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Where Is My Home and Where Is My Heart?

Kantilal Jinna

I am often asked by friends who have known me for a long time what years I was at Natabua High School. It is difficult, almost disloyal, for me to say that I went to Marist Brothers High School in Flagstaff, Suva. The first 16 years of my life almost to the day were in Flagstaff, then Tavua (just over a year) and Samabula. The following three years were in Auckland, followed by 21 years mostly in Lautoka, including two years in Canberra and a year in Leeds, UK. My wife Jyoti and our children accompanied me in later years to these places. After Leeds, we moved to Suva for a year and then to Canberra, where I spent a year on secondment to the Fiji High Commission. Jyoti and the children settled in to live there and remained. Yes, my life has been one of constant change.

There is no doubt that the most exciting period of my life was spent in Suva. It is almost like saying that we grew up together. My father and previously my grandfather spent very difficult days earning a living as barbers there. Their initial business was in the colonnaded corridor of Morris Hedstrom's store, along Nubukalou Creek.

It was not a shop but a footpath. My father would set up 'shop' at 7:00 am and close at 7:00 pm when he would wrap up his equipment with a sulu cloth and take it with his chair across Renwick Road to Bhulabhai & Sons to leave there overnight, taking the washing home with him. He would go to the room above Wahley's Butchery in Cumming Street where he, my grandfather and four cousins would sleep. It was also a kitchen where

my grandfather, an excellent cook, would feed everyone. This continued until my mother arrived from India in January 1938, after a three-night and four-day train ride from Surat, Bombay, to Calcutta. There she boarded her namesake ship *Ganges* (her name was Ganga) for a five-week boat ride, which brought them to Nukulau Island for a month-long quarantine period.

My grandfather had in the meantime taken a small shop next to a laundry in Flagstaff and rented a room for my parents where the current Bhura & Jokhan Service Station is situated, directly opposite the newly constructed Flagstaff Plaza and my future high school, Marist Brothers.

My early recollections are from the age of five in 1944 when I started attending St Columba's High School, now called Marist Suva Street. On the same campus was St Felix, a primary school for Part-European and European Catholics. Later, the first Marist Brothers High School was established on the campus.

Up Spring Street, joining Amy Street on the right-hand side, was the Methodist Boys School and the Dudley House School for girls. If you turned left you would pass High Street and Toorak Road and the Dudley Church, leading to the Anderson Maternity Hospital, where our son Rohit was born, and the Colonial War Memorial (CWM) Hospital at the T-junction. My dear friend Radike and his wife Eta gave Rohit his middle name of Vulivavalagi while we were studying librarianship together in Canberra many years later in 1966.

We used to be scared passing this corner because the first hospital building was the morgue. If you turned right, you went through Brown Street and continued to Rewa Street and Milverton Road towards Raiwaqa and Suva Point, while the left turn at Rewa Street took you to Samabula.

The CWM Hospital was called the 'Vale ni Mate' (House of Death) in my days and I am glad it later changed to 'Vale ni Bula'. Going right from the hospital along Waimanu Road, the area was occupied by elite expatriates with beautiful homes and magnificent views of Walu Bay and Tamavua. After passing the one-mile post you came to Borron House, the residence in those days of the highly respected leader Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna, and continued to Kings Road and Samabula.



Figure 15.1: Borron House, n.d.

Source: P32.4.9 Fiji Museum.

A left turn on Waimanu Road at the hospital took you down to Robertson Road on your right, but if you maintained the left you went past Dr CMP Gopalan's surgery on your right, Marks Park on your left at the Bidesi Construction corner and then the Lilac Theatre further down, next to Mar Gip's cafe. Lilac Café was a mixture of things. You could always hear the ruffle of mahjong tiles and excited chatter of Chinese players and cooks. There were 1-penny ice blocks and threepence ice creams in shop-made waffle cones. We came to learn as we grew older that what was in the smoking pipes was a bit more than Fiji tobacco and was provided to government-licensed imbibers.

Curry mutton and rice was 1 shilling and 9 pence, including a slice of buttered Fiji long-loaf bread (*madrai*) and a cup of tea, and all came with chillies, salt, sugar, tomato sauce and soy sauce.

If you turned left from there you would end up on Toorak Road, which led to several laundries at the top after passing Kuchappan's corner, which was previously Dr George Hemming's surgery. The right turn took you back to St Columba's, past Gospel Hall, and on the left you walked past my

classmate Jack Hanson's home and reached the Madar Baksh settlement complex. Madar Baksh's shop in Cumming Street repaired anything mechanical like primus stoves, benzene lights and knickknacks and sold spare parts. At the Lilac Cinema, Mr John Grant would be at the door in his tie and coat with Mr Dalton or Mr Basil Guruwaiya selling tickets, equally smartly dressed. As you came down you could turn to Marks Street with its greengrocers, shoemakers, bicycle hiring and repairing shop and barbershops and on to Suva Book Shop, then Pacific Transport, which operated nine small passenger buses leaving daily for Lautoka via Queen's Road, and the Century movie theatre.

Just across was a stepped lane past the imported mutton shop, Leyland's butcher and the ice-making shop, selling large blocks of ice for cool storage, fridges and ice cream making. At the end of the lane was a public toilet block leading to Cumming Street. Immediately after the toilet block at the end of the lane was Kwong Tiy & Co Ltd, General Merchants, and Wahley's Butchery, followed by Leong Lee Parshottam, greengrocers and seed merchants catering to the expatriate population. The top end of Marks Street led to the very smelly McGowan's sea shell warehouse for tortoiseshell buttons and jewellery-making, and then Burns Philp (SS) Co Ltd leading to the Suva wharves.

If you continued from the Lilac theatre down Waimanu Road, the first turn left led you to Marks Lane (*Vale Karasini*) now Raojibhai Patel Street, but if you persisted straight, it would take you along Renwick Road to Morris Hedstrom Limited and past Narseys Limited, Boots the Chemist and Caines Janif, photographers and picture framers. A left turn to Pratt Street led you to Vidal Library and Bookshop and the Sacred Heart Cathedral, the Central Police Station and St Anne's Primary School, eventually joining Gordon Street. Moving straight on was Desai Book Depot and the Club Hotel.

At the end of Marks Street, a turn immediately right would have taken you to the Centenary Methodist Church and a left turn would bring you to Thomson Street. About 30 yards further on your left was Cumming Street, arguably the busiest street in Fiji. On the right side were the Suva Markets with their rear on Nubukalou Creek, where putt-putts brought produce from various villages along the coast from as far as Nausori or towards Navua in the other direction. A few yards from the markets were Mouat's Pharmacy and a series of five barbershops and four well-

patronised Indian restaurants: Suva Lodge, Ram Garib Lodge, Indian Lodge (Karians) and Fiji Lodge catered for food and provided lodging for single workers and students from all parts of Fiji. The lodging rooms were upstairs and their washing was catered for by laundries on Toorak Road.

The barbershops started with Jinna Bros (my father) at the entrance of Suva Lodge, two more on the right and two across the street.

My father often reminded me that there was a fire in Cumming Street in 1923. Kim Gravelle, in his book *Fiji's Times: A History of Fiji*, writes that the fire on 10 February started in a combined grog shop and boarding house, gutted all the buildings in Cumming Street; and spilled onto the right-hand side into Renwick Road where it was stopped by the two-storeyed building owned by Henry Marks.¹ The inferno swallowed shop after shop until it reached a gap near a building occupied by Kwong Tiy and the Coronation Bakery. The fire crossed the street and destroyed everything on the Nubukalou Creek side, sparing only Jack Kee's furniture factory. According to Gravelle, 'Cumming Street, by Sunday morning, was nothing more than an expanse of flattened sheet metal. 45 shops, including nine tailor shops, 18 refreshment rooms and a number of retailers had been destroyed ... to the Indians and Chinese who were the primary tenants of the street, the damage was catastrophic.'² After the fire, the kava saloons shifted to Marks Street. Suva Markets moved into the ruins that were Cumming Street and remained there for 20 years until it moved towards the Suva Wharf adjoining the Suva Bus Station.

Along Thomson Street and running parallel to Cumming Street was Nubukalou Creek. From there was a commenced but abandoned plan to build a jetty right up into Suva Harbour to enable shipping, and to develop a sugarcane farm and sugar mill, a project of Suva businessmen Brown and Joske. The project would have stretched along Victoria Parade to the Government Buildings.

1 Kim Gravelle, *Fiji's times: A history of Fiji*, vols 1–3 (Suva: Fiji Times 1979). See in particular Volume 3, Chapter 40, 'The Cumming Street fire', 29–32.

2 Ibid., 31.



Figure 15.2: The aftermath of the Cumming Street fire, 1923.

Source: P32.4.33 Fiji Museum.

Morris Hedstrom's entrance displayed their confectionary department that left children drooling, unable to afford the expensive imported chocolates and lollies rolled up in beautiful see-through coloured wrappers. But it was the next shop that bedazzled every curious child. Walter Horne & Company Limited, General Merchants had their shop counter fairly close to their front door and all customers were given a receipt for purchases. What amazed me and aroused my curiosity every time was that the shop attendant put the customer's money and invoice into a small tube, then pulled a handle that sucked it up to a mysterious destination from where the change and a stamped receipt would arrive a few moments later.

My curiosity was even greater across the road at Millers Limited, sited next to Union Taxis at the edge of the hooped Nubukalou Bridge and selling beautiful new cars. I remember the names in metal stating 'Hillman Minx' and 'Vauxhall Velox'. They were so shiny and clean and ready for rich customers. A friend of my father bought one for his taxi business. In fact, it was across from my father's barbershop in Cumming Street in the mid-50s that I had my first job as the telephone boy for Viti Taxis, owned by Mr CP Bidesi. I don't know what I got paid but it went straight to my father. I was 12 years old and could speak English, unlike the drivers, who did not. My parents were really proud I had this job because I had superiority over six much older taxi drivers and could give them orders to go to the customers, mainly European, to take them to various destinations.



Figure 15.3: Morris Hedstrom building next to Nabukalou Creek, n.d.

Source: P32.4.39 Fiji Museum.

The only other regular work was in my father's barbershop on Saturdays, giving children a haircut and older customers a shave. I would also sit outside the shop and sell 'three inch' lengths of Fiji tobacco from a rope-like *bhindi* twisted roll.

Along Marks Street towards the wharf (instead of taking Thomson Street) was the Hotel Metropole and on the right was Burns Philp (SS) Co Ltd known familiarly as BPs. As part of the building on the corner of Nina Street was the small stand-alone shop of Thaw and Weaver, Jewellers.

The BP building had a special interest for me. It had the only customer lift in the city, which was operated by an Indian man who was always dressed in white and white. He would attend to every customer or curious wanderers like me instead of referring them to the wide staircase. My fascination to travel on the lift was insatiable.

To the right of BPs you went towards the Suva Bus Station and two major factories: Union Soaps Limited, manufacturing blue and white bars of washing soap and other soap products smelling of tallow and copra; and the Pacific Biscuit Company, making cabin crackers sold in packets or small and large tins. The biscuits were jawbreakers and the best way to eat them was to soak them in your tea. Fijian people took the biscuit tins, both small and large, to their villages as gifts or for special occasions. Multiple bars of soap were often included in such presentations, together

with 4-gallon drums of kerosene, boxes of corned mutton and beef, canned fish and packets of matches and cigarettes. The children received Wrigley's PK and Juicy Fruit chewing gum and other lollies.

The alternate road from BPs led to the wharves. On the left were the wooden or small metal ships like the *Yanawai* connecting passengers, mail and cargo between the main and island ports. Further along was the major wharf handling inter-Pacific Islands and international cargo, and international passenger ships. The wharves were very busy when the Home Boat arrived from England and the *Matua* and *Tofua* arrived from New Zealand and Australia.

A good time to come here was when overseas tourist ships paid a day visit, welcomed or farewelled by the Fiji Military Forces or the Fiji Police bands. Children gathered on the wharves and scrambled for the coins that the tourists threw down as the boats were about to leave.



Figure 15.4: Aerial view of Kings Wharf, n.d.

Source: P32.4.149 Fiji Museum.

That was in my twelfth year when I was about to finish primary school. It was 1951.

Moving along Victoria Parade was the General Post Office (the GPO, now located across the road), after passing the Pier Hotel in Pier Street owned by Sir Hugh Ragg. Sir Hugh owned and operated a number of hotels near the main towns on Viti Levu. D Gokal and Co. have their duty free shop where the street level of the Pier Hotel used to be. Moving on towards Albert Park, there were three places of interest for me. They were the Union Steamship Company, a travel agent and the Bank of New South Wales. Across the road on a triangle stood the age-old meeting place, the everlasting, still famous '*ivi* tree', these days propped up with a sturdy concrete post in its trunk.

This bank building was of special interest to me because on the top floor, Sir Henry Milne Scott and his son Maurice Scott had their law office. My father had a weekly contract with Sir Henry to cut his hair in his office. The same floor had the office of TEAL (Tasman Empire Airways Limited), later NZ NAC and now Air New Zealand. The counter officer, Mr Indarjeet, was a well-known soccer referee in Suva and would give away beautiful postcard-sized blotting paper with pictures of TEAL aircraft. These were quite a prestigious haul, as we used fountain pens or 1164 nib and ink pens at school. Downstairs in the bank, the staff, all expatriates, were well dressed in ties and coats. Only large businesses had bank accounts. My father had a small wooden money box in which the custodian, my mother, kept the 1 penny, 5 shillings, 10 shillings and the occasional pound note. The coin box was a glass jar with a screw tin top.

No one spoke to Sir Henry except his senior staff and the secretary Miss Underwood, who would tell my father when to go into his office and also pay him. One day, my father gathered enough courage to speak to Miss Underwood and Mr Tazim Raza the law clerk to ask if Sir Henry would give me a job in his office. He said I would be 13 years old in a few days' time and could speak English. I had also been accepted by the Marist Brothers High School to start secondary school at the end of January 1952.

The timing was perfect, as I was finishing my primary school and had 'appeared' for my School Leaving qualifying exam for Marist Brothers High School – and the tea boy and messenger for Sir Henry was going on leave for three weeks. I got the job and started on Monday 7 January 1952. I remember making and serving morning and afternoon tea for Sir Henry Scott every day and going to the post office to collect the mail. I also did the occasional errand.

As fate would have it, a severe cyclone hit Suva on Thursday 24 January 1952 during the day when everyone was at work. The three long sirens and yellow flag went up on the GPO at 10:00 am. Sir Henry told me to collect my belongings, get ready and go with his son to his house in Bau Street. We were all there at the house when a water leak was detected near an external window and Maurice Scott and I nailed a piece of timber to stop it. I was then told by Maurice Scott to accompany him to his house at Suva Point and stay with him till the cyclone passed Fiji. I was given a sumptuous meal by the enormous Mr Pirthipal Singh, Sir Henry's cook.

At around 6:00 pm, when the cyclone calmed down, Mr Maurice Scott took me to my father's barbershop in Cumming Street in his car to find my anxious father was there waiting for me. He had gone there after checking for me at the law office and finding it closed. We were dropped at our home on Kings Road, Samabula, where my mother and rest of my brothers and sisters, all six of them, were relieved to see father and son well and together. The next day was my last day at work and I was told by Mr Raza that 'Saheb' wanted to see me in his office. I went into his room and was given an envelope, which I took to my father. It contained a 1-pound note. My three weeks' pay was 15 shillings and I was given an extra 5 shillings for doing a good job. A few short years later, Sir Henry Maurice Scott was fully qualified, knighted and, like his father, became the Speaker of the Legislative Council of Fiji.

In October 1952, Suva was proclaimed a city.

Behind the Bank of New South Wales, Charles Stinson's Photography Shop, the Regent Theatre and the Suva Fire Brigade was the Suva shoreline as it continued right behind Cable & Wireless Limited, the Suva Town Hall, the Carnegie Library, the Suva Sea Baths, the Suva Grammar School, the Grand Pacific Hotel and the Suva Bowling Club.

Going past the *ivi* tree and continuing on from the Club Hotel was the Fiji Times and Pacific Islands Monthly Fiji office, run by Sir Thomas William Alport Barker CBE. Opposite Sir Alport Barker's office was the imposing white Cable & Wireless building. It was an important place for many people, especially those with overseas connections. This is where you could telephone anyone in the world and send and receive telegrams. My father received his telegrams from relatives in his village of Vesma, Gujarat, stating urgent messages like 'Mother seriously ill, send money' or 'Your sister Bhikhi has "expired" in Nairobi'. Receiving a telegram was never good news for him. On the left side of C&W was the precursor to the Fiji Broadcasting Service, running as Radio ZJV. I remember Mr Niranjan Singh presenting the Hindi program for 15 minutes on Wednesdays and Saturdays. I also liked the English breakfast program and songs like *Jambalaya (On the Bayou)*, a song written and recorded by American country music singer Hank Williams, which was first released in July 1952. My father had a Bush radio that was quite large in size and accompanied by a large battery. The front of our two-room home would be full of Indian friends and relatives and our Fijian neighbours for Hindi and Fijian programs four times a week. My mother was not happy about this because it was our parents' and sisters' bedroom and our sitting room.



Figure 15.5: Indian musical group auditioning at Broadcasting House, 1957.

Source: G4143 National Archives of Fiji.

Would my mother have dreamed that Suva would someday have several radio stations, multiple language presentations 24 hours a day and television stations not only local but in the hundreds, at any given time?

It was difficult enough for me to explain to her that on 20 July 1969, man walked on the moon for the first time ever. 'Chanda Mama' (a respectful name for the moon known to Indian children from a nursery lullaby) cannot be touched, my mother said. I had to remind her of her trip to Fiji, such a long way from a tiny village in India, and how she got to Nukulau, the quarantine island over 7,000 miles away. I may have convinced her by reasoning but not by belief.

Along Victoria Parade, we went past many offices until we came to the corner of the British Council Library and its Fiji headquarters. This institution had a major impact on my life in years to come. Firstly, I was invited to join the British Council Youth Club when I was in Form 4 and was asked to be the treasurer (I have an autograph to prove this) and later I was invited to join the Library Service of Fiji at the Western Regional Library, Lautoka. Neither I nor Radike Qereqeretabua, the two pioneering local librarians, ever applied for our jobs. It was quite true that I could be neither a member of the Carnegie Library nor of the Suva Sea Baths until they were opened to the public. I was, however, an accidental hero when I took a large live centipede in a glass bottle, which had been caught in our bathroom by my mother, and presented it to the curator of the Suva Museum, which in those days was on the floor above the Carnegie Library.

The British Council provided the initial funds for the establishment of the Library Service of Fiji operating from the Western Regional Library in Lautoka, and paid for the first two chief librarians, Robert Pearce (UK) and Dennis Edwards (Australia). They funded the extension to the library and later provided a scholarship for me to complete my master's degree at Leeds.

There were not too many exciting places in between the British Council and the Government Buildings except that you could easily go from the library to Flagstaff along MacGregor Road past Suva Chinese School or Girls Grammar School, depending on which turn you took, and then drive past Scott's residence and onto Marist Brothers High School.

The other major items of interest on and beyond Victoria Parade were Suva Motors, opposite the Carnegie Library, the Fiji Government Printer (now the National Archives of Fiji) and CC David Café, staffed by three beautiful sisters, and their 'Choc Bums', which were a cone of ice cream with a chocolate topping.

The Government Buildings had a charm of their own. If you were bold enough to go to the Public Relations Office you could get a haul of freebies, such as copies of royal family photographs and Empire Games posters. Inside the Government Buildings were fascinating places like the Legislative Council Chambers and the Supreme Court. Coming out at the Albert Park end, you were treated to a festival of sports.

On weekends, spectators and passers-by could see rugby, men's and women's hockey, cricket, basketball, lawn tennis and soccer matches. There were special occasions too such as the Indian Independence celebration, when everyone received free *mithai* sweets, and Coronation Day, when we all got a beautiful tin box full of lollies with a British Flag cover plus a bonus gift of a Union Jack.

Once you came to this end of town, you had to go to the Botanical Gardens and also see the Fiji soldier standing perfectly still, impeccable in full dress military uniform, at the entrance to the drive of the Governor-General's (President's) Residence and Government House.

On rare occasions we would end up at Suva Point where we could see the jetty where Royal New Zealand Air Force Sunderlands and other passenger seaplanes landed. We came twice to receive relatives arriving by seaplane instead of picking them up from Luvu Luvu airport at Nausori.

Samabula, a dormitory suburb of Suva, was the beginning or the end of a tour around Viti Levu along Kings Road. The Reliance and Sunbeam buses went past our house every day for Raki Raki, Tavua, Ba and Lautoka. Here, unlike in the big town of Suva, although only 2 miles away, we had a world of our own with people of all races and religions living side by side. Our immediate neighbour was Ning Soon and on the floor above lived Eroni and Setaita with children Setariki, Emma and Seremaia. Sharing the same bathrooms and toilets were Ram Din, wife Barki and their three sons and two daughters.



Figure 15.6: Indian ladies at Ruve Park, Samabula, 1968. This was presumably to commemorate the end of Indian indenture in Fiji.

Source: 561-S National Archives of Fiji.



Figure 15.7: Indian men at Ruve Park, Samabula, 1968. This was presumably to commemorate the end of Indian indenture in Fiji.

Source: 562-S National Archives of Fiji.

The daily 2-mile walk to St Columba's, past Samabula Government Boys School next door, wound by Samabula Police Station and the Public Works Department Depot, later transformed to Derrick Technical School, then the Fiji Institute of Technology and eventually the Fiji National University.

The choice was yours: you could turn right towards Tamavua where the Central Medical School, the Tuberculosis Hospital and the Central Nursing School were located or follow an ocean view bypass road at Walu Bay, where the fork leads to Queen's Road on which Pacific Transport buses take passengers to Lami, Navua, Sigatoka, Nadi and Lautoka. The left fork goes back into the city of Suva, to the soap and biscuit factories, the bus stand and the wharves.

For eight long years, how I longed for rain each weekday as I left home for school in order to get the threepence to catch the Atomic Power Hospital Bus instead of walking.

My commencement at secondary school took me along Baniwai Road, past Howell Road where the annual Hindu firewalking was held. I could not do my homework or studies at home because there was no electricity. The kerosene lamp was inadequate but thankfully the Brothers allowed a couple of dozen students to come to the school each night for a couple of hours to do their homework and swot for tests and Overseas Junior and Senior Cambridge examinations. The road became quite familiar for me as we passed Ritova and Matanitobua streets, learning soon afterwards that they were named after signatories of Fiji's Deed of Session to Britain on 10 October 1874.

Starting secondary school was a new experience for me. Having seven children, my father could not afford my fees and uniform but a timely intervention by Mr SB Desai, another customer of my father, provided me a job in his bookshop, which changed the course of my life. He paid for my fees and uniforms for four years while I worked for him every weekend and school holiday. I often stayed at his home on Waimanu Road, opposite Dr CMP Gopalan.

A interesting aside is that in 1953, on 14 September at 12:29 pm, while at Marist, we were waiting for Rishikesh Prasad, the only person in the class with a wristwatch, to ring the school bell for lunch, when the *Une Une*, an earthquake, shook us all. We were in Form 4 but the first person to beat everyone up to Bau Street away from the danger of a tsunami was James

Vei Makasiale, a descendant of Tongan prince and Fiji chief Ma'afu, and student in Form 3, all 12 stone of him, shooting past the fastest at school. The aftershocks lasted several days.

Desai Book Shop was on Victoria Parade opposite today's Sukuna Park. The tsunami that followed the earthquake brought live fish and debris into the shop, leaving the pure vegetarian Mr Desai and his staff bewildered. The subsequent reclamation has left no sign of the earlier landscape from where one could see Suva Harbour and ships small and large, sailing to or leaving their berth at Suva Wharf.

When I finished Form 4, having completed my Senior Cambridge Examinations at the end of 1955, Brother Anthony and the Principal Brother Cassian at Marist recommended to my father that I should continue my studies. With some financial assistance and further help by Br Cassian to enrol at St Peter's Christian Brothers School, I left for Auckland from the old Nadi Airport on the multi-propeller Pan American World Airways. The flight lasted six hours.

In my first letter to my father I told him that New Zealand was a strange country where Europeans sweep the streets. I was now in a new world from 1956 onwards.

A few years later in Lautoka, a friend named Tony Wilkinson, manager and *Fiji Times* correspondent for the Western Division, shared with me that in 1956 he and some Suva Jaycees friends started the Hibiscus Festival, now a national institution held annually in Suva. At that time we were congratulating ourselves on the success of 1963 Lautoka Sugar Festival. Little credit is given to the Jaycees of Fiji who have been involved with successful equivalents of the Hibiscus and Sugar festivals in many towns and settlements in Fiji.

The Suva of today has a charm of its own. Gone are the days of Somerset Maugham and the Grand Pacific Hotel. My memories are from the beginning of World War II, when spot lamps shone into the skies and alarm sirens summoned us to run to the shelters in a cave nearby during trial exercises. That was 25 years before Independence.

Today Fiji is our own and the postwar growth has brought many changes in Suva, the second capital and the first city of Fiji. The international airport, the magnetic tourist trade and economy-driving sugar belt of

the Western Division, and the contributions of the rest of Fiji in Vanua Levu and the Northern, Central and Eastern divisions, have made strong contributions and provide strong challenges to important happenings.

My father would no longer have to wait a week to learn that his mother was seriously ill in India or his sister had passed away in Africa. Today he would know within seconds, and he would not have to go searching around Suva during a cyclone looking for his son. He would know a week before of the likelihood of a cyclone.

I recall the day when the five-floor CMLA Building in Central Suva was pronounced the tallest building in Fiji and the 14-storey Reserve Bank Building was the talk of the Pacific Island countries. Now we talk of 27 floors or more.

This was my Suva for the first 16 years of my life. Not all cities can qualify as the economic, political, cultural capital of their country. Add on history and sheer beauty and it becomes unmatched.

Suva has a magnetic quality that makes you want to come back time and time again after throwing your *salusalu* into the receding waters as your vessel leaves the island, as the touching Fiji farewell song, 'Isa Lei', says:

Bau nanuma na nodatou lasa mai Suva, nanuma ...

Please remember the good times we had in Suva, always remember ...

This text is taken from *Suva Stories: A History of the Capital of Fiji*,
edited by Nicholas Halter, published 2022, The Australian National
University, Canberra, Australia.

doi.org/10.22459/SS.2022.15