



FUATAI PURCELL

MY HOME

I was born in Falealupo village, in the island of Savaii, in Samoa, a small island developing country in the Pacific. Savaii is the largest of the nine islands that make up Samoa, but the capital is on the island of Apia. These islands were settled as part of the general settlement of the Pacific by Polynesian culture.

Briefly, at the end of the last century, Samoa played a significant part in the colonisation of the Pacific by western powers. Samoa was first colonised in 1899 by Germany and in 1914 by New Zealand at the outset of the First World War. At the end of the First World War, New Zealand retained control of Samoa under a mandate from the League of Nations. New Zealand continued to control Samoa until 1962, when Samoa became the first Polynesian state in the Pacific to gain independence.

MY FAMILY BEFORE I GOT MARRIED

I am eldest in a family of thirteen children. As eldest, I instructed and directed my younger siblings as we all had to help out in gathering coconuts or ripe cocoa pods, open them and dry them in the sun. During the orange season, we helped our parents pick oranges and pack them with care in sacks, which our father took to the market to sell.

Looking back now, I can say that teamwork is nothing new to me, as it is the environment that I grew up with;

even the youngest, at three years, had to buddy with older children to pick up the rubbish and dry leaves around the house before breakfast. After school, we all had chores to do and it was my responsibility to make sure every one did her or his chores, or we would not achieve the maximum return we could get from the crops. I was also the money counter of the family after we took our crops to the shops.

We were a close bunch of happy children and wherever I went, seven followed. It was a long walk of about five miles from our home to the village. During certain times of the year, you could smell ripe pineapple along the way. The advantage of being the eldest was that you could tell the younger siblings to go and fetch some ripe pineapples growing wild in the bush for a snack before we reached our destination.

I must have done a great job, because I got everything I needed and handed it down to the younger siblings when I did not want it or, in terms of clothing, when it did not fit anymore. I remember that on White Sunday (second Sunday of October every year), I was the only child in the family with a new dress. Everyone else wore old dresses handed down from me. White Sunday is the Children's day in Samoa and it is still a tradition that every child wears white to church and a new outfit for a special lunch.

Even when I came home from the holidays when I was attending intermediate school and college in the island of Upolu, I continued to direct my siblings and tell them off when they disobeyed our parents.

MY EDUCATION

I attended the Falealupo primary school and when I turned twelve, my parents decided that it would be best for me to attend intermediate school in the capital so I could get a better education. It was the hardest time of my life having to leave my family and move to the island of Upolu to live with my aunty and attend school there. I went to my village every vacation, except when we did not have enough money to pay for bus and boat fare to go home.

Because I was privileged to go to the capital of Apia for my education, I worked very hard at intermediate school so I can get good marks to move up to a college. My family was happy and proud when my name was read out over the radio as one of the students to enter Samoa College in 1969.

The big problem, though, was school fees. In fact, after the second term in Samoa College, I could not return until my fees were paid in full. During the second term

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Fuatai, (in the middle with arm bands of tea leaves) in traditional costume for Samoa College entertainment at the dedication of the Chanel College Fale.



Eldest daughter graduating with a Bachelor degree in Anthropology, Massey University.



Eldest daughter getting married the traditional way.



Fuatai, her husband, and their immediate family



Mr. Purcell, Fuatai's husband, the public speaker



Mr Purcell, Fuatai's husband, with their grandchildren.

holidays, I went home and worked for two weeks non-stop to help my family raise my school fees. Even on Sundays, which are a day of rest in Samoa, I snuck out and gathered ripe cocoa pods and piled them far away from our home so that our parents would not know that I was working on a Sunday. Then, on Mondays, I woke up very early in the morning, and went with the four younger girls to cut the cocoa pods I had collected on Sunday.

I returned to college with the full fees and I stayed for the last term of my first year. However, I was still worried about the fees for my second year at college. The only thing I knew was to work hard at our plantations during the holidays. But at the end of my first year at college, it was announced that the government of New Zealand had five scholarships for the new year for all students who wanted to sit an exam and who were in hardship. I fit the criteria and started studying for the exam. I came second and it guaranteed me a scholarship that included full payment of school fees for the year as well as full fees to live in the hostel, plus a small daily subsistence allowance.

Eventually, I was also awarded a scholarship to study abroad doing primary teaching. At the time, I did not want to become a teacher, but an accountant. Instead of taking up the scholarship for primary teaching, I found a job at a public library and studied accounting part time through the University of the Pacific extension courses in Apia. I thoroughly enjoyed accounting and had a few more papers to do when I met my husband, got married, and started my own family.

My university education did not start until much later in life, when I was 43 years old in 1998. I went to Victoria University in 1997 to enquire about a formal qualification. I was told that I could not attend the university because I did not have a first degree. I gave them my C.V. and asked them about some part time studies to get a university qualification of some sort. I passed courses with flying colours and I graduated in 1999. In 2000, I enquired about doing my Master of Commerce and Administration with a major in Information Systems, by thesis only. I completed my Masters degree in 2003.

MY OWN FAMILY AND LIVING OUR DREAM

I got married in 1978 and have four children. We both worked for the same company and when we decided to get married, we both looked for jobs as we believed that it was not a good idea for a husband and wife to work together. I have no idea where we got this belief from, but I did get a job with the New Zealand High Commission in Apia. So I moved to my new job and my husband remained in his previous job. We both enjoyed our jobs and were blessed with twin girls the following year, and a son the year after.

In 1983, my husband and I decided to move to New Zealand to give our children a better education and better opportunities than we ever had. This idea was my husband's, because he was educated in St Paul's in New Zealand and returned home after his education. We paid for a container and packed all our possessions that my husband knew we could use in New Zealand. I had to listen to him because I had never been to New Zealand before. We took most of our kitchenware and bedroom furniture including pillows and sheets.

But our turn of wonderful experience turned into ashes when our youngest son was diagnosed with a very rare cancer called rhabdomyosarcoma, a cancer of the muscle tissue. During this time, I did a research into this type of cancer. I must have read every article available in books and online concerning rhabdomyosarcoma, asking the question "why me"? With my faith, I led my family to stand together in good, bad, and sad times. My precious youngest son died in 1997, which devastated our lives as a family. It is an experience that will always stay with me. In fact, it made me continue to lead my family to learn how to live with it and that it is something that will never be forgotten and will stay with us until we die. The death of my youngest son made me even stronger and I continued to lead by example through going to university for the first time, and getting A grades which encouraged my children who were all in college at the time. Leading by example helped my older children to do well in their studies.

THE STRUGGLE OF FINDING A JOB IN NEW ZEALAND

When we arrived at our new adoptive country, we stayed with my brother-in-law and his family while we looked for jobs and also a flat. It was a challenging experience. While our CVs and references were of highest standard, the simple fact that we did not have computer experience was against us. I interviewed well, but when prospective employers asked what computer experience I had, I answered them by asking, "what is a computer?" Computers were unheard of in Samoa at the time. Other people I met said they simply answered that they had data entry experience. But I did not even know what data entry was, as I knew only the typewriter. In my time of depression over difficulties in finding a job, I felt I had only two options for me and my family: either I looked for a factory job or returned to Samoa.

But my guardian angel was with me. Just when we discussed returning back home, the New Zealand government recognised the big gap in computer experience and offered free courses for those people needing computer skills. Two types of computers courses were offered for free. One course was called

the “computer user’s course” and the other one was called the “computer operator’s course.” I wanted to take the latter, but no seat was available, so I started with the computer user’s course. However, after three weeks, a student from the computer operator’s course left and I quickly took up the challenge.

After this nine-month course, I got the first job I interviewed for. Since then, I have never looked back, but was on my way to a challenging and enjoyable adventure for my husband, my children, and me. Not long after I started working, my husband found a job as a prison warden, something he never dreamt would appeal as a job but he had no choice. But like me, with all the opportunities at the workplace including courses paid for by the Corrections Department, he welcomed them with open arms. In the end, he became the first Pacific Islander to move up the ranks, studying at Victoria on full pay and fees all paid for, and ended up as the first Pacific person to hold the position of Principle Policy Officer. We had to move from Auckland to Wellington because of his job with the head office.

I am sure it is determination and believing in God and in ourselves that had given us our opportunity to work, study and learn well into our mid 40s in a new country.

While working in NZ, I sent money back home to my siblings regularly to help them. This is because I realised that our parents put all their efforts into educating me and when the younger ones started schooling, it was like they were too tired and did not work as hard as they did for my education. This is one of the reasons why I chose to return home. Upon my return, my extended family unanimously decided to bestow the family title "Gisa" to me. It was difficult being a woman but with the skill of my younger brother Tai'i Tulei who is an orator, the village council agreed to bestow the title on me, because I was the eldest and it was my extended family's decision.

Our three children are now in NZ and only the girls are married. We now have three grandchildren. Our youngest son still lives through our older children and now our grandchildren. God's name be praised.

THE EFFECTS OF DIPLO IGCB PROGRAMME IN MY LIFE AND CAREER

I have found the Diplo Internet Governance Capacity Building Programme (IGCBP) very practical and very useful. The IGCBP helped me a great deal with understanding issues around Internet governance and it has been helpful for my work as a national ICT project manager in Samoa. I am the Secretary of the National ICT Committee. I am also the Assistant CEO of the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, managing

the ICT Secretariat, a body set up by Cabinet to lead the implementation of the national ICT Strategy. Apart from developing ICT at the national level, my other responsibility is to represent my country in regional and international ICT conferences, workshops and other gatherings so Samoa can continue to be kept abreast with understanding the issues and solutions offered globally, as in acting locally and thinking globally. I have attended numerous such conferences and in particular, the WSIS summits, the ITU World Development conferences and Study Groups, and, regional or international donor workshops. I have built a great international network that I work very closely with, and thoroughly enjoy online meetings. What I really enjoyed is learning not just about Internet governance, but about other issues that affect the secure and affordable use of the Internet.

I studied Internet governance at a time when the World Summit of the Information Society (WSIS) was in progress. This course allowed me to understand the key issues of Internet governance and it also allowed me to be very diplomatic when I delivered the views of my country during discussions.

In September 2007, I was appointed the Rapporteur for the new International Telecommunication Union study question for small island developing states. My experience gained from the IGCBP will be very useful in studying the issues surrounding Internet governance in these states.

Because of the benefits I gained from the IGCBP, I have encouraged young people in Samoa to apply for the IGCBP and hope the government will continue this initiative in the future. Three young people from Samoa are currently participating in the IGCBP with the DiploFoundation. I encourage governments to have their public servants, in particular youth to study Internet governance in the Diplo IGCBP.

THE ONLINE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

The vast knowledge I now possess for Internet governance issues was attained through participating and attending the IGCBP with Diplo. It was my first exposure to using online learning tools. It is amazing how classmates from the 4 corners of the world can all discuss issues online. It makes enjoy my job more and strive to ensure that online learning can be established in Samoa so that those students in rural villages no longer have to move to the city to attend good schools.

Providing online learning tools to those in rural village can also help in reducing migration from rural villages to the city. There is an emerging issue of increased crime rate due to those people from rural villages who all of a

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Fuatai's nieces and nephews on the deck of her beach fale in Falealupo.



Fuatai and her family traveling to Namu'a Island after her daughter's traditional wedding.

sudden find that they no longer has the village council rules to adhere to.

Furthermore, online learning from my experience means cheaper tertiary education because families and governments do not have to spend so much money in sending people overseas to study. Online learning will also assist in combating the issue of lack of tutors and teachers especially in the field of information and communication technology.

There is a huge need for online learning infrastructure at the national level in my country and I am sure it is the same in other small island developing states. While this need exists, Samoa has an online course for doctors and this is an initiative that needs expansion to formal and informal education.

Leaders, regardless of any age, culture and beliefs must continue to learn and keep abreast with what is happening worldwide, in order to help their families, and countries develop knowledge and an information society.

PLANS AND VISION FOR THE FUTURE

I plan to do research on Internet governance and information and communication technology development in small island developing states, preferably as part of a

Ph D degree. There is a dearth of information about Internet governance in small island developing nations, in particular in those in the Pacific Ocean. However, funding is a significant issue. While scholarships are available, most specify an age limit of 45 years. This criterion does not provide opportunities to those people with a vast array of work and life experience that qualifies them to study at the Ph D level. I believe that some people with leadership skills over this age limit are those most qualified to study.

My plan for the future is to continue helping my country to develop information and communication technology for youth and for people living in rural settings. It is a pleasure to live in an adoptive country and have the opportunity to return home and contribute to your native country's development. I am enjoying it and look forward to more challenges. I am especially looking forward to representing my country in development initiatives and development conferences at the international level. It is only by participation with development organisations at the regional and international level that those organisations will understand the issues we face and help us resolve them.

I also plan to do more study with DiploFoundation in the future, particularly with diplomacy online course. As one gets older, the opportunity arises to work as a diplomat in overseas embassies.



“Diplo continues to amaze me with the quality of its global network of dedicated and skilled people who take part in its distant learning programmes. While many speak about the need for capacity building, Diplo gives an example of how capacity building can successfully be translated into action. For the past three years, first with Secretariat of the Working Group on Internet Governance and then with the Secretariat of the Internet Governance Forum, we had

a mutually beneficial cooperation. We gave fellowships to alumni from the IGCBP who were fully integrated into the Secretariat team and assisted us efficiently in our work, while they gained a first-hand insight into key Internet governance issues and got to know some key actors. We hope to deepen this cooperation, which is a hands-on way of promoting capacity building on Internet governance.

Markus Kummer
Executive Coordinator of the Secretariat
of the Internet Governance Forum