24. Conclusion

Fiji and its people are very special to me. In this book I have tried to capture the beauty and charm of some of the islands. In previous chapters, I have given sketches of its diverse people: Fijian, Indian, Chinese, European, other Pacific islanders, and people of mixed race. One of the unique pleasures of life is walking down the main street of Suva. It’s a busy little metropolis with an incredible diversity of people going about their daily business. Yet they always have time to stop and exchange a few words or simply smile and be courteous. What makes it really special is to have a very large lady sail towards you like a square rigger, open her arms, wrap them around you, give you a hug and a kiss and exclaim, ‘How lovely to see you,’ when you may have seen her only a few days before.

I am not so naive as to believe that everything is perfect in our island home. There is a dark side to all people and much that must be done if we are to fulfill our real potential. But one of the main strengths of Fiji people is willingness to forgive. If a tabua is presented in the proper way, murder, incest or coups can be forgiven. This is surely a rare quality that should be built upon.

I will never forget a photograph that was on the front page of the Fiji Times many years ago. Fiji had been ravaged by a devastating hurricane and the Yasawa islands had felt the full brunt of violent winds. The newspaper story reported the effects. The photograph in the centre of the page was of an old man dressed in a sulu and a torn singlet. He was surrounded by the flattened remains of his house, his village and his crops. He had nothing left. Most likely he had no financial resources with which to rebuild, but he was smiling happily at the camera as if he had not a care in the world.

Another image that lingers in my mind is of a group of Fijian children playing happily in a river in the interior of Viti Levu, screeching in delight as I drove my Land Cruiser over the flooded crossing. They were naked, playing simple games, totally unconcerned with events outside their immediate locale. These images characterised the fatalism of the Fijian people and their close attachment to their natural environment.

For me, Fiji is home. I don’t mean my house, my shelter, or the place where I live. I mean Fiji where I went fishing as a small boy; where I learnt to ride a horse; where I discovered that I was a man and that my penis had a special purpose. The place where my great grandfather was nearly eaten by cannibals; where my grandmother entertained German seamen; where my father discovered gold and copper; the place where I dug the rich soil of Taveuni and planted crops. The place where I walked in the shade of trees planted by my great grandfather.
mean Fiji where there is such a rich interaction of people with diverse ethnic origins and religions. The place where I can play golf with a Chief Justice or a mechanic; where I can drink yaqona with a cane cutter or a managing director; where I can enjoy the warmth and companionship of a Fijian chief or an Indian lawyer or a Chinese accountant; where a high chief will stop his car and change a tyre for my wife. And yes, a place where coups are staged; where there are inept, greedy politicians; where there are horrible crimes and petty jealousies; where there are extremes of wealth and poverty. I mean Fiji, that group of islands of unparalleled natural beauty. From the rain soaked forests of Taveuni to the dry grassland of western Viti Levu; from the sandy atolls of exquisite loveliness to the coral reefs with their swarms of tiny colourful fish and dangerous predators; from the raging tropical storms to the pastel sunsets that fill the evening sky. This is the place where I have lived all my life; where I was married and discovered sublime love; where my children were born and began their lives. All this, and so much more, is the place I call home.
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