

VAKA GAUALOFA CONNECTING TAGATA PASIFIKA

I sat at the **Millenia Hotel** at Sogi, at 2:25pm on Sunday 3rd June, boiling my tired eyes out while reading the heartfelt responses from 4 of the 6 vakas: vaka Samoa [**Gaualofa**], vaka Fiji [**Uto ni Yalo**], vaka Aotearoa [**Te Matau**], and vaka Mixed-crew [**Hine Moana**]. I had promised the remarkable Captains of the individual vakas that I would drink a glass of 'green tea' a.k.a **Vailima** to celebrate their selfless passion to make Pasifika Ocean a safer *moana* for our future generation. For the vakas that could not submit their responses before sail time, the 4 vakas are voices enough for all your courageous conviction. Nothing has tugged my heart more deeply since the heartfelt tsunami project with Sydney-based **Pacific Pathways** [for trauma counselling at the **National University of Samoa** in 2009] than the vision the Hawaii-based **Polynesian Voyaging Society** had activated. What wisdom the founders had and to be part of this noble course has riveted my heart to its core.



L-R: Jnr Patai [vaka **Marumaru n Captain's son**], Eric Rhema Ete [Rotuman/Samoan and vaka supporter]



FRONT: CAPTAIN PATAI [VAKA **MARUMARU**], MISS COOK IS N CREW MEMBER. BK: WRITER

The unexpected meeting with Tuatagaloa Joe Annandale at **Samoa Stationery and Books Ltd's [SSAB]** Fugalei branch on Saturday, 26th May started a journey that I know will last the remainder of my life time. My ultimate childhood dream from Fiji was to make it over to Eastern Polynesia and educate myself, if not with my son [Eric Rhema ETE], on the similarities of our Polynesian cultures and how our forefathers navigated our vast Pasifika Moana using God's amazing creation, namely the stars, sun and ocean currents. It was also the dream of my late awesome dad and one whom I miss deeply, **Tevita HANFAKAGA**, whom God called to rest suddenly in June, 1998 in Fiji. We had talked many a nights during my formative schooling years in Fiji of what it would be like to stand on the various Pacific Islands' *fanua*, to eat, dance, and *talanoa* with our indigenous Polynesian cousins. He had always wanted to go as far as the Marquesas and Rapa Nui [Easter Is]. This mission is now etched deep in my *fatu* and God willing, will take on this malaga in five year's time when my son, Eric, leaves my nest.

As I stuttered quickly to Tuatagaloa about my intentions of joining the **Samoa Vaka Society [SVS]**, he was gracious enough to invite me to the Marina the following Tuesday to welcome the **Gaualofa** and 5 other warrior vakas. The tentative time given was 4-5pm but thankfully Jeni Ah Kui, staff member from **SSAB's** Fugalei branch rang **Radio Polynesia** and was told that the **Gaualofa** and 3 other vakas had already berthed at the Marina by 2pm. Unfortunately the **Uto ni Yalo** [Fiji crew] and the **Hine Moana** [Mixed crew] had sailed off course, with Fiji's vaka having experienced a torn mast, and missed out on the well planned welcoming ceremony by the **Samoa Vaka Society**, at the Siva Afi tent, Matautu. This warm ceremony was graced by the presence of Samoa's Head of State, His Highness Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi and his good lady, Masiofo Filifilia. Also present was Samoa's Prime Minister, Tuilaepa Lupesoliai Aiono Sailele Malielegaoi, who gave an encouraging speech to welcome the tired and sunburnt gallant sea

warriors. The powerful vaka-montage shown on the night would entice any adventurous soul to want to take this experience. It was a glimpse of the cinematic documentary film entitled **“Our Blue Canoe”** that is due for release in 2013. It definitely had a profound impact on me!



Rotumans in Apia. BACK L-R: Etika, Makereta Manueli, Kim Bennet. FRONT L-R: papa Mausio, Writer

Spending time with the awesome crew from all 6 vakas only reaffirmed my 5-year dream plan to take that life-changing experience. To say I cannot wait to make that trip is a gross understatement. Meeting my *kainaga* or *aiga* from my motherland, Rotuma, the northern part of Fiji, was an emotional encounter. Having been away from home [Fiji] for the past 12 years was understandable with the instant bond I felt towards elder Mausio [vaka *Uto ni Yalo*] and Kim Bennet [vaka *Hine Moana*]. I must say I was impressed with Kim’s fluency in the Rotuman language and I couldn’t help feeling envious, especially since Kim has spent a good number of years surfing in Hawaii. What a tribute to her parents, John and Harieta Bennet.

Samoa’s *Gaualofa* crew member: Teleni Aiolupotea and Writer



Meeting the Captain and relatively young crew from the *Gaualofa* was inspiring. Captain Nicholas Henry [Cooks Is] and his Samoan crew are brave ambassadors’ for Samoa. The marketing leverage for Samoa as a safe holiday destination is immeasurable. I personally salute one of the younger crew members, 21 year old Teleni Aiolupotea, who is a great role model for youth in Samoa and across the Pacific. I couldn’t agree more with Kalolo’s written response “...i have made new brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers...been provided for by the alofa of the [different] people...”. His fellow crew member, Bruce, had added “.....[the journey] has provided me an opportunity to reconnect with my Samoan roots....to work with Samoan youth and others from across the Pacific to create a better, safer future for our children...”.



Vaka *Uto ni Yalo*: L-R- Captain Jonathon Smith, Writer, Fiji crew member

An unnamed crew member penned in Samoan “...o le falauga o se mea e sili ona taua i lo’u olaga, o se feau mo tatou uma e le gata ia te a’u, a’o alo ma fanau. Samoa, ia tatou galulue faatasi e puihui lo tatou siosiomaga”. Captain Henry summed it all up well “...the voyage is an opportunity to develop young leaders....to carry a message of cultural and environmental unity across the Pacific Ocean and the globe!”

Finally, meeting with the Captain of vaka Fiji, *Uto ni Yalo*, was simply therapeutic! Captain Jonathan Smith from Lautoka, the western part of Fiji, was my junior at *Drasa Avenue School*. What a pleasant surprise and I am so proud of him. Yes Captain Smith, “...DAS forever!” To also have the inclusion of Bishop Winston Halapua [prolific author on various issues, especially the ocean], Bob Tuxon [former USP Sports Coordinator and Lecturer] and Ratu Joseph Brown [former Fiji ODN grant recipient and entrepreneur] amongst other younger and fit crew, felt like home again. We had an awesome *talanoa* during the ‘cava cession’ on board the *Uto ni Yalo* on

Saturday night, June 2nd. The personal note by experienced senior crew member, papa Mausio, got my tear ducts running again. It was written in my mother-tongue, Rotuman, and is something I had lost touch with for a few years now. From my heart to you, "*Foi'eksia e hanisi ko o'fa Mausio ma Aitu la alalum ou lao ma mauri!*"



I also met my Polynesian lone-brother from Marquesas and a beautiful mama from Tahiti with their eye-catching tattoos. We have promised to keep in touch and will definitely look them up when I sojourn on my childhood dream in 5 years time. A commemorative tattoo in Tahiti [on my leg] is being planned while I prepare for my Malaga and that has excitedly consumed me during my leisure time.

Giftng *Gausalofa* from Germany to Samoa



Tears of happiness and thankfulness! L-R: Bre [Gausalofa crew], Tuatagaloa Joe Annandale- President *Samoa Vaka Society*, Captain Tua Pittman.

I was privileged to attend the *fono* onboard the *Gausalofa* on Saturday evening. Invitation was also extended to the Captains of the other 5 vakas. A tearful moment was felt and seen when the affable Chief Navigator, Mr Tua Pittman, announced by reading an email from Germany that the vaka *Gausalofa* has been gifted to the people of Samoa, in particular, the *Samoa Vaka Society*, of which Tuatagaloa Joe Annandale is the current President. This was to commemorate the 50th Anniversary celebrations in Samoa. Moreso, to strengthen the historical ties between Samoa and Germany. **Okeanos** is a German-based philanthropic organization whose objective is to '*...protect the ocean environment and marine life*'. I couldn't agree more when Tuatagaloa emotionally responded that his late beautiful wife, Tui's unexpected passing during the tragic 2009 Tsunami, would not be in vain. That has anchored my resolve as Tuatagaloa has given his blessings to source sponsorship for Samoa's vaka so that the core mission of PVC is continued. I am deeply honoured as this augurs well with the *Pro bono* expectations from my employer. I was also privileged to have met Ms Eme Tanielu [Vice President SVS and **Radio Polynesia Snr News Editor**] and senior *Gausalofa* members like Ms Seema Deo [SPREP]. I look forward to working closely with these passionate members for a worthy course.



L-R: Chief Navigator, Captain Tua Pittman, Captain *Hine Moana*- Captain Albert Mangus, Ms Eme Tanielu-VP *Samoa Vaka Society* and *Radio Polynesia Snr News Editor*.

Vaiala Church Service

The apt service delivered by susuga Reverend Moli was meaningful and appropriate for the return of the flotilla from Samoa. *Malo lava and faafetai tele lava mo lou saunoaga*. Tua Pittman gave the congregation an overview of the mission of the ***Pacific Voyaging Society*** and its

affiliated Pacific Island Voyaging Societies. The presence and the much-needed pep-talk by afioga To'omaletai had 'mana' that would have melted and motivated every sea warrior present at the church service.

Local Communities Visit the Vakas

What a testament that authentic Pasifika hospitality is still alive and practiced today. During the 6-day stop over for the vakas, the multi-cultural communities in Apia came out to visit their respective vakas with food and gifts. There was much laughter and stories shared of their voyaging memories and I was totally mesmerized and excited at the marina dock.

Visitations or *asiasiga* was seen by Dr Terimoana Puni from **MedCen Private Hospital** and the beautiful Ms Luna Marsters [**Le Manumea Hotel**] for the vakas *Marumaru* and *Haunui*. Mr Etika and Mrs Makereta Manueli [**SPREP**] for vakas *Uto ni Yalo* and *Hine Moana*. The Fijian community in Apia for vakas *Uto ni Yalo* and *Te Matau*. As expected, vaka *Gausalofa* was well catered for by their home family and friends.

Tahitian 'Stone-Ceremony'



This was the first time viewing for many locals, me included. The elder of the Tahitian crew gave a native language presentation of two stones that were brought over from Tahiti. I was told that this is the normal practice when they sojourn to a new location or *fanua* of their neighbouring Polynesian cousins. That has cemented my resolve for the *Gausalofa* malaga and I cannot wait to learn more. In the meantime, networking has already begun in earnest with everyone I have met.

The presence of Tuatagaloa Joe Annandale, afioga To'omaletai, susuga Rev Moli and his Vaiala congregation, members of the *Samoa Vaka Society*, in addition to the crew and supporters of the 6 vakas was heart warming to say the least. What an awesome ending to the feast of activities for the 50th Independence Celebrations in Samoa, albeit a tearful departure.

Farewell Ceremony for Pasifika's 6 Warrior Vakas

Finally, I can only offer my heart-felt prayers to the brave Chief Navigator- Tua Pittman, 6 Captains and their crew on your malaga from Samoa *en route* to Solomon Is for the *2012 Pacific Arts Festival* then onto New Caledonia. What *pro bono* work I intend to do for *Gausalofa* specifically, and PVS collectively, pales in comparison to the challenges that awaits you as you battle the unpredictable and treacherous weather conditions out in the wide Pacific Ocean, using traditional knowledge and basic equipment.



As reiterated at the Vaiala church service to the farewell on the dock, you are the warrior flagship that carries the hopes of a peaceful, safer and cleaner Pacific Ocean for our future generations.

Chief Navigator and Captain for all vakas: Captain Tua Pittman [Cook Is]

Gaualofa- Captain Nicholas Henry [Cook Is] and Samoan crew

Hine Moana-Captain Albert Mangus [NZ] and Mixed crew [PNG,Kiribati,Rotuma,Tonga,Sol Is]

Uto ni Yalo- Captain Jonathan Smith [Fiji] and Fijian/Rotuman crew

Marumaru Atua- Captain Peia Patai [Cook Is] and Cook Is crew

Te Matau a Maui- Captain Frank [NZ] and Maori/Fiji crew [backed by *Ngati Kahungunu iwi*]

Haunui- Captain Duncan Morrison [NZ] and Tahitian/Marquesan crew

Bon voyage and have a safe and adventurous life-changing experience across our great ***Pasifika Moana!***

Fai'eksia e hanisi, vinaka vakalevu, faafetai faafetai tele lava and au revoir!

Moana Liza-***Rotuma/Fiji/Samoa/Tahiti***

Guest Writer