

Bula (Hello) from Fiji

I sit here on a gorgeous July morning, sipping my tea out on my veranda. It's winter here in the Southern Hemisphere, and the cooling trade winds bring a pleasant 75-degree temperature. I look out over the brilliant blue South Pacific to see the many tiny islands dotting the horizon, and am in awe of its magnificence.

I am a chiropractor. I graduated from LACC in 1987 and ran an extremely successful practice in Southern California. To all appearances, I had it all: a huge office fully equipped with all the bells and whistles - eight adjusting rooms; two massage rooms with massage therapists on staff; an on-site gym with personal trainers; roller tables; hydro tables; and every piece of therapeutic equipment a body could hope for. I had a large home, three boats - even an airplane. So you might wonder what I am doing in my prime living on an island the size of Connecticut in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

Sometimes life just catches up with you without you even noticing. My days were long: 12-hour days Monday through Friday and eight hours on Saturday, with emergency calls that invariably came through on many Sundays and holidays.

One evening my wife, Susan, and I came home from the office and, as was our routine, went straight to the answering machine to check our messages. We looked at each other and asked, "What are we doing this for?" Susan, a professional journalist who had quit her job to help me run the office, spent most of her time scaling mountains of paperwork; I spend at least half my time wading through rivers of reports to justify my existence to insurance companies. We had lost the true meaning of what we had originally set out to do.

Our move was a touch more dramatic than most; we went about as far away as we could. It took "running away" to find what had been missing. It would be on a tropical isle where I would find the essence of what chiropractic was all about.

As I began to live among the warm, wonderful people of Oceania, I realized there was much more here than what the normal tourist experiences: glimpses of wonder; moments of awe; firewalkers and fire healers; medicine men who knew the secrets hidden deep in the tropical rainforests; hidden river grottos; majestic waterfalls; and an ocean so crystal clear, so warm, and so blue that it defied description. I found my essence in Fiji.

Today, I lead other Americans (and travelers from across the globe) off the beaten path and into the heart and soul of "my" Fiji. It's an amazing experience; one can't help but come back changed. We've explored an authentic cannibal cave (including a ritual platform and oven); sailed around many of the tiny islands that dot the horizon; taken part in a traditional Fijian fish drive; village tours; Fijian song-and-dance presentations; snorkeling; trekking; and discovery.

We've also witnessed the power of a sacred, secret religious firewalking ceremony. This is truly a page right out of *National Geographic*. Firewalkers must isolate themselves for three weeks in a temple, adhering to a strict diet, meditating and praying. The participants not only walk over white-hot coals, but across cane knives. A high priest in a feat not easily explained plunges his hands into

a pot of boiling oil, extracting deep-fried "Indian sweets" and offering them to onlookers.

What's different about my practice now? Four walls do not bind my office. I have adjusted villagers on simple hand-woven mats laid in a clearing in the rainforest; I treated a local Indian man on the concrete floor of his home; a manager of a small local resort was adjusted on a wooden desk that held tour and travel brochures. My payment: a kind word or *vinaka vaka levu* (thank you), a hug, and a bowl of kava. Tourists in Fiji receive adjustments in their rooms, and pay me for what amounts to my gas money to get there. Sometimes I am treated to a meal, and once was even offered a prized goat. But payment is not what makes chiropractors tick. It's that look of surprise that our patients have when they get off the mat, the floor, the desk, or in most cases, the adjusting table - of being pain-free at last. I don't care how many reimbursement checks you get from your insurance provider; nothing can match that feeling!

I am especially excited that I have the opportunity to share these wonders with my fellow chiropractors, as a colleague and friend, Dr. Weltch, recently decided to host a relicensing seminar right here in Fiji.

I continue to amaze the people of our islands with chiropractic magic. And I am continually amazed at the magic of Fiji, which they are so willing to share with me. Of course, it's a different life, and not for most. But it is richly rewarding for me, and has truly brought me back to my roots. It has reminded me that ultimately, it all comes down to healing; that no matter where I go, I have my two hands. And with those, I can do just about anything.

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