A Journey to Unity

Sunday afternoon, sitting under the Pohutukawa tree, I wondered what my folks must be doing in New Zealand. It had been 25 years since they officially shifted, leaving me and my Maori honey to look after our family business. Not that I couldn’t go and settle in New Zealand myself but bringing a Maori wife home seemed cooler. Well technically I belong to both countries; my kids are Fijians as well as New Zealanders. Kahurangi, my elder son was conceived in NZ, born in Fiji while Sainiana, my only daughter was conceived in Fiji, born in NZ. Ironically, my wife and I still haven’t figured out where my youngest, Vallan was conceived. Was it during our 5th honeymoon in Waikato or the Easter holidays up in the northern friendly side of Fiji? Nevertheless, it didn’t hinder us in deciding where to have him delivered; of course the Auckland City hospital; after all that was where Jacinda Ardern, the former Prime Minister of NZ back in 2018 gave birth to her baby girl. My wife, Heeni, insisted for months and months for this. Now after 18 years, we are back in Fiji and enjoying our life to the fullest. Heeni often tells me that we must be the only ‘Fijzealanders’ around here, however I bet there must be 100’s of us by now.

### My reminiscence took me to that delightful night when I first met my beautiful angel. The image of our first encounter, that first look, the events of the night when I realized that first sight love does exist became so vivid that I could almost sense the perfume she was wearing that night. It was the year 2008 and Crusaders had won the Super Rugby title for the 7th time. A victory party was held at Christchurch for them. While the players brought their family members, Ben Franks, one of my mates in the team tagged me along. I had gone to NZ that year on a tourist visa. I was super excited to meet the Crusaders squad but little did I know that it will be the love of my life that I was to meet that night. I sighted Heeni the moment she walked in with her cousin, Sean Maitland. As my eyes found hers, hers did mine. And from that time till now, she is mine and I am hers. Those were the years when it was typical of my Fijian parents and her Maori family to oppose our marriage but nothing could stop us from tying the knot; we were too, too much in love. We finally got hitched, first a traditional wedding in NZ with the blessing of the Maori Tohunga [[1]](#footnote-1) and later a traditional I-taukei ceremony at Lau, Fiji. This was the year Heeni brought a pohutukawa plant and we planted it together as a symbol of our love and the unity of the two families and two countries. Two years later, we were blessed with our first child, 4 years after, our second and then our third and last in 2018. And now, the Pohutukawa plant has become a blossoming tree.

The first six years of our marriage had been a roller coaster ride for both Heeni and I. We were both young and had a lot to accomplish. A disadvantage of early age marriage usually is the deprivation of education, however in our case, we fought against all odds of our life and persevered in this field. Our savior, our university. The University of the South Pacific accommodated us and our difficulties lessened as we pulled through one semester to another. I took up a journalism program while Heeni decided on studying physics. It was during this time that I actually learnt the history of USP and how proud I was to be acquainted with a New Zealander. Apparently Laucala Bay, Suva had gained fame with the establishment of a Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) base by the No 5 Squadron. Sir Edmund Hillary had served for a time at Laucala Bay as a member of the NZ team and in 1968 the RNZAF facilities were gifted by the NZ Government to Fiji for the establishment of the University of the South Pacific. This information had gained us quite a respectful reputation around the campus, and man were we ever tired of flaunting our successful marriage to the other students! We, in fact became the role model for many; the very epitome of a perfect couple. Inter-marriages became an in-thing back then and Heeni was continuously nagged for her cousins’ phone and email contacts. Some actually managed to contact some of her cousins! Surprisingly, hardly any Maori or New Zealanders for that matter were much around the campus that time. I guess student visas were tough to get. However, now things have become as easy as peanuts. It is 2036 and Fiji has become a visa free country for New Zealand and vice versa! Who had ever thought of that! Well whoever did, needs to be saluted for the initiative. Of course certain regulations and monitoring is in place. This is to avoid tarnishing the bond and relationship that the two countries have managed to create and strengthen in these long eighteen years. Students exchange programs are also a hype nowadays. Scholarships are also provided to Fijians for studying in NZ and them in Fiji. USP is flooded with students from NZ and I guess the same is in their universities; more and more Fijians are moving. So much has changed; each country is readily available to assist each other in times of difficulties. Monetary and physical assistance has been provided whenever disasters have struck, whether it be a cyclone in Lautoka or an earthquake in Christchurch. Both countries have also grown immeasurably in terms of two way trade. This includes the two way tourism as well. I myself with Heeni and kids have been to and fro NZ almost 90 times in these years. Fiji’s currency has also slowly matched up with the NZ dollars and Fiji Airways had even started giving discounts on travel fares to NZ from last two years! Oh! Sweet life.

Amidst my musing, I heard a familiar voice , “he rite tina, te honi!”[[2]](#footnote-2) My wife walked towards me with her usual smile and bent to peck on my cheek.

I replied with great enthusiasm, “Lo daru sa lako, Baby. Au sa via kana.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

I was indeed famished and couldn’t wait to taste the mouth-watering marinated raw fish that Heeni rarely made these days. The unique Maori recipe was only utilized for special occasions.

As we sat at the table, Heeni brought a cake and smiling said “ra whanau ki a koe, Semi![[4]](#footnote-4) Many happy returns of the day, darling.” As I got a tight hug from her and the kids, I thanked Lord for the family He had blessed me with and said a silent prayer for all my kin; in Fiji and New Zealand. Aloud, my eldest son blessed our meal and prayed for our family’s health and unity. We all felt a peace within us as we said Amen in unison before I cut the cake.

### (approximately 1188 words)

1. Maori Chief [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Lunch is ready, honey! [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Yes, let’s go baby. I am hungry. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Happy Birthday, Semi! [↑](#footnote-ref-4)