

Joseph Rao of Taveuni Gets Two Gold Medals in Law School

Joseph Rao received two prestigious Gold Medals from the University of Fiji School of Law; one for being the “Outstanding Student in Law” and another overall award for being the “Outstanding Graduate in School of Law” after completing his Bachelor of Laws Degree and Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice. He holds the record for achieving the highest marks to date in UniFiji School of Law with a GPA of 4.35.

“I am honoured to have received such prestigious awards, this was only possible through my prayers and faith in God, hard work, love and support of family and friends and of course my Law Lecturers at the University of Fiji,” he said.

Joseph didn’t do well with studies in Primary and Secondary schools; one of his Secondary School Principals wrote in his academic reference that he was naturally not bright but was a hard worker, the reference reads: “Though not naturally endowed with brightness, he had more than compensated for the lack with sheer hard work.”

When asked how he got two Gold Medals in Law School, he smiled and said: “Never let anyone tell you that you’re not good enough; what you think of yourself is what matters. For me personally as a Christian, I keep God close to my heart; I believe with God there is no limit to what you can do. There are no obstacles you can’t overcome; through him all things are possible.”

Joseph comes from a humble farming background and recalls as a child he used to dread weekends and school holidays because it meant waking up early in the morning to go to the farms regardless of weather conditions.

With a deep sigh he said: “It used to be really cold in the morning and really hot during the day. It can be nice and sunny one moment and suddenly soaking wet with cold winds”.

Joseph commends his parents for their foresight and wisdom that education could open doors of opportunities for their children.

“My parents had worked so hard to put my sister and I to school, a privilege that they themselves didn’t get,” he said.

“My sister and I went to school in Taveuni, we used to walk to and from school. We studied with Hurricane Lantern. We never had pocket money. My sister and I used to stay with our kind relatives to attend Secondary School. As a child, I thought our life was tough but I realised growing up that our problems were not unique; there were so many other students who went through and are still going through similar or worse situations. I realised that all the hardships were blessings in disguise; as it taught me to value the things I have in life and be grateful. It taught me to work hard to achieve goals in life,” he said proudly.

Joseph left Secondary School for three years due to financial difficulties caused by Cyclone Ami destroying their family farms. He then collected money through planting and selling Dalo to enroll in the School of Hospitality and Tourism Studies to pursue Diploma in Hotel Management. He passed with flying colours in Tourism School and after experiencing Tourism Industry, he decided to study law.

Given Joseph’s interest in Hospitality and Tourism Industry, he decided to start his own business of running a Cafeteria which happened to be at the UniFiji Samabula Campus in Suva and 5 years since opening the cafeteria, he enrolled into UniFiji Law School as a Law Student.

He shared his inspiration on why he joined UniFiji School of Law.

“I love new challenges and constantly look for meaning in life. I knew that joining the Law School will give me a new challenge and a new purpose in life. I realised that becoming a Lawyer would allow me to meaningfully contribute towards the needs of our society. I knew that Law School was going to be tough but UniFiji provided me with much needed encouragement to excel in academia. I used to observe lecturers and students from behind the counter of the cafeteria. The students used to sit around the cafeteria arguing amongst themselves on a particular point of law; it was exciting, I wanted to know what they were saying. They carried themselves with such confidence. I spoke with some Lecturers and students about my prospects of becoming a Lawyer and they encouraged me to join the Law School,” he said.

UniFiji challenged Joseph to develop his academic and personal confidence. Apart from his studies, he represented UniFiji in 2017 ANZ Innovation Challenge and was recognised with an

award for being an outstanding student, played Mark Anthony's role in Julius Caesar play as part of School of Law's Thespian Society, participated in Bema Open Forum sessions- a platform which invites speakers such as Lawyers, Politicians, Academics and the like to talk to students on topics of interest, and he also went to Christchurch in New Zealand to represent Uni Fiji in a moot competition.

Joseph believes we make our own destinies. "I believe, your true worth is not measured by your talent, intelligence or inherited privileges for these things you are born with and it can be wasted, but, how well you do against the face of adversities is the test; it's like being a fish and running a marathon and coming first. Even if all odds are against you, with God's favour, hard work, humble and teachable attitude, you can go very far. Strive for excellence, ask a lot of questions and question the answer."

Joseph Rao attained unprecedented grades in the School of Law as stated by Professor Shaista Shameem the Vice Chancellor and the Dean of School of Law when addressing the panel of judges while moving his petition for his admission to the bar as a Lawyer.