
IN SUPPORT OF

NAITAUBA SCHOOL



FIJI
February
2017



OUR JOURNEY

RESPONSE TO A CALL

Rebuilding of Safe House/Community School

Imagine your community is completely wiped out by a horrific Category 5 cyclone. Your school and your homes are now a pile of rubble. You have no resources to rebuild. The hurricane season is again approaching and there is not one safe and secure cyclone (hurricane)-ready building that could provide shelter for the families and children. This was the situation for a community dear to our hearts made up of 38 children and their families who live on the island of Naitauba, in Fiji.

In response to this call for help after the cyclone that devastated Fiji Islands in 2016, we - Dorota and Stan - were moved to help with the building of a safe house/community school for the families on the island of Naitauba. Polstar Group Ltd., Dorota and Stan's masonry company based in Toronto Canada, donated time, tools, and senior level expertise towards this critical initiative. In February 2017, our crew of five senior masons - Roman, Taras, Robert, Stanislaw and Richard - embarked on the lengthy trip of two planes and a boat ride to the island of Naitauba. The team would spend fourteen days working non-stop providing master-level bricklaying services to construct the walls of three buildings designated for a Safe House/School and water tank project.

The project required significant funding. As part of the consideration, we provided everyone with a background story on the dire situation facing families in Naitauba. We asked our friends, family, and business associates to partner with us by making financial gestures. And they responded amazingly! Many people from around the globe donated time and money for the building materials and tradesmens' wages that were required to pull off this project in a tight timeline.

Now we are happy to share our story. It was an adventure in the making with unforeseen challenges and miracles.

With our gratitude,



Dorota & Stan
(POLSTAR GROUP LTD.)





Approximately 100 Fijian adults and their 40-50 children live together in the village on the island. The school was home to three resident teachers and provided education for 38 children between the ages of 5 and 13 years.

To continue their education older children accompanied by a member of family move away to one of the larger Fijian islands.

Re-establishing the school on Naitauba Island in Fiji, following Cyclone Winston

Building New School

The unprecedented severity of Cyclone Winston, and the prediction that more frequent and stronger cyclones will occur as climate change intensifies, forced major changes to the master plan for Naitauba. A design was developed for a new cyclone-resistant school building to be constructed on higher ground. The school would also serve as a safe refuge during cyclones for families. The site location was identified, design completed and fundraising well underway.

The building construction began in February 2017.



BUILDING A NEW SCHOOL

February '2017

The brutality of tropical Cyclone Winston

On February 20, 2016, Tropical Cyclone Winston, a Category 5 Cyclone, the most intense storm ever recorded in the Southern Hemisphere devastated much of Fiji. On the small island of Naitauba there was catastrophic wind damage, and the associated tidal surge resulted in massive waves demolishing all the homes situated near to the shoreline.

Naitauba (pronounced "Naita-oomba") Island is located in Fiji's Koro Sea. The capital city of Fiji, Suva, is 260 kilometres away. The nearest larger island is Taveuni, 64 kilometres and a 4 1/2-hour boat trip over open ocean that is often too very rough for travel. There is no airstrip on the island of Naitauba. The island is the sacred hermitage sanctuary of Adidam Samrajashram.



CATEGORY 5 CYCLONE

February '2016



Fundriser

"In November 2016, we began fundraising. A Go Fund Me page was setup as well as Instagram and Facebook. We reached out to our business partners, friends, and family". - Dorota

In general, building costs in Fiji are lower than in more developed countries as labour costs are lower. However, the lower Fijian labour costs were largely offset by the cost of shipping the building materials to Fiji and by barge to Naitauba. The total project cost excluding Polstar management and labour was \$257,500.USD. We estimated that our portion of this project would require \$35,000 CDN which included airfare, food, and lodging. Most of our bricklayers generously donated three weeks of their time.



December' 2016 - February' 2017



So many community facilities in a dire need of rebuilding... we're very grateful to those who contributed so far....



Sweet water is precious and hard to come especially after all the water tanks have been damaged.

Fundraiser Progress

Please enjoy excerpts below of our ongoing Facebook and Instagram communication during fundraising:

November 29, 2016

"We've reached 15% of our goal in 13 days towards School/Safehouse Project! We are so grateful to you all for connecting with this project via money or shares or simply prayers/good wishes for its full success. Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

December 20, 2016

"The children thank YOU from the bottoms of their hearts!!!! After a successful fundraising event over the weekend we've reached almost 16k!!!!"

December 23, 2016

Dorota: "To keep you updated on the campaign, I want to let you know that I am excited to make the first withdrawal in my name, from the fund to cover the cost of airfare for seven of us leaving for Naitauba on February 12th, 2017!!!! This is very exciting milestone towards the completion of this schoolhouse/ safehouse building. Thank you all who made this possible!!!!"

February 15, 2017

"Over 30K Pledged! Feeling grateful for such support!"



A family grateful to be alive. We're alive and strong together.



Staying HAPPY and POSITIVE is the only way FORWARD.

Management Crew, from left: Sjanon, Stan and Tonga.



Future School/Safehouse architectural drawings.



It takes lots of preparation! Naitauba school and safehouse planning stage

In collaboration with the Island management team of Chris, Cynthia, Shannon, and architect Miki, we began planning the construction, in anticipation of the February 2017 arrival of our crew.

Over many Skype meetings, we poured over details of the project and the proposed stages of execution. The collaboration was wonderful. Everyone was energized and happy to know that soon the crew would be on their way. So that no time would be wasted and our skills could be fully utilized, many tools and materials needed to be ready onsite. We considered many potential challenges and created project plans around accommodation, food, climate, health, and safety. In Toronto Canada, the months of February and March are usually very cold and masonry work slows down. Hence these are the best months to donate masons' time. We discussed the progress of the foundation work that needed to be completed by foreman Tonga and his crew prior to our arrival. There were moments when we were really concerned. Everything had to line up.



October '2016



Island Manager with Foreman Tonga and Fijian crew



February '2017



Our Team

After speaking with our employees and contractors, a crew of five masons was selected, based on availability, response and experience. Robert, Stanislaw, Ryszard, Roman and Taras, together with myself and Stan met regularly to prepare for our trip to Fiji. We started our journey at Toronto Pearson International Airport, travelling to LA, then to Nadi, Fiji and finally to Taveuni-a small "garden" island of Fiji. We spent the night on this beautiful, intimate little island, then boarded the boat, along with various indigenous people who were returning to Naitauba. Sitting amongst many cargo boxes, we made ourselves comfortable for the five hour journey. It was exciting! We were curious and happy to see what awaited us at Naitauba.



Sitting among cargo boxes, we made ourselves comfortable for the five hour journey from Taveuni to Naitauba



First site visit from Polstar Crew, from left: Ryszard, Taras, Dorota, Stanislaw, Stan, Roman, Robert



CONSTRUCTION BEGINS

February-March '2017

YAAA! Construction Begins!

We began our first day of work by enjoying a hearty breakfast in the village. Then we were taken up to the construction site. We met with the local labourer crew and Island management team, then moved ahead to set up our tools and organize the job site. The work in front of us was familiar - however the cement blocks, sand, water, and other materials and tools were unfamiliar and difficult to work with.

Weather was the greatest obstacle to getting things done. Between the rains, intense heat and humidity, it took everything we had to stay on schedule. In a jungle environment, each day brought different challenges. The local Fijian crew bonded with our masons, who learned many new skills while becoming fast friends. Much of the time, sixteen labourers were trying really hard to keep up with our Canadian crew. Without humour, optimism, and a collaborative spirit, things would not have moved so quickly. Daily, we stood in amazement seeing progress that exceeded our expectations. And there were miracles. We were very grateful to know that everyday sanctuary residents offered prayers in the main Temple for our safety, health and success of the project.



"The school site is positioned on a hill overlooking the Pacific Ocean and the village below. It was like looking at the most gorgeous postcard picture".





We even attempted to work at night, trying to do more in the cooler temperatures. However, this strategy did not work for us as we had hoped. The next day we returned to the regular day time schedule.



Meeting the school children.

On our second day, we were so happy to meet the school children who were eager to learn more about Canada, it's traditions, and history. The children were curious about each of us and our families.

"It was an emotional experience as a I recognized many of the smiling faces from the post-cyclone pictures". - Dorota

We were also very happy to meet with the principal and teachers and learn more about the educational system in the Fiji Islands.

"The experience of being invited into the villagers' homes and family lives and sharing with many laughs and stories is forever imprinted in our hearts. I personally am very impressed with the level of education and the children's vision of their futures. I sense a happy future helped by good education". - Dorota



Every day brought different challenges in this jungle environment and without humour, optimism and collaborative spirit, things could not be moving as quickly as they have. Each day we were amazed to see a progress that exceeded our expectations, miracles were readily observed and enjoyed.



*Great Joy!
Meeting the
School Children*

Stan greets the Naitauba School principal.

Stan, avid soccer player, signs the soccer balls that he brought from Canada as a gift for the children.



**MEETING
THE SCHOOL
CHILDREN**

February '2017





HEART-WARMING HOSPITALITY

We were very impressed with the hospitality and care offered to us.

We feasted on delicious meals prepared daily, breakfast, lunch, and dinner with locally sourced items from the sea, farm, and neighbouring islands. The Fijian ladies took care of our tummies and our overall well being, making sure we were comfortable, happy and healthy. For example, to keep us fresh and comfortable in this extremely humid climate, the laundry had to be done twice daily. Often during the night we would wake up and jump into cold showers to cool off and be able to sleep. Neither air conditioning nor even fans were available at night. The Island runs on generators that were shut down at 10pm. Recalling the luxuries of our Canadian lives at home in contrast to the stark simplicity of life here served as a great experience in practicing gratitude and appreciation for all that we have. Cooperation and tolerance underpinned a sense of peace that prevails throughout Island life.



In no time we befriended many wonderful Fijian villagers along with international Adidam sanctuary servers who support the many Naitauba Temples and Empowered Sacred Sites. This Island is a refuge of pilgrimage for many people. Employment of villagers is extremely important in making this Sacred Island function. No matter its many difficulties relative to lack of resources or luxuries, that back at home many of us enjoy daily: mutual love and respect are the basis for this wonderful-to-observe way of life.

"I am so impressed with the closeness of this community. You can see it as the locals live together and help one another in this small village. They are happy. It is a lesson for all of us". - Stan



Delicious food was prepared for us daily.

Happiness and optimism accompanied us throughout all daily functions and activities.

Cooperation and tolerance underpinned a sense of peace that prevails throughout Island life.





Sacred Kava Ceremony and Ceremonial Drink

We were happy to enjoy a few Kava Ceremony occasions during our stay, always honoured to be invited and treated in this very special and honoured way.

Kava is Fiji's traditional ceremonial drink. It is made from the pounded roots of a local pepper plant mixed with water and is consumed from a communal coconut shell in a ceremony visitors are invited to participate in. Everyone sits on the floor in a circle as the kava is prepared in the tanoa bowl. Then, as Fijian hosts rhythmically chant and clap, each person in the circle is invited to sip from the shell full of kava.

"A year later, on my trip to Naitauba for a school opening ceremony, I was invited to join the Village's Chief, Island management, and school principal and teachers in a very intimate occasion of a Kava Ceremony hosted on the veranda of the new school, marking this very important moment. We sat in silence. I recalled the Cyclone and all the good wishes and prayers for this project to come alive, and being grateful that it came to fruition". - Dorota

We had a pleasure to experience the Traditional Kava Ceremony on Naitauba during our visit.



Kava Fiji's traditional Drink Preparation.



Lovo Ceremony on Naitauba during our visit.

Traditional meat preparing for Lovo Ceremony.

The Lovo Traditional Meal

This traditional Fijian meal is prepared in an underground oven called a lovo. In many ways, it is like a New England clambake-except the ingredients are different. In a large underground hole, Fijians place wood and large, flat stones and heat the stones until they are red hot. They then remove the remaining wood and spread the stones out until they are flat. Then the food - pork, chicken, fish, yams, cassava, and taro - is wrapped in banana leaves and placed, the largest items first, onto the hot stones. It is covered with more banana leaves, coconut stalks, and damp burlap sacks and left to cook for about two hours. We were honoured to enjoy this wonderful meal prepared for us in appreciation of our service.





FAREWELL CELEBRATION

March '2017



Farewell celebration

We were invited to have our last lunch at the Community Centre Hall. A great celebratory banquet was prepared with care by the village women. We played music, exchanged stories and enjoyed each other's good company.

In the evening all the Fijian Villagers and our crew were invited by the sanctuary residents to the sanctuary village, for yet another celebration and night full of artistic performances, dance, and video presentations. We ate, played a soccer game, and together danced into the night, enjoying this international gathering of people that took care of each other and stood for a oneness in life all together. The next morning, we were off on the boat to Taveuni Island for a well-deserved rest, before heading back to Toronto.



2 Days of Well Deserved Relaxation for the Polstar Crew

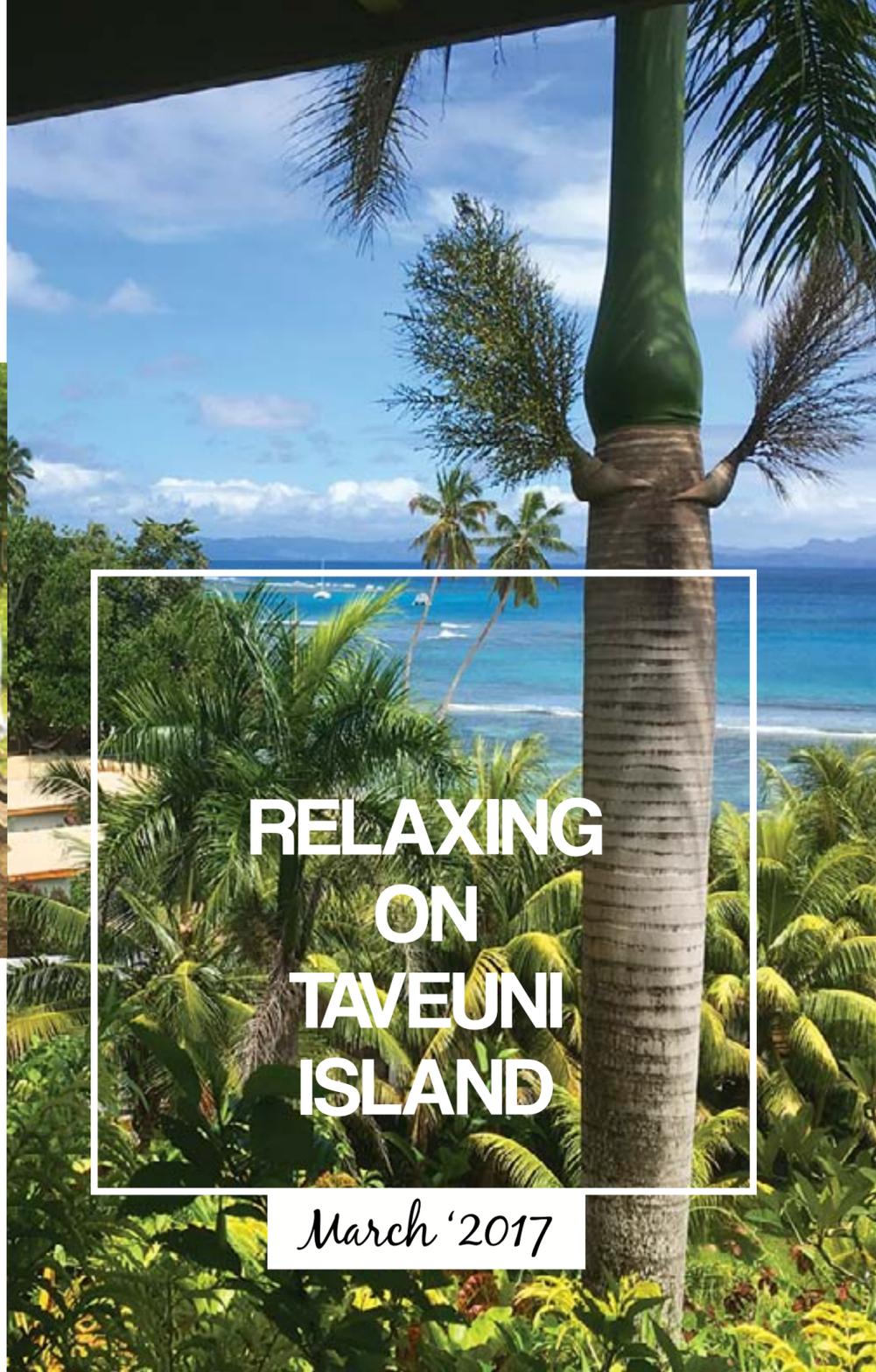
In appreciation of the extreme effort and service provided by our crew, we spent two wonderful days at Taveuni Island Resort, a beautiful set apart small cottage resort overlooking the Pacific ocean, offering all the bells and whistles in hospitality and culinary delights. We felt spoiled and were finally able to get a good night's sleep in well air-conditioned rooms, take swims in the gorgeous infinity pool, and enjoy the vast views. We visited many places on this small island, including the Timeline dividing the world into east and west.



*Taveuni
Island
Resort*



Wonderful accommodations at Taveuni Island Resort.



RELAXING
ON
TAVEUNI
ISLAND

March '2017



Happy group on the right side of the river.

Rest of the island's roads also flooded and needed to be crossed by foot.



We attempted to find help. Dorota hiked back up to get the signal on her phone to call for help. She was told to not attempt to cross the raging waters and wait for the army to come and get us. Unexpectedly, we were blessed to be rescued by local men who came with ropes and expertise to get us all back to safety. We were led behind the waterfalls, walking on a steep, narrow and slippery surface, holding on to vegetation to get to the other side. Afterwards we discussed this adventure and agreed that the experience was a gift: one of life's gestures of sharing its bounty, and a demonstration of the how things work out in mysterious ways. We could not ask for a better experience, even if it felt quite dangerous at the time. The memory of it will always stay with us and the feeling of joy in spontaneously experiencing life as children playfully do.



Unexpected Challenges...

One of the wonderful experiences was our trip to the magnificent waterfalls. Unexpectedly, flash rains poured on us while hiking through the jungle up to the waterfalls. In only an hour or two, so much rain fell that the river which we had crossed on our way up exploded to ten times the size, and the bridge was no longer visible or available for crossing.





We did it!

Celebrating School Opening

The Official School Opening celebration was marked by a visit of a representative from the Ministry of Education and red ribbon ceremony performed by one of the Adidam Hermitage highest order priests, Ruchiradama Nadikanta. The energy was high and the children could not wait to enter their new school! Finally, after many months following our departure, the two school buildings and one water tank were ready. The buildings had been completed by other tradesmen/workers. All carpentry, electrical, plumbing, framing, and finishing work was complete. The rooms were beautifully painted and furnished. The landscaping was beautiful.

Upon entering the buildings, children found colorful and happy looking walls and furniture, all brand new and ready to be used. To their amazement, they discovered inside washrooms, a luxury not previously experienced by them, all under one roof, with that gorgeous view! Everyone present felt uplifted by life's miraculous way of providing what is needed, when many come together in the spirit of community and egolessness.

"I feel there are no barriers to accomplish things if we only come together in the moment of need and make things better for oneself and others. We are forever grateful to have the opportunity to be part of this wonderful endeavour, and must say that we feel just as much gifted and served by coming into the company of all these beautiful people and their culture. Thank you". – Dorota



School ready for Official opening Ceremony.

Red ribbon ceremony performed by Ruchiradama Nadikanta.

School Principal, teachers and Village Chief accompanied by Sanctuary management team.



Colourful, clean and airy classrooms ready for happy and proud students.

Charles, island's doctor and Simon, Sanctuary resident enjoying company of curious students.

NAITAUBA OFFICIAL SCHOOL OPENING

June '2018



OUR JOURNEY

WAS ACCOMPLISHED

CHILDREN ENJOY LEARNING
IN BRAND NEW SCHOOL
& VILLAGERS HAVE A SAFE PLACE
TO TAKE SHELTER FROM EXTREME



GRADUATION CEREMONY

November ' 2018

Dorota participating in Graduation as a Guest of Honour

Graduation Ceremony in a Brand New School

"In November 2018, I was blessed once again to come back to Naitauba where I was invited to be the guest of honour in the student graduation ceremony. I was so very happy to meet the children again, and congratulate them on their accomplishments. I was embraced by the elders and children, as one of their own, and could not have been happier than to partake in this very special occasion. Looking back, who would have known that a gesture in response to a call for help could enrich one's life in this way? What has been received by me, far exceeds anything I could imagine. May we all be blessed to keep on experiencing the miracle of life lived consciously and in service to oneself and others. I am forever grateful to all residents of Naitauba and to my crew and to the many, many others that made this journey possible". - Dorota



Thank You
to All

WHO MADE THIS PROJECT
INTO A SUCCESS STORY



SPECIAL THANKS

To Our Crew who worked tirelessly:

Stan Maronski
Roman Skowron
Robert Cumming
Ryszard Piertyk
Stanislaw Kaczor
Taras Bahryi

To our sponsors and clients:

AFE Rentals Ltd.
Canadian Equipment Outfitters
Yorkwood Homes
Agnes and George Herczeg Foundation
Brampton Brick Limited
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John Casson and Monika Liberek
Duivenvoorden Haulage Ltd.
Bellegate Developments Ltd.

Also thanks to many friends and family!!!!!!!

Photography:

Miki Malinka, Robert Cumming

Stock photography:

pg. 2 cyclone - Wikimages/Pixabay, pg. 6 palm tree - HeikoBrown/Pixabay, pg. 7 map vector- Free Vector Maps, pg. 8 architectural drawings - John Dortmund/Pixabay, pg. 14 kava drink close up - Istock photo, pg. 15 lovo meal closeup and flowers arrangement - Istock, pg. 17 flowers - HOerwin56/Pixabay, pg. 20 balloons - Peggy & Marco Lachmann/Pixabay, pg. 22 - plumeria photo by Schantalao/Freeipik, back cover water image - Damon Hall/Unsplash

Graphic design and book layout:

Daria Beer @dbcreative.ca

*We couldn't have done it
without you!*



Dorota & Stan
(POLSTAR GROUP LTD.)





Printed in Canada

Feeling pride and joy of mission accomplished,
with immense gratitude to our hero - masons!!

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