**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....