

AN INTERVIEW WITH JUNIOR FONOTISATELE

An Oral History Conducted by Cecilia Winchell

Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islander
Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
University Libraries
University of Nevada Las Vegas

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Oral History Project

University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2020

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PREFACE

Junior Fonotisatele began life in Harbor City, California, where his mother worked as a nurse's aid and his father worked in construction. Given a new construction opportunity in Utah, his father moved the family to Ogden, Utah, when Fonotisatele was five. His Samoan ethnic background contributed to very strong family ties all throughout his life, including when he lived in Utah and remembered doing all kinds of activities with his entire family. After moving back to California briefly, Fonotisatele ended up in Las Vegas when his sister needed help and obtained a degree in sociology from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. While attending school, he started UNLV's first Polynesian club and organized an annual multicultural festival, strongly advocating for more Pacific Islander representation.

Upon graduation, Fonotisatele briefly worked in construction before working as bodyguard for Floyd Mayweather for five years. During this time, he also started a clothing brand named Stak Gear that embraced the idea of sacrifice, triumph, attitude, and knowledge. After meeting his wife at the Aloha festival, Fonotisatele settled down and began his entrepreneurial career, investing in a range of ventures related to mental health, solar panels, and security. His many ventures reflect the strong values he was raised with in the Samoan community and his passion for sharing his culture.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Interview with Junior Fonotisatele
November 10th, 2021
in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Cecilia Winchell

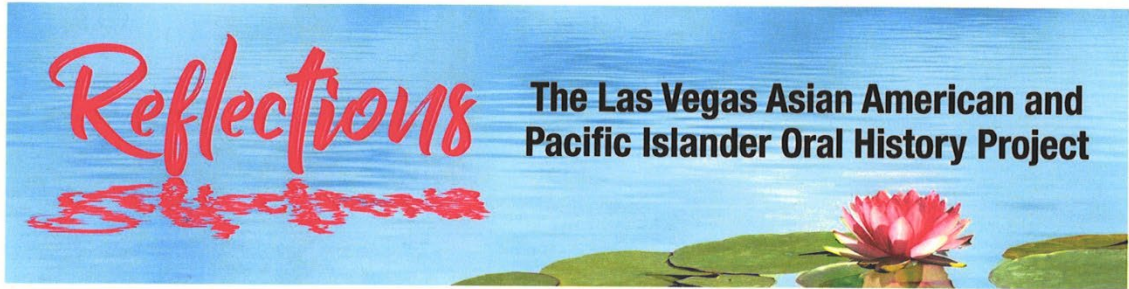
Preface.....iv

Junior Fonotisatele begins with his early childhood in Harbor City, California. He talks about his Samoan grandparents and their family history, as well as what it means to be chief of the family. While living in California, his father worked as a construction worker before moving out to Ogden, Utah, for more work opportunities. A lot of growing up in Utah revolved around family, which included several siblings and extended cousins. His close family connection would eventually lead to his move to Las Vegas, Nevada, when he had to help out with taking care of his nephews. After moving, he discusses his first impressions and his time at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.....1-6

Upon graduating from UNLV, Fonotisatele drove forklifts for Pacific Stone before getting contacted for bodyguarding work and meeting Floyd Mayweather. Fonotisatele recalls his time bodyguarding for Mayweather for five years before meeting his wife at a festival and settling down. During those five years, he started his own clothing business called Stak Gear. He also divulges into his involvement with the solar business and a record label.....6-12

With several family members also living in Las Vegas, Fonotisatele recounts some of the holidays they celebrate together. He also expands on the Samoan and Tongan foods he regularly cooks and eats. Next, he touches on his religion, what he enjoys most about living in Las Vegas, and his connection to his Pacific Islander identity. This connection includes his tattoos and the chief status. Fonotisatele also explains the large Samoan population in Utah and California and what the predominant religions of the island are.....12-18

Lastly, Fonotisatele briefly touches on cryptocurrency, the order of which his family came to the mainland, his most memorable Samoan foods, and the family chef. He explains the difference between the Samoan and Tongan language and when he learned Samoan. He also discusses the mental health service he ran contracted with the state that would work with both kids and adults.....18-24



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Good morning. Today's date is November 10th, 2021. This is Cecilia Winchell. I'm joined here by Stefani Evans and Junior Fonotisatele.

Junior, could you please spell your name for the record?

Yes. First name is Junior, J-U-N-I-O-R. Last name Fonotisatele, F, as in Frank, O-N, as in Nancy, O-T, as in Tom, I-S, as in Sam, A, as in apple, T, as in tango, E, as in echo, L, as in Larry, E, as in echo.

Thank you. To start off, can you tell us about your childhood; where you grew up; your parents; your family; so on and so forth?

I was born in California. Harbor City. There is an old soap opera, "General Hospital," and the beginning of that is the hospital where I was born. That's how I tell people, "Hey, you know that hospital on 'General Hospital?' That's where I was born in Harbor City, California." We stayed in California for a little bit and then moved up to Utah and stayed in Ogden, Utah. I grew up there, elementary and half of my high school years, and then we went back to California. From California, I went to a junior college out there in San Diego. I just pretty much moved all around California. Then from California, I went back to Utah and then came here, and I ended up graduating from UNLV.

Could you tell us a little bit more about your grandparents, what you know about them?

My grandma, she died when I was a baby. My grandfather, to this day, we still can't find a picture of him. I just know that he was a very strong individual. He didn't like taking pictures. He was the chief of our family because my ethnicity is from Western Samoa. Everyone is still trying to find a picture of him, but he was the chief of our family. My grandma, she was a beautiful lady. She helped all our family get from the islands to here. My dad came up here first, and then he sent for my grandma, and then they helped everybody get their citizenship to get to

the States, from California. Both my grandparents...I wish I met my grandma, and I never met my grandfather. Just memories and stories, well, stories mainly.

Could you tell us one of those stories?

For my grandpa and grandma, they were loving parents to my dad and his sisters. The main thing was family. Family is everything in our culture. Number-one thing is respect. We always respect our elders. They just took care of the families in Samoa to get them ready to come to the United States for a better life, so they're the liaison mainly to get family here from the islands.

You talked about your grandfather being the chief of the family. What does that mean to be chief?

Chief is...he's the boss of all the families. He is the one that makes all the calls for our property and the land, the village, what goes on. Something kind of like the movie *Moana* where you see there's a chief. He was the one that makes sure everything is going okay, everybody is taken care of, because they all lived in a village. He was the one that made sure everybody has food, everybody is taken care of. The leader.

Do you know more about the process of what it was like trying to get your family—and why did they want to come onto the mainland?

My dad would tell me stories. He was like, "You've got to be appreciative of what you have because in Samoa we only had limited things. When it was Christmastime, we had one balloon. You have a lot here." The main reason was for them to get to the States to have better opportunities. He expressed that education was number one and always to improve in education.

What did your parents do when they got to California?

My mom was a nurse's aide, and then my dad worked construction. He said, "When I got off the boat, I went to the first help-wanted sign." It was construction. He made his way from the

ditch—he was digging in a ditch—to operating the cranes. He had to start by digging the holes and all that stuff. For him, he worked very hard. He was a part of the union in California. He was a union worker, so he worked his way from the trenches to operating machinery. He always told me a great leader leads the team in the trenches, not on top looking down.

How long were you in California?

I was in California, I would say, until I was five, and then we moved to Utah.

Do you remember anything from your time in California?

I just remember hanging out with my little cousins; that was it mainly. Then when I got to Utah, I grew up over there, in Ogden, and just went from there.

Why did your family choose to move to Utah?

My dad had seen an opportunity for construction and his work, and they had an opportunity for him to move up, and so that's why.

How long were you in Utah?

I was in Utah from five years old until fifteen, and then I went back to California.

What do you remember about growing up in Utah?

Growing up in Utah, everything was family oriented. I won't forget shoveling the snow. Utah, it was good because at that time just being able to...my childhood, which is different right now from today's childhood. We did everything together, rode bikes. You didn't have to really worry about watching out for things that are going on now. It's real hard to be a kid and walk home right now without being harassed or bullied. It was really family fun in Utah.

How big was your family?

There are six of us and then extended cousins. There were six of us, and then we had cousins that would come and live in the house, too, so there would be eight to ten because everybody is just

like, “Yes, come stay with us,” because that’s our culture—we take care of everybody that needs help.

Can you tell us a bit more about your siblings?

Yes. My sister, she stays out here in Las Vegas. She works for FedEx. My other two sisters, they’re in Utah, still, and they’re stay-at-home wives. As far as that, I have a half-sister and a half-brother, and they’re in Utah, too. Me and my other sister Stella, we’re the only two out here in Las Vegas. In fact, I came out here to help her because I was single at the time, and my brother-in-law didn’t have his papers to transfer for his job. In our culture, if you’re not doing anything, you go and you help. My sister needed help with watching my nephews, so I came out here twenty-one years ago, and I’m still here today. I came out here to help her, and as soon as my brother-in-law got the transfer to here for his work, I moved out and did my own thing.

What was it like going to school in Utah?

It was good. Everything is pretty much family oriented there. The whole community knows each other. It’s a close-knit community. As far as activities, I love football, so everything was surrounded by football, sports. Sports in Utah; that was real big, even now. I wish I could say the same for my football team, but it’s just different. When there’s a game on and it’s Utah or BYU, it’s like everybody is...Over here, it’s like, “Who’s playing? Oh okay, never mind.” Everything is family oriented. Everybody knows each other.

Then you moved back to California for a while, and then you came to Vegas, right?

Yes.

Why did you eventually end up coming to Vegas?

I was telling you it was my sister; she needed help. In our culture, the youngest is the one that goes and helps out.

And you're the youngest?

Yes. I have a half-brother. From my dad's first marriage, I'm the youngest.

What were your first impressions when you got here?

When I got here, I stayed out there in Craig, Camino Al Norte and Craig. There was nothing out there. I was like, Vegas...all I thought of was Circus Circus because that was the first thing when we came here in Vegas where we went. When I got here, I would go to the Strip, but after a while it just gets old. Vegas, I really thought I'd never move here especially because of the heat. When I first moved out here, I really didn't like it. I just had to do my best, and here we are.

Then you went to UNLV here in Vegas. What did you study?

My first year I was undecided. Then I just decided to major in sociology because I'm a people's person, and so that's my major that I really liked, and I use that now. I just got involved. I wanted to fill a void because there wasn't really stuff that pertained to my culture. They had a club here; it was the Hawaiian Civic Club, but it wasn't really AAPI. I started (NAME) Polynesian Club, UNLV Polynesian Club. I believe it was in 2002, or three, one of those years. That was the first Polynesian club recognized here. From there, I started the festival; it was called the Multicultural Festival. I think they changed it. I don't know what its name is now. But, yes, I just started those things. As far as coming from leaders all the way from my grandfather, I just wanted to see what we could do to be a voice, and we're still a small voice. The Asian, AAPI, Pacific Islander; that's why. That's the reason why I'm here, too, is Pacific Islanders have got to get more involved. The Asians are well involved. We've got to get involved.

Could you tell us a bit more about the Polynesian Club? What kinds of activities did you guys do?

We did fundraisers. We did a lot of events to let people know our culture. We invited everyone in the Polynesian culture to see the different ethnicities in the South Pacific. There's Samoa. There's Tonga, the Kingdom of Tonga. They still have a king, and so that king still hangs out with Queen Elizabeth. They are still ruled by a king. We have Fiji where you see the Fiji water. And we have Samoa. One big person from our culture in Samoa is "The Rock," Dwayne Johnson. Then we have Hawaii, obviously. All those different islands are in the South Pacific, and there's a lot of different islands, but those are just some that are really known in the States.

What did you do after getting out of college?

After getting out of college, I looked in the mirror and said, "What am I going to do now?" [Laughing] I ended up getting a job at Pacific Stone. I was driving a forklift. I was like, what the heck am I doing? I just got my degree. But, hey, I had to get a job, so I started doing that.

One of my friends called me and said, "Hey, I've got some work bodyguarding." I've done a lot of bodyguard security for a while just as a side gig. He said, "Hey, I'm looking for somebody." I said, "Well, hey, let's do it." He came down from California, and he picked me up, and then we went to Summerlin. He goes, "Do you know whose house this is?" I go, "Whose house is it?" And he goes, "Floyd Mayweather." And I go, "Who's that?" This was twenty-one years ago. No, wait, 2005. This is sixteen years. I go, "Oh okay." I only knew the heavyweights. We went inside, and he goes, "That's him." I go, "Okay." He looks like a small, little thing. I don't think we had Google in 2005. Did we? I tried to ask some people, "Who is this guy, man?" I called my brother-in-law, and he said, "That's one of the top boxers."

Then from there, the guy that introduced me to him, he just said, "Hey, can you take care of him?" I said, "Yes. Where's the money?" He said, "Don't worry about that. We'll take care of it." From there...what was it, 2005, six, seven, eight, nine, ten...for five years I was with the



champ. As far as bodyguarding, meeting a celebrity, that was pretty big because I was on TV a lot with him, *MTV Cribs*. We started the HBO show called *24/7* where they go behind the scenes, and they look at the athletes or the fighters for twenty-four hours seven days a week, everything, waking up, all that. We started that. I've been all over with him. I even rang the bell in New York at Nasdaq. Travelled to London. You name it, I've been everywhere with that guy.

But he is one of the guys I first met as far as businesswise, very smart. Nobody really knew it until now. Not only was he a great boxer, he knew how to use that as leverage to get where he needed to be where he doesn't have to box anymore to get money. Businesswise he's a very smart man.

What does bodyguard work involve?

Bodyguard work, you've got to put your body in front of the person that's going to get shot or hurt. You put your body and you protect him. For me, I've never had those situations when I was with him, and I've worked with other celebrities. It's just protection, mainly as a deterrent. When you have two of my-size guys walking on both sides of you that means stay away, don't come close unless you say okay. As far as being a bodyguard, just protection. Let them know, hey, this guy is protected; he's important; we're here to protect him, which is pretty obvious when you walk in the community and you've got two big guys. It's like, we're here to protect this guy. We don't want no trouble. We're just here to protect him.

How long were you with him?

Five years.

What did you do afterward?

After the five years, I ended up meeting my wife. He kept calling me here and there, but I was like, "I can't come back because if I come back, there's no use to being married because I'm

going to be travelling twenty-four seven; I'll never be home." I got married to my wife in 2011, and I've been married ever since.

How did you meet your wife?

I met her at a festival because I was into clothing, and so I was still there and I was getting it back up, I just took a little break. It was called Stak Gear; that was my nickname. That's how Floyd knows me. I was kind of like that bodyguard you really don't want to mess with. I never tried to be like that, but people knew I meant business when it came to protection. After I met my wife, I stayed out of the bodyguarding scene, but I just opened up a security business last year, and we're at the Venetian now. I don't work it; I don't do security no more, but I just own it and have somebody operate it.



What was the festival that you met your wife at?

It was in Henderson. I believe it was something like the Aloha Festival. I forgot. It's a Hawaiian Civic or Aloha Festival in Henderson on Water Street.

Do you regularly go to festivals around Vegas?

No. Next year I am. We're going to be travelling, probably two of them just to start back up and do my clothing line. Floyd did a commercial with it, and Floyd has never had a commercial, not even Nike. He's had them call him and want him to do it, but he was the first to brand my clothing. He did that for free. If you're on YouTube and you type in Stak Gear, S-T-A-K, G-E-A-R, then you'll see. It hasn't been for a while. It just fell off. I got married and things went different ways. But I'm bringing it back, for sure.



stakgear



What kind of clothing is that?

It evolved from my nickname. Then we decided to do acronyms so it would be more marketable. It's just motivation to sacrifice in order to be successful. In anything, in business, in school or whatever it might be, you've got to make sacrifices. When you sacrifice, you win, so that means you triumph. Attitude is everything; that's the A. And then knowledge, you can never stop learning. Sacrifice, triumph, attitude and knowledge. We're going to make it into that direction.

Obviously, you've been in Vegas for a long time. How have you seen it change in your time here?

I've seen just a lot of buildings going up. It's growing fast. It's going to be like California pretty soon. But, yes, it's getting up there. I'm also in the solar business as well, and so that's good for me because there are houses going up every month; there's new developments. This is one of the hottest states on Earth besides Arizona, which is a little bit hotter. Instead of one twenty, it's about one twenty-three in the summertime over there. As far as me doing business in solar as well, it just helps the homeowner to not pay the outrageous prices. They pay less and own their electricity. But, yes, as far as seeing everything going up, I drive by my old house in the north side, and there are houses everywhere. It used to be all fields, and now it's completely saturated with housing developments.

What do you do in the solar business?

I'm the closer guy. I have people go and talk to home residents and see if they're interested in solar, and I come and I close it. Really you don't need me, but I just introduce the different options for you, which one you like, because either way you can stop paying NV Energy and forget about all this, or you can pay cheaper and own it. I just basically show them their options.

I'm not really into the sales. "Hey, you've got to..." No. I just say, "Hey, these are the qualifications," and see what you can do. I'm a broker. I broker deals.

Are there any other business things you're involved in?

Yes. I've got some other irons in the fire, and it has to do with entertainment. I used to have a record label; it was called Stak 'Em Up Music. That was good. That was a good learning experience because as an entrepreneur, you're always going to take a risk, and then you're going to fail. Yes, I did that. As far as music, I may do some stuff in entertainment, maybe productions or something like that. As far as that, really solar and security and my clothing line are my top three, and then I have other things as far as investing. I'm into the big coins, crypto and things like that.

What other family do you currently have in Vegas? Just your sister and your...

I have a lot of cousins. My grandma had four sisters. One of my grandma's sisters, her family is out here.

I'm assuming that you guys still celebrate a lot of cultural celebrations.

Oh yes.

Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

Yes. As far as when we have Thanksgiving, we have all the family come over, and our door is always open for visitors. We do the traditional pig in the ground. We eat some of the Samoan delicacies. My wife, she's from Tonga, so we eat some of the Tongan delicacies. Pretty much, in our culture, when it's time to eat, the elders eat first, and then we fall in, so that would be something different by going to a traditional Thanksgiving where everyone eats together. It's always the elders eat, and then they sit at the table, and then everybody else fills in after them. We do all the blessings and all that, but always the elders eat first, so that's something different

from a traditional Thanksgiving where everyone is... We have gotten westernized a little bit where we all sit together, but it's got to be at least three tables. We're doing that this year. I've already got two tables, long tables, where we'll all sit together and do it westernized, which is not a bad thing. As far as our culture, it's still to this day the same, pretty much as it was. Always the elders come first. Always respect, which is always helping no matter what it is.

Could you tell us a bit more about the Samoan and Tongan delicacies that you guys eat?

Samoan is *palusami*; it's a meat and it's cooked in coconut milk and it's wrapped in taro leaves, and so it's green and it has the meat in there, and then you put the foil on it and either bake it or cook it in the fire, the rocks inside the ground. It's called *palusami*. And then we eat the taro. Hawaiians mash it up and they make poi. We just eat it solid and that also is cooked in coconut milk. It tastes good with coconut milk and onions. We eat octopus and green banana. Green banana, it's not ripe yet; we boil that. Everything is in coconut milk and onions.

For Tonga, they're known for mixing the watermelon and '*otai*; that's what it's called.

You know the drink, the Boba?

Milk tea? Yes.

Yes, yes. It's with watermelon, so it's kind of like that, and it's sweet. They make that with watermelon. They're known for the '*otai*. Tongans are also known for their pineapple pie, and Samoans make that, too, but ours is more like a pie that's bread over it, and theirs is a pie where you see the pineapple on top of it. Tongans like horse; we don't. That's how I play around with my wife. I'm like, "Hey, we can't go to the rodeo, right? You're going to get hungry." She's like, "Shut up." But, yes, that's what they're known for. We always tease them amongst Polynesians when it's Tongan and Samoan, and they tease us with other stuff, but we always tease them with

the Tongans eat horse meat. They like horse. I've had horse one time, but that was the last time, and it was good. We like pork. They'll always go, "Yes, go get your pig."

But the whole thing of the cultures, it's the same dynamics with family. It's God, no matter what religion, and family; that's the dynamics of Polynesian cultures, God and family and elders.

What religion do you consider yourself a part of?

I'm a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. In my time with Floyd, I wasn't really practicing, but that's the religion that I'm with right now. I was born and raised LDS, and I went off and did my own thing, but I always came back. I was born in the temple, Las Vegas, married in the temple with my wife, the Las Vegas Temple. I'm still a strong member.

What do you enjoy most about living in Vegas?

Because it's in between Utah and California. My dad is buried here, and my mom is buried here. Both of my parents, and this is...God doesn't make no mistakes. My dad was with me when he died, took his last breath, and so was my mom. Just me and them, nobody else. I look at it like that. They're buried at Palm Mortuary. Yes, they're there.

How strongly connected do you feel to your Pacific Islander identity?

I'm very strongly connected. I don't go to the church on that side, but there is a Samoan ward, which is a Samoan Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints ward, and that's the first one out here ever. I have family there that go to that church, obviously, and so to be a part of that is good. When I was out here in college, I was very connected with the Hawaiian community, which they know me well especially since I started the Polynesian Club here. As far as the Asian community, I've met the leaders from the Asian community, and I've been there to a couple of

meetings. Evan Louie, he's a real big part. We connected almost twelve years ago, I think more than that, twelve or thirteen years ago, and that's one of the reasons why I'm here. Evan is very strong in the community with the Asian Pacific Islanders. He was always trying to tell me, "Hey, we've got to get the PIs out here, bro. Got to get more PIs." I was like, "I know, man." That's how I met my wife, because she worked for the census during that time, and that's why she was going around at the festival. I've met the governor. I've met the commissioners, even our commissioner now, I remember meeting him. I was a part of the entrepreneurship program that Clark County had, and Sisolak was the chair. As far as any county and state events that have to do with anything in voting, I pretty much still keep my ties.

Have you ever experienced any racially discriminatory practices against you, or heard from others?

Yes. Sometimes it's obvious when you're in the room and there's an elephant in the room. Just experiencing that type of profiling, I've seen that. I've witnessed that.

Could you tell us about your tattoos?

Yes. My tattoos, this is everything that is a part of my island, and so we have the birds, the mountains. This is the *falla* that we sit on. Some of the flowers. Just things of my island goes around my arm. But the main one that I'm going to get is called *pe'a*, and that's done from the stomach all the way down. If you Google a Samoan *pe'a* that's the next one.

SE: *How do you spell that?*

S-A-M-O-A-N, Samoan, and then tattoo, and then Samoan, same, and then P-E, apostrophe A.

The woman had one, too. Whoever is the chief's daughter, she would have that. It's called a *malu*, M-A-L-U. The Samoan is the *pe'a*. It's kind of like that movie *Moana*. They got that right.



He has the tattoo. That's the chief. All in the chief's line, they've all got it. The woman, the chief's daughter, she has the *malu*. They didn't show that in that movie, though.

Your dad was the chief?

Yes, he had it. We're supposed to go to Samoa to go get it; sometimes they come out here, but I haven't had a chance to have somebody come out here because we've got to pay for everything for them to come here, and it's just a big hassle. You think I'm making an excuse because it

hurts, but I'll get it eventually. Yes, it's like a rite of passage going through that pain, and they check you; you can't have no anesthetic. They watch you to make sure you're not popping pills or whatever. It takes two weeks. This is just traditional for my arm. But the one I'm talking about from the stomach, it takes about two weeks. If you ever YouTube, just type in "Samoa tattoo," and you'll see it. It's done with the tapping, not with a needle. This was done with a needle because that's the one I could get because my friend said he'll do it for free. I've had this since 2007. I started with this, the armband. Then I just got that. Corporate, you're right here. But when I went like this, I go, okay, I'm more entrepreneur. Yes, I'm my own corporate.

That's very cool. I'll turn it over to Stefani now and see what questions she has.

In Ogden, you talked about having family there. How was it growing up in Ogden as a Pacific Islander? Besides your family, were there other—

Yes, there were other Pacific Islanders there, and one of them was the chief of police. We really didn't have any problems because he just lived around the corner. I didn't know until I got older, but when I was over there in Utah, everybody was accepted. I really didn't have any problems with racism.

I've heard, and maybe you could correct the record here, is it true that Utah has the largest Samoan population outside of Samoa?

I would say probably Utah and California because that's where we first come from; we come from the islands to California. A lot of Polynesians, when they come to California, they stay around the airport, so that's the nice areas of California, which is Compton, Carson, Long Beach. They're nice areas, but in L.A. Those are all where they migrated from when they come from the state.

That's the first stop?

The first stop, yes.

You mentioned that there is a Samoan ward here in Las Vegas. Where is that?

That is off Eastern. There are two of them. They actually have two of them now, and one of them is called...because it got so big. I think it's Pacific View. The wards have different names. My ward is the Falton's ward because I live in Green Valley, and it's the Green Valley stake. Yes, Pacific View ward.

Is that more on the west side of town?

Yes. See this right here on Facebook? If you look at it. That's one of the wards. The Pacific View, and then they have the original, but this is the second one because it got bigger.

Do a lot of Samoans belong to the Church of...?

Jesus Christ. Yes, pretty much, but we have all the religions in the islands. There's everything. But everybody knows, like my dad told me Sunday, in Samoa, you don't do anything except worship. They do all their cooking Saturday, and Sunday just warm it up. They eat after church. It doesn't matter what church you are, Sunday is the sabbath day; that's how they see it.

What would be the most common religions in Samoa?

LDS, Catholic, Presbyterian, Seventh-day Adventist.

I'm thinking of the missionaries.

Yes, missionaries. In fact, I have a lot of nephews that are on mission right now. I never got to serve a mission. I had a different mission. There is a variety, but the main ones are Catholic, LDS, Presbyterian and Seventh-day Adventist; those are the top.

This is more of a personal curiosity. I am so curious about cryptocurrency. Can you explain it and tell us—

Right there.

I can explain it afterward.

Crypto evolved because of the banks, there's a monopoly and you don't really collect interest in your money; it just sits there. The banks in the states, they trade money on your money, and they make the profit. Now, with crypto, it's different. Right? Something like that? It's hard to believe, but if you really want to have some type of investment for retirement, spending just to get— obviously, you spend pennies just to get any type of big coin. You could put five, ten, you never know, and just let it sit, and it's going to move faster than your two hundred dollars in the Bank of America right now. Something like that, huh?

A little bit.

But crypto is coming up.

It's blowing up, yes.

And it's going to get taxed, too, by the president. He's trying.

Who was the first in your family to move to the mainland?

My dad. Then he brought my grandma.

His mother. And was your dad already married at that point?

Yes.

He brought his mother and then...?

And then me and my grandma and then my mom. My dad was a momma's boy.

And how many kids were there?

We brought three.

He brought three with his wife.

Well, with my mom, just one.

And that was you.

No.

No, you were born here.

Yes, I was born here.

And he went straight to Harbor City.

Yes, L.A. area, yes.

Why Harbor City?

Because that was the place where another cousin stayed.

And then when you came back to California after Utah, where did you go?

California, Utah...I was going back and forth from California to Utah, and then I ended up here, 2000.

You're the youngest of the first marriage, and so your responsibility was to help out.

Other family.

That was your job. Now, what if you were married, if you had your own family?

I would still try to see what I could do.

That would still be your job.

Yes, yes, that would still be my job, yes. When my parents...because I'm the son. If I was a daughter, it would probably be different, but since I'm the son, whatever responsibilities of my dad falls to me when he's not here.

We've talked a little bit about food, but I'd like to get a little bit more specific. When you want Samoan food that reminds you of your childhood and your family and just makes you feel good, what is that dish?

Green banana; taro; corned beef, the brisket. The best corned beef is from New Zealand. And chop suey. See their influence? That's why we're together. Chop suey. I forgot. That's what

we're known for, chop suey, but it's Asian influenced, absolutely. But you have to have chop suey, you have to have the green banana, the corned beef, and the taro to be considered a Samoan plate. Chop suey is with everything. Any Polynesian, especially Samoan, event, it's chop suey. That's automatic. If you don't have chop suey, then it's not a Samoan function.

Who is the cook in your family?

The cook in my family, it was my mom, but she's passed. It's my wife now, and she can make both.

Good for her. Did she cook Samoan food before she knew you?

Not really. Sometimes she makes her type of chop suey, but I say, "Hey, baby, make the Samoan one." The noodles are too small in the Tongan one. Yes, she cooks both.

The languages in Samoa and Tonga, are they based in a common language, or are they totally different?

Totally different. Samoan, for example, *talofa* is hi, and in Tongan, *malo e lelei*, so two different languages. It's not like Spanish where you have these guys that speak a little faster and these are slower; you can tell this one is from Puerto Rico, no. It's totally different.

When you met your wife, what language did you guys speak to each other, English?

English, yes.

You learned that in the home before you start school?

Yes.

You were born here.

Yes, I was born here. We spoke English in the house. My dad always spoke Samoan. But the values, the customs, and the language were always there for my dad, but he said, "You've got to know English, too, because we live in America. It's different. English, you're going to be good."

He said, “The English makes the money; Samoan don’t make no money when they speak Samoan, but know your language.”

Was your dad active in the union?

Yes, construction.

What positions did he hold in the union?

Crane operator. He was a supervisor, manager. He started in the ditches digging the holes. Then he worked his way up. He was a very hard worker. If we could sweep the ground, he would, instead of sweeping it, get a little, small broom and go each side instead of getting the big one. He found a way for us to work hard instead of easy. When he comes home, oh man, you’re not watching TV. My brother would sit by the window. As soon as he would say, “Dad’s here,” the TV is off, and my sister runs and washes the dishes. When he comes home, there is no such thing as watching TV. His value is to always work hard.

Is there anything we haven’t asked you that you hoped we would, or that you would like to talk about it?

I think we pretty much covered everything, just the basics, pretty much. For me, everything you asked was great. I’m glad that I came to UNLV, got my education, which is one thing I promised my mom. I started the Polynesian Club, I started a festival, and left my imprint here. Do you guys still get those books where it has all the different clubs? No. See, I still have that.

Like a yearbook?

Yes, like a yearbook, and you can go to this club or this one. Everything is on the phone now.

Yes, I’ve still got that. I’m just glad that as far as through my community, in my church, I do help people get jobs, and that’s through all ethnicities, so basically helping the community.

Feeding the homeless as well. From my mom's funeral, all the food that we had left, we went and fed the homeless with it. Just little things, small things to show compassion.

I ran a mental health business. It was the first Polynesian health business in Nevada, and it was called A List Family Services. We no longer are operating. There were a lot of budget cuts. But I started that for almost ten years, and we had medical and clinical oversight. We had a psychiatrist and MFT, marriage and family therapist. But we were contracted with the state. To me, with the mental health, I did that, and we housed them and helped them get back in the community.

That's a shame that's no longer.

Yes. That was one of my things that I really liked. Some of the kids still call me out of nowhere. One of my clients, he's in Utah. They sent him to Utah. He calls me Uncle. He called me and said, "Uncle, I miss you." He has disabilities. When you do that and help your community, mental health, a lot of kids with disabilities and adults, you help one, it's like you helped a lot. Me doing that, I liked to help my community. Later on, I'm thinking about getting back into that because I was a state contractor for over ten years. That's how I got in the program with Sisolak; it was called a B-O-W-D program, Bowd community. They changed the name now. They helped entrepreneurs get more customers and more contracts with the state and country through that program. I'm happy with what I've done here, but you can always do more, and so that's my plan, keep it going.

What was the name of that mental health place?

A List Family Services. We were contractors with CPS, DCFS, and the state, Southern Nevada Developmental Health Services. We took the kids and adults that nobody wanted; that was one thing too that was different. Nobody wanted these two kids, and we took them. They knew we

really cared and we loved them. Like I said, through budget cuts, because we were Medicaid providers, they just kept cutting, cutting the resources, and so we couldn't operate. We had four houses that housed all the adults, and then we helped the kids with in-home therapy, LCSW. (NAME), she was one of my therapists. She would go to the house and do therapy with all the children and families.

I think that's it. We covered a lot. Anything else from me?

I just want to go back to the tattoo a little bit. The designs, did you draw out the designs, or did your tattoo artist have them?

The tattoo artist, he freehand everything. This is all freehand.

Is he Samoan as well?

Yes. Samoans tattoo Samoans. Tongans will tattoo Tongans. That's how it is. I see a lot of patterns, just around. A lot of people have adopted it, not my ethnicity, but they see how it is with the meaning of it. This is culture. This is family. These are things from the island. They like it. More power to you.

Thank you so much.

Thank you.

Yes, no problem.

[End of recorded interview]