

SHADES OF L.A. INTERVIEW PROJECT
INTERVIEW SUMMARY
ELIZABETH, KOLOKEA, AND TUIOFU FOISIA - 6/17/94
INTERVIEWER: SOJIN KIM
2 CASSETTE TAPES

SIDE A, TAPE 1

000 Silence

001 Introduction. Tuiofu Foisia, Jr. born 10/14/44. Came to San Francisco in 1955. They moved to Long Beach when his father, who was in the navy, was stationed there. 1956 they got their home in Carson.

Elizabeth Foisia first came to the U.S. in 1971. Born in Bailima(check?), Western Samoa. Moved to New Zealand in 1953. Married Tuiofu in 1973. Came to live in the U.S. permanently in 1974.

025 Tuiofu's parents were Tuiofu and Fapio (check) Foisia. Father from Manua (?) Island, village of Ofu, part of American Samoa. Mother from Savii (?), Western Samoa.

033 Father worked for the U.S. navy. Before this he was in the Fitafita--local law enforcement. The Dept. of the Navy ran the island at the time. When living in Carson, his father became involved in the church. Their family had been affiliated with the Mormon church when they lived in Hawaii, later when they came to CA. they became affiliated with the Congregational Church. His father became a full-time minister for the Samoan Congregational Church when he retired from the Navy.

051 His mother worked as a nurses aid. Trained in Samoa and continued work in U.S.

056 Family moved first to Hawaii in 1949 when his father was stationed at Pearl Harbor.

062 Ten kids in the Foisia family. 5 boys and 5 girls. One brother passed away in 1990. Tuiofu is the oldest. Ruta, Ruby, James, Harry, Wilson, Daisy, Judith, Betty, Franklin. Frank, Betty, Judy were all born in California. Tuiofu, Ruta, Ruby born in Samoa. James, Harry, Wilson, Daisy were born in Hawaii.

079 First came to San Francisco because that's where the military flights landed--came on a sea plane--landed in Alameda. Relatives drove them to Long Beach after a couple months.

090 Lived mostly in military housing in Hawaii--Pearl Harbor. Went to military schools. In California, lived in military

housing in Long Beach. Parents then bought a house in what is now Carson--their mailing address was Carson. At the time, it was mostly farmlands. It wasn't a city yet.

- 108 No Pacific Island population in the area at the time. Tuiofu didn't meet very many Pacific Island people when he first arrived in California--only the ones in the military. There were a lot in the military.
- 111 His family arrived in San Francisco. He was surprised at how cold it was. People thought that because they were from Hawaii, they were from the jungle or from a Tarzan movie.
- 157 Tuiofu was 11 when he came to Long Beach in 1955. Went to 5th grade in Long Beach, 6th grade in Carson. In Long Beach he went to Daniel Webster Elementary School. In Carson, he went to Catskill Avenue School. First day of school he experienced a similar reception as when his family arrived in San Francisco: that they were "natives."
- 182 Went to Wilmington Jr. High. Was well acclimated to the surroundings by that time. No Jr. High in Carson at the time--still farm area. Remembers math class, met a few Polynesian kids whose parents were also in the military.
- 199 The church was the central institution for the Pacific Island community at this time. First Samoan Congregational Church started in Long Beach. His father was the minister of it. Ground breaking was in Carson when they bought property and actually built a church. A group of people got together and formed a church in the late 1950s. Used to meet at the First Congregational Church in Long Beach--still on 3rd St.--a historic landmark. Church allowed them to use the facilities for free. Prior to the church in Long Beach, the services were held at the Foisia's home in Carson. People felt the need to worship in their own language--as a means of keeping a tie to their homeland.
- 223 People would come to the services from other states and stay the weekend. They would hold meetings, choir practices and dance practices. Tuiofu would sneak off when everyone else was busy with the activities.
- 257 People from Samoa in California would find out about one another through word of mouth. Tuiofu's father became involved in the church because some people from San Diego came up to Carson to meet him
- 268 How his father became a minister. There was a Samoan Church in San Diego--the first such church in California. It seems that back in the 1950s and 60s everything having to do with the Samoan community centered in Southern California. Navy people from San Diego were being transferred up to Long Beach. Members of the church in San Diego talked to

Tuiofu's father about starting a church in Long Beach. Father had a very strong personality--confident, forged ahead.

- 316 The eldest from the mother church in the islands gave approval for the establishment of the church and for Tuiofu's father to be the lay minister. His father was required to take courses at a theological school in order to be ordained. 4-5 other men were also trained and ordained to be lay ministers. Liz and her family came to the United States from New Zealand for the ordination.
- 344 Tuiofu's father retired from the military in 1962. Then went to work in Torrance for Douglas Aircraft. Took a while to get the church started and get ordained. Purchased property on Figueroa St., held fund raisers for the building. When his father got his certificate he blew it up really large and hung it in the living room.
- 360 Liz first met Tuiofu, when she came with her father to the ordination. Her father was the representative from New Zealand.
- 363 Liz's parents have always been in the ministry. They went to Catholic schools in Samoa--only good schools accepting non-Europeans. Her grandfather and great grandfather were also ministers. She thinks her father was forced into the ministry--as the eldest. Moved family to New Zealand in 1953, left the ministry, and went to work in the post office. (He moved in 1952--the rest of the family moved 1953--mother, two brothers, sister, and Liz joined him.) There was an established Pacific Island community in New Zealand. PICC--Pacific Island Congregational Church. Samoan church was established in New Zealand in 1962. Her father then went back into the ministry.
- 464 Liz first came to the U.S. in 1971 for the church conference. Her family got lost on the freeway in a taxi on their way to their cousin's house. They eventually had the driver take them to the Foisia's house instead.
- 527 Liz is the only daughter. Has an adopted sister who left the family when Liz was 6 years old. When Liz came to the U.S. in 1971 she was pregnant. Her family came for the conference and also to leave Liz with family in California. Her son was born in CA. at Harbor General Hospital. Became friends with Tuiofu while living in CA. In 1972, Liz returned to New Zealand. Tuiofu came to New Zealand to visit. They got married in 1973. Liz returned to CA in 1974.

[Kea joins interview]

- 642 Tuiofu finished high school in 1962 and joined the army in

1963--stationed in Germany. After he returned home, he went to Harbor College for one year, and then got a job w/ United Airlines.

671 The things that most impressed Liz when she first came to the United States: Black people, police officers carrying guns, the largeness, the amount of television channels, the freeways, and the fact that people could speak their own language (other than English) in public.

735 Introduce Kea Foisia

End of SIDE A, TAPE 1

SIDE B, TAPE 1

000 Silence

001 Kea Foisia, maiden name Momoli. Arrived in CA. in 1964 because her father was in the Navy. Her family had lived in Honolulu prior to this. They moved to San Diego when her father was stationed there. When he retired, they found a home in Carson.

010 Born in Pago Pago, American Samoa in 1949.

014 Moved to Carson because they had relatives there already. Also, it's near the ocean--can obtain food like fish.

016 She had, at one time, intended to become a nun. Boarded for three years at Notre Dame Prep. for high school--in Sunland, Tujunga--near Glendale. When she graduated she took classes at Harbor College and then got a job at Carson City Hall doing general office/payroll.

024 In Hawaii, it was a melting pot. They were used to Asian and Polynesian cultures, but they were surprised at how many black people there were here. Kea's family was worried about the Civil Rights movement when they arrived in 1964. They were afraid that they were going to be treated as bad as black people.

037 Kea indicates that the many young Samoans in California adopted aspects of the black movement. When the Watts riots started, they were concerned that the violence would spread to Long Beach.

047 In the mid-1960s, a group of people started an organization called "Omai Faatasi," which was a spin off of the black civil rights movement geared to Samoans.

065 Omai Faatasi was formed as a means to search for their Samoan identity. There had been a social club called USO--

United Samoan Organizations--that held dances. Some older people considered Omai Faatasi to be too radical. Kea feels that the organization did not carry their mission far enough in terms of addressing their own culture--they identified too much with Hispanics and the black movement.

- 088 Omai Faatasi means "come together." They were identified as radical for the way they dressed and because some of them became interested in the writings and ideas of Carl Marx and Malcolm X.
- 114 In high school, Tuiofu played football at Banning High. Initially he had signed up for baseball, but the coach told him to sign up for football instead. Tuiofu didn't know anything about football when he signed up. His first day of practice was like his first day in the military.
- 136 Eventually it got to be more fun. The only reason they put him on the team was because of his size. His younger brothers also played football.
- 147 Kea was in boarding school/convent-type school for high school. On weekends, it was chaos--different world. Felt out of place. Enjoyed the football games. Her brothers were also very involved in football. Didn't go to dances, the crowds made her nervous. Eventually she came to enjoy the world outside her boarding school more.
- 165 They would all congregate at Scott Park (in Carson on Catskill): volleyball, picnics, discuss issues of identity.
- 180 They would also go to Wilmington Hall--a gym/park. Also went to dances at Filipino Hall, VFW hall, and various night clubs/restaurants: Latitude 20, Mr. C's in Long Beach. They didn't go out of their neighborhood much although they did like to go to the Martial Arts and Samurai movies in L.A.--Toho(?) La Brea Theatre --movie theatre on La Brea, and Kokusai(?) in the Crenshaw area.
- 204 It was Tuiofu's interests that influenced the younger teenagers--sports and music (R & B; Motown; Sergio Mendez and the Brazil 66). His brothers used to borrow his car, Oldsmobile--take turns.
- 241 Kea met the Foisia family through relatives. Fathers had been in the Fitafita together in Samoa. Her brothers knew the Foisia brothers.
- 252 Harry Foisia [husband] had been a friend of Kea's brother. They got married in the 1970s.
- 259 Organizations involved in now. The most important thing for them now is politics. Liz is involved in lots of community activities. Importance of voting. Importance of passing on

activism to younger generation. Omai Faatasi is no longer in existence though people who were in it are still around. Chuck Furitani, father of Warren Furitani, was involved in Omai Faatasi.

- 280 Church activities are important as well. Samoan Federation 404(?) programs are important. Office of Samoan Affairs. Involvement in other Asian American organizations.
- 293 Important issues that they are working with: representation; need to educate youth and encourage them to get into offices that make policy decisions; encourage kids to seek higher education.
- 305 Liz contrasts situation in New Zealand to situation among Samoan youth in CA during the 1960s--more social consciousness, cultural awareness in CA. During 80s, more political involvement in New Zealand among young Samoans. Samoan language movement catalyzed by black movement in the United States. Students from New Zealand who visited Liz in CA. were inspired to go back to New Zealand and mobilize in response to various political/social issues.
- 342 Liz became motivated politically a few years ago in unsuccessful efforts to rename Scott Park to Harry T. Foisia Memorial Park. Again, this effort was influenced by African American efforts in same area--existing parks named after African American private citizens. They feel the Samoan presence should be more recognized now.
- 378 Other recent events of concern to Samoan community: beating of the Dole (?) family in Cerritos; shooting of the Tualaulelei brothers.
- 400 Must have a cohesive voice to be recognized. Importance of education. They are also all involved in the Association of Pacific Islander Educators.
- 418 Importance of passing on culture to younger generations. Their parents always stressed family. Tuiofu's father used to say that the problem with Americans is that they don't know how far back their families go. His father could trace his family back to the first one that landed on the islands.
- 435 Kea explains about the Samoan Ba'tai system, which pulls a chief that serves as the head of the household and the family. It is important to have customs and to identify with the Samoan culture but it is also important to adapt it to life in the United States. It is important that the language be taught to the children as well.
- 457 Kea refers to the movie the Joy Luck Club and Kea reflects upon the endurance of her own mother.

469 When Liz was growing up, family, culture, and church were the values that were stressed. She passes on the importance of these things to her children. It is also important to have respect for parents and elder family members, and for those in authority--particularly the church. The minister is like the head of the family.

489 The chief system. Chiefs should understand that it's hard to be 100% in that system. Kea's husband Harry felt they needed to adjust. Their true culture of "Fa'a-Samoa" is very hard to follow in the U.S. It's very strict.

504 Harry Foisia took the title of chief. Went back to Samoa and went through the ceremonies.

538 Chiefs are taken very seriously at social functions and family functions. There is a regular high chief and a high talking chief.

546 Liz and Tuiofu Foisia's children were born and raised in the U.S. but are still strong in the culture. 19-year old son went to Samoa to live with his uncle--learn language (there is an every day language and a formal language) and customs.

566 The chief's name and title also identifies village, family, and status of people.

575 Interviewee comments on family photographs copied for the Shades of L.A. collection

585 S-006-136
Kea with her mother when she was 2 years old. Getting ready to take trip on U.S.S. Jackson to come to Hawaii. Hardships endured by mother. Other women in neighborhood would look down on her.

609 S-006-138
When mother became Americanized she insisted that they always dress up. In 1964 when they went to Disneyland, she made her kids dress up in their Sunday best.

626 S-006-142
Harry Foisia receiving award from City Council of Carson. Harry worked in the Public Safety Dept. of the City of Carson. Also involved in talking with youth, counseling youth, encouraging them to stay in school. Involved in Boys and Girls Club and Scholarship Organization. Importance of "The Brotherhood"--older brothers and other older men from the community--promoted cultural awareness and pride. Believe strongly that they must promote their identity and concerns.

731 When Tuiofu returned from the service in '66 he noticed that

the Samoan community had grown. He was surprised when he went into the market and saw more than five Samoans in there at one time. The increase in churches also indicated an increase in the population.

740 End of SIDE B, TAPE 1

SIDE A, TAPE 2

000 Silence

001 (cont. from Tape 2) When it became apparent that the Samoan community had grown. When Tuiofu went to the store and when he went to church. There were more churches being built.

010 S-005-867 Ground breaking of property that the church bought. Minister from San Diego that was instrumental in getting Tuiofu's father involved in the church in Long Beach.

018 S-005-861 Tuiofu's nephew at Minister's house on 21224 S. Figueroa (1979). There were never locks on the doors to the minister's house.

032 S-005-858 Liz w/ son and cousin in 1971.

037 S-005-863 Opening presents at Foisia family. Picture shows how they continue as a family. Picture taken just after Tuiofu's mother died.

044 S-005-854 Tuiofu's niece (12/25/89). Half-Samoan, half-Chinese--Franklin Foisia's daughter.

050 S-005-845 Baptism of Franklin Foisia--photograph from Independent March 10, 1958. Newspaper caption had mentioned that one of the brothers would become chief of the family. Liz and Kea went to the library to find the article after they saw an old clipping that their brother had saved. Same minister from ground-breaking did the baptism.

074 S-005-852 Foisia family w/ Liz's relatives from New Zealand in front of their home.

080 End of interview
Remainder of Tape 2 is blank

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SHADES OF L.A. INTERVIEW PROJECT
TRANSCRIBED EXCERPTS

Accession #:

INTERVIEWEES: ELIZABETH FOISIA, KOLOKEA FOISIA, TUIOFU FOISIA, JR.
INTERVIEWER: SOJIN KIM
DATE OF INTERVIEW: 6/17/94
LOCATION: CARSON, CALIFORNIA
ETHNICITY: SAMOAN AMERICAN
TRANSCRIBER: SOJIN KIM

INTERVIEW NUMBER: SH-
NUMBER OF DAT TAPES: 1
NUMBER OF CASSETTE TAPES: 2

SK: Sojin Kim
LF: Elizabeth "Liz" Foisia
KF: Kolokea "Kea" Foisia
TF: Tuiofu Foisia, Jr.

These excerpts have been selected for the purposes and use of the Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection. They represent only small portions of the tape recorded interviews available for public use. Researchers are advised to refer to the actual tape recorded interviews.

Note: Interviews were recorded on DAT (Digital Audio Tape) and transferred to standard cassette tape for transcribing and listening purposes. The three digit numbers are indexed from the cassette recording and not the original DAT recording. These numbers may be used as a guide for locating indexed information on the cassette tapes. In some cases, the numbers on the transcript may not correspond exactly to the counter readings on the cassette player.

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079 First came to San Francisco because that's where the military flights landed--came on a sea plane--landed in Alameda. Relatives drove them to Long Beach after a couple months.

090 Lived mostly in military housing in Hawaii--Pearl Harbor. Went to military schools. In California, lived in military housing in Long Beach. Parents then bought a house in Carson.

TF: 102 It wasn't Carson then.

LF: And plus you said around that time there wasn't hardly anything though. It was mostly farmlands and stuff. So he probably kind of like thought of that more as back on the islands I guess. It wasn't city.

TF: 106 Well, when we came here it was quite open. That used to be called--our mailing address there was Torrance.

108 No Pacific Island population in the area at the time. Tuiofu didn't meet very many Pacific Island people when he first arrived in California--only the ones in the military. There were a lot in the military.

SK: 111 Can you tell me then about how the move here struck you when you first got here. What are the experiences or the memories you have of the impression you had?

TF: Oh geez, the impressions I got was...well, they said "Long Beach," so I thought "Gee, this is great. I'm going to live on a Long Beach and go swimming everyday." And when we got here all I saw were these big buildings." The biggest thing I could see was it wasn't green. I looked around and I said "God." I wanted to go back to Hawaii. It was cloudy, it was cold, and it wasn't green. Because I remember when we got into the airport, the guy said it was 65 degrees outside. I thought I was in Alaska. I remember when they said "It's 65 degrees outside. Welcome to California." When I stepped off the airplane I thought I was dying. I looked around, I didn't see the sun. I didn't see anything green. I just remember I just sat in that waiting room and though "Geez, what happened?"

132 And then they took us around San Francisco and I couldn't believe --it seems like I was closed in. All these houses were all stuck together. People walking all over the place; up and down the hills. This is definitely not America.

LF: Not the paradise you were--

TF: It's really something. And then the people that we met, they would ask us "Where are you from?" I said "We just came from Hawaii." And they thought we just came out of the jungle. And I said "No, we got streets, we have cars, we have buildings." They thought we were out of a Tarzan movie.

LF: (laughs) He just swung down from a vine. Oh god.

TF: 143 That's the impression they had of us.

SK: What sorts of questions would people ask you?

TF: They'd ask us "Why do we speak funny?" Because when we came from Hawaii I guess we had that what you call "Hawaiian accent." And that was the biggest thing, why did we speak funny. And the second questions was "Why don't you wear shoes?"

LF: You didn't wear shoes?

TF: No, in Hawaii we didn't have to. We only wore shoes when we went to school. After school we took them off. [...]

157 Tuiofu was 11 when he came to Long Beach in 1955. Went to 5th grade in Long Beach, 6th grade in Carson. In Long Beach he went to Daniel Webster Elementary School. In Carson, he went to Catskill Avenue School. First

day of school he experienced a similar reception as when his family arrived in San Francisco:

TF: 167 Geez, you're from the jungle. Yeah, that's us. Well, they called us "natives." And I couldn't understand what that word "native" was until I saw some of the Jungle Jim and Tarzan movies. And then I knew what a "native" was. I thought a native was somebody indigenous to the country. But no, the natives were the guys carrying the--

LF: --the spears, and the grass skirts, right?

TF: That's what people around here thought of people from Hawaii. Right out of the jungle.

SK: 176 Did they even know where Samoa was?

TF: No, they hadn't even heard of Samoa. In fact a lot of them hadn't even heard of Hawaii.

LF: And now it's a state.

182 He went to Wilmington Jr. High. Was well acclimated to the surroundings by that time. No Jr. High in Carson at the time--still farm area. Remembers math class, met a few Polynesian kids whose parents were also in the military.

199 The church was the central institution for the Pacific Island community at this time. First Samoan Congregational Church started in Long Beach. His father was the minister of it. Ground breaking was in Carson when they bought property and actually built a church. A group of people got together and formed a church in the late 1950s. Used to meet at the First Congregational Church in Long Beach--still on 3rd St.--a historic landmark. Church allowed them to use the facilities for free. Prior to the church in Long Beach, the services were held at the Foisia's home in Carson.

LF: 220 Just a group of them got together and they just felt that they needed to worship in their own language. And it was like...I think that was the only way to kind of like keep that strong tie to your homeland.

TF: 223 But at that time we didn't live close together to these people. They came from Los Angeles...god, they came from long [distances]. Some of them were--

LF: --in other states, but they would come for the weekend.

SK: They all stayed at your house?

TF: A lot of them would.

229 At least 20 people in addition to the Foisia family
 would be present.

LF: 239 When we're talking and sharing memories and stuff,
he'll say "Yeah, I remember a whole bunch of people, hanging out
all over, in the front, in the rooms, we couldn't even walk
anywhere. There were people all over the place." I can just
imagine. He goes "We never had a room to sleep. We always had
people there."

TF: I guess they call that "time sharing" now.

SK: What did you call it then?

TF: (laughs) We called it "we were just out in the cold." First
come, first serve.

249 During the weekend services there were meetings, choir
 practices, dance practices. Tuiofu would sneak off
 because the family would be so busy during these times.

257 People found out about one another through word of
 mouth.

TF: 258 When there's just a few of you, you go a long way just
to try to meet another [...] One would meet up with somebody and
then that was it. They'd actually search out somebody from the
islands. In fact that's how my father got involved. People from
San Diego came to look for him.

268 Description of how his father became a minister. There
 was a Samoan Church in San Diego--the first such church
 in California. It seems that back in the 1950s and 60s
 everything having to do with the Samoan community
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the church to be established, and for him to be the pastor--or
not the pastor, but be the lay minister. But he was required to

take the necessary courses here in a school here, in an established theological school so that he could be ordained. Otherwise he would have had to go back to the islands and attend the school there, the theological college there--which was impossible, he had the family, job here. So he and several other lay ministers--most of them were all military people--because from his church, the first church here in the South Bay area, sprung up all other churches too. They were all lay ministers. None of them were originally ordained. And there were about 4 or 5 of them. So it took a while before he became an ordained minister, but prior to that he didn't charge and was the lay minister. So when they completed their courses, that's when I came here because my dad was an elder minister from the same church in New Zealand. So we came here for the ordination of these ministers and his dad was one of them.

344 His father retired from the military in 1962. Then went to work in Torrance for Douglas Aircraft. Took a while to get the church started and get ordained. Purchased property on Figueroa St., held fund raisers for the building. When his father got his certificate he blew it up really large and hung it in the living room.

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464 Liz first came to the U.S. in 1971 for the church conference.

LT: 469 That was a long story. We got lost on the freeway. We were supposed to go and stay with my dad's cousin here in Carson and then contact his father [Tuiofu] to let him know because his father was coordinating all the outside visitors. So he was supposed to contact his dad to say "O.K. we're here." And then he was going to come on his own and leave my mom and me with

family. But instead the taxi was going round and round and round and couldn't find the street where my Aunt was at. So my dad was frustrated because by this time we were circling Carson almost two hours because it's one of those streets--it wasn't on the map--

TF: --unincorporated area.

LT: Right. And the poor taxi driver was so frustrated. And my mother was almost hysterical. First time she'd seen a black man. And the taxi driver happened to be a black man. And she was getting hysterical in the back seat. She kept tapping my dad's shoulder, "Where's he taking us, where's he taking us?" You know, speaking in Samoan. And my dad kept turning around "Have faith. Don't worry. He's O.K. The poor man, he's lost." And my mother was near tears. So finally my dad told the taxi driver "Look, I have a friend--a fellow minister--that maybe you should just take us there and he'll contact our family." Well, the minister happened to be Junior's father. So we pull up into this big old parking lot and I remember my brother in law, who passed away, Harry was the one who opened the door and led us in. And they were having a church bingo game at the time, so sent someone over to the church hall to let them know there were some ministers from New Zealand. And I remember when I opened my mouth to say "Is this the Reverend Foisia's house?" I know I must have had a real heavy accent then, I've lost it now. But his brother's mouth just opened and he just looked at me like "Where's she from? From outer space?" Because I guess they hadn't had any contact with any people from New Zealand--Samoans.

512 Welcomed by Foisia family.

527 Liz is the only daughter. Has an adopted sister who left the family when Liz was 6 years old. When Liz came to the U.S. in 1971 she was pregnant. Her family came for the conference and also to leave Liz with family in California. Her son was born in CA. at Harbor General Hospital. Became friends with Tuiofu while living in CA. In 1972, Liz returned to New Zealand. Tuiofu came to New Zealand to visit. They got married in 1973. Liz returned to CA in 1974.

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642 Tuiofu finished high school in 1962 and joined the army in 1963--stationed in Germany. After he returned home, he went to Harbor College for one year, and then got a job w/ United Airlines.

SK: 671 [Q. to Liz] How did it strike you when you first came to Southern California.

LF: Like I said, the first thing that I saw that---was the black Americans because we don't see them in New Zealand. And it was a real eye opener. It was like "Wow, a black man." That's exactly my reaction. And guns--police officers at home don't carry guns and so that was real scary. And just the size, just the hugeness of this place. It was like something out of the movies. I was just so fascinated. And then hearing people speak their own language. Because in New Zealand it's so rude when you speak your own language. See we call the white folks over there "Europeans," I don't know why, but that's the term that is used in New Zealand for white people. And boy they look at you real strange if you speak in your own language. And so you grew up--and like even in school, you don't speak your own language or you get told off. And it's like you have to whisper to each other if you want to speak your own language. But when I came here, boy, I heard all those languages floating backwards and forwards, and nobody turns a head. So that was another thing that really got me.

The freeways. Oh my goodness. I thought I was gonna die when I went on the freeways over here. Back home it's just like two lanes. Television. All these channels on T.V. Just last year we got our third channel in New Zealand.

[...]

735 Introduce Kea Foisia
End of SIDE A, TAPE 1

SIDE B, TAPE 1

000 Silence

001 Kea Foisia, maiden name Momoli. Arrived in CA. in 1964 because her father was in the Navy. Her family had lived in Honolulu prior to this. They moved to San Diego when her father was stationed there. When he retired, they found a home in Carson.

010 Born in Pago Pago, American Samoa in 1949.

014 Moved to Carson because they had relatives there already. Also, it's near the ocean--can obtain food like fish.

016 She had, at one time, intended to become a nun. Boarded for three years at Notre Dame Prep. for high school--in Sunland, Tujunga--near Glendale. When she graduated she took classes at Harbor College and then got a job at Carson City Hall doing general office/payroll.

SK: 024 I've asked them the same question, when you first came here what most struck you about southern California?

KF: 025 Well, in Hawaii it's a melting pot so we were used to the different culture. But just like Liz said, it was terrible because we had a fear already of the Civil Rights movement so by the time we arrived in '64, things were already heavy. And of course it was the black situation--that we were going to be treated just as bad. So upon arrival, that's what we were looking at. We could not get over the many blacks that were already here. We were used to the other cultures: Asian and Polynesian. And with the way we were treated also was that they didn't understand who we were. But it was mostly understanding the black movement and of course, the year after that in '65 was the Watts riot. And by that time there was a lot of fear that things were going to get even worse--and unfortunately it's not quite better now.

SK: 035 I actually wanted to ask you what that was like--and you [Liz] kind of came on the tail end of that--what it was like being in southern California during the Civil Rights movement, during Vietnam?

KF: 037 At that time I was a teenager and our first fear was--we went through Anaheim and Long Beach--where it started to have trouble there. But the watching it on T.V. and the "Burn, Baby Burn" issue or motto that they made, it was horrifying for all of us. We were afraid that we were going to be in the middle of it also because of the color of our skin. But it was just a lot of injustice. And as the years went on we just felt like we were part of that, or just on the tail end. That we were always going to be mistreated in the same manner. So in a way we adopted some of that black movement; to have better treatment for everybody, here in the United States. Hawaii was a little different. Everybody accepted each other and I believe a lot of the blacks enjoyed living in Hawaii. But we watched it on T.V. for several days and we were afraid that it was going to come down to our area eventually.

LF: 047 That's right because those guys there [points at Tuiofu] started something didn't you, Junior.

TF: No, I didn't start anything.

LF: Oh yes you did.

TF: But as far as the riots, I was at Germany at the time so I was pretty well removed from it.

SK: What was Liz just referring to?

LF: Well, the organization that you guys started up. You know it was something, I believe that came out of--

TF: Omai Faatasi. It's kind of like a spin off of the Civil Rights-type black movement. And this was geared mostly to Samoans--trying to get our piece of the pie.

SK: What year did you start it?

TF: That was late '60s because I was just out of the military then. So it was after '66.

SK: So it was an organization or a movement?

TF: An organization.

SK: Is there a movie made about that?

TF: No.

KF: I believe there was a video. By Asian American Drug Abuse Program [...]

SK: 065 Could you tell me more about the organization, who started it--?

TF: [to Kea] You're probably better at that because your husband was really involved in it. My brother, he was kind of right in the middle of things. I just came along as his brother.

KF: It was a search for identity--for our own people. A lot of our kids began to realize that we didn't know too much of our culture. And so they began as a social club with USO--United Samoan Organization. And that was just to gather them together and have dances and express themselves like the blacks were doing and the Mexicans or Hispanics. Then eventually it wasn't enough because we just felt that a lot of the kids hadn't found themselves through the education process and we were being neglected or ignored. So of course the education thing came across and that we needed to tutor a lot of our kids to stay in school. And that's where it started to move in that direction. And that's when he [Harry] came in and became more involved. But USO was a social club. It was Omai Faatasi that some people label as radical--too extreme for a lot of our older parents, the elders in the community. It was there to help the children that were coming from the islands into the mainstream here and identifying that it's O.K. to be who we are and to express ourselves. But to this day they've identified too much with the gang-banging, the Hispanics, and the Black movement, rather than addressing our own culture. But Omai Faatasi was the stepping stone and unfortunately we should have carried it further but a lot of us had to go on for our own lives and search jobs. So

we're looking to our other generation to move into now--it seems to be politics. That's the main thing now.

LF: 088 Omai Faatasi means "come together."

SK: What are examples of type of thing you did that made other people think you were a more radical arm?

KF: I think it was the manner of dress. We had afro hairdos--that was part of the expression. But again it was whatever the hippy movement, that type of thing. Also we began to read a little bit about Carl Marx and Malcolm X. Some of the children were believing in that philosophy. And of course it was a struggle between what Martin Luther King--I was a shame because we had to look to them for that type of identity and third world activities that were going on. But finally say "Well education is the key" and that we have to educate our parents also to understand us. It's not right to protest or demonstrate...at that time.

[...]

That's when his brother said it's not good to fight the system. We better work within to make the change. Find something that we believe in and adopting some of those principles.

TF: Getting some of those radical ideas...like burning the city down.

KF: 108 That was getting too violent.

TF: That was just talking about these things. I said "Nope, this isn't for me."

SK: 114 Can you talk about your high school and teen age years--activities or places that you used to go to?

TF: Well, my high school years were just school and playing football.

SK: You played football?

TF: Yeah, but originally I had signed up to play baseball because at that time I didn't know what football was--in the early '60s. So I had gone in and I was going to sign up for the baseball team, and the coach took one look at me and said, "No, you don't want to play baseball. You go and see this coach." so I went to see them and that's what I found out that what I was signed up for was football. I knew nothing about football. I didn't even know what it was. I didn't even know the rules. So my whole tenth grade year was finding out what this game's all about.

SK: 124 What was the first practice like?

TF: The first practice I was in a daze because there were people yelling at you. I would compare that first day to my first day in the military. It was no different. People screaming at you, pushing you. Gosh after the first day, I didn't know what I was doing there. I didn't even know what this game was about.

SK: What position did they make you play?

TF: I thought I was a tackling dummy for a while because they just stick you up in front and they tell you "The guy with the ball, you go for him." But they didn't tell you all these other guys would be trying to knock you out of the way.

136 Played football for Banning High School. Eventually it got to be more fun. The only reason they put him on the team was because of his size. His younger brothers also played football.

147 Kea was in boarding school/convent-type school for high school. On weekends, it was chaos--different world. Felt out of place. Enjoyed the football games. Her brothers were also very involved in football. Didn't go to dances, the crowds made her nervous. Eventually she came to enjoy the world outside her boarding school more.

165 They would all congregate at Scott Park (in Carson on Catskill): volley ball, picnics, discuss issues of identity.

180 They would also go to Wilmington Hall--a gym/park. Also went to dances at Filipino Hall, VFW hall, and various night clubs/restaurants: Latitude 20, Mr. C's in Long Beach. They didn't go out of their neighborhood much although they did like to go to the Martial Arts and Samurai movies in L.A.--Toho(?) La Brea Theatre --movie theatre on La Brea, and Kokusai(?) in the Crenshaw area.

204 It was Tuiofu's interests that influenced the younger teenagers--sports and music (R & B; Motown; Sergio Mendez and the Brazil 66). His brothers used to borrow his car, Oldsmobile--take turns.

241 Kea met the Foisia family through relatives. Fathers had been in the Fitafita together in Samoa. Her brothers knew the Foisia brothers.

252 Harry Foisia [husband] had been a friend of Kea's brother. They got married in the 1970s.

- 259 Organizations involved in now. The most important thing for them now is politics. Liz is involved in lots of community activities. Importance of voting. Importance of passing on activism to younger generation. Omai Faatasi is no longer in existence though people who were in it are still around. Chuck Furitani, father of Warren Furitani, was involved in Omai Faatasi.
- 280 Church activities are important as well. Samoan Federation 404(?) programs are important. Office of Samoan Affairs. Involvement in other Asian American organizations.
- 293 Issues with which they are involved: representation; need to educate youth and encourage them to get into offices that make policy decisions; encourage kids to seek higher education.
- 305 Liz contrasts situation in New Zealand to situation among Samoan youth in CA during the 1960s--more social consciousness, cultural awareness in CA. During 80s, more political involvement in New Zealand among young Samoans. Samoan language movement catalyzed by black movement in the United States. Students from New Zealand who visited Liz in CA. were inspired to go back to New Zealand and mobilize in response to various political/social issues.
- 342 Liz became motivated politically a few years ago in unsuccessful efforts to rename Scott Park to Harry T. Foisia Memorial Park. Again, this effort was influenced by African American efforts in same area--existing parks named after African American private citizens. They feel the Samoan presence should be more recognized now.
- 378 Other recent events of concern to Samoan community: beating of the Dole (?) family in Cerritos; shooting of the Tualaulelei brothers.
- 400 Must have a cohesive voice to be recognized. Importance of education. They are also all involved in the Association of Pacific Islander Educators.
- 418 Importance of passing on culture to younger generations. Their parents always stressed family.
- TF: 428 My father always told me "That's what's wrong with Americans is that they don't know how far back their family goes. They can only go so far and that's it." My father says he can

trace his family back to the first one that landed on the island. And that's what he tries to pass on to us and that's what we have to pass on to our kids is that family is what it's all about.

KF: 435 I agree with him. And also we have a lot of customs. And we have a ba'tai(?) system that pulls the chief that's head of the household and the family. Now we agree with that also but we believe that it needs to be somewhat amended in a way that it can deal with what's going on today. We trust our chiefs but we believe that like all systems it can be abused. And we have, of course, our respect for our reverend--you see many Samoan churches here. We identify with our culture and our customs and it's important that the children know, but also to somewhat adapt with the modern culture or modern civilization as we call it, and realize that's what holds us together. That's what makes us unique. But we need to deal with it in a way that is going to promote the youth and our people and not create a hardship in the many senses.

The chiefs are good and they need to teach the language. That's why we can't lose it. But other than that I think the love of our homeland and what the stories our parents have told us.

[...]

457 Movie the Joy Luck Club--Kea reflects upon the endurance of her own mother.

LF: 469 Family, our culture, and church. These are three things that have always been stressed in my family growing up. Coming here to the states now, I believe that those are the three things that we always stressed to our kids. That as a family we have to be supportive of each other and we have to stay together and we have to respect our roles in the family. We stress respect for the parents, respect for our elder family members. And respect for those in authority. And especially church. That's a very strong factor. Your family just automatically carries on over to your church. The minister there is like the head also of your family. You know if you have any problems, you know your minister is there.

But then also like Kea said, you know, we have this ma'tai (ba'tai?) or this Chief System in place in our culture, and that's very important. But like she said when you're living here in America, you know, our chiefs have to understand sometimes it's difficult for us to be 100% in that way, in that chief system. So we have to try and...her husband [Harry Foisia] this type of thinking that we have to adjust somehow so that it's easier on us because our true culture or the "Fa'a-Samoa" is very, very hard to follow here in America.

TF: It's very strict.

504 Harry Foisia took the title of chief. Went back to Samoa and went through the ceremonies.

538 Chiefs are taken very seriously at social functions and family functions. There is a regular high chief and a high talking chief. This is part of the culture that the children grow up in.

LF: 542 I'm very proud of the fact that our children, who were born and raised here, now they're very, very strong in the culture, and they really respect that [the Chief system]. So I'm very proud of that because I don't know about the other Samoan kids. That's something that as a group we want to see.

TF: 546 Just recently, our son who's nineteen, he just volunteered to go back to the island and stay with my uncle. My uncle says that by the time he comes back he should be well versed in the language and customs. Because when they speak there's different words they use--it's not the everyday words.

LF: There's an everyday language and a formal language that is spoken by the chiefs only and the elders and the ministers. So when you're in a formal gathering you don't speak your regular language because it's very rude. So you have to know the correct way to address and the proper language to use.

566 The chief's name and title also identifies village, family, and status of people.

575 Interviewee comments on family photographs copied for the Shades of L.A. collection

585 S-006-136
Kea with her mother when she was 2 years old. Getting ready to take trip on U.S.S. Jackson to come to Hawaii. Hardships endured by mother. Other women in neighborhood would looked down on her.

609 S-006-138
When mother became Americanized she insisted that they always dress up. In 1964 when they went to Disneyland, she made her kids dress up in their Sunday best.

626 S-006-142
Harry Foisia receiving award from City Council of Carson. Harry worked in the Public Safety Dept. of the City of Carson. Also involved in talking with youth, counseling youth, encouraging them to stay in school. Involved in Boys and Girls Club and Scholarship Organization. Importance of "The Brotherhood"--older brothers and other older men from

the community--promoted cultural awareness and pride. Believe strongly that they must promote their identity and concerns.

731 Tuiofu noticed that the Samoan community had grown when he returned from the service in 1966. He was surprised when he went into the market and saw more than five Samoans in there at one time. The increase in churches also indicated a growth in population.

740 End of SIDE B, TAPE 1

SIDE A, TAPE 2

000 Silence

001 (cont. from Tape 2) Tuiofu noticed that the Samoan community had grown when he went to the store and when he went to church. There were more churches being built.

010 S-005-867
Ground breaking of property that the church bought. Minister from San Diego that was instrumental in getting Tuiofu's father involved in the church in Long Beach.

018 S-005-861
Tuiofu's nephew at Minister's house on 21224 S.Figueroa (1979). There were never locks on the doors to the minister's house.

032 S-005-858
Liz w/ son and cousin in 1971.

037 S-005-863
Opening presents at Foisia family. Picture shows how they continue as a family. Picture taken just after Tuiofu's mother died.

044 S-005-854
Tuiofu's niece (12/25/89). Half-Samoan, half-Chinese--Franklin Foisia's daughter.

050 S-005-845
Baptism of Franklin Foisia--photograph from Independent March 10, 1958. Newspaper caption had mentioned that one of the brothers would become chief of the family. Liz and Kea went to the library to find the article after they saw an old clipping that their brother had saved. Same minister from ground-breaking did the baptism.

074 S-005-852
Foisia family w/ Liz's relatives from New Zealand in front

of their home.

080 End of Interview
Remainder of Tape is Blank