinging the fish in their hands side to side to appeal "Fresh catch!" to cars driving by.

There are vegetable markets and fish markets in Fiji, but people typically buy fish sold on the streets. Most likely from Christian influence, Fijians often cook fish on weekends, so on Fridays and Saturdays, I often see people that drove by buying these fish.

 I also often buy fish. It is quite an emotional moment to see a parent and his/her children from the other side of the sugarcane field, running up to me on the side of the road fluttering their big fish.

 I am not sure if its proper to call them fishermen. I am not sure if they are properly paying taxes. Putting that aside, they have pride in their work. They sing and dance when someone praises them for the fish they have caught. Just watching them jump for joy makes me happy too.

 When they are praised about their catch, they start boasting about where and how they caught the fish, even if I didn't ask them about it. I like fishing myself, so I love to hear these brag stories.

Indeed, having pride in your work is such a joyous state.

I can't resist comparing them with the staff of the fresh fish corner in Japan's supermarkets. While I live in Tokyo, I have struck up conversations with them on several occasions, but some do not even know the name of the fish they are selling. It doesn't matter to them whether the fish tasted good or not. They do not react much if I praise the fish the next day.

When I attended university in China, I would sometimes see a three-wheeler taxi. Among the three-wheeler taxis, some vehicles could be controlled, its accelerators, brakes, etc. with just hands. I have seen taxi drivers who had lost both his legs for some reason driving around, doing his work and properly paying taxes.

I was touched to see that when this driver goes home after work, residents living in the same apartment helped him onto a wheelchair-like pedestal.

 In comparison, people of similar circumstances in Japan are not able to actively participate in society. There are many who feel sorry for making such people work. To me, the taxi driver without legs seemed proud to come home after a day's work.

Some people talk about work like it is a hardship, but I think it is wonderful to work for someone in society. To me, someone deprived of that wonderful opportunity seems ill-fated.

There are many reverent Christians in Fiji, and everyone is kind to others. If you ask a stranger for directions, not only will they tell you the way, but they will go with you to your destination. They always seem delighted from the bottom of their hearts that they were able to do a good deed of showing you the way.

In the Fijian language, "Vinaka" means "Thank you" but is also used as "You're welcome." In other words, when one says, "Thank you" the other returns "Thank you."

 Like any parts of the world, there are many people with disabilities in Japan. But most of them are concerned about their disabilities that they don't bother thinking about traveling overseas or studying abroad. In fact, there are hardly any inquiries to our school from people with disabilities.

Fiji is definitely not a convenient country. Our school is not barrier free. But if you saw those living around our school and those working at our school, you would not think that they will pass by ignoring someone in a wheelchair. Surely, they will help push the wheelchair, carry them on their backs, or chat with them all day long. I am most certain about it.

Now I had another new idea I wanted to try. That is, to start an international language study course for people with disabilities at Fiji's language school. (For the time being, it will be limited to wheelchair users.)

When I discussed this with my employees, I was asked how I was going to manage construction cost to make the school barrier-free. I answered with,

"They won't come to Fiji expecting everything to be like Japan!"

Thus, our "Wheelchair Study Abroad" program started with no additional facility investment, only with pure passion and kindness.

**Postscript　Lifelong Declaration of a Revolutionist**

 I hope everyone enjoyed this book.

This is my half-life. My life is just an example of 'always choosing the most fun-looking option from the choices thrown at you and working hard at it without giving up.

Why don't you pick a paper and pen and start writing your own autobiography?

There is no such thing as the 'best life' but writing your own book of life, no matter what you do for a living or where you live, could help you organize thoughts you may not realize you had. I realized this wonderful effect while writing this book, and now I encourage all of my friends and employees to write their autobiography.

I even talked about it in my speech at the celebration of our stock listing.

"I LOVE making things that people say, 'it can't be done' or 'that's impossible' to come true."

Much of my hard work paid off and now I have become quite famous in Fiji. So much so that I'm beginning to think if I ask the Fiji government for something that isn't costly, they will help out.

At the national high school where I serve as chairman, there are Kiribati, Tuvalu, and Nauru students attending, also tuition-free. To my surprise, there are NO high schools in the Republic of Nauru, a country with only 9,000 people. Since long ago, almost all of the students who finished junior high school in Nauru advance to my high school. So, when I visited Nauru, many people, including the President himself, came to thank me. I was also introduced in both newspaper and TV.

That's when I had ANOTHER great idea!

The "definition of a state" is stipulated in an international treaty called the Montevideo Convention. If you can receive a "state approval" from any one place, you can become an "autonomous country." If you can receive approval from two places, then you can become an "independent nation." Moreover, if you become an independent nation, you are recognized with your own sovereignty and you can properly join the United Nations.

Fortunately, I have connections with the Fiji and Nauru governments. If I politely asked them, I'm sure they can't turn me down.

IF... yes IF, Fiji and Nauru "approve" me as a state, then an independent nation could be born!

I will continue to make efforts to realize all of those things that everyone thinks can't be done or impossible to do, one by one.

I am happy and fully satisfied with my own life. I wish to continue to be a "revolutionist" to help people who aren't!

 Last but not least, I'd like to touch on my family. Since I ran away from home on September 30th, 1999, my parents have visited me twice.

 The first time was in autumn of 2006. My parents suddenly paid a visit to my Tokyo office. It had just opened, with brand-new furniture, office wares, and stationaries. It could have been mistaken as a showroom.

 My desk was at the very far end of the office, but I was able to see both of them from my desk after receiving an internal call from the receptionist. I immediately told the receptionist, Matsuoka, "They are not people interested in studying abroad, so please escort them out." My father swept the office and was smiling the entire time. He looked pleased with the success of his son. On the other hand, my mother was crying the entire time. My parents were satisfied just seeing my face. They quickly left the office.

After that, Matsuoka scolded me why I had not let them see me. I still remember clearly that I angrily replied, "A man must keep to his own words!"

 Since then, packages containing Fukui specialties such as mackerel and small snappers pickled with bamboo leaves would arrive at our office as mid-year gifts. The employees who know I will not accept any of the gifts look at me and say, "Fukui mackerels arrived at our office this year, too. Did you know they are really tasty?"

 The second time was on March 6th, 2016, my 5th day of hospitalization at Keio University Hospital for lymphoma. That evening, my girlfriend and I had planned to talk about our breakup, with her parents sitting in. Shortly before that, my parents, and my sister (and according to my girlfriend) as well as her husband and baby (in other words, my nephew) had come to visit me.

 When I started cancer treatment, she kindly informed my parents that I was hospitalized. She couldn't stop worrying about me. It was out of her good intentions. Perhaps she considered it was better to have me see my parents before I died. She arranged my parents and my sister's family to visit me at the hospital room on the 5th day of my hospitalization. Ever since, my mother would text me encouragement messages (which I didn’t reply to). My mother was considerably worried that her son was going to die, and often texted me messages. I never once replied, but always read them.

 When my meddlesome girlfriend told me that my family came to visit, I asked her to tell them I was fine, and they could go back home. My mom yelled "Hiroshi, you are going to be alright, so hang in there!" from the other side of the hospital room door. Again, I pretended I didn't know who had arranged this family visit, and again I was scolded why I had not let them see me. Slightly grumpy, I replied, "A man must keep to his own words!"

When I looked at her, she seemed to be chuckling at me. Unlike the first time, I thought that my behavior may have been childish.

 On the morning of February 28th, 2018, I found an unread notification on my cell phone. An unknown person called Kaori had sent me a LINE message. I don't share my LINE account with many people. Wondering who it could be,　I opened the message to find that it was my sister notifying me that my father had passed away.

My ex-girlfriend must have told my sister my LINE account.

My mother probably called the office, because as I was getting ready to go to work, Miyamura from management sent me an email saying, "I'm sorry to notify you that your father passed away. Please contact your mother. She seemed very depressed."

That day, I didn't go to work. I thought about going but I just stayed home to collect my thoughts. I wasn't really thinking anything special. Not even reminiscing memories with my father. Just sat there, with my mind turning...

That evening, I was scheduled to have dinner with a person I just met the previous week. While dining, I casually told her that my father had passed away that morning. She quickly asked if I was okay, and then just kept quietly listening to what I had to say.

This was only the second time meeting her and yet I matter-of-factly confessed to her, "I thought I was fighting my dad for as long as I could remember, but today I realized he wasn't the enemy." She just kept on listening.

What was I fighting against?

 My life had been compared to my father's more than a few times. Yet I think I was convinced of my victory when he came to visit my office and smiled at me. But thinking back on it, the question "What was I fighting against?" remains unsolved and still occupies a large part of my heart.

What was I fighting against?

　　March 2018

Hiroshi Taniguchi

**The Profile of Hiroshi Taniguchi**

Born in 1972. Raised in Fukui Prefecture; Currently residing in Tokyo. After graduating from high school, he advanced to the Department of Applied Physics in Tongji University, Shanghai with scholarship funded by the Chinese government. Transferred to the Department of Architecture in his sophomore year and dropped out of university altogether in his senior year.

He later worked at a real estate company in Hong Kong and a construction company in Thai. In 1997, Hiroshi returned back to Japan as a result of the Asian economic crisis. He then joins his father's construction company but quitted in a year and a half. He also sealed the document renouncing all properties. He then starts a Japanese education business for Chinese workers in Kanazawa city of Ishikawa prefecture. The principal business of this business was to provide human resources to domestic enterprises.

In four years, the company had grown to a scale of 380 million yen. He resigns. In March 2004, he established [South Pacific Free Bird](http://www.southpacificfreebird.co.jp/) Co., Ltd., with its pillar of management being the operation of a language school in the Republic of Fiji. In 2010, upon request by the Fiji government, he starts rebuilding a national high school which could not be administered at all. In parallel, Free Bird also begins accepting Japanese high school students. The number of international students accepted for four years had exceeded 20,000 people. In December 2013, the company finished its stock offering to the public and was listed on the South Pacific Stock Exchange on February 2nd, 2015.

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